

6

The Secretariat



The PPN Secretariat is an important part of the PPN. It is the administrative arm and takes its direction from the Plenary (all of the Member Groups).

The Secretariat is made up of Member Group representatives from each of the three Colleges (Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental). The role of the Secretariat is to make sure that the decisions taken by the Plenary, the operational decision-making body of the PPN, are carried out. They also oversee the implementation of the Strategic Plan. If the Secretariat needs to make operational decisions between Plenary meetings, they then must be approved (ratified) by the Plenary at the next Plenary meeting.

Who is the Secretariat?



How the Secretariat is made up should reflect the PPN as a whole. To comply with the Department's circular (CVSP 1/2014), the PPN Secretariat must contain at a minimum:

- one representative from each of the Municipal Districts in a county (or set geographical areas within the cities), and
- equal numbers (but at least two people) from each of the three electoral colleges (Environmental, Social Inclusion, Community and Voluntary).

Where vacancies occur, they should be filled as soon as possible.

People elected to the Secretariat must be nominated by a Member Group from within their own area (that is, geographical area) or College (that is, Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion or Environmental).

Only Member Groups connected with the same area or College are allowed to vote for each nominee. For example, if a candidate is nominated by a group in the Social Inclusion College in a particular Municipal District, only Member Groups who are part of the Social Inclusion College in that area can vote for them. Some PPNs may also want to appoint Secretariat members on the basis of Linkage Groups. The important thing is that the Secretariat acts on behalf of all of the full PPN - all PPN Member Groups - in carrying out its duties.

The College system makes sure that all three separate voices (Environment, Social Inclusion, Community and Voluntary) within the PPN can be equally represented on the Secretariat and their views can be communicated clearly.

Local Authority staff cannot be a member of the PPN Secretariat, even if they are part of a PPN Member Group.

Election to Government Office

In order to preserve the independence of the PPN, current PPN Secretariat Members cannot stand for election to any Government office, local, national or European, while remaining part of the PPN Secretariat. If a Secretariat member decides to stand for election to Government office, they must resign their position immediately before putting their name forward for nomination.

If a Secretariat member is unsuccessful in their bid to be nominated for election to Government office, they must wait at least 12 months after the date on which they were advised that their bid for nomination was unsuccessful before seeking election to the Secretariat.

If the Secretariat member is nominated for election, but is unsuccessful in their election, they must wait at least 12 months after the date of the election before seeking election to the Secretariat.

If the Secretariat member is successfully elected, they must wait at least 12 months from the date their term of office expires before seeking election to the Secretariat.

Role of the Secretariat

The Secretariat is an administrative body that takes its direction from the Plenary of the PPN. Its role is to:

- Help put operational decisions of the Plenary in place.
- Make sure that the PPN is working properly in between Plenaries on behalf of the Member Groups.
- Organise or help to organise the PPN activities on behalf of the Member Groups.
- Communicate regularly with all PPN Members and share information about all PPN activities as widely as possible.
- Keep correct, up to date, records of PPN business, including minutes of meetings and make sure agendas are circulated in good time.
- Be a point of contact for the PPN for the Local Authority, Department of Rural and Community Development, other PPNs, the National Advisory Group and other stakeholders of the PPN.
- Deal with all correspondence on behalf of PPN, by sending out copies and writing responses.
- Facilitate and enable the PPN Workers in their day to day activities to deliver PPN objectives of the PPN.

Nominations and Term of Office

Election of the Secretariat Members should be in line with the democratic mandate of the PPNs.



In order to really achieve participation, the PPN must make sure that Representative roles, such as the Secretariat, are refreshed regularly.



Secretariats must be refreshed at least every 3-5 years to make sure that there is a balance between the need to have some members in place with the knowledge and understanding of the work that the PPN is doing, and the need to make sure that the membership is properly represented. When the Secretariat is being refreshed, the longest-serving members must step down first to allow new voices to join. In addition, no Secretariat member should serve more than two consecutive terms.



