

*Review
of the Operation
of Strategic Policy
Committees*



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*Review of the
Operation of Strategic
Policy Committees*

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for the
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Foreword

The establishment of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) in the late 1990s was a bold move to put councillors at the heart of local authority policy formulation, implementation and review. It allowed local government to develop policies in a spirit of partnership, harnessing the valuable knowledge and expertise of both elected members and representatives of local sectoral interests including the social partners, for the benefit of their communities.

Modern organisations need to focus on strategic planning if they are to continue to prosper and local authorities are no different. Proper, well-developed policies provide the essential framework for the delivery by local authorities of the best possible services to people at local level. I believe that SPCs, with a particular focus on policy rather than operational matters, can contribute to this goal.

This review carried out by the Institute of Public Administration on my behalf is timely because it allows us to look at the actual experience of SPCs to date. We can see what worked well in SPCs and what areas need attention and in so doing we can reap the maximum benefit from the SPC structure. The IPA has examined the SPC structure and consulted widely with the principal players involved in order to establish an actual picture of how SPCs are operating.

It is clear that there is much goodwill towards the concept of elected and sectoral representatives working together to develop appropriate policies for their authorities. It is also clear that some factors are preventing SPCs

from delivering on their potential. The findings and conclusions of the IPA team give us all plenty of practical and relevant suggestions, which can assist the efforts of SPC members on policy development and review. There is a responsibility on all those involved with SPCs – councillors, sectoral representatives and local authority management – to commit themselves to the work of SPCs in a businesslike and professional manner.

I want, in particular, to thank the IPA for its work and also all those who contributed to the review for their frank and honest contributions, which I hope will enable us to continue to improve the operation of SPCs in the future.



Martin Cullen TD
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

17 June 2004

Executive Summary

The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) was requested by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to carry out a review of the operation of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs). The review involved conducting a series of meetings and consultations with a number of key stakeholders (see Appendix 1 for full list) involved with the SPC process. It also involved accessing some earlier work done by the Department itself.

The review concentrated on the following areas: SPC structures, membership and topics discussed; the practicalities of SPC meetings; linking the SPCs with other parts of the local authority; identifying the impact of the SPC process.

The key findings of this review indicate that, whilst some progress has been made in relation to the operation of SPCs, the progress has not been uniform and indeed there would appear to be variations between SPCs within individual local authorities and between local authorities. Some of those contacted during the review expressed disappointment and frustration with SPCs. In order to successfully progress the SPC process, we make a series of recommendations. These concentrate mainly on the practicalities of SPC meetings and the linking of SPCs with other parts of the local authority. We are conscious that both sets of recommendations involve some profound cultural changes, as well as some relatively minor ones. We are confident that, if implemented, the recommendations will enhance the effectiveness of the SPC process.

The first set of recommendations involves the *procedures* before and during SPC meetings. These recommendations are designed to ensure that meetings are effective and that they make the best possible use of members' time and background. SPC chairs and directors of service should go through the agendas of SPC meetings well in advance of the meetings and agree on the objectives and expected outcomes. Members of each SPC should identify issues that can be incorporated into an operational work programme, that could run over a number of years, and that is capable of linking the SPC's priorities and objectives to corporate priorities and objectives. SPCs should normally meet four times a year, unless the need for more meetings arises, and the timing of the meetings should accommodate all key players, which in some cases can mean evening meetings. A contact person should be available to SPC members to deal with SPC matters between meetings – either the director of service himself/herself or an appropriate senior official. If possible, members of SPCs should remain on the SPC for the full duration of the council. An informal collaborative atmosphere should be encouraged at SPC meetings in order to facilitate discussion of key policy options. The meeting should be conducted in a professional and courteous manner. A greater number of SPC meetings could be conducted in community halls and centres, and key documentation and papers should be circulated to members at least four weeks in advance of the meetings.

The second set of recommendations involves the *policy support and development* for SPC meetings. In order to develop and formulate policy at SPC meetings, directors of service should carry out appropriate research and produce clearly presented reports with executive summaries. These should be circulated in advance of meetings. The need for high quality research is recognised by all. Local authorities could develop their SPC policy support role by making better use of research carried out by local authority community and enterprise development officers (CEDOs), and

indeed by using any other existing sources, for example the Local Government Management Services Board (LGMSB) and third-level institutes. Once the research is carried out and all the potential avenues and options are identified for the SPC, policy options need to be presented to the SPC in a clear and unambiguous manner so that members can reach conclusions on an approach and subsequently draft the policy. It is important that the potential of SPCs to influence policy be exploited. In this regard, members of SPCs should be cognisant of the fact that departmental and governmental guidelines, as opposed to explicit direction, need to be interpreted as guidelines and not instructions, in order not to limit their discretion in terms of policy options. In order to encourage more discretion at SPC meetings it is important that all key players think fully through the implications of various options and take greater responsibility for decisions made. Members should be encouraged to focus on the medium to long-term policy options and should be in a position to adapt national policies to local circumstances. In order to achieve this, directors of service should engage more with relevant sections of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) and other relevant agencies.

The third set of recommendations involves the *media and training*. At the very early stages of the deliberative process it is important to encourage honest and frank discussion on the development of policy, and this can be inhibited where media representatives are present at SPC meetings. Those involved with SPCs should receive a wide range of training in areas such as the following: training on specific policy areas; effective meeting skills for SPC chairs; policy research and development skills for directors of service and their staff; and information-based training for sectoral reps on the operations of the local authority. In addition new SPC members should receive an introductory handbook and introductory training explaining the background and composition of SPCs.

