



National Women's  
Council of Ireland  
Comhairle Náisiúnta  
na mBan in Éirinn

---

Submission to the Draft Strategic Policy Scheme 2019-  
2024 for Dublin City Council

---

July 2019

National Women's Council of Ireland  
100 North King Street, Dublin 7  
Tel: 01 – 6790100  
[www.nwci.ie](http://www.nwci.ie)

## Introduction

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) welcomes the opportunity to submit our views to the Draft Strategic Policy Scheme 2019-2024 for Dublin City Council. This work is kindly supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development through the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) administered through Pobal.

NWCI is the leading national women's membership organisation in Ireland. Established in 1973, it represents a membership base of over 190 groups and organisations across a diversity of backgrounds, sectors and locations and is committed to the promotion of full equality between women and men.

### **Context: Women and decision making**

Inequalities between men and women continue to be persistent and far reaching and pervasive. Women have been traditionally under represented on local decision making structures. Women are frequently multiply disadvantaged by policies that do not recognise their different realities and lived experiences, including unequal pay, responsibilities at work and home, and gender-based violence.

---

*Women are more likely to be poor, to parent alone, to be the main provider of unpaid care work, to be in precarious employment, to earn low wages and to be at risk of domestic or sexual violence.*

---

Representation of all women, and particularly women in disadvantaged or marginalised communities, must be incorporated into all stages of policy development, planning and programme delivery. Local government in particular, with its proximity to women's lives, is uniquely situated to strengthen women's leadership and participation and improve the representation of their interests. All policy/steering groups responsible for decisions in communities including Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) should achieve a 40% quota of women representatives who can contribute an equality lens that takes into account the requirements of women living in poverty or social or geographic isolation. This should be achieved by making concrete national commitments on composition, function, terms of reference and standing orders of those committees and groups.

It is the task of the SPCs, as committees of the council, to advise and assist the council in the formulation, development and review of policy. 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. It is crucial that this system is effective in increasing participation and influence in policy making at local level. Incorporating a diversity of views and experiences is critical to effective design of policies, programmes and budgets. A review of the SPC structure was called for to improve their impact in the recommendations of the Public Participation Network (PPN) Annual Report 2017.<sup>1</sup> In a recent Ipsos MRBI survey carried out on behalf of the National Oversight and Audit Commission, only 26% of respondents agreed that they could influence decisions their local authority area.<sup>2</sup> A broader review and open public consultation led by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government should be initiated. This should include the views and perspectives of previous members, including those representing the PPN, on their experience of being part of the SPCs.

Decision-making processes informed by diversity<sup>3</sup> have been found to be consistently more likely to find innovative solutions to foster inclusive growth. SPCs can, through their competences and composition, undertake concrete actions in favour of gender equality. While it is important not to categorise women as a minority group, it is essential to recognise the particular or perceived nature of women's and men's roles in society and tailor budgets, policies, plans and programmes accordingly. Equally, women's equality is not a minority issue; the rights and needs of women cut across all sections of society. Policies and programmes should not be shaped by assumptions. International human rights mechanisms recognise that public participation rights encompass the rights to be consulted at each phase of legislative drafting and policymaking, to voice criticism and to submit proposals aimed at improving the functioning and inclusivity of all governmental bodies engaged in the conduct of public affairs.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://assets.gov.ie/3185/221118103749-263ddd13dc4c4e568e7518a3b35a7711.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> National Oversight and Audit Commission Local Authority Satisfaction Survey 2019 NOAC Report No. 21 – July 2019

<sup>3</sup> Gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability, nationality, race, civil status, religion, socio-economic status

## NWCI Observations on the Draft Strategic Policy Scheme

The following are our observations on the Draft Strategic Policy Scheme 2019-2024 for Dublin City Council. They are centred on representation and how the structure operates.

1. Statutory guidance documents have been developed on the establishment and operation of SPCs and how they should discharge their key functions. We refer to the Circular LG 07/2014 - Establishment of New Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and Corporate Policy Group – Strategic Policy Committee Guidance.<sup>4</sup>

The Departmental Guidance encourages gender balance among sectoral representation on SPCs where possible -

*“the following factors, which are in no particular order of importance, must be considered in determining sectoral representation on and across each SPC -*

- *A stated commitment to working towards gender balance and to encouraging as full as possible gender balance in representation from the sectors;”*

*“The sectors should be asked to bear in mind the objective of achieving a 40% gender balance in the making of appointments, as well as the need to foster social inclusiveness and equality when selecting their representatives.”*

This does not appear in the Draft Strategic Policy Scheme and is of concern to our organisation and our members. Such a stated commitment is in line with Government policy including the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017 – 2020;

