



WESTMEATH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORK

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2030



Líonra Rannpháirtíochta Pobail An Iarmhí
Public Participation Network Westmeath



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

Achievements of Strategic Plan 2020 -2025

Our Vision, Values & Principles

Overview of the Role of the PPN

How the WPPN Works with National Policy

How the WPPN Works on the ground

Development of WPPN Strategic Plan 2026 – 2031

Community Wellbeing Statement

UN Sustainable Development Goals

Strategic Aims 2026-2031 - Goals

Strategic Aims 2026-2031 - Actions

PREFACE

The Secretariat of Westmeath Public Participation Network (WPPN) is delighted to present this Strategic Plan for the period 2026 to 2030. This plan sets out our priorities for the coming five years.

Westmeath Public Participation Network (WPPN) is a collective voice for over 1000 community and voluntary, environmental, and social inclusion organizations working together for a better Westmeath. It enables the population to be represented in decision-making processes in Westmeath, and to support and influence policy that in turn improves people's quality of life.

Westmeath PPN helps members to contribute positively to their community and engage with each other, Westmeath County Council (WCC), and other local bodies. It provides space for policy development on issues of community concern and opportunities, for networking and relationship-building. WPPN is an information hub receiving and collating information relevant to member groups and disseminating it in a variety of user-friendly formats.



That WPPN is an integral and respected local decision-making partner and network. It is engaged and pro-actively consulted in the development of all Westmeath economic, social, community and infrastructural policies. Its members are well supported and aware of their ability to make a difference for their community.

This strategy will guide the priorities, vision and workplans of WPPN over the next five years. It will ensure that the voices of voluntary groups in Westmeath are heard, and their influence increased in policy decisions at local government level.

WPPN Secretariat 2025: Cathryn Whelehan, Joe McEvoy, Vinny Bagnall, Angela Locke-Reilly, Merrin Rebecca, Larry Quain and Nick Linnane.



ACHIEVEMENTS OF STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 -2025

Goal 1 Improving our Network

Have reached one-thousand-member groups.
Operated to a high standard over the last years.
Linkage and thematic groups created.
The operational capacity has increased through the use of Salesforce.

Goal 2 Improving our Communications

Brand new website up and running and regularly updated.
Regular monthly newsletters.
Social media accounts updated and monitored.
Members notified of important updates.

Goal 3 Improving our Member Supports

Training supports provided to groups both in person and online.
Representatives Network in place.
New website contains resources for members, including guides, members directory and online registration.

Goal 4 Improving our Representation

Consultations regularly sent to WPPN membership and included in Newsletters and website.
Regular Linkage Group meetings held.
Active participant in Midlands Regional Public Participation Network (MRPPN).
Increased our number of WPPN Reps on WCC Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs).

Goal 5 Environment and Sustainability

WPPN brought forward a byelaw about pesticides.
Have provided educational opportunities about Climate Change and other environmental issues.

OUR VISION, VALUES & PRINCIPLES



Vision

The Vision of Westmeath Public Participation Network is to 'act as the voice of the Community in Westmeath and to influence improved decision making in the county'



Values

Inclusiveness and Participation
Independence and Diversity
Accountability and Transparency



Principles

Clarity of role and structure
Commitment to our members
Commitment to the integrity of the organization
Communications - to be clear, concise, simple and timely
Consistency of service



OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE OF THE PPN

The PPN was setup as part of Local Government reform in 2014.

This was on the foot of a 2013 recommendation by the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government.

The recommendation was set out to achieve the aim of more extensive and diverse input by citizens into the decision-making process at local government level.

The PPN is a countrywide initiative to build a network of community, social inclusion and environmental groups who work within a local authority area.

The focus of the PPN is to empower and assist groups to participate in local decision making.

The PPN is key to Westmeath's framework for public engagement.



It provides the structure to facilitate the two-way engagement between Westmeath County Council and Community, Environment and Social Inclusion groups.