The final set of recommendations involves *linkages between SPCs and other elements of local governance*; SPC chairs should introduce SPC recommendations for approval by the full council and there should be automatic feedback to the SPC on whether or not the recommendations have been approved, and if not why not. Corporate Policy Group (CPG) members should liaise closely with the manager in identifying key issues to be discussed by SPCs. SPC chairs who sit on the city/county development boards (CDB) should provide a link between the needs identified by the SPC and the activities of other public bodies. The chairs in turn should report back to the SPC on the activities of the CDB as they affect the work of the SPC. Finally each sectoral SPC member should provide structured feedback on the activities of the SPC to his/her nominating organisation/community forum (as appropriate).

1. Introduction to the Review

1.1 Background and Context

The background to this review was the establishment of new structures within local government known as Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs). These structures were the result of one of the four core principles of the 1996 White Paper, *Better Local Government – A Programme for Change*, which proposed to enhance local democracy by ensuring that local communities and their representatives would have a say in the provision of local services, and by strengthening the role of elected members. One of the main means for implementing this enhancement of local democracy was to be the establishment of a number of Strategic Policy Committees in each county and city council area.

The principles behind the SPC system were further emphasised in the 1997 Programme for Government, *An Action Programme for the Millennium*. In 1997, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) circulated guidelines on SPCs to city and county councils. The actual establishment and operation of SPCs was in many local authorities delayed due to industrial relations problems associated with the reform programme. However, SPCs were established in some local authorities during 1998, and there was a new membership in most county and city councils following the local elections in 1999. Generally speaking SPCs only became fully operational from mid-2001 onwards with the recruitment of the directors of service. The 1997 guidelines were subsequently revised by more detailed guidelines issued following the 1999 elections entitled

Strategic Policy Committees: Guidelines for establishment and operation

Each county/city council was to establish a number of SPCs (in practice most have established either four or five) that would focus on policy development in areas related to council services. SPCs were to concentrate on policy-making and were not to become concerned with individual representational or operational issues. Policy recommendations from the SPC would be referred to the full council, which would still have the final say in exercising reserved functions (i.e. those functions which are reserved to elected members for adoption by resolution). Two-thirds of the membership of each SPC would be comprised of elected members, and one-third would consist of "sectoral interests" made up of representatives of social partners, community and voluntary groups and other relevant interests at local level. The chairperson of each SPC was to be a member of the council. The work of the SPC was to be supported by the local authority's director of service for the related service area, and any other officials necessary.

The chairperson of each SPC, plus the cathaoirleach/mayor of the council, would also meet in a grouping known as the Corporate Policy Group (CPG). The CPG would have a co-ordinating role, and deal with cross-cutting issues that might transcend a number of SPCs, as well as dealing with corporate issues including the corporate plan, the modernisation process, and customer service issues. It would also play a role in the preparation of the local authority budget. The work of the CPG would be supported by the city/county manager. Part of the rationale for the CPG structure was the creation of an embryonic "cabinet-style" structure within Irish local government.

The 1999 guidelines provided advice and guidance on the role and configuration of SPCs and the CPG. They also provided that each city and county council, after considering submissions on the issue, should draw up an SPC scheme for their area outlining the number of SPCs, the policy

configuration, number of members, and representation of different sectoral interests and town/borough councils on different SPCs.

The guidelines specified that each local authority SPC scheme should ensure that a nominee from each of the following sectors would be represented on at least one committee in their scheme:

- Agriculture/Farming (not necessary in urbanised local authorities)
- Environmental/Conservation/Culture
- Development/Construction
- Business/Commercial
- Trade Union
- Community/Voluntary/Disadvantaged.

Sectoral representatives were then nominated to serve on specific SPCs in accordance with the scheme, either through national organisations (as was the case for the agriculture, business, trade union and construction representatives) or through the local community forum (as was the case for environmental/cultural and community/voluntary representatives). The guidelines also provided that town and borough councils had the option to establish Municipal Policy Committees (MPCs) for their area, which would also be based on two-thirds of the members being town councillors, and one-third coming from sectoral interests.

A statutory basis for SPCs was provided for in the Local Government Act 2001. The Act stated that SPCs would "consider matters connected with the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy which relate to the functions of the local authority and advise the authority on those matters" (ss. 48(1)). Section 49 of the Act provided for the establishment of MPCs. Section 133 provided for the establishment of a CPG in each county and city council, while subsections 133(3) and 133(4) provided that the manager shall consult the CPG when preparing the corporate plan and draft budget.

While acknowledging that it would always take some time for the SPC process to embed itself firmly within the local government structure, it was felt that a review could take place at this time with a view to assessing the progress made and identifying problems encountered.

1.2 Terms of Reference

In 2002, the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) was requested to carry out a review of the SPC structures, with a view to highlighting good practice and making recommendations on SPCs. Among the issues that the Department asked the Institute to examine were the following:

- the views of the key stakeholders on the operation of SPCs to date
- whether SPCs have contributed to the formulation, development and review of policy in their local authority
- the linkage between SPCs, the CPG, the full council, the County/City Development Board, other relevant agencies outside the formal local authority structure, and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG)
- examples of good practice which have enhanced the effectiveness of SPCs, as well as barriers which have impeded their goals
- proposals to enhance the performance, quality and effectiveness of the work of SPCs
- the need for any additional support required.

