



Public Participation Network **Kildare**

Kildare PPN Submission

Seanad Public Consultation on the Future of Local Democracy.

Kildare Public Participation Network
Community & Culture
Level 7, Áras Chill Dara
Devoy Park
Naas
Co. Kildare

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INTRODUCTION

Kildare Public Participation Network (Kildare PPN) was established on foot of the Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government published in 2014, which recommended greater input by communities into decision making at local Government level. The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provided for the formal establishment of PPNs and they are now operational in all Local Authority areas.

Kildare PPN has 841 diverse member groups in the community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental pillars in Kildare. The primary purpose of Kildare PPN is to enable PPN member groups to input into and have their voices heard within the formal decision-making structures of Kildare County Council. The PPN is now the main way that Local Authorities connect with groups active in their area. Kildare PPN currently have representatives on the Local Community Development Committee, the Joint Policing Committee, and the Strategic Policy Committees with Kildare County Council. Kildare PPN therefore provide a mechanism to facilitate the two-way flow of information between the Local Authority and their groups to influence policy development and the delivery of services to the wider community.

Kildare PPN welcomes the opportunity to make this Submission on behalf of its membership to the Seanad Public Consultation Committee.

CONSULTATION

Kildare PPN held in-person and online consultations during July 2023 with our member groups to gather our network's suggestions and recommendations on a number of issues including Participation, Democracy and Good Governance. The findings from these consultations form our submission for the future of local democracy ahead of the local elections in June 2024.

Sixty people contributed to the in-person consultations, with an additional seventeen on-line submissions representing voices from the Community & Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental sectors in County Kildare.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Public Engagement and Participation in the Local Government Process and Functions

In order to create a more inclusive and participatory future democracy, it is essential to amplify public engagement at the local government level. Kildare PPN is a valuable initiative that should be further empowered with increased funding and resources. Efforts should be directed towards simplifying the electoral registration process, making it more inclusive and accessible for all, including immigrants who have moved to Ireland. Encouraging broader voter registration and participation is crucial to ensuring a diverse and representative electorate.

Key Points:

- Simplify and expand electoral registration processes to include immigrants.
- Promote awareness campaigns to encourage voter registration and participation.
- Strengthen Kildare PPN by providing additional funding and support.
- Foster collaboration between local government and schools through the PPN to engage youth and young people in community volunteering and decision-making.

The Powers of Local Authorities

To enhance local democracy, it is imperative to re-evaluate the powers of local authorities and create a more balanced governance structure. A shift towards directly elected mayors can bring fresh perspectives and greater accountability to local government. Additionally, a comprehensive governance framework should be established to ensure proper oversight and accountability for decision-making at both the local and governmental levels.

Key Points:

- Introduce directly elected mayors to infuse new ideas and accountability into local governance.
- Establish transparent oversight mechanisms for decision-making at all levels, including local councils and government.
- Strengthen accountability for grants and funding distribution to community groups.
- Expand the role of public participation networks in decision-making processes.

Impact of Changes to the Local Government Process

The abolition of town councils and the introduction of directly elected mayors represent significant changes to the local government landscape. These changes can foster a more inclusive, transparent, and responsive democratic framework. The return of decision-making control to local county councils is a step towards greater community-driven governance. Embracing technology by broadcasting council meetings and live streaming Municipal District meetings enhances transparency and accessibility.

Key Points:

- Embrace technology to broadcast council meetings and Municipal District meetings, promoting transparency and accessibility.
- Reinforce the role of local county councils as the primary decision-making entities.
- Encourage meaningful representation by allowing community, youth, senior citizens, ethnic diverse, and sports representatives to participate in council decision-making.
- Establish educational programmes that promote understanding of democracy, decision-making, and community engagement.

CONCLUSION

The future of democracy lies in fostering robust public engagement, revamping local authority powers, and embracing changes that amplify transparency and inclusivity. By empowering initiatives like Kildare PPN, facilitating broader voter registration, and redefining local governance, we can create a more participatory and equitable democracy that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of all members of the community.

Thank You