The network enables residents of Westmeath to influence plans and policies for the future development of the County through their local community organizations.

Since their establishment PPN's are the primary means of Civic Society to engage with County Councils.

WPPN
Representing
the Voice of
Communities
since 2014

HOW THE WPPN WORKS WITH NATIONAL POLICY



National Level

The PPN User Guidebook 1 states that the PPN is to function as “the main link through which the Local Authority (LA) connects with the community, voluntary, environmental and social inclusion sectors” and “enables the public to take an active formal role in the policy making and oversight activities of the LA’s area of responsibility.”

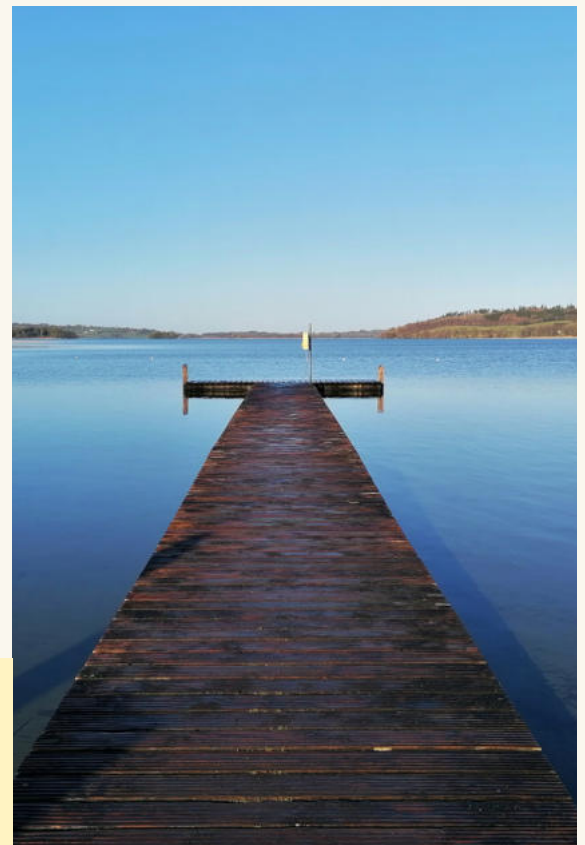
The intention is to achieve local representation through a collaborative partnership approach. Positive relationships between PPN and the LA are essential for the success of this. Each PPN and LA draws up a clear memorandum of understanding to govern their operations, funding and independence.

The Irish Government is committed to the continuation and development of PPN. The Open Government Partnership National Action Plan 2016-2018, commitment 22 is to support PPNs through the operation of the National PPN Advisory Group (NAG). The NAG is charged with advising and supporting the Department in the development of PPNs.

The membership of the NAG is made up of representatives from the Department, sectorial interests, PPN volunteers and PPN workers, which are the Westmeath PPN Resource Worker and Support worker.

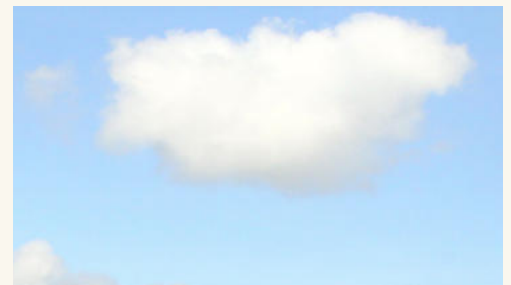
Role of the National Advisory Group

- Engage with all stakeholders, including other PPNs, community-based PPN member organisations and local authorities to promote best practice.
- Update and improve the PPN User Guide.
- Continue on-going training/capacity building programmes for local PPN participants.
- Roll out a capacity building programme for LA members and officials.
- Develop a national communications/awareness-raising plan for PPNs.



WPPN joint-funded by
Department of Rural and Community Development
Westmeath County Council

HOW THE WPPN WORKS ON THE GROUND



Local Level

At local level the PPN is embedded in Westmeath County Council through its Corporate Plan 2024-2029. This plan provides a framework within which annual service delivery plans set out the principal service objectives and priorities for each functional directorate.