1.3 Methodology

This review is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data is sourced from individual and group meetings as well as from workshops held specifically for the SPC review.

The Institute of Public Administration, with the agreement of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government,

undertook to deliver as inclusive a review as possible. In particular, it wished to formally meet with and consult a number of representative stakeholders with a role in the SPC process. A number of face-to-face in-depth meetings, focus groups and workshops were held with relevant parties including SPCs covering different policy areas and in different local authorities, councillor representative associations, national social partner organisations and nominating bodies, and local authority officials. The review group also sat in on a number of SPC meetings themselves. The full list of meetings conducted for the review is attached as Appendix I.

Our strategy was to select a representative sample which would give us comprehensive coverage and enable us to make recommendations that would apply generally.

It should be noted that a large number of the meetings with both the representative associations of elected members, and with the national social partner organisations, involved a number of SPC members drawn from various local authorities across the country. This enabled the review group, as well as meeting with individual SPCs in different local authorities, to also draw from the experience of SPC members (both councillors and sectoral interests) from a large cross-section of local authorities around the country.

The review group would like to express its appreciation to all those who took the time to meet with the IPA and share their thoughts on the SPC process to date.

The secondary data for the review consists of written submissions and reports connected with the SPC process. At a number of the face-to-face meetings with different parties, written submissions on SPCs were presented to the review group. In some cases, these had already been presented to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local

Government. In addition, the review group made use of information collected by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in 2001 on the number of SPCs per council, number of meetings each year, levels of attendance, etc. This data was collected by the Department from responses to questionnaires issued to city and county councils. The review group was also able to make use of a concurrent study carried out by the Institute of Public Administration for the Committee for Public Management Research (CPMR) on the local government modernisation process as a whole. The study was entitled *Changing Local Government: A Review of the Local Government Modernisation Programme*. It took a wider ambit than the present review, and examined progress in areas such as corporate planning, financial and human resource management, customer action plans, integrated service delivery, and the use of ICT. As part of the CPMR study, data was collected on SPCs, county/city development boards and other areas of activity during 2002 on the basis of questionnaires issued to county and city managers and interviews conducted with senior management in local government, as well as managers in a number of state agencies and other organisations with a close linkage with local government. However, the SPC review presented here results from an undertaking to consult with a wider range of stakeholders on their views specifically with regard to SPCs, and to specifically evaluate the operation of these structures in greater depth.

The review presents the composite view drawn from different quarters. There was broad agreement in many areas between different groups on various aspects of the SPC process. There was a divergence of views between different parties in a limited number of areas and where this occurred the divergence is indicated in the report.

The review group consisted of Mark Callanan, Anne O’Keeffe and Philip Byrne of the Institute of Public Administration.

1.4 Structure of the Report

This introductory section presents the rationale for the review, its background and context, the issues the review group was asked to address, and the methodology applied. The following section presents our main findings. These are grouped into four broad areas.

- Basic information on progress in the establishment of SPC structures in local authorities – who is represented on SPCs, and what issues are being discussed?
- Findings concerning the practicalities of the SPC process – how meetings are held, conduct at them, the role of the different actors, and the policy focus of SPCs.
- Findings concerning the work of SPCs and how they relate to other structures – links between SPCs and the full council, links with other structures such as town councils, area committees, county/city development boards, nominating bodies, etc.
- Findings concerning the impact that SPCs have had to date on local government activity.

Throughout this section, we attempt to highlight examples we have uncovered of good practice in the conduct of SPC business.

Our findings influence the content of our final section, which deals with conclusions and recommendations for action, and which is addressed to a number of different actors and stakeholders in the SPC process, including SPC members, local government officials, and central government.

The conclusions and recommendations arising from the findings will, we believe, enhance the performance of SPCs and ensure that their impact is maximised.

2. Findings

2.1 Introduction

As indicated in the previous section, our findings will be divided into four broad categories.

- General information on the different SPC structures that exist in local authorities across the country, their membership, and the range of issues being discussed.
- The practicalities of SPC meetings – how meetings are held, what preparation goes into them, how is business conducted, what is the role of different actors, and whether the policy focus of SPCs is being maintained.
- Linking the work of SPCs and how they relate to other structures – links between SPCs and the full council and the CPG, links with other structures such as town councils, area committees, county/city development boards, nominating bodies.
- The impact that SPCs have had to date on local government activity.

2.2 SPC Structures, Membership and Topics

In April 2001, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) conducted a survey of all county and city councils relating to the establishment and operation of SPCs and the CPG in their area. The survey was based on the results of completed questionnaires received from county and city councils. It is of course worthwhile noting

that the survey took place at a very early stage of the SPC process, and only shortly after the recruitment of new directors of service positions. Nevertheless, the data collected provides basic information on the SPC structures that exist across the country.

2.2.1 SPC Structures

The exact designation and remit of SPCs varies from local authority to local authority, depending on the individual SPC scheme. For example, while a few local authorities have an SPC that deals exclusively with housing matters, quite a number have SPCs that combine housing, social and cultural matters. According to the DEHLG survey information, all county and city councils have an SPC that deals with housing issues, planning issues, environmental matters, and transportation issues. Just over half of the councils reported that they also had an SPC that dealt exclusively with arts, culture, recreational and other services. Some local authorities also reported SPCs with other remits, such as economic development, financial matters, and urban and rural development.

