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Strategic Policy Committee Scheme

2024 – 2029

Contents

1. Introduction

The Strategic Policy Committees provides Councillors with a framework and opportunity to fulfil to a far greater extent their role as overall policy makers for and within the local government system. It also develops opportunities for partnership with local and appropriate sectoral interests. The SPC process provides for better focus and enhanced capacity for involvement in policy formulation, review and evaluation.

In June 2024 the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage published revised Guidelines for the establishment and operation of Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committees, informed by the work of a Stakeholder Working Group (SWG)[1] and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA)[2]. It summarises the central features of the SPC system as follows:

- The role of the Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) is to formulate policy proposals, evaluate and report on policy implementation, for consideration and final decision by the full council.
- A focus on the SPCs' policy-making and strategic role is fundamental to the SPC concept. In their work, SPCs are not concerned with individual representational or operational issues.
- The SPC system presents councillors with a prime opportunity to become more involved in policy formulation. It provides a chance to review and optimise committee structures and related procedures, which demands a rationalisation of existing committees and standing procedures.
- Each authority will have generally four SPCs, with the option of more in the largest authorities, if warranted.
- Local authorities are statutorily required to have an SPC for Economic Development and Enterprise. All SPCs should consider climate action as a cross-cutting issue in their work programmes.
- SPCs are to be chaired by one of the councillor members.
- SPCs are to have a minimum total membership of nine.
- At least one third of the members of each SPC are to be drawn from relevant sectoral interests; to provide relevant expertise and advice and allow for a range of inputs in the formulation of policy
- Relevant organisations for each sector will be identified as early as possible, parallel with the drafting of the scheme.
- Each sector will select its own nominee(s) via the PPN, where appropriate.
- The CPG is to comprise the Cathaoirleach of the local authority, the SPC chairs and a representative of each municipal district, as needed, in accordance with section 133(1) of the 2001 Act. It is to be chaired by the Cathaoirleach. It will be supported by the Chief Executive5.
- The role of the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) is to coordinate the work of the SPCs and facilitate the flow of the outcome of the work of the SPCs to the council.
- Area Committees can complement the SPC system in local authorities that do not have a municipal district. Local operational matters should be assigned to these area committees as the SPC system will not deal with local representational issues and operational issues.

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[1] gov - Review and Report of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) - Stakeholder Working Group Commentary (www.gov.ie)

[2] gov - IPA Report on a Review of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) (www.gov.ie)

2. Role of the Corporate Policy Group

The statutory basis for Corporate Policy Groups (CPGs) is set out in section 133 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by section 48 of the 2014 Act.

This 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".*

The membership of the CPG comprises of the Mayor and the chairpersons of each SPC and is supported by the Chief Executive. The CPG is a committee of the council, links the work of the SPCs and provides a forum where policy positions affecting the whole council can be agreed for submission to the full council. Its task is to advise and assist the council, with full decision-making authority remaining with the council. The Mayor reports to the full council on the work of the CPG.

The CPG will:
- play a key role in preparing the budget;
- provide input to the full council on any matter of general concern to the council either on its own initiative or following a request from the council;
- monitor the overall performance of a local authority, including in relation to matters of governance and oversight, in particular though consideration of reports of the Audit Committee, Local Government Auditor and National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC), and in accordance with the Local Government Code of Governance;
- deal with overall issues in relation to service delivery plans, customer service, value for money, etc., (individual SPCs would deal with such issues in their work insofar as their particular service remit was concerned);
- approve the work programmes of the SPCs and monitor their achievement;
- co-ordinate the work of the SPCs;
- request SPCs to consider particular policy issues; where appropriate; and
- provide feedback to the SPCs on council policy and views in areas relevant to the SPCs.

The minutes of CPG meetings will be circulated to all members of the local authority as a matter of course.

3. Role of the Strategic Policy Committees

The statutory basis for Strategic Policy Committee's (SPC's) is set out in the Local Government Act, 2001 (Section 48) as amended by Section 41 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, which provides that *"a Local Authority shall establish committees to be known as 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 advise the authority on those matters."*

3.1   SPCs and the Council

It is the task of the SPCs, as committees of the council, to advise and assist the council in its work. While it is the task of each SPC to assist the council in the formulation and development of policy, the final policy decisions rest ultimately with the full council.