Linkage Groups

- Linkage Groups (LGs) are the structure that bring PPN members/organisations with a common interest together to discuss their views and interests in a specific policy are linked to a decision-making committee or board (e.g. SPC/LCDC) with PPN representation.
- Representatives take direction action from LGs and bring what has been discussed/decided by the group to their committee/board on behalf of the PPN membership.
- LGs ensure that all PPN members play a direct role in choosing their representatives on council committees, can influence policy that affects them and are kept up to date with developments.
- LGs are open to all PPN member groups/organizations regardless of which Pillar or Sector they belong to. These groups provide PPN Reps with a mandate and to be the voice of the community.

WPPN's 4 LGs match WCCs 4 Strategic Policy Committees

Economic-Development Enterprise Agriculture Tourism LG
Environment Climate-Action Rural-Water Emergency-Services LG
Planning Regeneration Transportation LG
Housing Community Recreation Culture LG

It is envisaged that a new thematic group focused on Crime Prevention and Community Safety will be created in 2026.

PPN Reps have being sought for the newly formed Local Community Safety Partnership.



**WPPN is embedded in
Westmeath County Council through its
Corporate Plan 2024-2029.**



DEVELOPMENT OF WESTMEATH PPN STRATEGIC PLAN 2026 – 2031



A submission was also sought from Westmeath County Council, a key stakeholder.

The strategic plan's key purpose is to orientate the PPN's systems and resources in a common direction to achieve the agreed goals.

The strategic plan will need to be cognizant of the new policy developments and regulatory framework.

This strategy was developed by members of the WPPN who contributed in the following ways-

- Discussions with the Secretariat and submissions sought
- Mass email sent to all member groups seeking submissions
- Meetings held in Athlone and Mullingar
- Public online meeting

Key policy documents/reports released since the last Strategic Plan were also considered including -

- 'Final Research Project on Barriers to Participation in PPNs'
- 'National PPN Report Building Community Resilience for Times of Emergency'

WPPN is a network of up to 1000 community, social inclusion and environmental organisations in Westmeath

WHAT YOU SAID IN YOUR SUBMISSIONS?

Here are some of the comments received at our consultation meetings

Can we have more informal meetings to discuss issues. This would help with presentations and with participation in decision-making?

The members could have a larger role in influencing the Municipal District Budget

More engagement and information on how we can be a part of decision making would be welcome

The WPPN should encourage more participation and involvement from youth groups

More could be done to educate new members and how the PPN is of benefit to them

There is a need to reach out to members of the community

The PPN educates and informs our members of the importance of the environment. However, we need to keep the pressure on regarding clean water and its importance to future generations

More funding is required for community groups, and their activities

I'd like to see more outreach community sessions

Residents Associations could be able to communicate with each other through the WPPN

Get the younger cohorts of people involved!



COMMUNITY WELLBEING STATEMENT

The continual examination of wellbeing is central to the values of the PPN as they try to understand better what supports true wellbeing in their community.

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) directed all Public Participation Networks to regularly develop a Vision for Community Wellbeing in consultation with their member groups.



Westmeath PPN Vision Statement comprised the overall 'Vision for Community Wellbeing'.

The Vision for Community Wellbeing voices the ambitions of the membership.

The Westmeath PPN Community Wellbeing Statement has currently expired.

As part of this Strategic Plan, WPPN will lead the community in the creation of a new Community Wellbeing Statement.

A Vision for Community Wellbeing identifies the key issues that member groups in Westmeath PPN consider are important for their community to be "The best that it can be for this and future generations"



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

UNITED NATIONS

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Many PPN's nationally strive to demonstrate how their work is aligned with and contributes to the realization of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

These goals address global challenges, including inequality, prosperity, peace & justice, poverty, climate, and environmental degradation.



