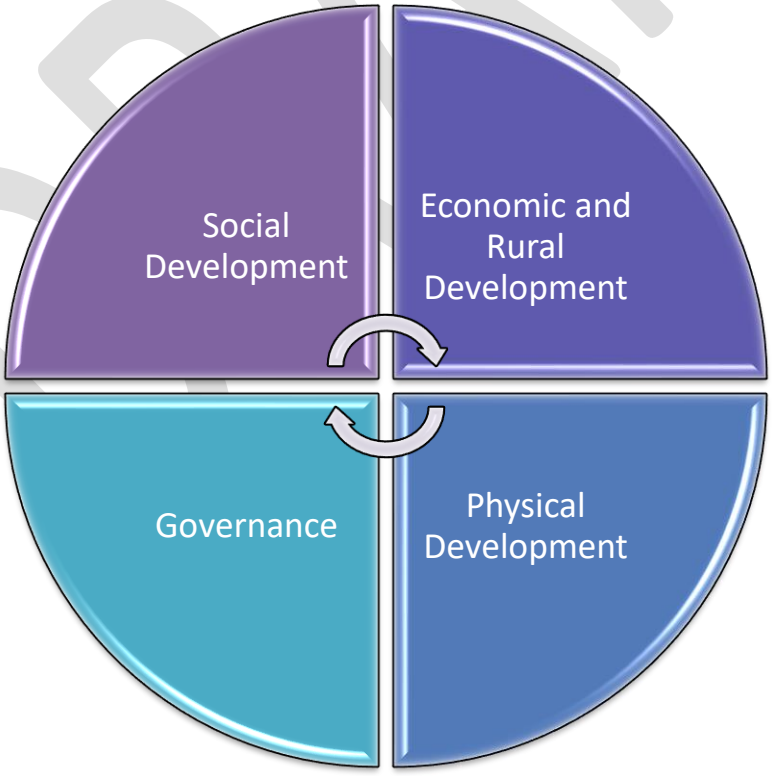
Draft
Strategic Policy Committee Scheme

2024 - 2029



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Longford County Council

Strategic Policy Committee Scheme 2024 - 2029

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COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LONGFOIRT

LONGFORD COUNTY COUNCIL

STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE SCHEME 2024 - 2029

1. Introduction

The statutory basis for Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) is set out in section 48 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by section 41 of the 2014 Act.

As per Section 48(1) of the 2001 Act, 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".

Guidelines were published by the Department in June 2024 for the establishment and operation of Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Groups – *Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committees: Revised Guidelines for Establishment and Operation*.

The role of the 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.

2. Strategic Policy Committee Scheme

The Chief Executive, based on the Departmental guidelines and in consultation with a representative group of councillors and outgoing members of the SPCs, prepared a draft scheme for the implementation of the SPC system. Feedback was also sought from sectoral interests through the Public Participation Network.

Longford County Council, at its Annual General Meeting held on 21 June 2024, appointed the Chairpersons Designate in respect of the four SPCs for year 1. Together with the Cathaoirleach, the Chairpersons Designate form the Corporate Policy Group.

The CPG considered the manner in which the SPCs have operated to date in County Longford. When considering how the SPCs can most effectively be established and operated for the period 2024 – 2029, they also had regard to feedback from the PPN and the various guidelines issued by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. The recommendation of the CPG to approve a draft for public consultation was approved by Longford County Council at its meeting on 10 July 2024.

Following consideration of the Chief Executive's report on submissions received during the consultation period, which recommended a number of amendments to the draft scheme, Longford County Council adopted this revised Strategic Policy Committee Scheme for County Longford for 2024 – 2029 on XX XXX 2024.

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3. Corporate Policy Group (CPG)

The statutory basis for the CPG is set out in Section 133 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by Section 48 of the Local Government (Reform) Act 2014.

This provides that the CPG may:

- 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
- Make proposals for the allocation of business as between strategic policy committees and for the general coordination of such businesses.