The PPNs must separate the election cycle for the Secretariat from the local election cycle for Councillors, to ensure that an experienced Secretariat is in place when there is a need to elect new representatives to Local Authority Boards and Committees. Where this is not the case, PPNs must put a plan in place to do this as soon as possible.



Secretariat members should be nominated by Member Groups following an open and transparent nominations process. In the event that the original nominating body no longer exists, or the Secretariat member is no longer associated with them, the Secretariat member will be deemed to have stepped down from the role and an alternate will be selected following another nominations process.

Secretariat membership is valid for 3-5 years, depending on the PPN.



A provision to stagger the Secretariat term of office must be included in all PPN Constitutions. If it not currently part of a PPN's Constitution, it should be addressed as soon as possible, acknowledging that a formal amendment to the constitution and the holding of a Special General Meeting may be specifically required to do this. At least one third of a group should remain in place to guarantee continuity.

Each Secretariat should have a Rotating Chair / Facilitator, appointed from within its membership. In keeping with the Flat Structure, the role of the Rotating Chair / Facilitator should be time-limited and available to every member of the Secretariat at least once during their term of office. To make sure that every Secretariat member has the opportunity to act as Rotating Chair / Facilitator, it is recommended that this role rotate after every meeting, but at least every 6 months. Each Secretariat member who takes up the position of rotating facilitator must undergo training in the responsibilities/competencies required, such as chairing meetings and good team communications skills. Such training is to be paid for from the PPN budget.

It is important that the principles and practices of the Flat Structure (e.g. inclusion, participation, active engagement of all members, non-hierarchical) are followed no matter what title may be given to particular roles on the Secretariat, such as the title of Facilitator or Chairperson.

The role of the Rotating Chair / Facilitator is to:

- Actively facilitate meetings during their term as Rotating Chair / Facilitator.
- Make sure that agreed actions from meetings held during their term as Rotating Chair / Facilitator are put into practice on behalf of the PPN and, where necessary, approved (ratified) by the Plenary.
- Represent the Secretariat at relevant meetings and events during their term as Rotating Chair / Facilitator.
- Carry out any other necessary duties on behalf of the PPN as required.

Code of Conduct

Every PPN must have a Secretariat Code of Conduct to make sure that the Secretariat operates in an open and transparent manner and is as inclusive as possible. A sample Code of Conduct is set out in Appendix 8.



Secretariat Meetings

The Secretariat should agree an annual schedule of meetings at the beginning of each year as part of its Workplan. Meetings should be held at locations and times that are most suitable for the majority of Secretariat members.

The Secretariat should agree on the number of meetings needed each year to allow the Secretariat to deliver its Workplan. It may be necessary to have additional meetings to deal with unforeseen events that might come up, however these should be exceptional.

Attendance at Secretariat meetings is essential. If a Secretariat member fails to attend three consecutive meetings and, in the opinion of the PPN Secretariat, without good reason, they will be deemed removed from the role.



The Secretariat member may appeal this decision in line with the individual PPN Complaints Procedure (see Appendix 2 for sample).

If the appeal is unsuccessful, or no appeal has been made, the PPN will seek an alternative Secretariat member from the relevant Municipal District / College.

Induction Training and Ongoing Support

The PPN will provide induction training to all newly appointed Secretariat members. Secretariat members who are not newly appointed but who would like to take a “refresher” course can attend this training, subject to numbers, with preference given to those who are newly elected. As a minimum, this training should cover:

- The role of the PPN, its values and principles
- The Role of the Secretariat
- The Secretariat Code of Conduct
- An overview of how the individual PPN operates, its policies and procedures.



Secretariat induction training is mandatory. The PPN will endeavour to provide this induction training as soon as possible after the appointment of new Secretariat members.

The National PPN Secretariat Network

The national PPN Secretariat Network is made up of representatives from each of the 31 PPN Secretariats. This group meets to discuss best practice across the PPN network and to work collaboratively to strengthen the PPN as a whole, with an awareness and acceptance of the local and regional differences.

