

Understanding Local Government: Your Role and How It Works

A guide for PPN members on local authority structures, decision-making bodies, and how your voice shapes the community.



The Foundation: What Is Local Government?

Local government is the tier of public administration closest to the people — responsible for delivering essential services and implementing policies at community level.

City Councils

Serve urban populations, managing everything from planning to infrastructure in Ireland's cities.

County Councils

Cover rural and regional areas, providing services across housing, roads, environment, and more.

Community Services

From libraries to parks, local authorities are the backbone of everyday public life.



National vs. Local: A Connected System



How the Two Tiers Relate

National Government (Dáil Éireann) sets overall policy direction and the legislative framework — the "what" and "why" of public policy.

Local Authorities implement those national policies and manage local services — the "how" and "where," tailored to each community's needs.

Local authorities operate within the laws and budgets provided by national government but hold real power over local decisions.

How Local Authority Structures Work

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BASICS

Local authorities are made up of two connected parts: **the elected Council**, which sets direction and approves major decisions, and **the Executive**, which delivers services and carries out those decisions.

Elected Council (Councillors)

Chosen by the public to represent communities and make political decisions.

- Set policy direction
- Approve budgets and major decisions
- Make key decisions on behalf of residents

Councillors are the decision-makers.

Executive (Chief Executive + staff)

Professional officials who manage day-to-day operations and deliver services such as housing, roads, and more.

- Run local authority services
- Implement council decisions
- Manage staff, resources, and operations

Staff make things happen.

The Key Structures

Together, these structures create a clear hierarchy: the Full Council sits at the top, the Corporate Policy Group and committees coordinate and shape priorities, and municipal districts handle local issues at the community level.



The Corporate Policy Group (CPG): Coordination & Leadership

The Corporate Policy Group (CPG) serves as a vital leadership and coordination body within the local authority structure, though it is not a decision-making body in itself.

It is composed of the **Cathairleach** (Mayor/Chair) and the Chairs of each **Strategic Policy Committee (SPC)**.

The CPG's core functions include setting overall priorities for the council, coordinating the work of the various SPCs, shaping the council's work programme, and providing a crucial link between the political leadership and the Chief Executive.

Think of the CPG as the "**steering group**" for the council, guiding its strategic direction.

How Decisions Flow Through Local Authorities

The decision-making process within local authorities involves several key stages, ensuring policies are developed, aligned, approved, and implemented effectively:



Policy Development

Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) develop detailed policies and proposals in their respective areas.



Priority Alignment

The Corporate Policy Group (CPG) reviews and aligns these proposals with the council's overall strategic priorities. This step is optional but highly influential.



Council Approval

The Full Council debates, amends, and formally approves the policies and proposals, turning them into official council decisions.



Implementation

The Chief Executive and their staff implement the approved policies, ensuring they are put into practice effectively across the community.

Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs)

DRIVING LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

LCDCs are established in each local authority area to **coordinate and oversee local and community development funding**, ensuring a joined-up approach across all stakeholders.



Who Sits on an LCDC?

Members include local authority elected members, council staff, public bodies, and community interest representatives.



Their Purpose

Promote citizen engagement, ensure value for money, and drive a collaborative approach to community development.



Key Output: LECP

LCDCs develop the **Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)** — the roadmap for economic and social development in the area.

How SPCs and LCDCs Work Together

SPCs

Strategic policy direction for the local authority's own functions — shaping how the council delivers its services and responsibilities.

Both committees draw on the combined expertise of elected members, council staff, and community stakeholders — ensuring decisions are informed, representative, and effective.

LCDCs

Planning, coordination, and delivery of local and community development initiatives — focused on the broader community ecosystem beyond the council itself.



The Public Participation Network (PPN)

YOUR VOICE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The PPN is the **structured link between local authorities and the community and voluntary sector**, ensuring community voices are connected to local governance.

Community

Supports local groups and voluntary organisations so their perspectives are heard.

Social Inclusion

Brings forward the views of people and groups who may otherwise be underrepresented.

Environment

Represents environmental interests and priorities in community planning and decisions.

Together, these three pillars ensure **diverse community interests are represented in local decision-making** through a clear, structured process.

- ✔ PPN members are not just observers — they are active participants with a formal seat at the table.

PPN's Role in SPCs and LCDCs

1 Nominees to SPCs and LCDCs

PPN representatives are nominated to serve on Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs).

2 Community Perspective in Discussions

They bring community perspectives and on-the-ground knowledge into policy and development discussions.

3 Policies Reflect Community Needs

Their involvement helps ensure policies and plans reflect community needs and lived experience.

4 Active Participation

PPN representatives are active participants in these decision-making bodies.

How PPN Connects Communities to Local Government

The Public Participation Network (PPN) serves as a vital bridge, embedding community voice directly into the local authority's decision-making processes.

PPN Provides Representatives

PPN provides representatives to key structures: Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs).