Generally speaking, most SPCs follow the main programme groups, albeit with differing combinations.

2.2.2 SPC Membership

Most SPCs have 12 members, comprising 8 elected members and 4 representatives of sectoral interests. The data on SPC type and membership is summarised in Table 1 (see page 10).

According to the DEHLG survey, just under one-third of sectoral representatives were drawn from the community/voluntary/disadvantaged sector. This sector accounts for the highest level of representation of sectoral interests on SPCs, followed by the business/commercial sector and the environment/conservation/cultural sector.

Table 1: SPC type and membership

Type of SPC	% of authorities that have SPC	Average no. of members on SPC	Membership breakdown		Gender breakdown	
			% councillors	% Sectoral representatives	% Male	% Female
Housing	100	11	65	35	75	25
Planning	100	12	65	35	85	15
Environment	97*	11	66	34	82	18
Transportation	100	12	65	35	84	16
Recreation/culture	56	12	65	35	75	25
Other	41	13	65	35	79	21

Source: DEHLG

*The exception in the Department's statistics is North Tipperary County Council. However, the figure of 97% may be somewhat misleading, and could be more accurately recorded as 100%, because North Tipperary County Council has an SPC which deals with both planning and environment issues. Upon contacting the local authority in question, it was confirmed that a significant proportion of this SPC's time is given over to environmental matters.

Table 2: Membership by sectoral interest

Sector	Number of representatives	% of total representatives
Community/voluntary/disadvantaged	203	32
Business/commercial	110	17
Environment/conservation/cultural	102	16
Development/construction	75	12
Trade union	67	11
Agriculture/farming	66	10
Other	12	2

Source: DEHLG

Other interests included representatives from the tourism sector, group water schemes and educational interests.

2.2.3 SPC Topics

The DEHLG survey asked local authorities to report on the main topics being addressed by their different SPCs. The results are set out in Table 3.

Table 3: Top three priority issues being dealt with by SPCs (April 2001)

<i>Housing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Homelessness Strategy ■ Housing Strategy – Part V ■ Traveller Accommodation
<i>Planning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ County/City Development Plan ■ Housing Strategy – Part V ■ Planning and Development Act 2000
<i>Environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Waste management ■ Litter Control Policy/Management/Pollution ■ Recycling Policy/Water Quality Standards
<i>Transportation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Road Safety Policy ■ National Roads/Non-National Roads Programme ■ Rural Transport Initiative/Corporate Plan
<i>Recreation/Culture</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Library Development ■ Arts Plan/Strategy ■ Promotion of Irish Language

Source: DEHLG

While Table 3 offers only a snapshot into what was being discussed at a particular point in time (April 2001), it is useful in demonstrating the range of issues that were being addressed, even at the early stages of the process. Some of the other issues identified (both by the DEHLG survey and the

SPC review group) as topics that were being addressed by SPCs are listed in Appendix II.

While the Local Government Act 2001 requires the establishment of SPCs by county and city councils, it allows the option for town and borough councils to establish Municipal Policy Committees (MPCs). It would appear that relatively few town and borough councils have established such committees. The DEHLG survey revealed that by April 2001, only four town and borough councils had established MPCs, and the review group found little evidence to show that the use of MPCs is widespread across the country. However, it should be noted that town councillors can be represented on the SPC of the relevant county council.

2.3 The Practicalities of SPC Meetings

2.3.1 Introduction

The review group wanted to examine the specifics of how SPC business was managed. In particular, it wished to review

- procedures in place to prepare for meetings
- how the agenda is determined
- the preparation of documentation and relevant material for the meeting
- the conduct and running of meetings
- the content of meetings (discussion, presentations, etc.)
- participation at meetings, and the role of different actors such as the SPC chairperson, SPC members (elected councillors and sectoral interests), and the director of service and other officials
- the policy focus at meetings
- the number of meetings.

The findings of the group, based on feedback from meetings, focus groups, and written material suggests that there have been some positive aspects to the SPC process so far in this area.

One positive aspect of the process which the overwhelming majority of those interviewed cited was the principle of involving external sectoral representatives in local government policy-making. This was particularly welcome for virtually all sectoral representatives and elected members, and while many interviewees relayed specific criticisms of SPCs they welcomed this innovative part of the process. The impression of the review group is that most councillors have embraced the concept of partnership at local level, and many contributors to the review pointed to the benefit and potential of being able to avail of a wide range of relevant views on particular topics. It was pointed out by a number of contributors that the SPC process can encourage elected members and sectoral interests to “think outside the box” in terms of their own immediate interests. A number of sectoral interests also mentioned that their participation on SPCs had given them a new appreciation of the difficulties faced by local authorities and the constraints on their activities.

Meetings appear to be run on an inclusive basis in the vast majority of cases. While some exceptions to this practice were reported, the majority of contributors to the review felt that SPC members were treated on an equal basis, and that each member of the SPC had sufficient access to speaking time – this is important in building an inclusive and collaborative working relationship, and in ensuring equality of participation. Most contributors felt that SPCs were a forum with which participants were relatively at ease.