The role of the CPG is strategic, and it links and co-ordinates the work of the different SPCs. Acting as a link between the SPCs and the full Council, the CPG will have an active role in the preparation of the draft budget. It will determine whether a function will be discharged at the Municipal District or authority level, where reference in relation to this question is made to it. It must also be consulted in the preparation of the corporate plan.

The CPG is supported by the Chief Executive.

The Cathaoirleach reports to the full Council on the work of the CPG and should also report to the Council on the work (including proposals) of the SPCs on a quarterly basis (although this may be more frequent depending on circumstances). The Chairs of each SPC report back to their committees as do the representatives of each Municipal District to their fellow Municipal District members.

4. Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)

Each Local Authority establishes SPCs which bring together both elected members, and people actively working with social, economic, cultural and environmental bodies to develop and review policies related to Council services.

The SPCs thus provide elected members with external views as they discharge their strategic role in the development of the Local Authority, including their policy development and oversight roles within the Local Authority. The SPC system provides them with a better focus and enhanced capacity for involvement in policy formulation, review and evaluation, with inbuilt assistance of relevant sectoral interests and the support of a Director of Services.

SPCs prepare the groundwork for policies which are then decided on by the Local Authority, including as appropriate at Municipal District level. Accordingly, local sectoral interests, including the trade union, farming, environmental and community/voluntary sectors, along with the business community, constitute one half of the membership of Longford County Council SPCs.

Section 48(1A) of the 2001 Act requires that at least one of the SPCs that is established considers matters which relate to the functions of the Local Authority in relation to economic development and enterprise support. Accordingly, each Local Authority is required to form an SPC entitled the "SPC for Economic Development and Enterprise". The functions of this SPC are to include the preparation of the economic elements of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), the implementation and review of the economic elements of the LECP and the oversight by the elected members of the operation of the Local Enterprise Office (LEO).

5. Strategic Policy Committees Work Programme

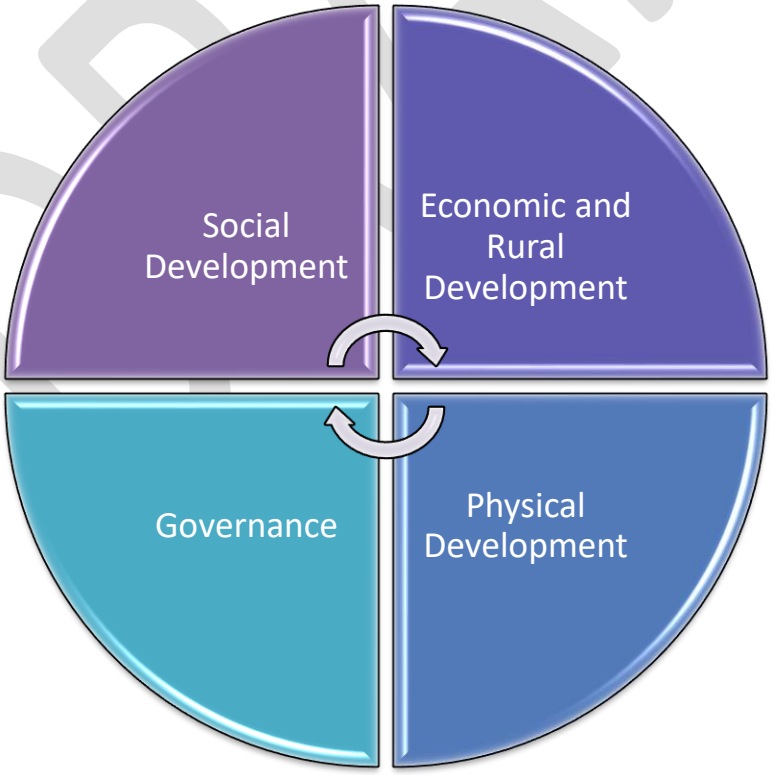
The Guidelines recommend that:

- SPCs should 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 the SPC work programme should be carried out by the CPG in the third year of the Local Authority electoral term.
- SPC members should be fully involved in the process of preparing the SPC work programmes, which should begin once the policy parameters of each SPC having been drawn up, the SPC scheme having been agreed, and the SPCs' membership having been determined.
- Once a suitable draft work programme for an SPC has been prepared, it should be circulated to the SPC's 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.