There are many parallels between the UN SDGs and the Westmeath PPN Community Wellbeing Statement. WPPN representatives have the opportunity to use their role to ensure decisions and policies progress the goals of both

STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

We aim to focus on achieving 5 goals.

GOALS 1-5

1

Improving our Network

Operate the network to the highest possible standard.
Run Linkage Groups/Thematic Groups.
Continue to grow Westmeath PPN membership in a planned and sustainable way.
Increase the operational capacity of the PPN.
Hold outreach meetings in the community to educate the public about the PPN.

2

Improving our Communications

Continue to engage with PPN members through our website, social media and Salesforce mass-email system.
Showcase our achievements at meetings and on our website.
Communicate clearly and concisely.

3

Improving our Membership Supports

Provide a range of Training Supports.
Create networking opportunities.
Sharing opportunities and supports to members and PPN Reps.
Develop methods to make the PPN more understood and accessible.
Focus on involvement of youth groups and young people in the 18-40 age cohort.
Follow the Municipal District Protocol.

4

Improving our our Representation

Progress the PPN as a mandatory consultative and participatory structure.
Foster key partnerships and explore future public participation initiatives.
Further develop relationships between the PPN relevant agencies, organizations and Public Representatives.

5

Environment & Sustainability

WPPN will operate in an environmentally sustainable way.
WPPN will actively try to positively influence policy on issues such as Climate Action.
WPPN will strive to encourage our members to conduct their activities in a safe and environmentally responsible manner.

STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

We will accomplish them through 19 actions.

ACTIONS 1-19

1. Operate the network to the highest possible standard.
2. Run Linkage/Thematic Groups.
3. Grow PPN membership in a planned and sustainable way.
4. Increase the operational capacity of the PPN.
5. Enlighten the public about the PPN through outreach meetings.
6. Engage with PPN members through our communication channels.
7. Showcase Westmeath PPN achievements.
8. Communicate clearly and concisely.
9. Provide a range of Training Supports.
10. Create networking opportunities.
11. Supporting our representative and delegates.
12. Develop methods to make the PPN more understood and accessible to youth groups and youths in the 18-40 age cohort.
13. Follow the Municipal District Protocol.
14. Progress the PPN as a mandatory consultative and participatory structure.
15. Foster key partnerships and explore future public participation initiatives.
16. Further develop relationships between the PPN relevant agencies, organizations and Public Representatives.
17. Operate in an environmentally sustainable way.
18. Actively and positively influence policy on issues such as Climate Action
19. Strive to encourage members to conduct their activities in a safe and environmentally responsible manner



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 1

Operate the network to the highest possible standard.

The PPN will continue to actively participate in the National PPN Workers Network, the National Secretariat and the Midland Regional PPN meetings. This will ensure continued learning and sharing of emerging good practice, resulting with the PPN remaining at the forefront of development in Westmeath.

In order to operate Westmeath PPN to the Highest Possible Standard we will:

Adhere to the National PPN manual.

Westmeath PPN Policy Documents are reviewed and updated as required.

Westmeath PPN attendance at National & Regional Networks.

Attendance at all relevant training.

Implementation of best practice training.

Measure of progress.

Attendance at relevant training and implementation of training.

The National PPN Manual is adhered to.

Attendance at National Networking Events.



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 2

Run Linkage/Thematic Groups.

The following Linkage Groups are currently in operation.
Economic Development Enterprise Agriculture and Tourism Linkage Group.

Environment Climate Action Rural Water and Emergency Services Linkage Group.

Planning Regeneration and Transportation Linkage Group.

Housing Community Recreation and Culture Linkage Group.

It is further envisaged that a new thematic group will be created in 2025 in relation to Crime Prevention and Community Safety, now that PPN Reps are being sought on the Local Community Safety Partnership.

Attendance at our Linkage Group meetings has been underwhelming. A survey will be conducted to investigate how to improve engagement and participation.

Measures of Progress.

Number of Linkage/Thematic meetings held.

Attendance.

Agenda and minutes kept.