Action 4.14 *“Support women’s community organisations to identify relevant local structures for participation, and support the participation and progression of women within these structures locally, regionally and nationally.”*

We understand why some SPCs would struggle to achieve a gender balance due to the low representation of women as elected councillors in many parts of the country.<sup>5</sup> With two thirds of all seats on every SPC, local Councillors have a significant impact on the policy development and implementation of

---

<sup>4</sup>[https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/lg\\_07\\_\\_2014\\_circular\\_est\\_of\\_spcs\\_and\\_cpg\\_-\\_spc\\_guidance.pdf](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/lg_07__2014_circular_est_of_spcs_and_cpg_-_spc_guidance.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Only seven out of thirty one Local Authority areas have reached or surpassed 30% gender balance of councillors

local authority services across the country. This further reinforces the need to introduce gender quotas at local level to ensure that when selection happens with councillors they have equal numbers of women and men to draw from. Further to this an effort should be made to compile the gender balance of each SPC in each local authority area and this should be made public. This is also in line with the commitments in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plan and is recommended in the Consultation Principles & Guidance from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.<sup>6</sup> Without establishing a baseline, a target and a plan to achieve gender parity on all decision making structures, significant change will not be achieved or impact will not be measured.

2. People have a number of rights and policies that underpin them in relation to participation. Valuing the participation of Public Participation Network (PPN) and other community representatives means acknowledgement that extra time, resources and support can be required in order to facilitate equal involvement and influence. Participation is a crucial element of the duties conferred on SPCs under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014.<sup>7</sup> The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act (2014), provides, in Section 42, for the introduction of a public sector equality and human rights duty.

Section 42(1) outlines what public bodies are obliged to do:

42(1) A public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to—

- (a) eliminate discrimination,
- (b) promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and
- (c) protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.

A 'public body' is broadly defined in the Act and specifically includes Local Authorities. The duty applies to the totality of a public body's functions: as an

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2019/03/DPER-Consultation-Principles-and-Guidelines-2016.pdf>

November 2016

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty/>

employer, policy maker, service provider, and procurer of services. This is referred to also in the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020<sup>8</sup>;

*Action 6.1: All Public bodies will assess and identify the human rights of women and girls and the gender equality issues that are relevant to their functions and address these in their strategic planning, policies and practices, and annual reports, in line with the public sector duty.*

Civil participation in the decision-making process: the code of good practice, supported by the Council of Europe

Public policies, programmes and services affect men and women differently and they will always affect those who were not considered in unexpected ways.

## **Recommendations**

1. Reach gender parity: establish formal monitoring by requiring all SPCs to report gender breakdown for the committees and chairpersons. Ensure gender balance across all SPCs especially those with an economic and enterprise brief.<sup>9</sup> The Economic and enterprise SPCs have important roles in the implementation and delivery of Local Economic and Community Plans.<sup>10</sup>
2. Promotion of succession planning in areas of low and median gender representation through nomination, rotation and review of SPC membership.
3. Report on good practice and publicly recognise where efforts are being made to improve gender balance and meet gender goals eg. Chambers Irelands Local Government awards.
4. Invite the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to provide support and guidance in implementation of public sector and human rights duty.
5. As part of any review process, existing policies and programmes should be gender proofed to (assess whether it has had particular intended or

---

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/National\\_Strategy\\_for\\_Women\\_and\\_Girls\\_2017\\_-\\_2020.pdf/Files/National\\_Strategy\\_for\\_Women\\_and\\_Girls\\_2017\\_-\\_2020.pdf](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/National_Strategy_for_Women_and_Girls_2017_-_2020.pdf/Files/National_Strategy_for_Women_and_Girls_2017_-_2020.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Three out of four SPCs in Kerry only had one female member out of 11 or 12 members. 2/13 members of the Kilkenny Economic SPC were women.

<sup>10</sup> NWCI(2017) Submission on Local Economic and Community Plans  
[https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWCI\\_Submission\\_on\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_Monitoring\\_and\\_Review\\_LECPs\\_-\\_06.04.17.pdf](https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWCI_Submission_on_Guidelines_for_Monitoring_and_Review_LECPs_-_06.04.17.pdf)

unintended impact on women or men) with the findings applied in subsequent planning.(See appendix)