Travel and Expenses

Secretariat members will be paid travel and expenses in respect of representation they make in an official capacity on behalf of the PPN, outside of their capacity as PPN Representatives on a Local Authority Board or Committee.



These travel and expenses payments will be made in accordance with public sector norms and the PPN Travel and Expenses Policy (see sample at Appendix 6). Such expenses will apply only for travel within the county for PPN secretariat meetings or outside the county in exceptional circumstances such as training, attending the PPN conference or Secretariat Network meetings.

PPN Representatives on Local Authority Boards and Committees are reimbursed by the Local Authority, and not the PPN (see Section 4).

Functions of the Secretariat – Overview

The main functions of the Secretariat are administrative, carrying out duties as directed by the Plenary. These functions include:

- The development and implementation of the Strategic Plan
- Facilitating and enabling the PPN Workers in their day to day activities to deliver PPN objectives.
- Making sure that the Flat Structure is kept in place
- Promoting the PPN and Membership
- Managing the membership database of the PPN (subject to GDPR regulations)
- Overseeing elections for PPN Representatives
- Being accountable to the Plenary and carrying out their instructions

This role must be clearly defined and set out in the Constitution of the PPN. The Constitution should be reviewed regularly to ensure that it is consistent with the terms of this Handbook and all Departmental circulars.



Development and Implementation of the Strategic Plan

Each PPN should have a Strategic Plan in place that covers a period, subject to annual funding allocations, of three to five years. This Strategic Plan should be developed by the Member Groups of the PPN; written up by the Secretariat and Workers; and approved by the Plenary.

The Strategic Plan is then overseen and implemented by the Secretariat on the Plenary's behalf. The Local Authority, as stakeholder and co-funder, should be invited by the PPN to input into the PPN Strategic Plan. These inputs should take account of the independence of the PPN in carrying out its work and of the PPN objectives.

Facilitating the PPN Workers

There should be a clearly defined role description for the Resource Workers and Support Workers, which is in line with the implementation of the workplan and agreed at the start of the year. These role descriptions should be reviewed accordingly by the Staff Liaison Committee. The Secretariat should give clear direction to the PPN Workers on follow up actions required after every meeting and clearly communicate with the PPN Workers.

The Secretariat facilitates and enables the day to day activities of the PPN Workers in delivering the PPN objectives on behalf of the Plenary and makes sure the PPN Workers carry out their duties as set out in the PPN Workplan. Where the PPN Workers are employed by the Local Authority / Host Organisation / Support Organisation, HR and administration of payroll will be a matter for the Local Authority / Host Organisation / Support Organisation and these distinctive roles must be clearly set out in an assignment agreement.



The Secretariat oversees the work of the PPN in between Plenaries and facilitates and enables the day to day activities of the of the Resource Worker, Support Worker and any casual, part-time or Scheme staff engaged by the PPN to further its objectives. As it is not possible for up to 15 people on one Secretariat to be responsible for the day to day support of staff, each Secretariat must appoint a Staff Liaison Committee consisting of three members of the Secretariat who will directly engage with staff in respect of their day to day activities.

As soon as possible after the appointment of the Staff Liaison Committee, all three members must ensure to attend HR and management training before taking on their role as part of the Staff Liaison Committee.

When it comes to the recruitment and selection of all PPN Workers, the PPN Secretariat and, where appropriate, the Resource Worker, should be fully involved in a clear and transparent process that is appropriate to meet the requirements of the individual PPN and the associated job description.

Acknowledging that PPN Workers might be employed by a number of different stakeholders and, depending on their employment contract, have a mix of permanent and temporary contracts, it is recommended that Resource Workers and Support Workers are engaged to work with the PPN, subject to annual funding allocations, for a minimum period of 3 years where possible. This does not exclude the PPN Workers from taking advantage of other career opportunities should they present themselves and be of interest to the PPN Workers.



