

Meath Public Participation Network

Grievance Policy & Procedure

Approved at meeting of Meath PPN Plenary held on 14th May 2024



Líonra Rannpháirtíochta Phoiblí An Mhí
Public Participation Network Meath

Grievance Procedure

Policy Statement

1.1. Meath PPN aims to ensure a harmonious working environment is maintained for the benefit of all and to resolve problems and grievances promptly and fairly.

2. Purpose

2.1. The grievance procedure describes the process by which a PPN Worker or volunteer may formally forward a grievance regarding any condition of their work.

3. Scope

3.1. This policy covers all PPN Workers and volunteers within the organisation

4. Glossary of Terms and Definitions

4.1. A grievance is defined as a complaint which any PPN Worker or volunteer of the PPN has concerning **any aspect of their work on behalf of the PPN, working environment or professional working relationships**

5. Principles

5.1. All grievances should aim to be resolved in an informal basis with the person involved, if possible.

5.2. Any proceedings should be conducted honestly, fairly and without bias.

5.3. Proceedings should not be unduly delayed.

5.4. The person(s) against whom the grievance/complaint is made should have the opportunity, and be given a reasonable time to put forward their side of the event/s before resolution is attempted.

6. Standing Provisions to Address Grievances

6.1 Grievances Log: The Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee (or, if not in place, the Secretariat) will ensure a log of grievances is kept in order to enable periodic assessment of whether these are being handled successfully and, if not, to undertake a process to address this. In addition, it will provide data about any trends emerging in relation to complaints that may require to be addressed such as increasing numbers or types of grievances. This Log will be kept confidential and be updated by the Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee who will also compile a summary of data for the Secretariat periodically as requested (e.g. number of complaints, outcomes, etc.). Personal data relating to individual grievances will not be reported and all information will be held subject to data protection regulations.

6.2 Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee: This Committee should be established in line with the Public Participation Networks Handbook 2020, Department of Rural and Community Development. It is responsible for delivering the procedures set out in this document unless the grievance raised involves the Committee itself (see below for provisions in such a situation). **Secretariat Complaints Committee** In the event that a grievance involves the Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee, the Secretariat

Complaints Committee (see Meath PPN Complaints Procedure for details) may be called upon to ensure the procedures set out in this document are followed.

6.3 Standing Secretariat Agenda Item: Grievances (and Complaints) are a standing item on the Secretariat agenda, so that provision is made to expedite handling of these issues.

6.4 No Dual Membership of Secretariat Staff Liaison and Complaints Committees: There will be no cross-over of membership between the Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee and the Complaints Committee, to ensure that a grievance procedure that involves the Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee can be overseen by the Secretariat Complaints Committee.

6.5 External Independent Complaints & Grievances Appeals Group: To support both PPN Complaints and PPN Grievance procedures, the PPN will approach 5 external agencies to agree to nominate a suitable staff member to participate on an external Complaints and Grievances Appeals Group (hereafter referred to as the Appeals Group). This Appeals Group will only be asked to meet in the event that a grievance (or complaint) cannot be successfully resolved through internal procedures. The agencies concerned will agree to make their staff available to participate in a formal grievance hearing, with the PPN meeting their associated expenses. (The list of external agencies that have agreed to provide staff to make up this Appeals Group are listed at the end of this document.)

7. Process

7.1. Informal Grievance

7.1.1. The affected individual should attempt to resolve the complaint as close to the source as possible where this is appropriate, i.e. by discussing it with the individual(s) involved.

7.1.2. If the PPN Staff / Volunteer does not want to deal directly with the individual with whom they have the grievance, they should discuss this issue with the Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee. However, if the Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee is not in place or the grievance concerns that Committee itself, then the PPN Staff/ Volunteer should discuss it with the Secretariat Complaints Committee.

7.2. Formal Grievances

7.2.1. It is understood however that informal resolution is not always possible and that a formal procedure may be required to ensure the swift and fair resolution of matters. Any PPN Worker / Volunteer, who has a grievance or complaint related to the PPN that cannot be resolved through informal channels, should raise the matter with the Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee immediately in writing. If the matter relating to the PPN Worker concerns the Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee itself, then the grievance should be taken to the Secretariat Complaints Committee. In the event that the grievance also involves members of the Secretariat Complaints Committee, then the grievance should be taken to the HR Department of the Local Authority. Notification should include: the substance of the grievance; the remedy sought; and the fact that this is a formal grievance notification.