Clear policy/practice outcomes.



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 3

Grow PPN membership in a planned and sustainable way.

The more member groups in WPPN the greater its representation, its diversity and its voice. In order to increase membership WPPN will be marketed and promoted through the following methods:

Contact all local resident associations and community groups not involved in the PPN to invite them to participate.

Encourage PPN members to spread the word and support additional engagement of fellow community members.

Attend events (with PPN stands) to increase profile of W PPN.

Create and conduct social media campaigns, targeted at different demographic profiles.

Greater utilisation of outreach facilities in community centres, libraries, shopping centres etc.

Support and engage with any national campaigns.

Work with support agencies (eg the local authority and local development companies) to encourage groups they work with to join.

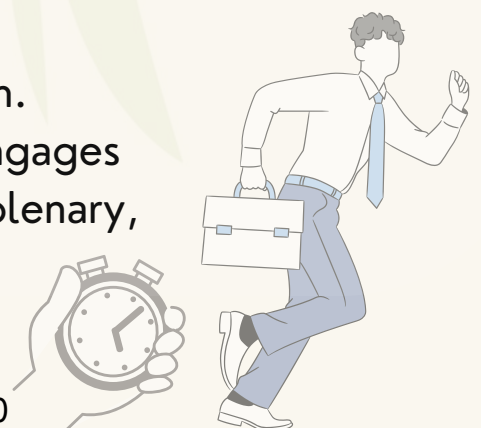
The PPN membership database, in-line with GDPR and departmental guidelines, will be updated every two years. This process involves a reregistration of all PPN members.

Measure of Progress

Maintain an active membership of 50% per annum.

*Note an active member group is anyone who engages with the PPN through an event, Linkage Group, plenary, survey, consultations, at least once per year.

Number of presentations, events attended etc.



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 4

Increase the operational capacity of the PPN.

There is a need to review the PPN's staff resources. Ideally the WPPN will have a permanent fulltime PPN Resource Worker and fulltime PPN Support Worker in place on a permanent basis.

ACTION 5

Enlighten the public about the PPN through outreach meetings.

From the feedback that has been received, there is a need for outreach meetings throughout the County to educate the public about what the PPN.

It is important to meet the ordinary members so they can learn about potentially becoming a Rep.



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 6

Engage with PPN members through our communication channels.

Westmeath PPN must continue to use its tripartite methods of Communication – Website, social media and Salesforce. Groups that do not have internet access must be catered for especially in relation to notification of plenaries. All Westmeath PPN communication needs to be clear, concise, effective and timely.

Measure of progress

A social media presence.

Increased demand for PPN Newsletter.

Encourage PPN members to spread the word and support additional engagement of fellow community members.

Support and engage with any national campaigns.



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 7

Showcase Westmeath PPN achievements.

Westmeath PPN has achieved many successes since its beginning in 2014. In order to gain profile, trust and confidence in the work of Westmeath PPN it is imperative that the PPN continues to communicate to its members and the public on the progress and achievements of PPN activity.

To continue to develop and disseminate annual reports, using infographics to highlight the achievements of the PPN

Use case studies in newsletter and on website to highlight our success and impact

WPPN Members encouraged to note/acknowledge assistance/support of WPPN publicly on their websites/ social media platforms etc.

Attending events

Measure of Progress

Achievements are recorded and visible on the website, social media and in reports.

Numbers of reports, newsletters / etc. showcasing achievements published



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 8

Communicate clearly and concisely.

Westmeath PPN will work to communicate in user friendly language, distributing useful information, clearly and concisely to its groups and the wider public. Westmeath PPN will do this by:

Supporting the streamlining of communications on important day to day public information.

Westmeath PPN will communicate policies and useful information clearly and concisely to its members and the wider public.

Develop a communications protocol between Westmeath County Council and the PPN. This will be particularly beneficial during periods of emergency response (i.e. severe weather warnings/Covid-19) and when major works are on-going.