6. Policy Configuration – Placemaking and Better Public Services

In line with the Department's Guidelines, four Strategic Policy Committees will be established as follows:

Placemaking and Better Public Services



Each SPC will focus attention on the development of policy focusing on placemaking and better public services. In some cases, it may be appropriate that a number of SPCs will work together.

- Social Development – focusing on policies relating to building sustainable, integrated, and safe communities and delivering on housing commitments.
- Physical Development – focusing on policies relating to investing in sustainable infrastructure and protecting our built and natural heritage.
- Economic and Rural Development – focusing on policies relating to economic development, enterprise and rural development, reimagining and reinventing public spaces and maximising the opportunities for sustainable economic, cultural and rural development.
- Governance – focusing on policies relating to ensuring transparent and better public services.

People	**Place**	**Opportunity**	**Better Public Services**
Placemaking - Social Development	Placemaking - Physical Development	Placemaking - Economic and Rural Development	Placemaking - Governance
• Housing Strategy • Housing Provision and Development • Refurbishment and Retrofit Programmes • Community Development and Engagement • Social Inclusion • Integration • Sports Partnership • Sláintecare Healthy Ireland • Sláintecare Healthy Communities • Community Safety Partnership • Older Persons • Younger Persons	• Forward Planning • Sustainable Development and Urban Design • Heritage Strategy and Conservation of Built Heritage • Climate Action Plan • Environmental Protection • Biodiversity • Veterinary Services • Estate Management • Emergency Services • Transportation Solutions • Active Travel • Public Realm, Public Spaces • Playgrounds and Amenities	• Economic Development • Enterprise Development • LECP – Economic elements • Urban and Rural Regeneration • Town Centre First • Vacancy, Dereliction and CPOs • Night-time Economy • Just Transition • Library Strategy • Arts and Cultural Strategy • Tourism Strategy • Diaspora Strategy • Twinning Policy • Broadband	• Corporate Planning • Financial Strategy • ICT and Digital Strategy • Innovation • Communication • Corporate Services • Compliance and Risk Management • Health and Safety • Audit

In line with the requirements of section 48(1A) of the Local Government Act 2001, it is only the SPC with responsibility for economic development and enterprise that is mandatory. 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.

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7. Chairpersons of Strategic Policy Committees

The SPC chairs have a pivotal role in ensuring the success of CPGs and SPCs. In that context, to facilitate the smooth and effective operation of the SPCs and the CPG, Local Authorities should ensure that SPC Chairs are selected on the basis that they:

- Have an interest in the work of the SPCs,
- Are fully aware of the leadership role of SPC Chairs, and
- Appreciate the need to work with the relevant Director of Service.

SPCs are to be chaired by one of the councillor members. The Chairpersons are appointed by the full Council for a minimum period of three years, which may be extended by the Council.

- The overall spread of SPC chairs must reflect the elected representational spread on the full Council.
- SPC chairs should also reflect the gender make-up of the Council.
- It is important that the SPC chairs appointed by the full Council should, as far as it is practical, be representative of each of the Municipal Districts in the Local Authority.
- Subsequent Chairpersons will be appointed by the County Council from among the existing Councillor members of the SPC.
- At the Annual General Meeting of the Council held on 21 June 2024 the Chairpersons designate were appointed and the Members who will succeed to the Chairs were also selected.
- In the event that a Chairperson of a SPC relinquishes the Chair, they will continue to be a member of that SPC for the remainder of the life of the Council.
- If a Chairperson ceases to be a councillor, he or she will automatically cease to be a member of the SPC.
- The Chairperson of an SPC at the time of a Local Election will continue to hold office until the ordinary day of retirement of Members following the election, in accordance with Section 17 of the Local Government Act 2001.

