

WATERFORD PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORK



**S e c r e t a r i a t
S t r a t e g i c P l a n
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Waterford
**Public
Participation
Network**

Welcome Message

“Involving people in making the decisions that affect them and their lives is a core principle of democracy. Real participation goes beyond voting to a situation where people and government work in partnership to co-create infrastructure and services, solve problems and work towards the well-being of all. [This] requires a leaving aside of power differentials and making a specific effort to ensure that the voices and views of people who are not traditionally influential are heard and considered”¹

The Secretariat of Waterford PPN is committed to delivering on this ambition statement. It believes passionately in the importance of participative democracy and in ensuring that citizens have a meaningful say in matters that affect their lives. This strategic plan sets out how the Secretariat will work systematically over the next four years to fulfil its role as the organising committee of the PPN. It outlines the Secretariat’s goals and objectives for the period of the strategy and describes the key actions it will take to deliver on these.

We look forward to working in partnership with the PPN Board of Management, PPN staff, PPN member organisations, Waterford City and County Council and all stakeholders in the years to come.

¹ PPN Annual Report 2020

Background to this Strategic Plan

Introduction to Waterford PPN

Public Participation Networks (PPNs) came about following the report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government published in 2013, which recommended that communities be given more of a say in decisions taken by local government (that is, their Local Authorities or councils). As a result of this, PPN were written into law in the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

There are 31 PPNs in Ireland, with a combined membership of over 17,000 local groups and organisations. Almost 1,000 PPN representatives sit on more than 400 committees, facilitating citizens to take a more formal say on a wide range of issues, including those relating to strategic policy, local community development and policing.

Benefits of PPN Membership

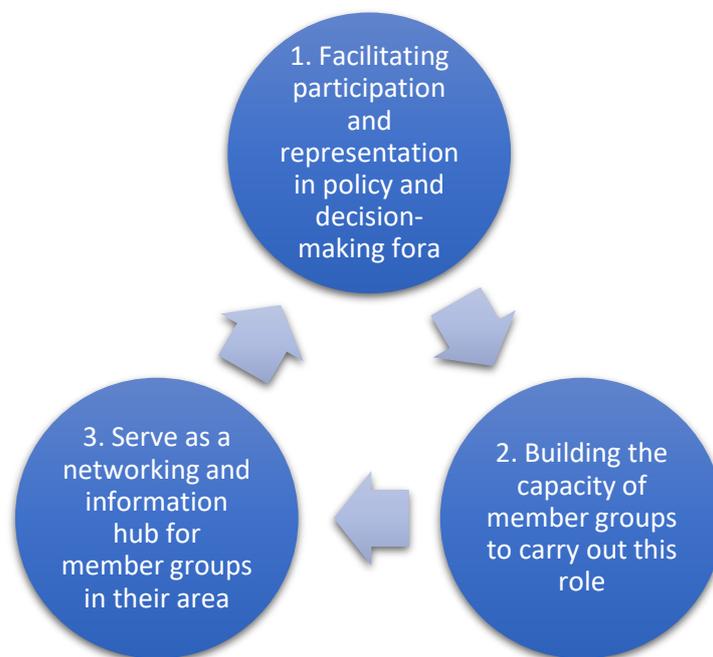
Membership of Waterford PPN has many benefits, and provides local groups and organisations with:

- Access to information on decisions and proposals being made in Waterford, and a mechanism to feed into these
- An opportunity to network with, and learn from, other organisations in Waterford with complementary goals and activities
- An opportunity to nominate members to sit on local committees and boards on behalf of PPN.
- An opportunity to become part of a Linkage Group, to have their views heard and to contribute to local policy
- Access to information on local and national funding and grants
- Access to capacity building and training opportunities to support them in their work

Our Role

The primary purpose of Waterford PPN is “to enable the PPN member groups to input into and have their voices heard within the formal decision-making structures of the local authority” (PPN Handbook, 2020). The Department of Rural and Community Development refers to PPNs as “the ‘go to’ for all local authorities who wish to benefit from community and voluntary expertise in their area”².

PPNs fulfil three functions:



This strategic plan describes how the PPN Secretariat will work to deliver on these three functions in a systematic and strategic manner. The PPN Handbook, which is produced by the Department of Rural & Community Development, sets out guidelines and advice to assist Secretariats, as well as representatives, member organisations, staff, local authorities, and other stakeholders in fulfilling its role.