Each PPN must make sure that good Human Resources practices are followed, and that the PPN follows all employment regulations. This is the Secretariat's responsibility. To this end, the Secretariat should make sure that the PPN has at least the following policies in place. These policies should be signed by all Secretariat members and PPN Workers to acknowledge that they have been read and fully understood:

- Travel and Expenses Policy (see sample at Appendix 6)

- Email and Internet Usage Policy (see sample at Appendix 7)
- Grievance Procedure (see sample at Appendix 9)
- Driving for Work Policy (see sample at Appendix 10)
- Vulnerable Adults Policy (see sample at Appendix 11)
- Dignity in the Workplace Policy (see sample at Appendix 12)
- Data Protection Policy and Guidelines (sample tba)

All policies and procedures developed by the Secretariat must be approved / ratified by the Plenary.

The Secretariat is also responsible for the development of the PPN Workplan. They do this in collaboration with the PPN Workers and in consultation with the PPN Member Groups. This Workplan is then put forward to the Plenary for approval. A sample Workplan is attached to the sample Memorandum of Understanding circulated by the Department of Rural and Community Development and set out in Appendix 13.

Maintaining the Flat Structure

To maintain the Flat Structure, Secretariats must develop practical ways of working such as:

- Rotating the Chair / convenor of meetings on a regular basis. During their time as Rotating Chair / Facilitator, that person can sign documents etc. on behalf of the PPN provided always that they are mandated to do so by the Secretariat.
- Having a Rotating Chair / Facilitator / convenor group e.g. the incoming Rotating Chair / Facilitator and current Rotating Chair / Facilitator working together to guide the process. The Rotating Chair / Facilitator role should rotate after every meeting, but at least every six months, to make sure that all Secretariat members have an opportunity to facilitate.
- Setting up short-term task-based subgroups which report to the Secretariat and ultimately to the Plenary e.g. Finance, Communications, Membership, Recruitment etc.
- Regularly reassessing how these of subgroups are made up and rotating people on and off them. PPN members who are not on the Secretariat are eligible to join these subgroups if appropriate.
- Having clear processes and procedures for the PPN which are approved by the Plenary.
- Ensuring that all agendas and minutes of Plenary and Secretariat meetings as well as reports issued by PPN Representatives on Local Authority boards and committees are made available in good time on the PPN's website to ensure maximum transparency.

Promotion of the PPN and Membership

The PPNs should have as diverse a membership as possible, which reflects the volunteer-led activity in the Local Authority area and which is socially inclusive. Many organisations may be unaware of the PPN and the benefits it can bring them. The Secretariat has a role to promote membership throughout their Local Authority area.

The PPN should be proactive in promoting the benefits of community representation on Boards and Committees. At a minimum, all community representatives on Local Authority Boards and Committees must be appointed through the PPN.

PPNs should be open to new members and in particular to groups who are traditionally under-represented. Many of these groups are also targeted by the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) which is run by Local Development Companies, and it may be useful for the PPN to collaborate with SICAP to connect with these groups. The PPN Secretariat should also network with their Member Groups by attending training and networking events organised by the PPN.



In cases where a change to the membership criteria is proposed, the Secretariat must bring the new criteria for membership to the Plenary for approval. When a group wants to register, and it is not clear if they fit the criteria, the Secretariat can request further information from that group (the Secretariat may delegate this work to the PPN Workers).

In some cases, a category of Associate Membership may be added for groups who do not fit all the criteria. Such groups would be able to receive information and access training etc., but voting will be at the discretion of the PPN and in accordance with its Constitution.

Member Groups should be able to self-select as Community and Voluntary or Social Inclusion organisations based on the definitions provided, and be registered as part of those Colleges. In some cases, the Secretariat may offer guidance to proposed Member Groups where clarity is required.



