Westmeath PPN (Spring) Plenary
Draft Minutes of the Meeting

18:00-21:00pm, 27th April 2026
Shamrock Lodge Hotel, Athlone

Public Participation Network Westmeath

1 Attendance

- **Present**

The record of attendance from the attendance sheet was 42 including County Council employees.

- **Apologies**

Apologies received from Hugh Farrell, Merin Rebecca (PPN Secretariat), John Bawle (PPN Secretariat), Frances Coffey, John Corrigan, Christine O' Mahony, Nicole Lonican, John and Therese McCullagh-Melia.

- **Information Villages**

WPPN, An Taisce, Mullingar Mental Health Association, SICAP & Westmeath Traveller Project, STEM, WCC Biodiversity, Midland Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force (MRDATF), Rural Support Schemes

- **In attendance WPPN Secretariat:**

Cathy Whelehan, Nick Linnane, Joe McEvoy and Vinnie Bagnall.

- **WCC Community Staff:**

Annette Barr Jordan, Margaret Egan, Veronica Moran, Breda Reynolds, Thelma Garvey, Sylvia Gunning and Kelly Keogh

- **WPPN Staff:**

Edel Ennis and Lourdes Neary

2 Housekeeping and Welcome (Joe McEvoy)

Joe McEvoy welcomed all attendees and outlined the housekeeping procedure. Joe highlighted the diversity of the Westmeath PPN network, noting the shared challenges faced by member groups such as funding access, volunteer recruitment, and communications. The Plenary was emphasised as a key forum for knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and collective decision-making.

The Plenary focused on the challenges and successes experienced by PPN member groups in delivering community projects. Representatives from Ballinahown Community Development and Milltownpass Tidy Towns shared their experiences of participating in the Tidy Towns competition, highlighting key supports, achievements, and challenges encountered. Presentations were also delivered by Mental Health Ireland and the Westmeath County Council Biodiversity Officer. Discussion provided members with practical insights and examples of good practice in community development.

3	**Minutes of previous Plenary 24th November 2025** The minutes were proposed by Joe Whelan and seconded by Brian Browne. There were no matters arising.
4.	**PPN Updates** Edel Ennis provided an update on the work of the Westmeath Public Participation Network, including progress on the Strategic Plan and Workplan approved in November 2025. Key activities delivered to date included member training programmes, funding workshops, grant information clinics, linkage group meetings, consultations, strengthening committee representation, and ongoing communications and outreach to member groups. Members were encouraged to engage with PPN communications through the website, email, and Facebook.
5	**Presentation by Ballinahown Community Development** Councilor John Dolan delivered a presentation on behalf of Ballinahown Community Development, highlighting the area's achievements and the strong work of its committee and volunteers. He emphasised that with the right people, the right attitude, and the right timing, there are many funding opportunities available, and much can be achieved.
6	**Presentation by Westmeath County Council Biodiversity** Christina Sweeney, Biodiversity Officer from Westmeath County Council outlined the purpose and importance of the Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031. She explained how increased knowledge of biodiversity actions can be incorporated into community projects to support environmental sustainability.
7	**Ratifications of Nominations for Committees** • LCDC Rep Social Inclusion Pillar- Christine O'Mahony • Roads and Safety Forum- John Corrigan • Westmeath Community Development- Hugh Farrell All the nominations above were formally ratified following a show of hands by those in attendance.
8	**Presentation by Milltownpass Tidy Towns** Ronan Lynskey delivered a presentation on behalf of the group, outlining Milltownpass as a volunteer-led initiative. He shared key successes, challenges, and practical lessons, advising a focus on achievable goals. Milltownpass extended an invitation to those present to attend the official launch of their Bog Bothy on 4th May at 12 noon.

9	**Presentation by Mental Health Ireland** Karen Boyle delivered a presentation on mental health and the HELLO, How Are You? campaign. The campaign aims to increase awareness and understanding of mental health, reduce loneliness, strengthen social connections, and foster a greater sense of community. It also seeks to improve signposting to services and build confidence in having conversations about mental health. Karen explained Mental Health Ireland provide Information on mental health supports that can assist groups in promoting wellbeing among volunteers and community members.
10	**General Questions & Answers** The presentations generated positive discussion among attendees and provided practical examples for groups seeking to develop and enhance projects within their own communities. There was an opportunity for questions with all the presenters following the presentations. **Key discussion points included:** • LEADER funding, particularly managing cash flow gaps between grant drawdowns. Presenters highlighted the importance of breaking large projects into stages, careful financial planning, and accessing multiple funding streams to reduce borrowing and interest costs. • Sustainability and Tidy Towns featured strongly, with speakers emphasising that small, visible actions such as bicycle repair stations, pollinator initiatives, rainwater harvesting, polytunnels, and community food projects can have a meaningful impact. Collaboration between Tidy Towns groups was encouraged, with an emphasis on sharing experience. • Community engagement was identified as critical to success. Speakers advised groups to start with achievable projects, understand the skills within their communities, and build momentum gradually. A positive, people focused approach was repeatedly highlighted as essential. • Biodiversity topics included pollinator friendly planting, grassland management, and the importance of using native species, with caution advised regarding imported seed mixes that may contain invasive species. Updated guidance from biodiversity officers and the National Biodiversity Data Centre was recommended. • • Environmental concerns raised included protection of wildlife habitats, notably Lough Ennell murmuration's, with a call for improved signage and visitor awareness to protect birdlife while supporting sustainable tourism.
11	**Close** The session concluded with thanks to all the speakers, attendees, Westmeath County Council Community Section staff, PPN secretariat and the venue. The evening was described as inspiring, informative, and collaborative, with a strong focus on learning, connection, and sustaining positive change in communities.