The SPC system is intended to give councillors and relevant sectoral interests an opportunity for full involvement in the policy-making process from the early stages, when policy options are more fluid. Therefore, if the SPC system operates satisfactorily, much of the preliminary and background work, discussion and recommendation should be completed at SPC level for final consideration and ratification by the council.

The work of the SPC chair and Director of Services is of critical importance and the success of the SPCs is crucially dependent on the active involvement of councillors and on a positive mindset from all involved – Councillors, sectoral representatives, Chief Executive, Directors and staff – that are focused on the strategic role of SPCs.

3.2   SPC Work Programme

Each SPC will adopt a multi-annual work programme linked to the local authority's Corporate Plan which may be updated as necessary.

The CPG should approve the work programmes of the SPCs and may, as appropriate recommend issues to be considered by the SPCs. A review of SPC work programmes should be carried out by the CPG in the third year of the local authority electoral term.

Once a suitable draft work programme for an SPC has been prepared, it should be circulated to the SPC membership for their observations, comments, and feedback. At least four weeks should be allowed for SPC members to return responses on a draft work programme. Having considered any responses from SPC members, the work programme should be finalised and submitted to the CPG for approval.

3.3   Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy

There is a requirement on each SPC to have regard to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) prepared by the Regional Assembly.

3.4   Commitment to Inclusive Community Engagement

South Dublin County Council is committed to collaborative and inclusive processes in policy development and will have regard to available resources in developing consultation and engagement processes, including the **Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making** (2023, Department of Rural and Community Development).

3.8   SPCs and Service Delivery Plans (SDPs)

The development of Service Delivery Plans (SDPs) will facilitate the identification of objectives and preparation of strategies for individual services.

SPCs can provide advice and assistance to the council in the preparation of individual SDPs and in setting out the related objectives, strategies, standards and performance indicators.

In this context too, particular policy issues can be identified for special consideration and in-depth examination by the SPC. Such SDPs could set out statements of overall policy, focus on best practice issues, identify particular issues to be addressed and approaches taken, review overall performance of programmes, set out the future strategic direction for the service, address value for money (VFM) issues, effectiveness and efficiency etc. Responsibility for staffing matters is not altered by these arrangements.

More generally, the work of SPCs would take account of the council's overall corporate policy and objectives, integrate with statutory plans where relevant, link realistically to financial resources and be responsive to sectoral consultations.

4.   SPC Meetings

4.1   SPC Meetings – Procedures

Procedures for SPC meetings are set out in the SPC Standing Orders. These will be reviewed following the adoption of the new Scheme by the Council and reviewed again after 3 years.

4.2   SPC Meetings – Linkage with the Council and Nominating Bodies

SPC chairs should introduce SPC recommendations for approval by the full council.

The SPCs sectoral representatives should provide feedback to their nominating organisations on the activities of the SPC.

Members of SPCs should be provided with automatic feedback on the outcome of the council's decisions on SPC recommendations.

4.3   SPC Meetings - Training

Training will be provided for SPC members as appropriate to their needs. These may include: -
- Workshops on policy to cover the various areas within the remit of the SPCs, particularly in respect of climate action;
- Briefings on public sector / local government reform programmes;
- Briefings on the role and functions of local government;
- Legal and ethical responsibilities of SPC members, including but not limited to GDPR, lobbying, etc.;
- Skills orientated training such as team building.
- Effective meeting skills for SPC Chairs

South Dublin County Council will assess training needs through a consultative process with the Sectors generally and the SPC members specifically.

4.4   Expenses Incurred by Members

In general, any expenses arising from participation in an SPC will be met by the organisation the SPC member is representing. However, those SPC members whose expenses cannot be met in such a manner would be entitled to travel expenses for attendance at SPC meetings.

South Dublin County Council will consult with all sectoral members to determine which, if any, members are not receiving expenses from their own organisations for attendance at SPC meetings. Any member not already receiving expenses will be able to claim them from the local authority. and the Local Authority will meet these expenses.

5. SPC's 2024 – 2029: Structure and Membership

5.1   Structure

The factors to be taken into account in determining the overall framework of SPCs for South Dublin County Council include:
- the total number of elected members on the council;
- the range of sectoral and other interests to be represented, including facilitating a reasonable spread of interests;
- the desirability of allowing adequate opportunity for participation by councillors and sectoral interests;
- the organisational arrangement of service groupings within the authority and the remit envisaged for each SPC;
- the need to ensure that the organisational and financial resources of the particular local authority are not over-stretched; and
- integration with other meeting requirements and committee structures and ensuring streamlined procedures generally.