As a requirement of the Environmental Pillar, groups who want to be categorised as part of the Environmental College must be approved by the Environmental Pillar. The Secretariat must send a list of these applicant groups, and a description of their environmental activities to Environment Pillar, MACRO Centre, 1 Green Street, Dublin 7, Telephone: 01 8780116 Email: office@ien.ie

Managing the Membership Database

Groups should re-register with the PPN at least every two years to make sure that their information is up to date. This can happen more regularly depending on the needs of the PPN. Where the PPN becomes aware that the information they have about a Member Group has changed, it should verify the correct information and update its database as soon as possible. The Secretariat and PPN Workers should work together to develop a way to re-register Member Groups that is not time consuming or administratively difficult, either on the Secretariat / PPN Workers or the Member Groups.

Each PPN should draw up a protocol for re-registration. A sample protocol is contained in Appendix 14.

The PPN contact point(s) in a member organisation are critically important for the distribution of newsletters and other information. It is preferable that contact details include an email address, however being aware that some groups may not have access to emails, validation of contact details and processes are a matter for the Secretariat, with the approval of the Plenary.

Where possible, one individual should not be the contact point for multiple groups. Because of the separation of the functions of Public Representatives and the PPN, Pillar Representatives, people with political roles (i.e. Councillors, TDs, Senators and MEPs), and Local Authority staff should not be the PPN contact point for organisations. Each PPN should use a general PPN email address (e.g. 'info@sampleppn.ie') as its key means of contact rather than an email address associated with an individual person.

To encourage active participation, Member Groups should receive regular information about the PPN, its operation and how they can get more involved.

Municipal District PPNs

The large majority of counties are now organised into Municipal Districts, where the councillors and Local Authority staff have certain powers relating to operational and maintenance works within the District. It is recommended that Municipal District PPNs be established in each Municipal District in a PPN area. This is where local decision-making happens and each PPN should have a presence in each Municipal District to make sure that the voice of the community is heard. The PPN Secretariat and PPN Workers should work with the Member Groups to encourage their participation at Municipal District level, or any other types of sub-structures in cities, by communicating the benefits of doing this in a clear and accessible way.

In cities where there is no Municipal District structure, PPNs may want to establish sub PPNs in defined geographical areas, perhaps based on Electoral Divisions or Local Area Committees of the Local Authority.

The Membership Database

The Secretariat is responsible for managing the membership database through

Salesforce (subject to complete compliance with GDPR). It may delegate its operations to a Worker or third party, but the membership database must be under the control and direction of the Secretariat.

The Secretariat must ensure that access to the Salesforce database is at all times compliant with relevant data protection legislation and that appropriate data protection policies and guidelines are in place.

Supporting the Development of a Vision for Community Wellbeing

The Vision for Community Wellbeing is intended to set out a vision for the wellbeing of the community for this and future generations. Making sure that PPNs set aside time to explore what the Member Groups want to achieve for their community, so that these aspirations can inform the PPNs' work, is an important project for the PPN. A number of PPNs have developed their Visions for Community Wellbeing and are using these to inform their work in consultations and Representative inputs. As such, this is a key part of the work of the PPNs.

The process for developing the Vision for Community Wellbeing (the Vision) is worthwhile, yet time-consuming. It involves consultations with Member Groups, online consultations, drafting and revisions before a final, robust document can be delivered for approval by the Plenary which truly reflects the views of the PPN. In supporting the development of this Vision, the Secretariat is expected to attend training on both the process used to develop the Vision and, where necessary, the facilitation skills required to facilitate consultations with Member Groups.

Members of the Secretariat should also make themselves available to review the consultation inputs and develop the draft wording for consultation.

Overseeing elections for PPN Representatives

When a Local Authority, or other agency, Board or Committee looks for a PPN Representative, they should contact the PPN Secretariat with the following details:

- Title of Board or Committee
- Function and scope of the Board or Committee
- The existing Board or Committee members
- The commitment expected from a PPN Representative e.g. time and location of meetings, participation in subgroups, becoming a company director etc.
- What skill set(s) they would like the Representative to have.
(Note: these cannot be overly restrictive e.g. "an interest in and knowledge of issues impacting on people in poverty" would be acceptable, whereas "be a qualified social care professional" may not.)
- What expenses are payable.
- Any restrictions on membership of the Board or Committee e.g. not being an employee or member of an organisation funded directly by the Board or Committee

(conflict of interest), or not being a member of another nominating sector e.g. farming, which already has representation on the Board or Committee, or coming from a particular geographical area or type of organisation. For example, a Local Link could seek a Representative from each Municipal District in a Local Authority area; a Sports Partnership could seek Representatives from different target groups e.g. older people, people with a disability etc.