There were, needless to say, areas where contributors felt there was plenty of room for improvement with regard to the practicalities of SPC meetings. Some of the adverse issues identified could be seen as “teething problems”, given that the SPC process is still somewhat in its infancy (indeed, some contributors reported noticing a steady improvement in the management of SPCs and how topics were addressed). Other criticisms, however, are more fundamental in nature and will require a rethink of the role of various actors that contribute to the work of SPCs.

2.3.2 Setting the Agenda for SPCs – Having a Work Programme

Few SPCs displayed evidence of a structured work programme to provide continuity between meetings, and to set the agenda in terms of priorities and targets for the SPC. A work programme should be agreed by the members of the committee themselves, and should identify targets for progress to be made. This would help to give participants a greater sense of purpose by outlining what the objectives of particular SPCs will be.

A number of contributors mentioned this lack of purpose and objectives as a failing. It meant that SPC members were unsure as to what their remit was or what their discussions actually led to. Simply turning up to debate a particular issue, with no output at the end of the meeting and no prospect of an output at further meetings, was a source of frustration for a number of SPC members interviewed, and this may affect future participation in the SPC process – indeed it may already be affecting rates of participation.

The work programme could be usefully informed by the local authority's corporate plan, the county/city development board strategy, reviews of policy as required, and of course suggestions from SPC members themselves. Some of these influences are illustrated in Figure 1.



2.3.3 Participation in SPCs

While exact figures on participation rates are not available, the research undertaken for this review and for the CPMR study on the local government modernisation programme* suggests that there can be difficulty in reaching a quorum for meetings. However, the picture is a varied one, with participation rates reported to be good in some local authorities, and problematic in others. Even within local authorities, participation rates vary depending on the SPC. Issues reportedly affecting participation include a perception that SPC meetings do not yield concrete results, and that issues discussed are not relevant to some of those participating. Also cited were pressures of time and the large number of meetings to be attended, aside from SPC meetings (the level of participation is a topic we return to in the section on the impact of SPCs below).

It was also observed by some contributors that attendance and participation appeared to be higher in rural areas than in urban local authorities.

A suggestion raised by some contributors was that SPC members that consistently fail to attend meetings (whether councillors or sectoral interests) should be replaced. This might apply after a member has missed a certain number of meetings.

It was also felt by a number of contributors that the fact that some SPC members are not paid travel expenses can affect rates of participation (this issue is dealt with separately below).

2.3.4 Preparing for SPC Meetings

The procedures for advance preparation of SPC meetings appear to be very much up to the SPC chairperson and the director of service. Thus, the review group noticed a wide variety of arrangements in place in different locations for advance notice of meetings, how and when material is circulated in advance of meetings, and the type of material that is circulated in advance.

* *Changing Local Government: A Review of the Local Government Modernisation Programme*

In some cases, there was evidence of a large amount of preparatory work for meetings, for example the preparation of policy papers, summaries of new developments, and details of the implications for and options open to the local authority. In other cases much less preparatory work appeared to have been done – very often the extent of the preparation work depends on the level of commitment of the director to the SPC process.

In some cases, contributors to the review complained of inadequate notice of meetings, and that documentation often arrived very late before meetings, making it difficult for participants to make a meaningful contribution to discussions or to consult with their nominating body. However, it would appear that in some locations there has been improvement in more recent practice in this respect. Another complaint was that the quality and relevance of material circulated was poor (a point returned to below).

It is the practice in certain locations that prior to meetings the SPC chairperson and relevant director of service meet to go through the agenda and agree on their objectives for the meeting and what should be decided. This is a practice that might be considered in other locations. The chairperson and director could also discuss the key areas they would like the committee to address during the meeting, so that the chairperson can keep the meeting focused on these areas.

2.3.5 Conduct at Meetings

A regular comment, particularly from representatives from sectoral interests, related to the rather formal procedures used at SPC meetings, making them somewhat akin to council meetings. It was suggested by a number of contributors that a few basic procedures be established, such as the introduction of new members at the start of meetings. Most sectoral representatives and a number of elected members expressed a preference for avoiding council-type procedures, such as proposing and seconding the agenda, and the like. These procedures can appear rather “fussy” and be

somewhat off-putting to non-councillors in particular, and can accentuate differences between elected members and sectoral interests in what should be an inclusive process. It can also make the atmosphere of the meeting more formal than it need be.

As noted above, it is important that the SPC chairperson ensures that meetings are run on an inclusive basis, and that each member is treated equally and has the opportunity to make a contribution to discussions. Based on contributions to the review, almost all SPC chairpersons appear to be both helpful and courteous, although there were suggestions that some tend to be better at chairing meetings than others.

Behaviour during meetings was the subject of some adverse criticism, for example the practice of some members wandering in and out of meetings, and taking mobile phone calls during meetings. This can give an impression, particularly to sectoral interests, that some members are not committed to the matter under discussion; this is very negative and undermines the credibility of the process. It gives participants the sense that certain SPC members do not take SPCs seriously and it can be off-putting to members who have given up time to participate in the process and who expect other participants to take it equally seriously. Some sectoral interests have found it difficult to get people to serve on SPCs and it does not help when meetings are run in an unprofessional manner. Unprofessional conduct at meetings may also make it more difficult to get people to serve in future.