² <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/b59ee9-community-network-groups/>

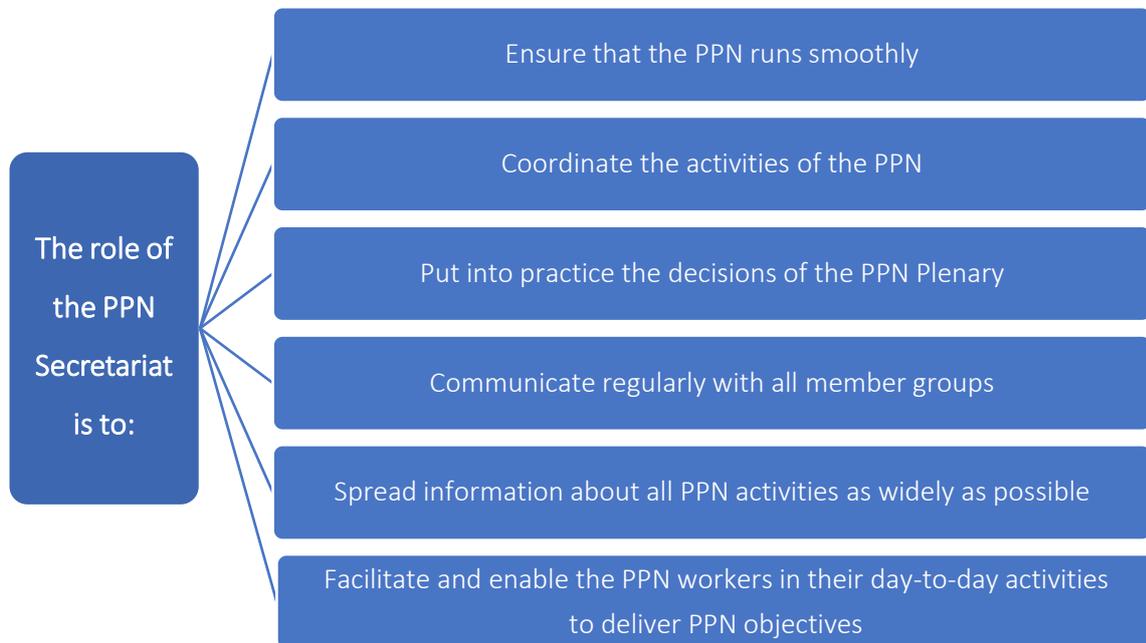
What We Do

- We elect representatives to sit on Local Government and other committees, to represent our members' views on important local matters
- We engage with Waterford City and County Council to advocate for inclusive, participative, and meaningful consultation and engagement with citizens
- We provide a mechanism for Waterford City and County Council to gather the views of local communities in response to calls for consultations
- We facilitate our members to come together to discuss matters of mutual concern and to share information and ideas
- Through our website, social media and traditional media, we help to keep citizens informed on local issues, activities and events
- We provide training to our members on participative democracy and policy-influencing to build their capacity to participate in local and national consultation processes
- We collaborate with other organisations and agencies in Waterford to organise and run initiatives and events which promote active citizenship

Meet the Team

Waterford PPN employs a staff of two people, comprising a PPN Coordinator and a Support Worker. The staff are based in the Civic Offices, Dungarvan and City Hall, Waterford.

The PPN's administration is supported by a voluntary Secretariat which is drawn from the overall membership. The Secretariat meets monthly and works closely with the PPN staff to ensure that the PPN is operating as an effective body and to best practice standards.



Structure and Funding of the PPN

The PPN works based on a “flat” structure, which helps to ensure that there is equality of participation and that no single voice or member group dominates its work. The aim is to spread the PPN’s work and decision-making across its membership. The diagram below, from the PPN Handbook, explains how the flat structure works.

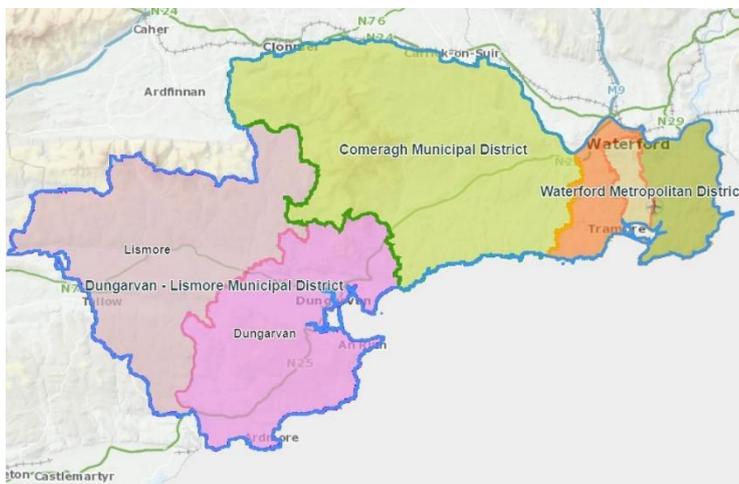


Funding is provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development and by Waterford City and County Council to *Waterford City and County PPN CLG* which is a company limited by guarantee. The company, which acts as a host organisation, is regulated under the Companies Act 2014 and all associated legislation and regulations. The funding covers staff costs, PPN activities and expenses of the Secretariat and PPN representatives. Waterford City & County Council also supports the work of the PPN by providing office facilities, utilities and IT support.