- Any potential conflict of interest which could impact on a Representative's full participation on the Board or Committee.
- Any other relevant matters.

If these details are not provided, the Secretariat should request them from the Local Authority or agency looking for PPN Representation.

The Secretariat must make sure that nominations and elections for positions on Boards and Committees are carried out in a timely manner and following the processes established by the PPN, a sample of which are set out in Section 4.



In developing these processes, the following should be taken into account:

- All PPN Representatives on Boards or Committees should be nominated by (and in some cases elected by), report to and take direction from a Linkage / Thematic Group of Member Groups. They do not represent their own interests or those of their own organisation.
- The Linkage / Thematic Group structure allows for the development of a group of people within the community who have a deeper understanding of policy issues and their impact. Getting Linkage / Thematic Groups up and running, and developing them, is an essential part of the work of the PPN Secretariat.
- Representation should be spread widely in terms of gender, geography and type of organisation.
- An individual should only represent the PPN on one Board or Committee (with the exception of Secretariat members who can also represent the PPN on one Board or Committee in addition to their representation on the Secretariat). While exceptional circumstances may arise, the governing principle must be to ensure a range of Representatives.
- PPN representation is based in volunteer-led organisations and is a separate process from Government Politics e.g. TDs, MEPs, Senators, Councillors etc. Therefore:
 - Elected representatives of Local Authorities, Oireachtas members or MEPs cannot be nominated through this process.
 - A person who has put themselves forward for nomination to be elected, stood for election or who has been an elected representative on any level of government (local, national or European) cannot represent the PPN in any Representative role, including on the Secretariat, for a period of 12 months after the date on which they were advised that their bid for nomination was unsuccessful, or, in the case that they were nominated, 12 months from the date of the election or, in the case that they were elected, 12 months after completing their term of office.

The Secretariat and Local Authority

The PPN is a key part of community engagement with local government structures. PPNs can support the work of the Local Authority by facilitating consultations with their Member Groups and encouraging support for relevant Local Authority initiatives where these are of benefit to their members.

Local Authority Policies

Due to the close relationship between the PPN and the Local Authority, the PPN may be impacted by some Local Authority policies. The Secretariat must engage with the Local Authority in a respectful and collaborative way, with an awareness that Local Authorities have responsibilities that must be fulfilled and policies that must be complied with in the performance of their duties (e.g. financial returns).

Memorandum of Understanding

Each PPN must agree a Memorandum of Understanding with the Local Authority and other relevant organisations. This should cover key areas between both structures, provide clarity on roles and relationships and avoid duplication.

At a minimum, this Memorandum of Understanding should cover:

- Participation in decision making and representation i.e. managing elections, Representatives and Linkage / Thematic Groups, participating in consultations and other fora, developing positions on key issues etc.
- The employment, facilitation and support of PPN Workers, which requires a clear understanding in situations where the PPN Workers are employed by the Local Authority but are being supported by the PPN Secretariat.
- Recruitment and selection of PPN Workers and the role of the Local Authority and the Secretariat within this recruitment and selection process.
- Capacity Building i.e. working with Member Groups to deepen their understanding of, and participation in, the PPN; assessing training needs and offering relevant training, facilitating networking and sharing of best practice between Member Groups; developing networks etc.
- Information sharing and communications i.e. working with members, developing and maintaining a website, designing and publishing a regular newsletter.
- Other activities i.e. managing an office and staff, holding regular meetings of the Secretariat, Municipal District PPNs, Plenary, liaising with the Local Authority, managing the database, monitoring and evaluation, general administration etc.

A sample Memorandum of Understanding is set out in Appendix 13. This Memorandum of Understanding forms part of the PPN annual Workplan and should be reviewed annually to make sure that it is appropriate and relevant.