2.3.6 Location and Timing of Meetings

A number of local authorities have taken the initiative of holding some SPC meetings outside of the council buildings in community centres or halls. Again, this would seem to have the benefit of engendering a less formal atmosphere than holding meetings in the council chamber or even within council headquarters. Contributors complained that meetings often

appeared to be timed to suit the requirements of certain elected members or officials. Where one local authority moved from afternoon meetings to evening meetings this appeared to have a positive impact on attendance.

Many contributors believed that indicative dates for SPC meetings should be agreed by members at the beginning of each year, and kept to whenever possible.

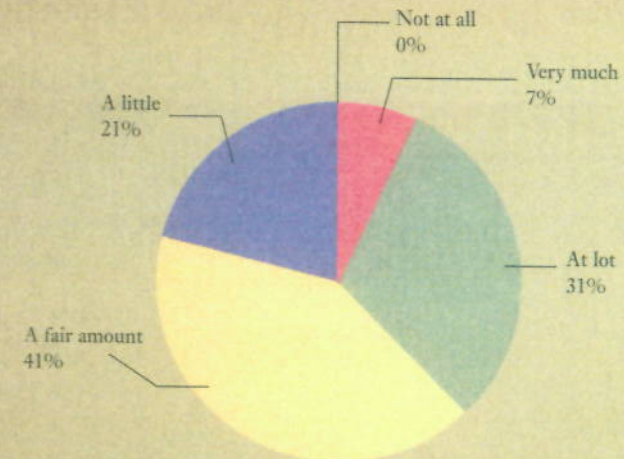
2.3.7 Frequency of Meetings

Typically, most SPCs meet quarterly. Most contributors did not have strong feelings as to whether this was an adequate number or not. Some however argued that there was often a relatively long time between meetings, and that there was a need for more frequent meetings to engage in in-depth policy development. Others argued that SPC meetings should not be held unless there is a worthwhile agenda – without a worthwhile agenda, the result is a waste of time for councillors, sectoral interests and officials. Given the pressures on time for both elected members and sectoral interests, it appears that some flexibility is needed here. For example, if an SPC is considering the draft development plan, it may be necessary for it to meet more often than usual, whereas if the agenda is relatively light, the SPC could agree to meet say three times during the year. This is an issue that could be considered by the SPC chairperson and relevant director of service, and ultimately decided upon by the SPC members themselves.

2.3.8 Maintaining a Policy Focus

Other problems have concerned the difficulty in maintaining a policy focus. In the 2002 survey conducted for the CPMR study on the local government modernisation programme, all thirty-four county and city managers were asked their views on progress made under the new SPC structures. Of the twenty-nine that responded to the questionnaire, just under 40% felt that the SPCs were meaningfully engaged in the examination of local strategic policy issues, while over 60% felt that SPCs are engaged only a little or a fair amount. The full results of the survey are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Views of county/city managers regarding the extent to which SPCs are meaningfully engaged in the examination of local strategic policy issues (2002)



Source: *Changing Local Government: A Review of the Local Government Modernisation Programme*, p. 31

Strategic Policy Committees, as their title suggests, should be concerned with policy matters. However, there can be a rather blurred line as to where policy stops and operational issues begin. Some areas clearly fit into the realm of policy, such as the drafting of the development plan, which is a statutory responsibility. Some SPCs however have taken a broader interpretation to policy. Rather than confining their examination to the adoption of statutory plans and programmes, they have also examined how different services are being managed. This they have done with reference to issues such as service indicators, or comparisons with other local authority areas in terms of issues such as opening hours, or whether or not the local authority engages in pre-planning consultation. This practice could usefully be part of the “policy review” stage of the SPC’s involvement in the local authority’s “policy cycle” (see Figure 3, page 35). The important thing here is that a county-wide or city-wide approach to the delivery of services is the focus of the SPC. It is important that, while the Planning

SPC might wish to review the delivery of the planning service by reference to service indicators, it should not be engaged in discussion on individual case studies.

SPCs are in many cases also monitoring the implementation of plans and programmes, and it is here that it is very easy to slip into operational issues. Monitoring of implementation should have as its focus how the plan is progressing, and whether any changes to the original plan are warranted due to developments in implementation or changes in the overall environment in which the plan operates (for example changes in the local authority's budgetary situation).

Elected members of course have two specific roles (representational and policy-making). It is understandably difficult to separate these roles in practice. The role of the SPC chairperson is key here, because one of his/her duties should be to ensure that discussion remains focused where possible on policy-related issues. In this respect, the SPC chairperson can be advised by the relevant director of service.

2.3.9 The Key Roles of the SPC Chairperson and Director of Service

Our findings lead us to believe that the two key figures in terms of influencing the practicalities of SPC meetings are the chairperson and the relevant director of service. The *SPC chairperson* has a key role in ensuring that the business of the meeting is properly and efficiently conducted, while at the same time ensuring that each member of the committee has an opportunity to make his or her contribution to the discussion. The atmosphere at meetings should be conducive to the free exchange of ideas, and participants should be encouraged to ask questions if they are unsure about topics raised (for example, sectoral interests will not necessarily be familiar with bye-laws that may be raised by elected members or officials). The chairperson has a key role in creating an informal, inclusive atmosphere. The chairperson must be assisted through preparatory work

done for the meeting by the *director of service* and other relevant staff, in terms of presenting readable and usable material (explaining "jargon" where necessary) and, where appropriate, identifying policy options for members to discuss. It appears to the review group that this preparatory work is essential for providing a focus for discussion within SPCs. The director may also be called upon to explain the implications for the local authority of various policy options presented to SPC members.

