



Comhairle Contae **Lú**
Louth County Council

Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Scheme 2024 – 2029 (DRAFT)

July 2024

1. Introduction

Louth County Council has a wide range of statutory and service obligations which it carries out on behalf of and for the benefit of the people of County Louth.

There are 29 Councillors elected to Louth County Council from three Municipal Districts as set out below. The Council formulates and adopts policy and is assisted and supported in this work by several Committees called Strategic Policy Committees. Adopted policies are implemented by the Executive of the Council.

Borough/Municipal District	No. of Members
Ardee	6
Dundalk	13
Drogheda	10
Total	29

Table 1: District Membership

Following the local elections held in June 2024, each Local Authority is required to establish new Strategic Policy Committees in line with the revised Guidelines published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in June 2024.

Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)

The statutory basis for Strategic Policy Committees (SPC's) is set out in Section 48 of the Local Government Act 2001 as amended by Section 41 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

The Council is and remains the decision-making Authority, and it is the task of the SPCs, as committees of the Council, to advise and assist the Council in the formulation, development and review of policy. The remit of the SPC is to deal only with policy matters and as such they are strategic in nature. They have no remit in relation to routine operational matters in relation to delivery of services. The SPC system is intended to give Elected Members and relevant Sectoral Interests an opportunity for full involvement in the policy making process from an early stage.

Section 48(1A) of the 2001 Act requires that at least one SPC that is established shall consider matters relating to the functions of the Local Authority in relation to economic development and enterprise support.

Local Authorities are required to establish “strategic policy committees to consider matters connected with the **formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy** which relate to the functions of the local authority and to advise the authority on those matters” (Section 133(2)(b) of the Local Government Act 2001 as amended).

The Department published revised Guidelines in June last, which provides direction to SPC members and officials in relation to the role of the SPC's which is explained as follows:

- **Policy formulation** can be seen as the process by which policy alternatives to address local challenges or opportunities are identified and narrowed down.
- **Policy development** can be the process by which a particular policy is to be most effectively implemented: by whom, using what financial and other resources, within what timeframe, with what measurable anticipated outcomes or results, etc.
- The **monitoring and review of policy** occur during and after a policy is implemented to evaluate whether the policy objectives are being achieved and the outcome of the policy approach taken.

Corporate Policy Group (CPG)

The Corporate Policy Group (CPG) consists of the Cathaoirleach of the Council who will chair the group together with the chair of each of the Strategic Policy Committees and a representative of any Municipal District not already on the Corporate Policy Group.

The role of the CPG is strategic, and it links and co-ordinates the work of the different SPCs.

Its role is set out in Section 133 of the Local Government Act 2001 as amended by Section 48 of the 2014 Act which provides that the CPG may:

- a) “advise and assist the elected council in the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy for the local authority and for that purpose propose arrangements for the consideration of policy matters and the organisation of related business by the elected council”, and
- b) “make proposals for the allocation of business as between strategic policy committees and for the general coordination of such businesses”.

Workflow and Feedback Mechanism between SPCs and the Plenary Council

The SPCs, CPG, and Plenary Council have a synergistic relationship regarding policy formulation, development, approval, and review. The SPCs focus on specialised policy development, engaging stakeholders and conducting analyses. The CPG, on the other hand, provides strategic oversight, coordinating and integrating the work of the SPCs to ensure alignment with the local authority's overall corporate objectives. The final policy decisions rest ultimately with the full council.

Each SPC shall have an annual work programme prepared by the Chairperson and

relevant Director of Services. The annual work programme shall be approved by the CPG who also should get regular updates on progress.

The overall process can be outlined as follows:



Council Executive

The Chief Executive and their staff are responsible for the operational activities of Louth County Council. They oversee the day-to-day management and administration of the services and functions of the authority and operate within the Government and Council policy framework and the legislation governing local authorities.

2. Proposed Strategic Policy Committee Framework 2024 – 2029

Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) are structured around the main functions of a Local Authority. While their remit is based on the main local government services, it is intended that they will operate in the context of the wider local picture, considering related public services and agencies and of local needs and circumstances generally.