Regard must also be had to the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), including its membership and remit.

Section 48(1A) of the 2001 Act, as inserted by Section 41(a) of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, requires that at least one of the SPCs that is established shall be to consider matters which relate to the functions of a local authority in relation to economic development and enterprise support.

In addition, each SPC is required to consider climate action and climate impacts as part of any and all policies that form part of its work programme. Again, deliberations in this regard should operate in a cross-cutting manner and in the broader public policy context; any interrelationships with other policy domains should be taken into account while considering policies. Climate action should be considered in its widest sense, to include biodiversity action, water quality action, sustainable land use, energy (source and usage), resource management, sustainable transport/mobility, air quality/emissions, soil quality, waste management, community action, etc., and other related issues – reflecting the complex and integrated nature of climate action. This does not preclude the establishment of a specific Environment/Climate Action/Water Quality etc. SPC, as proposed below.

The following are the six Strategic Policy Committees proposed for South Dublin County Council:-
- Economic Development, Enterprise and Tourism
- Land use Transportation and Planning
- Social, Community and Equality
- Environment, Public Realm and Climate Change
- Housing
- Arts, Culture, Gaeilge, Heritage and Libraries

5.2 Policy Configuration

Economic Development, Enterprise and Tourism
- Economic elements of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)
- Local Enterprise Office (LEO)
- Innovation Quarter
- Grange Castle
- Tallaght Stadium
- Heritage Centre
- Tourism Plan
- Climate Action

Land use Planning and Transport
- Local Area Plans / Masterplans
- Adamstown and Clonburris SDZs
- Bus Connects
- Cycle South Dublin
- County Development Plans
- Heritage Plan
- Road Safety
- Biodiversity
- Development Contribution Scheme
- Climate Action

Social, Community and Equality
- Comhairle na nÓg
- Active South Dublin
- Community Grants
- Sláintecare / Healthy Ireland
- Equality
- LECP
- Community Development
- Age Friendly
- Integration
- Climate Action

Environment, Public Realm and Climate Change
- Environmental Noise Action Plan
- Climate Change Implementation & Action Plan

- Circular Economy & Environmental Awareness Activities
- Allotments
- Waste Management Action Plan
- Community Recycling Strategy
- EV Charging Strategy
- Dublin Urban Rivers LIFE Project
- River Basin Maangement Plan
- Waste Enforcement
- Flood Alleviate and Surface Water Schemes
- Litter Management
- Casual Trading

Housing
- Housing Delivery
- Allocations
- Rightsizing
- Vacant Homes
- Affordable Housing
- Traveller Accommodation
- Housing Maintenance
- Grants
- Climate Action

Arts, Culture, Gaeilge, Heritage and Libraries
- Library Development Plan
- Irish language promotion
- Arts & Cultural Venues
- Creative Ireland
- LECP
- Arts plan
- Commerations
- Climate Action

5.3   Membership

The Guidelines recommend that each of the Strategic Policy Committees will have two-thirds of its membership drawn from the elected representatives of the Council and that one-third of the membership be drawn from external sectoral groupings. While this general principle is respected the distribution of council membership is also reflective of potential workload. The Economic Development SPC will have 8 elected members, while the Housing and Environment SPCs will have 7 elected members, and the remaining three SPCs will have 6 elected members. The Chair of each SPC will be from among the Elected Members.

The Chairs of the SPC's, the Mayor and the Chief Executive will form the Corporate Policy Group.

There are seven overall sectors recommended in the guidelines which should, in general, be represented in each local authority SPC configuration. These are:

1. Agricultural / Farming
2. Environmental / Conservation
3. Development Construction
4. Business / Commercial
5. Trade Union
6. Community / Voluntary
7. Social Inclusion

The allocation of membership for each committee is as follows:

Economic Development, Enterprise & Tourism
Elected members x 8
Business commercial x 2 (overseas and indigenous)
Trade union x 1
PPN x 1 (community pillar)
TU Dublin, Tallaght x 1

Land use Transportation and Planning
Elected members x 6
Development construction x 1
Business commercial x 1
PPN x 1(environmental pillar)

Arts, Culture, Gaeilge, Heritage and Libraries
Elected members x 6
Business commercial x 1
PPN x 1 (social inclusion pillar)
ETB x 1