2.3.10 The Importance of Policy Support to Give SPC Meetings a Greater Focus

The results of the survey undertaken by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on SPCs revealed that many SPC meetings consist of briefings on particular policy issues relevant to the SPC's work. While briefings are a valuable element of SPC meetings, and are a useful method of relaying basic information to and raising awareness among SPC members on a particular topic, they can very easily be followed by general discussions *around* the issue at hand, but with few concrete results of such deliberations, or items put to members for a decision. It is important to note that discussions in themselves bring an added value to members of SPCs by ensuring that they are better informed on issues surrounding a particular policy area, which in turn leads to better informed decision-making. However, a frequent complaint and source of frustration encountered during this review was that very often issues were discussed but left unresolved, without any prospect of action being taken.

It is clear that a greater focus to SPC discussions is often needed. Thus briefings need to conclude with a presentation and explanation to the SPC members of the different options open to the local authority, relaying the experience of good practice elsewhere. Policy papers should generally conclude with a series of bullet points at the end identifying the areas for discussion at the meeting (see good practice example below concerning disabled persons' grants). The SPC chairperson, assisted by the director,

should then work towards keeping the discussion focused and concentrating on those areas where the local authority has discretion. Based on the ideas generated at the SPC meeting, the director can present a draft to the subsequent SPC meeting, which can then decide on proposed recommendations to full council. This might involve a concentration of meetings to ensure that key deadlines are met.

Better Local Government (section 2.19) stated that “each SPC will be supported by the programme manager [subsequently re-titled director of service] for the relevant service, who will operate under the general direction of the committee and submit policy review papers for the service or services in question. This will give a clear focus to the work of the committee”. A recent role profile and training needs analysis for senior local government staff carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers identified a number of core competencies for directors of service, including strategic thinking and policy development. The report specified broad agreement among managers and directors of service that this role encompassed “involvement at all stages in the development of Local Authority policy as follows: *Researching, Drafting, Achieving a Decision, Implementing and Reviewing*” (italics in original). The same report also observed a consensus among almost all senior executive officers and a majority of senior engineers that they had a similar role in terms of facilitating the works of SPCs.

It is thus the clear intention of *Better Local Government* that the directors of service and their staff should submit policy review papers designed to give the SPCs a clearer focus. There was a general consensus among contributors to this review that there is scope for improving the level of support for SPCs. Adequate time needs to be given to analysing policy options and their resource implications for the local authority, and presenting these to SPC members as potential courses of action in a manner that is clear and understandable. The traditional approach of presenting

“one” policy response to an identified problem or issue might have had the advantage of securing a quick decision, but it might also have been at the expense of democratic ownership, sectoral involvement, and inclusive analysis of alternatives. The preparation of policy options requires considerable investment in time, research and preparation before SPC meetings. It may also require investment in and development of key skills which may not traditionally have been prioritised by local authorities. These skills need to be developed across the different service areas.

Responsibility for ensuring that this supportive work gets done needs to be determined by the director of service, in consultation with the SPC chairperson.

Evidence from this study leads the review group to believe that the role of supporting the work of SPCs may not be sufficiently seen as a priority by all directors, and in some cases may be secondary to what is seen as the key task of managing a service. While this is understandable, the appropriate balance needs to be maintained. It is worth noting that enhancing service delivery depends on well-thought-through policies.

Support work for SPCs requires researching what options are open to the local authority, examining the resource implications of these options, and explaining these in a meaningful way to SPC members, in addition to providing facilities and drawing up agendas for meetings, and carrying out orientation briefings. More in-depth research in preparation for SPC meetings offers opportunities for local authorities to consider alternative approaches to problems, and to display innovation in policy and service provision.

A number of contributors to the review suggested to us that this policy/research support capacity needs to be further developed within local authorities. This view is confirmed by the survey of county and city managers carried out for the CPMR study on the local government modernisation programme, and in the researchers’ conclusions to that study.

2.3.11 A Lack of "Policy Space"

The approach outlined above assumes that policy options actually exist. The point was made to the review group by a number of contributors that instructions from central government can be so prescriptive that there is often little discretion for local implementation – in other words that there is a lack of “policy space” or alternative options for SPCs to consider. We have to accept that there is validity in this argument, although it may hold true more for some service areas than others. At the same time, while central government has a role in legislating for certain statutory requirements and these are often accompanied by “guidelines”, it is true to say that such guidelines are often interpreted as instructions.

Central government has responsibility for formulating national policies within which the local government sector must work. The desire for a level of consistency or even uniformity across all local authorities on a national basis will always be at odds with the desire for local discretion. Even where central government policies provides for plans and policies to be designed and adopted at local level, the relevant national policy can be of such detail (sometimes of necessity) as to limit the extent of the discretion available to members at local level. This is a practice very often accepted by local politicians and local officials, who will often seek instructions and guidance on how a particular scheme or policy is to be implemented. Because of this, some local policies vary little in their content across the country. This approach often allows little in the way of discretion to formulate local policies which will adapt national priorities to local circumstances.

We suggest that where guidance comes from the centre, the opportunity can be taken to ensure that policy is interpreted and adapted to meet particular local circumstances.

It was felt by many contributors to the review that some local government service areas lend themselves more to the process of policy-making than others.