8. Membership and Composition of Strategic Policy Committees

Membership of SPCs will comprise representation from Longford County Council and the sectoral interest groups.

Each SPC will have a minimum total membership of nine. At least one third of the members on 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.

Elected Members of Longford County Council

- Every councillor will as a matter of equity and good practice have the opportunity to serve on more than one SPC during a single Council term. This will enable a councillor to develop further expertise and experience of the particular service or services and to develop a degree of specialisation.
- Each Member of Longford County Council will be appointed as a member of a particular Strategic Policy Committee.
- Councillors may not be nominated to represent sectoral interests.
- In the third year of the electoral cycle, SPC membership should be reviewed by the Local Authority in order to give councillors an opportunity to leave the membership of one or more SPCs, and seek membership of another SPC or SPCs.

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- If a Member ceases to be a Member of Longford County Council their membership of the SPC will automatically cease.
- Five Members of Longford County Council will be nominated to each SPC.
- A councillor should not serve on more than two SPCs insofar as possible, again for reasons of equity and good practice and workload.
- SPC councillor membership should reflect the proportionality and the distribution of elected representation on the full Council. It is also important that the SPC membership should, as far as it is practical, be representative of each of the Municipal Districts.
- Longford County Council respects the requirements for Gender Balance in relation to the formulation of the SPCs and, in so far as possible, will ensure that this occurs in the nomination of members of the Council to the SPCs.
- 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.

Representatives of Sectoral Interest Groups

The formal appointment of sectoral interests to the SPC is a reserved function of the Council, providing for appointment of the sectoral interests that have been nominated. The following seven sectors shall be represented on at least one SPC.

- Agriculture / Farming
- Environmental / Conservation
- Development / Construction
- Business / Commercial
- Trade Union
- Community / Voluntary
- Social Inclusion

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 and associations must be active within County Longford and have a county wide impact or, at a minimum, relevance in a locality or number of localities in the area.
- Groups and associations must be open to new members, hold both Annual General Meetings 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.
- Groups formed around specific single local issues shall not be eligible to be represented on SPCs.
- Local Development Agencies represented at Strategy Group/LCDC level shall not be eligible to be represented on a Strategic Policy Committee. Arrangements should be in place, however, to facilitate meaningful engagement and consultation with such Local Development Agencies as part of the policy-making process.
- The nomination of sectoral representatives is the responsibility of each sector and should be conducted through the PPN where appropriate.
- To ensure that each Sector is appropriately represented on a Strategic Policy Committee, Longford County Council reserves the right to recommend that nominees have a broad knowledge and/or expertise in a particular area of relevance.
- 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,

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final decisions on membership will ultimately rest with the Local Authority as a reserved function. One month to enable the nomination process will be provided.

- Sectoral nominees retain membership of the SPC for the lifetime of the committee.
- It is open to each nominating sector to deselect its nominee, if felt necessary, and to notify the Council accordingly whereupon the person would cease to be a member. In such cases the relevant sector will nominate a new representative, via the PPN, where applicable. Where a casual vacancy occurs it should likewise be filled by the relevant sector. Appointments in such circumstances remain reserved functions.
- If there is a PPN vacancy to fill on any of its committees/ structures, the Local Authority will notify the PPN Secretariat and ask that the representative(s) to fill these seats be chosen by the PPN. The Secretariat will notify relevant member organisations of the vacancy and arrange a meeting of all those organisations with an interest/involvement in the area where the vacancy has arisen to choose a representative.
- In addition to the representation of the above seven sectors on the SPC's, a nominee of County Longford Tourism Committee will be appointed to the Economic and Rural Development Strategic Policy Committee.