Environment, Public Realm and Climate Change
Elected members x 7
Agricultural and farming x 1
Business commercial x 1
PPN x 1 (environmental pillar)

Housing
Elected members x 7
Development construction x 1
PPN x 2 (1 community pillar and 1 social inclusion pillar)
Trade union x 1

Social, Community and Equality
Elected members x 6
PPN x 2 (1 community pillar and 1 social inclusion pillar)
Business commercial x 1
Trade union x 1

Each Strategic Policy Committee Member will serve for the life of the Council. If a casual vacancy arises it will be filled by the sector involved. Nominating bodies may deselect their nominees. The

national pillars nominees should be representative of local organisations active in the county as it is the local perspective of the national pillar that the members will be expected to bring.

5.4   Nominations from Sectors to the Strategic Policy Committees

The nomination process for:
- the agricultural/farming sector will be facilitated by the farming and agricultural organisations pillar;
- the business/commercial and development/construction sectors will be facilitated by the business and employers organisations pillar;
- the trade union sector will be facilitated by the trade union pillar;
- the environmental/conservation, community / voluntary and social inclusion sectors will be determined on the basis of the local nomination process through the PPN (See paragraph 6.7 below);
- the environmental/conservation sector will be facilitated by the environmental pillar and the associated Environmental College under the PPN arrangements. To join the Environment Electoral College under the PPN, an organisation's primary objectives and activities must be environmental (i.e. ecological) protection and/or environmental sustainability. Membership of this Electoral College will be validated by the environmental pillar at a national level. (For national pillar contacts, see **Appendix 2**).

The responsibility for nominations is the sole responsibility of the sectors agreed in the Scheme. Each sector is also responsible for the putting in place of a structured feedback process between representatives and their nominating bodies.

While very effort will be made to accommodate preferences, the final decision as to the sectoral make-up of the SPC will rest with the Local Authority, and the following factors, will be considered in determining sectoral representation on and across each SPC:

- The need to foster economic and social development generally;
- A stated commitment to working towards gender balance and to encouraging as full as possible gender balance in representation from the sectors;
- the need to ensure a pro-active approach to having as many relevant sectors as possible across the SPC system;
- the need for balance between divergent interests;
- the need for a comprehensive audit of groups within the local authority area to facilitate the fullest possible consultation with each sector;
- the priority concerns of each sector and the appropriateness of the SPCs to these concerns;
- the relationship between the number of SPCs and the range of interests which can be represented;
- a commitment to the fostering of social inclusiveness and equality;
- a commitment to have a pro-active information strategy to inform the public on the renewal of local government;
- the desirability of facilitating relevant organisations to be part of the nominating constituencies.

5.5   State Agencies / Local Development Companies

As per the Guidelines, State and Local Development Agencies are not included as nominating bodies to the sectors and should not be represented on an SPC. This includes the LCDC.

6. 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. 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. See Appendix 1 for more information on the Transparency Code and South Dublin County Council's compliance with it.

7. Ethics Framework

It is important for all members of committees to be aware of and understand the Ethics Framework for the local government sector which is set out in Part 15 of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended). In particular the following:

Section 168 of the Act

> *In carrying out their functions under this or any other enactment, it is the duty of every member and every employee of a local authority and of every member of every committee to maintain proper standards of integrity, conduct and concern for the public interest.*

Section 170 (1)

> *An employee or a member of a local authority or of a committee of a local authority shall not seek, exact or accept from any person, other than from the local authority concerned, any remuneration, fee, reward or other favour for anything done or not done by virtue of his or her employment or office, and a code of conduct under section 169 may include guidance for the purposes of this subsection.*

(2)

> *Subsection (1) shall not be read so as to exclude the persons to whom that subsection relates from the application of the Prevention of Corruption Acts, 1889 to 1995, and any Act which is to be construed together as one with those Acts.*

Councillors and sectoral SPC members must disclose at a SPC meeting any pecuniary or other beneficial interest, (of which they have actual knowledge) they or a connected person have in, or material to, any matter with which the local authority is concerned in the discharge of its functions, and which comes before the meeting. The councillor / committee member must withdraw from the meeting after disclosure and must not vote or take part in any discussion or consideration of the matter or seek to in any other aspect influence the decision making of the Council.
Where a councillor or committee member has actual knowledge that a matter is going to arise at a meeting at which s/he will not be present, but if s/he were, a disclosure would be necessary, then in advance of the meeting s/he must make such disclosure in writing to the Ethics Registrar.