6. The representation of social inclusion reps on all SPCs to ensure the most marginalised voices can be heard in local government structures is crucial.<sup>11</sup>
7. Importance of mutual support through offering two places for PPN reps on each SPC or a support structure for PPN reps on all SPCs to be established and supported.
8. Working processes that do not alienate or intimidate are essential. Full and meaningful participation relies on open communication lines and good relationships. Make regular communication and more meaningful interaction easier by setting up fora, working groups, task groups, working papers and online discussion groups. Change the practice to increase participation through making mechanisms for engagement friendlier, e.g. South Dublin had adopted a roundtable format for its SPC meetings.<sup>12</sup>
9. Expect that there will be additional financial burdens and limitations for women participating in decision making structures. Arranging childcare on site and/or providing reimbursements for care and travel costs should be standard. Make sure members are aware of such arrangements and know how to complete the reimbursement process. To create access and opportunity for women's participation requires that facilitation of childcare and other caring responsibilities are embedded into the operation of all structures.
10. Diverse needs and lifestyles of the target groups should be accommodated, with particular consideration of care responsibilities, part-time and out-of-office work schedules and disproportionate dependence on or lack of access to public transport among some groups of women. Meeting times should be staggered throughout the day and week, make sure meetings have a set finish time and give plenty of notice once a meeting has been scheduled to allow for alternative care arrangements to be made.

---

<sup>11</sup> 2,365 of the registered organisations (17.74%) opted to be part of the Social Inclusion College within the Network. This proportion was lower than the corresponding figure for 2016 (19.17%). There is variation in different parts of the country eg. Carlow, Cavan and Offaly were below 10%. <http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NOAC-Performance-Indicators-Report-2017.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Brian Harvey(2014); Community participation in South Dublin: the experience of the South Dublin Community Platform

11. Send notice of meetings in good time. Minutes and meetings papers including agendas circulated well in advance to given adequate time for preparation. Also ensure opportunities for members to put items on the agenda<sup>13</sup>
12. Building capacity of members through participation in equality, anti-racism and unconscious gender bias training.
13. Have due regard to the ways in which people absorb and contribute information. Traditionally, women's communications styles are more narrative, while men can be reticent to expand when describing personal experiences. Make allowance for language barriers, differing literacy levels and learning difficulties. Be aware that some women may not have experience of formalised structures and so will need time to get used to the process; small-group discussions will allow for meaningful interaction where members are more likely to raise their voices.
14. Build in regular reviews of the committee structure and operations
15. Adoption of the Charter for Equality between men and women in public life(see appendix)

## **Conclusion**

NWCI are calling for the resourcing of a comprehensive gender audit across structures and programmes in all Local Authorities including funding programmes and consultation processes –with a view to tackling gender imbalance in representation and assessing the degree to which women's and men's differentiated needs are being addressed in regional and local plans. Resources should also be ring-fenced to carry out a comprehensive plan to make institutional policies and practices at local authority level more gender sensitive.

---

<sup>13</sup> Community Participation Project. Doherty, Ger (2008) Good practice guide to community participation. Dublin: Inner City Organisations Network/North West Inner City Network.  
<https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/15568/1/GoodPracticeGuide.pdf>



## **Appendix One**

### **Charter for equality between men and women in local life**

In order to promote gender equality at the local and regional level, the Council for European Municipalities and Regions launched the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life in 2006. The Charter is both a political document and a practical instrument. It encourages local and regional governments to make a public commitment to equality and to implement the principles listed in the Charter. The Charter proposes concrete methods by equality of women and men can be pursued in different fields of competences: political participation, employment, public services, urban planning, etc. Today, over 1600 local and regional governments in 32 European countries have signed the Charter.<sup>14</sup> No local authorities in Ireland have signed up to this charter.

## **Appendix Two**

### **Gender Proofing Template<sup>15</sup>**

1. Is there representation of women and men in decision making positions?
2. Have the specific needs and experiences of women and men been taken into account in the planning process?
3. Have factors relating to women and men's health over their life course and in relation to diversity and status been taken into account?
4. Has due consideration been given to the intersection of gender with equality grounds such as age, race, disability, ethnicity, geographic location, sexual orientation, family status, socio-economic status etc?
5. Is there a specific commitment in the policy or plan to promote gender equality and address gender differences?
6. Are there areas of the policy / plan /structure that perpetuate gender differences or gender stereotypes?
7. Are there any areas of the policy or plan that unintentionally disadvantage different groups of women or men or negatively impact on different groups of women or men?

---

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.charter-equality.eu/>

<sup>15</sup> Adapted from Marie Crawley and Louise O'Meara(2004)Gender Impact Assessment Handbook

8. Are there any areas where specific services need to be developed such as positive action measures for different groups of women and men?
9. Have service users that represent women's organisations and / or community groups participated in giving feedback on the services that are being planned, in data gathering exercises or on the policy that is being drawn up?
10. Have factors such as women and men's experiences of poverty, social isolation, care responsibilities and access to employment been taken into account?
11. What can be done to promote their participation in the decision making processes that affect their lives?
12. What indicators will you use to demonstrate achievements, progress and impact?