Dispute Resolution – Local Authorities

All disputes between the PPN and the Local Authority should be resolved locally in a way that reflects the working relationship between the PPN and Local Authority and respects the independence of each.

Any dispute that cannot be resolved locally between the PPN and the Local Authority will be referred to mediation to be facilitated by an independent mediator. The mediator will be chosen by agreement between the Secretariat and the Local Authority. If no agreement can be reached in respect of a mediator, the Department of Rural and Community Development will appoint an independent mediator. This will also apply to the appointment of any replacement mediator where the original mediator is conflicted from acting or cannot act for any other reason. In the case of mediation, the Local Authority and PPN will each pay half of the mediation costs and associated expenses, i.e. the PPN will pay its share of mediation costs and expenses from within its own budget and the Local Authority will pay its share from within its own resources. The Local Authority cannot deduct this amount from its allocation to the PPN.

Where no agreement can be reached, the Department of Rural and Community Development will make a determination on the matter which will be binding on both the PPN and the Local Authority and will be final.

Hosting Arrangements

Some PPNs are hosted by organisations outside of the PPN or Local Authority structures. In these situations, the Secretariat must ensure that the following agreements are in place to set out the terms of the hosting arrangement and ensure that boundaries are clear:

- i. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Local Authority and the PPN in respect of the current year.
- ii. A Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Hosting Organisation and the PPN.
- iii. An SLA between the local authority and the Hosting Organisation.

Budget Accountability

No matter what structure the PPN is using and with an awareness of the independence of the PPNs in their work, the PPN is accountable for the spending of public money. The PPN budget must only be used for PPN work, supporting the objectives of the PPN. There must be provision in the Constitution of the PPN in relation to how PPN budgets can be spent. In spending the PPN budget, the PPN must also follow the PPN Workplan, its Strategic Plan and related Departmental Circulars.

The Secretariat is also accountable to the Plenary, the Department of Rural and

Community Development and the Local Authority in respect of the annual budget of the PPN. The initial annual allocation to each PPN from the Department of Rural and Community Development was €50,000, to be matched with at least €30,000 by the Local Authority. In recent years, additional allocation has been made by the Department of Rural and Community Development to secure an additional Support Worker post. Local Authorities will supplement the Department's allocation with an additional allocation in accordance with Departmental Circular CVSP 2/2019.

! • The funding allocation in respect of the Resource Worker and additional funding allocation for the recruitment of the Support Worker must be ring-fenced by the PPN for PPN purposes and not used for any other purposes.

The Secretariat should work with the PPN Workers to develop the annual PPN Budget for approval by the Plenary.

While it may be administered by another body, this budget must be under the control of the PPN. The PPN is also free to apply for further grants and funding to support additional pieces of work that are undertaken in line with the PPN Workplan. Where the PPN funding is being held in a bank account operated by the Local Authority, the Local Authority may ask for expenditures to be vouched by the PPN in accordance with the standard financial procedures in place in that Local Authority. The Local Authority cannot request information outside of these financial operating procedures or look to influence how the PPN spends its budget. Where a dispute arises, it will be referred to mediation with each of the PPN and the Local Authority paying for all associated costs equally from within their own resources.

The allocation of funding to the PPN is based on assurances by the PPN that it has a robust budgeting process in place and a clear line of accountability and decision-making at Plenary level. The Secretariat should approve budget-related matters following these policies.

The Secretariat and the Department of Rural and Community Development

In addition to funding, the Department of Rural and Community Development also provides support to PPNs on operational matters through Departmental circulars.

! • The Secretariat must ensure that these Departmental Circulars are circulated to everyone that may be impacted by them or need to be aware of them and that the PPN is fully compliant with them. If the Secretariat is unsure about what is meant by the Department in any of its circulars, it should seek clarification as soon as possible from the Department. If the Department issues a new circular, the PPN should ensure that any required changes are made to its governing documentation which must be then ratified at the next Plenary.