They are made up of elected Councillors and other representatives of the Social Partners and other Sectoral interests. SPCs have a minimum total membership of nine with at least one third of the members of each SPC drawn from relevant sectoral interests. Each SPC will be chaired by an Elected Member and will be supported by a Director of Services. Membership of the SPCs (both Councillors and Sectoral Representatives) shall be for the

lifetime of the Council. Casual vacancies which arise will be filled by the sector involved. Nominating bodies may also de-select their nominees.

SPCs must be mindful of the “Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision” (2023, Department of Rural and Community Development) to ensure a collaborative and inclusive process for its work programme. SPCs must also have regard for any Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies prepared by the Regional Strategy.

Louth County Council propose to establish five “thematic” Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) as follows:

- Economic Development & Enterprise Supports
- Strategic Planning
- Community & Placemaking
- Social Development (Including Culture)
- Sustainability

Each SPC will consist of five (5) to six (6) Elected Members and four (4) nominees from Sectoral Interests.

The Council appoints the Chairperson of each SPC. This was done at the first Annual Meeting of Louth County Council on 21st June last, following the Local Elections.

Meetings of SPCs

SPCs will normally meet about four (4) times yearly at suitable times for all SPC members. It will be a matter for each individual SPC to decide on times, dates, etc., for their meetings, and whether it will be held in-person, hybrid, or remote.

Each individual SPC will at its inaugural meeting determine how matters relating to the conduct of meetings will be managed and adopt standing orders to ensure all SPC members have a clear understanding of procedures.

Media

Meetings of SPCs are not generally open to the Media.

3. SPC Scheme

Guidelines regarding Councillors

- Every Councillor shall serve on at least one SPC during a single council term.
- Councillors may not be nominated to represent sectoral interests.
- A person ceasing to be a Councillor would automatically cease membership of the SPC.
- It is also important that the SPC membership should, as far as it is practical, be representative of each of the Municipal Districts in the local authority
- The allocation of SPC chairs should also reflect equitably the spread of elected representation on the council, including, as far as it is practical, be representative of each of the Municipal Districts in the local authority.

Guidelines regarding Sectoral Interests

The following principles should be respected in the selection of groups and associations for a particular sector including those being facilitated by the national pillars:

- Groups/associations should be active in the area or an area of the authority and have a county wide impact or at a minimum a relevance in a locality or number of localities in the area.
- Groups/associations should be open to new members, hold AGMs and regular meetings, and should be broadly representative and accountable.
- Single-interest groups should be eligible, e.g., campaign groups focused on the disabled or elderly. Single-issue groups should be encouraged to affiliate with their relevant PPNs to ensure that they are also represented. Local Development Agencies represented at Strategy Group/LCDC level should not be represented on an SPC. Arrangements should be in place, however, to facilitate meaningful engagement and consultation with such Local Development Agencies as part of the policy-making process.
- Each sector should select its own nominee(s) via the PPN. The nomination of sectoral representatives is the sole responsibility of each sector. However, the authority may recommend that such nominee(s) have broad knowledge (or expertise) of a particular nature.

- Each sector will be asked to nominate the appropriate number of representatives as set out in the adopted scheme to the SPCs. While every effort will be made to accommodate preferences, final decisions on membership will ultimately rest with the local authority as a reserved function.
- An appropriate time frame to enable the nomination process should be provided. It is considered that one month should be sufficient in this regard.

Sectoral Representatives for the SPCs will be drawn from the following sectors:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| • Agriculture/Farming | National Pillar |
| • Environmental/Conservation | National Pillar |
| • Development/Construction | National Pillar |
| • Business/Commercial | National Pillar |
| • Trade Union | National Pillar |
| • Community/Voluntary | PPN Nomination |
| • Social Inclusion | PPN Nomination |

Nomination Process

The nomination process will be facilitated and agreed by the National Pillars, in other words, the Business Pillar (which includes the Development/Construction Sector), the Trade Union Pillar, the Farming Pillar, and the Environment Pillar.

The nomination process for the remaining sectors will be determined via the PPN structure based on a local nomination process.

Due regard will be given to those groups or county wide organisation who have a specialist expertise in certain specific areas of interest.

Sectoral nominees should retain membership of the SPC for the life of the Council. Each sector should select its own nominee. State and Local Development Agencies are not included as nominating bodies to the sectors and should not be represented on the SPC.

Nominations from the Sectors should, insofar as possible, reflect an appropriate gender balance in line with Government Policy.