9. Membership of Strategic Policy Committees 2024 – 2029

People	**Place**	**Opportunity**	**Better Public Services**
Placemaking - Social Development	Placemaking - Physical Development	Placemaking - Economic and Rural Development	Placemaking - Governance
5 Councillors	5 Councillors	5 Councillors	5 Councillors
5 Sectoral Representatives • Business / Commercial • Community / Voluntary • Development / Construction • Environmental / Conservation • Social Inclusion	5 Sectoral Representatives • Agriculture / Farming • Community / Voluntary • Development / Construction • Environmental / Conservation • Social Inclusion	5 Sectoral Representatives • Agriculture / Farming • Business / Employers • Community / Voluntary • County Longford Tourism Committee • Development / Construction	5 Sectoral Representatives • Business / Commercial • Community / Voluntary • Environmental / Conservation • Social Inclusion • Trade Union

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10. Nomination Process

The following nomination process will apply in respect of the sectoral representatives.

- The nomination process for the Agriculture / Farming sector will be facilitated by the Farming and Agriculture Organisations Pillar who will nominate two members.
- The nomination process for the Business / Commercial Sector and the Development / Construction Sector will be facilitated by the Business and Employers Organisations Pillar who will nominate six members.
- The nomination process for the Trade Union sector will be facilitated by the Trade Union Pillar who will nominate one member.
- the Environmental / Conservation, Community / Voluntary and Social Inclusion sectors will be determined on the basis of the local nomination process through the Public Participation Network (PPN)
- The nomination process in respect of the Environmental / Conservation Sector will be facilitated by the Environmental Pillar and the associated Environmental College under the PPN arrangements who will nominate three members. 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.
- The nomination process in respect of the Community / Voluntary Sector and the Social Inclusion Sector will be facilitated by the PPN who will nominate seven members. To join the Social Inclusion Electoral College an organisation's primary objectives and activities must focus on social inclusion/social justice/equality.
- County Longford Tourism Committee will nominate one member.

11. 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 SPCs established by Local Authorities may have obligations under the Act.

A critical element of public policy formulation by the SPCs 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 SPC about the work of the committee would be exempt where the group in question complies with the Transparency Code.

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12. Expenses Incurred by 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.

13. Sequence of Events Timescale

• Draft Scheme discussed with CPG and approved	July 2024
• Advertise/Publicise/Circulate Draft Scheme	July/August 2024
• Submissions deadline (minimum 1 month, maximum 6 weeks)	late August 2024
• Council to consider submissions on Draft Scheme	September 2024
• Adoption of scheme with/without amendments	September 2024
• Council to write to National Pillars and PPN seeking Nominations	September 2024
• Nominations confirmed from each of the sectors	October 2024
• First meeting of SPCs	late October 2024

14. Adoption of SPC Scheme

Adopted by members of Longford County Council at meeting on XX XXXX 2024.

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Cathaoirleach **Chief Executive**

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Appendix 1 – Corporate Policy Group (CPG)

The CPG, like an SPC, is a committee of the Council. Its task is to advise and assist the Council, with full decision-making authority remaining with the Council. It is a matter for each Council, in co-operation with the Chief Executive, to determine the range and responsibilities and tasks of the CPG.

The membership of the CPG comprises the:

- Cathaoirleach;
- Chairpersons of each SPC; and
- Where the Municipal District is not already represented, a member of such Municipal District (as selected by the Municipal District or failing selection, the Cathaoirleach of the Municipal District or his or her nominee).

The CPG links the work of the different SPCs, acts as a sort of cabinet and provides a forum where policy positions affecting the whole Council can be agreed for submission to the full Council. It is chaired by the Cathaoirleach.

The CPG should:

- Play a key role in preparation of the annual budget.
- Provide input to the full Council on any matters of general concern to the Council either on its own initiative or following a request from the Council.
- Determine responsibility for discharge of reserved functions as between the Municipal District level (or a specific Municipal District) and the Local Authority, where the question of consistency or avoidance of unnecessary duplication is referred to it by the Chief Executive.
- 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.
- Deals 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.
- Coordinate the work of the SPCs.
- Request SPCs to consider particular policy issues, where appropriate.
- Provide feedback to the SPCs on Council policy and views in areas relevant to the SPCs.
- Participate in the consultation process in the preparation of the Corporate Plan.