Community Views Informs Decisions

PPN representatives bring views from their respective Linkage Groups and feed back to members, ensuring community voice gets inside decision-making structures.

Active Participation

PPN members are active participants, not just observers, in these key bodies, contributing meaningfully to discussions and outcomes.

Where PPN Connects

SPCs

PPN representatives contribute to where policy is shaped and influenced, ensuring community needs are considered.

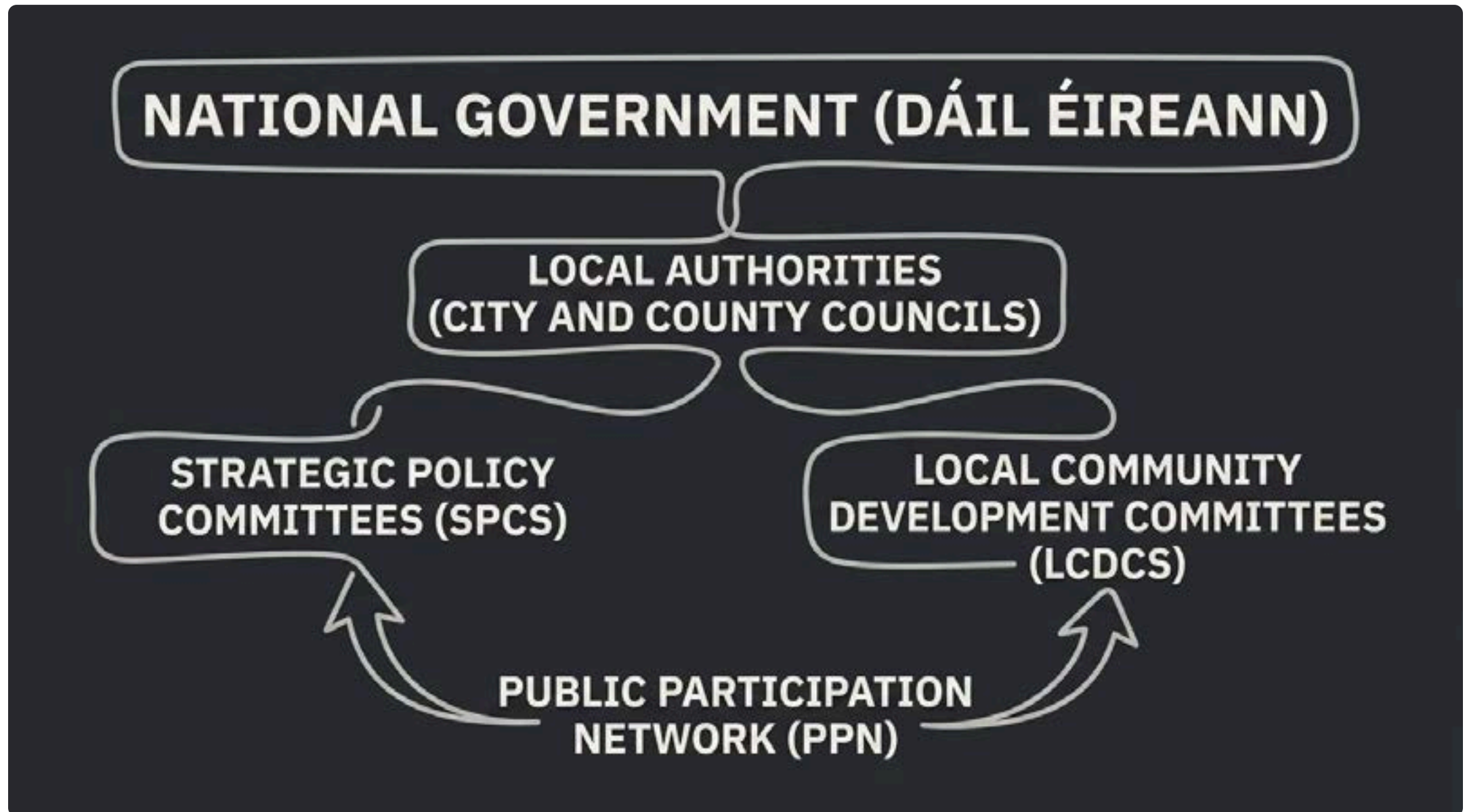


LCDCs

PPN representatives actively engage in community planning and funding decisions, guiding local development initiatives.

Ultimately, the PPN ensures that community voice is not just heard, but is actively integrated into the heart of local government decision-making structures.

Visualising the Structure



- ❏ **Key Takeaway:** A layered system where national policy is implemented locally — with community input, through the PPN, vital at every stage of the process.



Your Engagement Matters

Shaping Our Communities Together

Be Informed

Understanding these structures empowers PPN members to engage with confidence and purpose at every level.

Be Involved

Your participation in SPCs and LCDCs directly influences local policy, funding, and community development plans.

Be the Change

Together, we build stronger, more responsive communities — where every voice counts and every contribution matters.