Offer suggestions and on-going feedback on improving the accessibility of the Council's and other organizations and agencies communications.

Measure of Progress

All Westmeath PPN communications will be clear, concise and timely delivered.

Effective co-ordination between the PPN and Westmeath County Council and other organizations and agencies during major incidents and emergency response



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 9

Provide a range of Training Supports.

Westmeath PPN will continue to offer a range of training supports to members in partnership with relevant organizations. These will focus on three broad areas, the first is to build the capacity of the members groups, the second is to help PPN members and volunteer representatives to be more effective advocates and the third is training that can be used to improve the environment. The PPN will also aim to communicate all training opportunities that become available.

Measure of Progress

Number of training opportunities communicated to member groups.

Number of members attending training.

Provision of relevant training by WPPN alone and/or in conjunction with other organizations.



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 10

Create networking opportunities.

Consultation with our members has time and time again emphasized the importance of networking and peer to peer learning.

Westmeath PPN will work to facilitate more networking opportunities for its members for peer-to-peer learning, and access to tutors, trainers and knowledgeable people who can assist and increase capacity and resilience in community & voluntary groups in Westmeath.

- Organize funding workshops
- Organize funding clinics
- Organize information events
- WPPN Plenary
- WPPN Municipal District meetings
- Organize Networking opportunities at all of above

Measure of progress

Number of networking opportunities created

Number of members attending networking events

After event research/surveys



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 11

Supporting our representative and delegates.

All WPPN Representatives and delegates are volunteers from the community and voluntary sector who give of their time freely to the PPN. Without these essential representatives and delegates, WPPN would not be able to do its work or achieve its objectives. It is therefore immensely important that the PPN acknowledges and facilitates the participation of all volunteer PPN Representatives and delegates.

The following support structures will be explored and where possible expanded:

Provide information sharing and learning opportunities for PPN Representatives through the WPPN Representatives Network.

Work with other PPNs to provide collective opportunities for Linkage Group representatives to meet to discuss synergies across shared topic areas.

Explore methods of improving two-way communications between WPPN members and Representatives on structures and further to outside agencies. WPPN attendance at National Secretariat Network.

Provide an opportunity for PPN Representatives and delegates to engage in a personal development plan to include training and mentoring supports.

Explore with other PPNs the chance for representatives to attending training and networking opportunities.

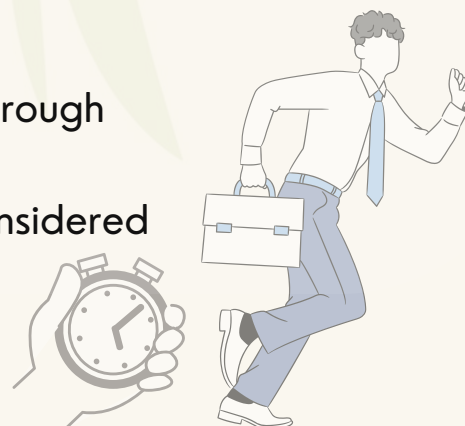
Measure of Progress

PPN Representatives engage with and progress through Personal Development Plans.

Regional National meetings of Representatives considered useful and thus recurring.

WPPN Representatives Network Meetings.

Number of WPPN representatives attending.



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 12

Develop methods to make the PPN more understood and accessible to youth groups and youths in the 18-40 age cohort.

Westmeath PPN took several steps over the course of the last plan to increase awareness and understanding. You can now read about the PPN on our website, and we have a guidance document.

However, further steps are required to increase participation from a younger cohort. Podcasts or other means to reach a younger demographic will be explored.

Measure of Progress

Training delivered

Presentations delivered

Mentoring developed

Podcasts or other methods delivered



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 13

Follow the Municipal District Protocol.

The Municipal District Protocol has proved invaluable in allowing community and voluntary groups interact with Councilors in relation to local matters where money may have to be allocated under the budget.

Measure of Progress

Municipal District Protocol implemented each year.