PPN Membership

Waterford PPN is made up of almost 600 member organisations, from across Waterford's five Municipal Districts:

- Comeragh
- Dungarvan / Lismore
- Tramore / Waterford City West
- Waterford City East
- Waterford City South



Membership is drawn from three sectors:

Community and Voluntary Sector	Social Inclusion Sector	Environmental Sector
• 78% Member Organisations	• 17% Member Organisations	• 5% Member Organisations

For an upto date list of all groups see www.waterfordppn.ie

How does Waterford PPN Feed into Local Structures?

PPN representatives sit on a wide range of oversight and decision-making structures across Waterford City and County. These representatives make sure that the voice of local people is heard on the local committees and fora.

PPN representatives sit on the following structures of Waterford City and County Council:

- **Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)**
- **Local Community Safety Partnership (WCSP)**
- **Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs):**
 - Economic Development & Enterprise SPC
 - Environmental, Biodiversity & Climate Action SPC
 - Housing, Community, Culture, Fire, Sport & Recreation SPC
 - Planning & Corporate SPC
 - Transportation & Infrastructure SPC

The diagram below illustrates how the structure above feed into council decision-making³



³ <https://www.tasc.ie/opengovtoolkit/engaging-as-citizens/local-government/>

Waterford PPN representatives also sit on the following structures:

Connecting for Life	Decade of Commemorations Committee	Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG)
Healthy Waterford	Waterford Heritage Forum	Purple Flag
Social Prescribing Steering Group	South East Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force	St Declan's Way
Traveller Interagency Group (TIG)	Housing Disability Sub Group	Waterford Leader Partnership
Waterford Migrant Integration Strategy Group	Waterford Purple Flag Working Group	Waterford Sports Partnership

Developing Our Strategic Plan

The development of this strategic plan gave us an opportunity to reflect on our journey since 2014 and to consider how we can strengthen our role and impact. We were eager to consult widely with our members and with other stakeholders to get their ideas on how the PPN can develop over the next four years. Therefore, we appointed an external facilitator to undertake a comprehensive consultation process with our stakeholders. Consultation was undertaken using a range of methodologies including an online survey of members, strategy workshops, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Over 120 people participated in the consultation process from the following stakeholder groups:



The consultation process helped us to understand what we are doing well as a Secretariat and where we can improve. The findings informed our thinking on our priorities for the next four years and helped us to identify the key actions we will undertake to deliver on our overall role as the PPN's organising committee.

OUR VISION

An inclusive City and County where citizens are equal partners in decisions that affect their lives

OUR MISSION

To ensure that the voice, experience, expertise and needs of community organisations are taken into account in decisions that affect them locally and nationally

OUR PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

In doing our work, we keep to a set of six principles which are set out in the PPN Handbook

Inclusive of all volunteer-led groups in their area, and actively look to include groups that might not otherwise be included or who might not often have their voice heard

Participatory, open, welcoming, respectful, willing to work together and supportive of each other. The PPN will encourage participation by member groups in all of its work, with clear communication to and from member groups using as wide a range of communication methods. The PPN supports new member groups, and member groups with more limited experience