Expenses incurred by SPC external members

In general, any travel expenses arising for an SPC member would be met by the organisation that the SPC member represents. However, in exceptional circumstances, where the nominating body is unable to pay such travel expenses, the member would be entitled to claim travel for attendance at SPC meetings, at the rate applicable to Elected Members of the Council.

4. Lobbying Act 2015 – Transparency Code

The Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 (the Act) is designed to provide information to the public regarding who is lobbying whom about what. Individuals and organisations who participate in Strategic Policy Committees established by local authorities may have obligations under the Act.

A critical element of public policy formulation by the Strategic Policy Committees is the availability to the local authorities of expertise, skills and knowledge from persons outside of the public service setting. Where membership of the Committee comprises of at least one person who, for the purposes of the Act is a Designated Public Official, it may be the case that communications within the group could be considered lobbying communications. The person making these communications may be required to register as a lobbyist and to submit a return of this communication to the Lobbying Register.

However, the Act provides for an exception from the requirement to register in such cases once specified transparency criteria have been put in place. A transparency code was published by the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform to address this situation. Communications between members of Strategic Policy Committee about the work of the Committee would be exempt where the group in question complies with the Transparency Code.

5. Implementation and Support Measures

Louth County Council will provide ongoing training and support for members of the SPCs to support them in their work:

- Workshops on policy to cover the areas within the remit of the SPCs
- Briefings on the role and functions of local government
- Any other training deemed necessary by the Council

6. Process of Establishments of SPCs

Sequence of Events

Timescale

Draft Scheme discussed with CPG and approved 2024

2nd August 2024

Advertise/Publicise/Circulate Draft Scheme

6th August 2024

Submissions deadline

6th Sept 2024

Council to consider submissions on Draft Scheme

16th Sept 2024

Council to write to National Pillars and PPN seeking Nominations

17th Sept 2024

Nominations confirmed from each of the sectors at Council Meeting

November 2024

First Meeting of SPCs

December 2024

TABLE A: Strategic Policy Committees –Remit and Responsibilities

Economic Development & Enterprise Supports	Strategic Planning	Community & Placemaking	Social Development	Sustainability
<p>This SPC is responsible for all areas of policy concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Development • Tourism • Enterprise • Broadband/Digital • Casual Trading • Finance & Fiscal Matters 	<p>This SPC is responsible for all areas of policy concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • New Supply Infrastructure (Roads, Utilities, EV & Active Travel) • Building Control • Dereliction Policy • Port, Harbours & Foreshores • Natural & Built Heritage • Fire Emergency Services 	<p>This SPC is responsible for all areas of policy concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placemaking – Towns and Villages • Town Regeneration • Community Development • Local Transport • Parks Open Spaces • Burial Grounds • Sports, Recreational Trails and Facilities, Playgrounds • Community Integration/Social Inclusion • Children and Youth • Needs of People with Disabilities • Older People/Age Friendly • Migrant Integration • Healthy Ireland 	<p>This SPC is responsible for all areas of policy concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Policy • Arts and Culture • Museums • Libraries • Creative sector • Archives Services 	<p>This SPC is responsible for all areas of policies concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Action • Environment • Waste Management • Rural Water • Water Quality • Biodiversity • Trees & Forestry • Control of Dogs

TABLE C: Sectoral Representation on Each SPC

	Economic Development	Planning	Community & Placemaking	Social Development	Environ & Climate Change
Sectors	4	4	4	4	4
Councillors	6	6	5	6	6
Total:	10	10	9	10	10

TABLE D: Proposed Breakdown of Membership of Sectoral Interests

Sectors	Economic & Development	Planning	Community & Placemaking	Social Development	Environ & Climate	Total
Agriculture / Farming	-	1	-	-	1	2
Environment/ Conservation	-	1	1	-	2	4
Development/ Construction	1	1	-	-	-	2
Business/Commercial	1	1	-	1	-	3
Trade Unions	1	-	-	1	-	2
Community / Voluntary	1	-	2	1	1	5
Social Inclusion	-	-	1	1	-	2
Total Sectoral Members	4	4	4	4	4	20
Elected Members	6	6	5	6	6	29
Total SPC Membership	10	10	9	10	10	49