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 14

Progress the PPN as a mandatory consultative and participatory structure.

The PPN is an evolving structure. Although awareness of the PPN among key local and national agencies is being improved, the PPN will advocate that the Irish Government requires all consultations to notify PPNs in the areas affected by their policy development.

Measure of Progress

The number of consultations coming through the WPPN



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 15

Foster key partnerships and explore future public participation initiatives.

There is potential for citizens to extend their influence through the development of PPN representation roles on other decision-making forums. To develop this role the PPN will gain agreement to have PPN representation on key committees in areas of strategic interest to the PPN, for instance in community development, health services, environment and heritage.

The PPN will explore innovative public participation initiatives taking place in Ireland and the European Union with a view to learning from these and introducing enhanced participative democracy measures in Westmeath (such as developing a Participation Unit, trialing Online Democracy and Participatory Budgeting, etc.). This should result in more active community participation in consultations, decision making and policy development exercises in Westmeath County Council and other local agencies.

New and existing partnerships need to be fostered on an on-going basis, particularly in the areas of capacity building, to support PPN member groups to meaningfully engage in activity to achieve their goals.

Measure of Progress

Increase representation on relevant local authority committees and consultation processes

There are new representative roles on non-local authority decision making forums

New participatory democracy initiatives trialed



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 16

Further develop relationships between the PPN relevant agencies, organizations and Public Representatives.

For Westmeath PPN to effectively progress issues, beneficial and supportive relationships need to be continually developed between the PPN and other agencies and organizations including elected Public Representatives.

To further support this, and to raise awareness with other agencies and organizations as to the benefits of engaging with PPNs, the following will be done -

- Updated Community Wellbeing Vision/Strategy document will be distributed to all relevant agencies and organisations including Public Representatives
- Seek support from agencies and organisations including public representatives, where relevant, when progressing community issues
- Ensure relevant agencies and organisations including Public Representatives are kept up to date on the PPN through circulating newsletters

Measures of Progress

Updated Community Wellbeing Vision distributed

Number of Newsletters circulated



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 17

Operate in an environmentally sustainable way.

We strive to encourage our members to conduct their activities in a safe and environmentally responsible manner

Westmeath PPN will pledge to recycle and use products that are made from recycled materials whenever possible

Westmeath PPN will be as paper free as possible

Measures of Progress

WPPN reduces its paper consumption

WPPN uses recycled products

WPPN recycles as much as possible



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 18

Actively and positively influence policy on Climate Action

Wherever possible Westmeath PPN will actively try to positively influence policy on Climate Action

Whenever possible Westmeath PPN will ensure the impact on the environment is considered in policy making

Westmeath PPN will make submissions to try to positively influence policy in relation to the environment

Westmeath PPN will run Climate Change and biodiversity courses for its members

Measures of Progress

WPPN positively influences policy decisions.

WPPN submissions made.

Biodiversity and other courses.



STRATEGIC AIMS 2026-2031

ACTION 19

Strive to encourage members to conduct their activities in a safe and environmentally responsible manner

WPPN will distribute information on how members can positively influence the environment

WPPN will support environmental training for its members

Measures of progress

Number of Environmental Information distributions to membership

Environment training/supported provided to membership





Líonra Rannpháirtíochta Pobail An Iarmhí
Public Participation Network Westmeath

WPPN is joint-funded by



**An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe
agus Pobail agus Gaeltachta**
Department of Rural and Community
Development and the Gaeltacht

An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail agus Gaeltachta
Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht

in partnership with



WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL
Comhairle Chontae na hIarmhí

Comhairle Chontae na hIarmhí | Westmeath County Council



CONTACT

Website: <https://westmeathppn.ie>

Email: ppn@westmeathcoco.ie

Telephone: 044 933 2157

Mark Ahern, Resource Worker WPPN

Martin Fagan, Support Worker WPPN

Community Section

Westmeath County Council

Áras An Chontae

Mount Street

Mullingar

N91 FH4N