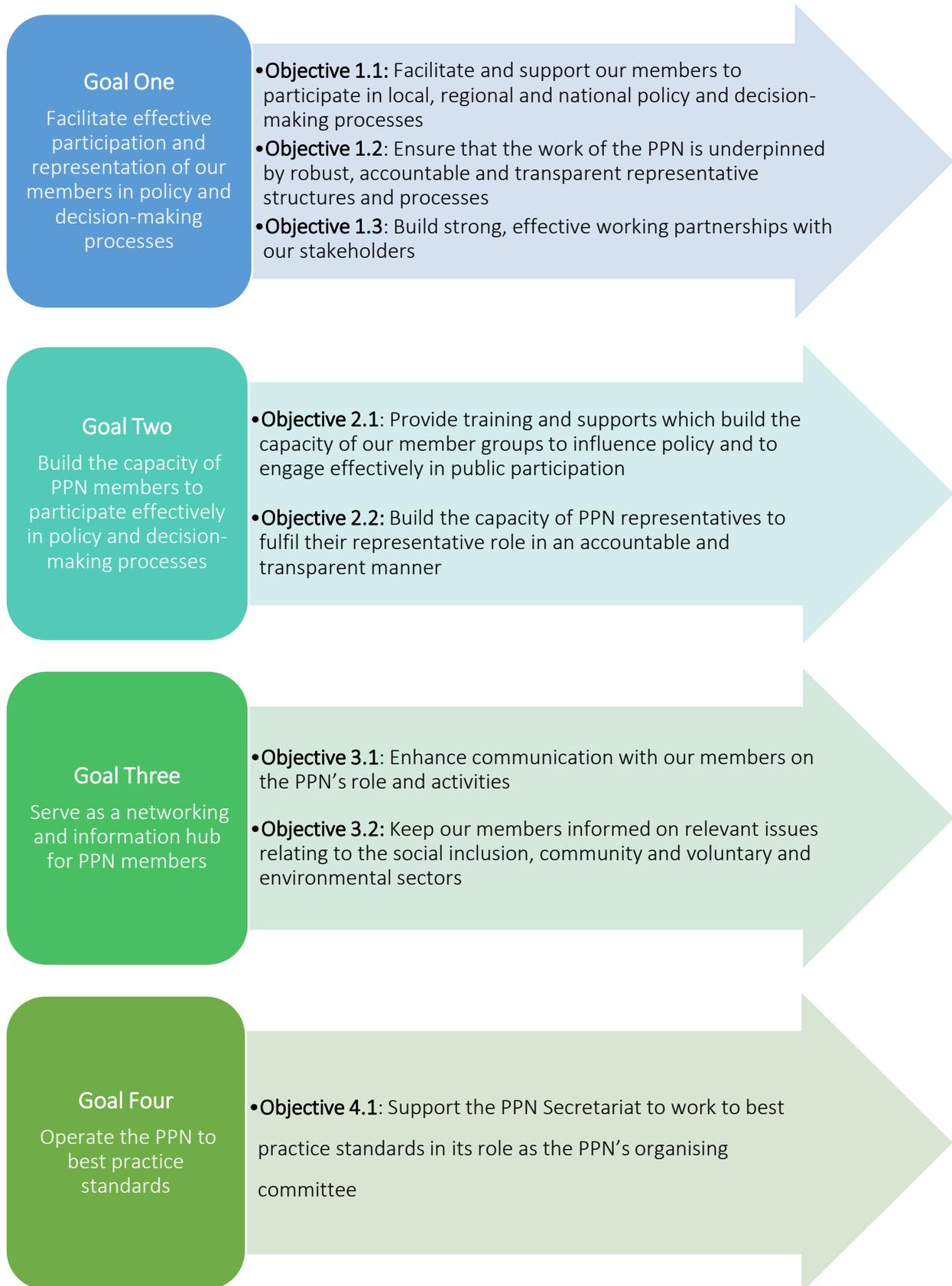
Independent from the Local Authority and of any special interests (the PPN must account to the Local Authority for its budget, but is independent in its work).

Valuing of Diversity and recognise that the sector are made up of people and member groups with a wide range of different views, experiences and opinions. PPNs are expected to feed into local government decision-making with the whole range of views from its member groups

Transparent in everything that it does. It should communicate openly, regularly and clearly with all member groups

Accountable to its member groups by putting good governance policies and procedures in place

OUR GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIONS



GOAL ONE: Effective participation and representation of our member groups in policy and decision-making processes

- Objective 1.1:** Facilitate and support our member groups to participate in local, regional and national policy and decision-making processes
- Objective 1.2:** Ensure that the work of the PPN is underpinned by robust, accountable, and transparent representative structures and processes.
- Objective 1.3:** Build strong, effective working partnerships with our stakeholders

Key Actions We Will Deliver Under Goal One

- a) We will continue to **nominate PPN representatives** to sit on Waterford City and County Council Committees, and other local committees.
- b) We will **establish robust “Linkage Groups”** to enable PPN representatives and member groups to discuss and agree positions on issues of collective concern.
- c) We will **enhance communication** between our member groups and PPN representatives, by ensuring that we have transparent reporting processes, regular Linkage Group meetings and networking opportunities.
- d) We will **work in partnership with Waterford City and County Council** to strengthen public participation by promoting good practice in citizen engagement and consultation with our member groups
- e) We will continue to **organise and participate in public consultation** processes through workshops, surveys, submissions and other mechanisms
- f) We will continue to **strengthen our relationships with policy and decision-making committees** in Waterford City and County to foster meaningful partnerships in public participation
- g) We will align PPN priorities and the work of PPN representatives with the ***Vision for Community Wellbeing*** as set out by our member groups for each Municipal District.