The foregoing statutory requirements must be observed at all times, and failure to do so is an offence under Section 181 of the 2001 Act. Analogous statutory requirements also apply to employees, and to external members of committees with the exception of the annual declaration in their case.

APPENDIX 1 Transparency Code – Criteria which must apply to avail of the exception under section 5(5)(n) of the Act[3] [4]

Transparency criteria

Information must be published on the public body's website setting out the following information:

1. Name of Chairperson together with details of his or her employing organisation;
2. Names of Members together with details of their employing organisation3 ;
3. Whether any non-public servant members were previously designated public officials;
4. Terms of reference of the group;
5. Agenda of each meeting;
6. Minutes of each meeting;
7. Expected timeframe for the group to conclude its work;
8. Reporting arrangements.

This information is published on South Dublin County Council's website in a prominent and easily accessible place[5].

In addition, the Chairperson of the Group is responsible for overseeing and conducting the work of the Group in a manner which ensures that the Group operates in a manner fully in accordance with its terms of reference and in the public interest.

The Chairperson will include with the final or annual report of the Group a statement confirming its compliance with the Transparency Code.

Sub-groups

The requirements of the Transparency Code also apply to sub-groups of the principal group where the membership of the sub-group consists of at least one Designated Public Official and at least one person from outside of the public service[6].

Timeliness of Publication:

Ideally the information should be published in as timely a fashion as possible, having regard to the public interest in safeguarding the integrity of the deliberative process.

All groups should publish information about their membership, terms of reference, expected timeframe and reporting arrangements on their establishment. Groups in existence prior to 1st September 2015 (commencement day for the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015) should now proceed to publish this information.

At a minimum, thereafter the information on the public bodies' website must be updated at least every 4 months with details of agendas, minutes, etc. in relation to each such group.

This timeframe is in line with the transparency requirements under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 for persons who are engaging in lobbying communications. A return must be submitted every four months in respect of such activity.

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[3] 2015-08-06-transparency-code-eng.pdf (lobbying.ie)

[4] Transparency Code - SDCC

[5] Strategic Policy Committees - SDCC and Meetings | South Dublin County Council (sdublincoco.ie)

[6] Alternatively if the Chairperson or member is representing a group of stakeholders, this should be stated. If the Chairperson is appointed in a personal capacity rather than as a representative of an organisation this should also be stated.

APPENDIX 2 Registration forms for representation to nominating sectors for Strategic Policy Committees

Name of applicant body: _____

Address: _____

Date of establishment: _____

State aims and purpose of your organisation:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

With which sector would you most readily identify your organisation (one only please)

Agriculture/Farming ☐

Environment/Conservation/Culture ☐

Development/Construction ☐

Business/Commercial ☐

Trade Union ☐

Community/Voluntary/Disadvantaged ☐

Social inclusion ☐

Name and address of person to whom correspondence is to be sent:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel. No.: _____

How often does your organisation hold meetings?

Date of your last AGM:

_____

State your total membership: _____

Names		
	Chairman:	_____
of	Treasurer:	_____
Officers	Secretary:	_____

Please specify the type of Strategy Policy Committee on which your organisation seeks representation:

1st preference: _____

2nd preference: _____

Signed: _____

(Secretary, Applicant Body)

- **Please note that the above suggested registration form is for use in relation to local organisations and is not relevant to the National Pillars**

- **While every effort will be made to accommodate preferences, final decisions will ultimately rest with the local authority, having regard to the likely degree of interest, the limited number of SPC places available and the need to have a balanced constituency for each SPC**

APPENDIX 3   Sector Contact Details

Pillar	Name & Address	Telephone and e-mail
Farming	**Gerry Gunning**	**01-4500266**
Irish Farmers Association Irish Farm Centre Bluebell Dublin 12		gerrygunning@ifa.ie
Business	**John Hickey**	**01-4004300**
Chambers Ireland 22-24 lower mount street Dublin 2		Kim.mulligan@chambers.ie
Trade Unions	**Fergus Whelan**	**01-8897777**
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Head Office 31-32 Parnell Square Dublin 1		fergus.whelan@ictu.ie
Environment	**Michael Ewing**	**071-9667373**
Environment Pillar – Social Partnership Coordinator Knockvicar Boyle Co Roscommon		michael@environmental pillar.ie