The minutes of CPG meetings should be circulated to all members of the Local Authority as a matter of course.

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Appendix 2 – Strategic Policy Groups

SPCs assist the Council in the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy. This means that SPCs should be involved at the earliest stages in the policy making cycle, from the initiation and development of polices to address local challenges or opportunities, to the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of those polices.

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 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 Executives, Directors and employees – that are focused on the strategic role of SPCs.

The work of the SPC chair and Director of Services is of critical importance.

SPCs have a major role in assisting and advising the Council in relation to functions of a strategic statutory nature, i.e. policy to mirror the functions of a Local Authority, e.g. preparation of a development plan. They also have a function in other, non-statutory policy fields, such as urban, village and rural renewal plans, policy related to the development of work programmes and the establishment of priorities for particular services; consideration of the needs of people with disabilities in the formulation and implementation of relevant policies; integration of sustainability principles to particular services, and in the strategic monitoring of Local Authority services.

The SPC with responsibility for economic development and enterprise also has specific functions in relation to economic development and support for enterprise.

The Council is and remains the decision-making authority, and the SPC has no remit in relation to routine operational matters in relation to the delivery of services.

While the role of each SPC is to assist the Council in the formulation and development of policy, the final policy decisions rest ultimately with the full Council.

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Appendix 3 – Administrative Matters relating to the Operation of Strategic Policy Committees

Preparation for Meetings and Conduct of Meetings
Each individual SPC will at its inaugural meeting determine how matters relating to the preparation and conduct of meetings can best be managed. These will be documented in the agreed Standing Orders. The Standing Orders will also reflect that the Chair (Elected Member) has the casting vote and quorums for meetings to remain at three.

The following issues will be agreed:

- Procedures before and during meetings
- Training for members of the SPCs
- Linkages between the SPCs, the County Council, local agencies and sectoral interest groups
- Assistance from Public Authorities
- Expenses
- Data Protection Records Retention Policy in respect of meeting agendas & minutes

Operation of SPC Meetings
The following procedures will apply in relation to operation of SPC meetings:

- A variety of venues will be identified for the hosting of SPC meetings and where possible hybrid meetings will be facilitated.
- The SPC members will consider the need for varying meeting times to facilitate members.
- The Local Authority is committed to have regard for the Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making (2023, Department of Rural and Community Development), in order to facilitate a collaborative and more inclusive process.
- A calendar of SPC meetings will be agreed at the start of each year. The SPCs will meet as frequently as necessary and at least three time a year. Each SPC will arrange its own business and proceedings, including the fixing of dates, times and venues of meetings.
- Separate standing orders for SPC meetings, to help ensure that SPC members have a clear understanding of procedures, will apply. SPC standing orders will be adopted by the Council following recommendation from each SPC and efforts should be made to reflect the various perspectives represented on the SPCs and the nature of the business.
- The SPC Chair and relevant Director of Services should meet well in advance of an SPC meeting to clarify the agenda for the forthcoming meeting and to agree on objectives and what they would like as expected outcomes.
- SPC meeting documentation will be circulated to SPC members, ideally four weeks in advance of meetings.
- The agenda and minutes of SPC meetings should also be circulated well in advance to all SPC members. In particular, the agenda should be circulated to all SPC members four weeks in advance of meetings. Minutes should include action points which assign responsibility to a specific party or parties in respect of each action.
- The Local Authority should provide a key contact person (other than the Director of Service) for all SPC members and particularly for sectoral representatives to deal with SPC matters.
- The Chief Executive is required to advise and assist the SPC generally with regard to the performance of the functions of the SPC, including when requested to do so by the SPC members. Normally, where the views expressed at the SPC meeting require the particular attention of the Chief Executive, the SPC Chair will identify these for the Director of Services for onward transmission to the Chief Executive and other Local Authority employees as appropriate.

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- Chairs should introduce SPC recommendations for full 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.
- Many Councils already promote the use of the Irish language in various facets of their work and this practice could be extended to SPCs.

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