7.2.2. A mediation process may be an appropriate intervention at this stage. Mediation should be offered, if appropriate, and arranged by the Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee (or Secretariat Complaints Committee where the grievance involves the Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee itself) where the PPN Worker/ Volunteer is agreeable.

Mediation is a confidential, neutral and voluntary approach to conflict resolution in which parties can engage without prejudice. If a PPN Worker/ Volunteer wishes to take up the offer of mediation as a means to resolve a situation, then the mediator must have declared any connection with any of the parties and be acceptable to all parties involved. The mediator must be fully trained, accredited and insured. The PPN will cover reasonable costs for provision of mediation. [The Secretariat Committee handling the grievance can sanction mediation costs to a limit of €500.00 beyond which it must seek approval from the full Secretariat.]

In the case of mediation, the outcomes and process will be confidential between the parties involved in the process, unless they agree otherwise (for example, in making recommendations for changes in PPN procedures, or requesting agreement to elements of the agreement by the Secretariat). The mediation itself will be governed by an agreement to mediate that will be agreed and signed by all involved parties before the mediation procedures.

7.2.3. If the issue is unable to be resolved to the PPN Worker's satisfaction through mediation, the mediator will notify the Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee or Secretariat Complaints Committee (as appropriate) only that the mediation has not been successful and that Committee will then initiate a formal grievance hearing.

7.3. Grievance Hearing

7.3.1. The Secretariat Staff Liaison Subcommittee or Secretariat Complaints Committee (as appropriate) will organise a Grievance Hearing as necessary.

7.3.2. The PPN Staff/Volunteer taking the grievance and the person(s) against whom the grievance/ complaint is made have a right to be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative. It is recognised that the grievance may involve more than one member of PPN staff and may be between staff and that, as in all cases, all parties will be treated fairly and with respect.

7.3.3. The Committee conducting the grievance hearing will meet separately with the PPN Worker raising the grievance and the person(s) against whom the grievance/complaint is made. If the PPN Worker/ Volunteer raising the grievance has specific questions for the person(s) against whom the grievance/complaint is made these should be put in writing and vice versa. If all participants agree, a combined meeting with all parties can also be undertaken. The decision as to what method is most appropriate for the resolution of the grievance will be that of the Secretariat.

7.3.4. The meeting will be conducted so as to ensure that all parties have adequate time to explain their views and to respond to the other parties' comments and views.

7.3.5 If no consensus on an acceptable resolution is reached in the hearing process then the Secretariat Staff Liaison Committee or Secretariat Complaints Committee (whichever is conducting the Hearing) will make a decision on the outcome of the grievance procedure.

7.3.6 If the outcome of the process leads to a recommendation for disciplinary action involving a PPN Worker, this will be communicated by the PPN Secretariat to the County Council HR section as employer.

8. Appeal

8.1. In most instances the organisation would expect the Secretariat's decision to be final and for the matter to come to a close. However, both the PPN Worker/ Volunteer who raised the grievance or the person(s) against whom the grievance/complaint was made has the right to appeal the decision if are not satisfied with the outcome of the Grievance Hearing. 4

8.2. Any party to a grievance procedure (whether the person who raised the grievance or the person against whom the grievance was raised) who wishes to appeal against the outcome of that procedure must do so within 5 working days from receipt of written notification of the outcome of the procedure.

8.3. To initiate an appeal any party must send a written request for an appeal, to the Committee who undertook the grievance hearing, and this should contain the original formal grievance notification. The Committee must then instigate the establishment of an Appeal Hearing (see 6.5 above). A minimum of 3 members of the Appeals Group are required to participate in an Appeal Hearing.

8.4. The process undertaken by the Appeal Group, will be as follows:

8.4.1. An Appeal Hearing will be set for a date notified to all parties in writing and which gives reasonable notification to facilitate them to attend and to bring a colleague or trade union representative with them.

8.4.2 The Appeal Group conducting the grievance hearing will meet separately with the party that has appealed the decision and other parties as necessary. It will ensure that it meets with all parties that may be impacted by the Appeal. If it is considered desirable and all participants agree, a combined meeting with all relevant parties can also be undertaken. The decision as to what method is most appropriate for the resolution of the grievance will be that of the Appeals Group.

8.4.3 The Appeals Group will discuss the matter in private and has the right to seek further information from either party.

8.4.4 The Appeals Group will advise all relevant parties of the Appeal decision in writing.

8.4.5 The decision of the Appeals Group is final.