GOAL TWO: PPN member groups participating effectively in policy and decision-making processes

Objective 2.1: Provide training and supports which build the **capacity of our member** groups to influence policy and to engage effectively in public participation

Objective 2.2: Build the **capacity of PPN representatives** to fulfil their representative role in an accountable and transparent manner

Key Actions We Will Deliver Under Goal Two

- a) We will enhance **training and other supports to our PPN representatives** to build their capacity to effectively represent the PPN on policy and decision-making fora
- b) We will help our member groups to have an effective voice by **providing training and supports on policy-influencing, advocacy and public participation**
- c) We will review and **strengthen the PPN representative selection processes** to ensure that PPN representatives have the necessary skills and capacity to fulfill their role
- d) We will continue to provide **technical and skills-based training and supports** to our member groups to assist them to grow and thrive (such as training on funding, good governance, planning and data protection).
- e) We will provide training to our member groups and PPN representatives to build their capacity to work together **towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals**

GOAL THREE: An effective networking and information hub for PPN members

Objective 3.1: Enhance communication with our member groups on the PPN's role, function and activities

Objective 3.2: Keep our members informed on relevant issues relating to the social inclusion, community and voluntary and environmental sectors

Key Actions We Will Deliver Under Goal Three

- a) We will **continuously enhance communication with our member groups** and work to communicate openly, regularly and clearly with them through our website, social media, traditional media and email.
- b) We will continue to **provide a virtual information hub to communities** by making up-to-date information and resources available on funding, governance, organisational effectiveness and other community issues
- c) We will work with all our stakeholders to **promote the role of the PPN** across Waterford City and County and to **actively build our membership**
- d) We will provide more opportunities for our member groups and PPN representatives to **network with each other** and with other PPN member groups and representatives.
- e) Through the **annual Community and Voluntary Awards**, we will celebrate and promote the work of the PPN and the community and voluntary sector in Waterford City and County

GOAL FOUR: Operate the PPN Secretariat to best practice standards

Objective 4.1: Ensure that the PPN Secretariat is working to best practice standards in its role as the PPN's organising committee

Key Actions We Will Deliver Under Goal Four

- a) Through training and other supports, we will continue to **strengthen the capacity of the Secretariat** to operate to best practice standards, in line with the PPN Handbook and Departmental Circulars
- b) We will **support the PPN staff** in their day-to-day activities to deliver PPN objectives
- c) We will **clarify the operating and legal structure of the PPN** to ensure that the PPN is operating to best practice governance standards

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Over the period of this plan, we are committed to working hand-in-hand with our partners to advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). PPN representatives will use their role to progress decisions and policies that:

- build sustainable communities;
- improve quality of life and wellbeing in Waterford City and County;
- protect the environment;
- promote equality and inclusion, and
- have respect for human rights.

Crucially, we are committed to building awareness within our member groups and representatives of the SDGs and of how communities can work together to contribute towards achieving them.



IMPLEMENTING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

This Strategic Plan will guide the work of the Secretariat over the next four years. Each year, we will produce an annual plan which will outline our priorities for the year ahead. The annual plan will help us to ensure that our activities are consistent with our vision, mission and values.

In implementing this strategic plan, we will align our priorities with our *Visions for Community Wellbeing* which sets out what our member organisations want to see achieved under the following headings:

- Physical and Mental Health
- Work, Economy and Resources
- Social and Community Development
- Participation, Democracy and Good Governance
- Values, Culture and Meaning
- Environment and Sustainability



Waterford Visions for Community Wellbeing can be found on www.waterfordppn.ie

ACHIEVING MEANINGFUL OUTCOMES

As the PPN Secretariat, we hope that the following outcomes will be achieved by successfully implementing this strategy:



The PPN will be the recognised mechanism for participation by our member groups in local government processes



The PPN will have developed a strong working relationship with all departments in Waterford City and County Council and there will be a widespread understanding of the role and function of the PPN.



Through our PPN representatives, our member groups will have a strong and protected voice in decision-making bodies and committee across Waterford City and County



Our member groups will be well informed and motivated to participate in the PPN's activities



There will be effective processes and structures underpinning the work of the PPN Secretariat



Engaging with the PPN will contribute to the well-being of communities and groups in Waterford City and County