The CPMR study on the local government modernisation programme* (p. 29) reported that “for some committees, such as housing and environment, there is seen to be a wide range of strategic policy-related issues suitable for discussion and debate. For other committees such as transportation and recreation/culture, the policy agenda is seen as being narrower in scope. Even for those SPCs with a broad range of topics, some concern was expressed about ensuring a supply of sufficient policy-relevant items over the medium to longer-term. Some concerns were also expressed concerning the depth of engagement with policy issues. For some SPCs, meetings would only last an hour or so, agendas would only be sent out immediately before the meeting and the degree of meaningful engagement with policy by participants was questioned.”

A number of contributors to the SPC review echoed this observation in relation to the differences between various service areas, and confirmed that in some areas local authorities have a certain discretion in policy-making and the operation of schemes (housing, for example), while in others there is little or no discretion and the local authority is effectively acting as an agent for central government in the delivery of a service (for example, in the area of national roads).

2.3.12 A Lack of Interest in Policy Development?

A further problem is the fact that some SPC members do not seem to rate policy decisions high on their list of concerns, or on the list of concerns of their constituents – a point conceded to the review group by a number of elected members. This lack of interest in policy seems to apply to a significant number of councillors, as well as some sectoral representatives, although the review group also encountered many elected members who felt the SPCs did offer, to those elected members who were interested, a real opportunity to play a role in policy development. It was also felt that if both elected members and sectoral interests could see the downstream impact of their contribution to SPC discussions through actions taken on the basis of adopted policy, this

* *Changing Local Government: A Review of the Local Government Modernisation Programme*

might increase their engagement in the process. This view would appear to reinforce the importance of the SPC having a real impact, rather than just remaining a “talking shop”, a topic we return to below.

Good Practice Example – Disabled Persons’ Grants

One example that the review group came across showed how advance preparation, and particularly the preparation of policy options, can help focus the discussion of SPCs.

A certain county council faced a dilemma as to how to manage its disabled persons’ grant scheme, given that the budget for 2003 was highly unlikely to meet demands. With a view to examining whether the scheme could be refocused on the requirements of those in greatest need, the Housing SPC was asked to review the local scheme and recommend to the full council any changes it felt were warranted. Instead of having a general discussion on the scheme and how it operates, the director of service outlined a number of different options which the SPC members might consider:

- introduce a system whereby the local authority would, in an effort to prioritise on the basis of need, have regard to the assets and income of the disabled person
- prioritise certain categories of disability
- introduce an application fee, which might prevent applications from those that did not really need the assistance
- reduce the percentage of the cost of works that the grant would cover, for example to 75% of the cost of works for higher priority cases, and 50% in all other cases
- leave the scheme as it was, in which case the total 2003 budget for disabled persons’ grants would be likely to be spent within the first four months of the year.

It was accepted by the SPC members that none of these options was

particularly appetising, given that the budget for the scheme was unlikely to meet anticipated demand, and there was no prospect of an increase in the overall amount. The SPC chairperson however felt that the members should be given the opportunity to seek to adapt the disabled persons’ grant scheme in the light of the changed circumstances. The SPC members expressed a willingness to work towards adapting the scheme, given the more limited resources available.

By virtue of the director explaining to the SPC members what options were open to the county council, and what the implications of each were likely to be (some of which had been pursued by other local authorities around the country), discussion was able to concentrate on these issues. The SPC chairperson felt that discussion should focus on the topic and invited the views of members, in order to achieve an agreed recommendation for the full council.

Various aspects of each of the options were discussed, the director having the opportunity to comment on the implications of each option, and members agreed to put forward a proposal on the basis of the discussion to full council. The example showed how SPCs could effectively come to an agreed conclusion on a topic, and take responsibility for proposing policy changes to the full council.

Some of the key ingredients exemplified here that rendered the SPC a useful forum in discussing this matter were

- an element of local discretion whereby central government allows local authorities to adapt a scheme to suit their own circumstances
- preparatory work done by the director of service and other officials in explaining the options open to the SPC
- a willingness by the SPC members to work towards an agreed outcome and present the recommendation to full council as the agreed view of the SPC, following in-depth discussion and debate.

2.3.13 The Media and SPCs

A further issue raised during the review was the presence of the media at SPC meetings. Local authorities have adopted different practices in this regard. Some have decided not to invite the media to SPC meetings. Others do inform the media about SPC operations. However, even where the media are informed, attendance by journalists at such meetings is at best relatively infrequent.

It was pointed out to the review group that a media presence can make it difficult to get some sectoral representatives to serve on SPCs, given that they are not public representatives.

Most contributors to the review, including both elected members and sectoral interests, expressed the view that reaching a consensus on a matter can be more demanding when the media are present at SPC meetings, and that very little real work is likely to be done. A media presence can sometimes tend to encourage an element of “playing to the gallery”. The objective of SPC meetings is to encourage free and frank discussion on a relatively informal basis, and the review group believes that some SPC members find the presence of the media inhibiting in this respect. The role of SPCs is to advise the local authority on given policy matters. It is, however, at meetings of the full council, which members of the media usually attend, that the final decisions on these matters are made.

2.3.14 Training for SPC Members

As noted above, the 2001 Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government survey on SPCs revealed that many SPC meetings regularly include briefings by officials on policy issues as part of an ongoing process of training for SPC members. Several other examples of training provided for SPC members were also highlighted as part of the review, as was training for other actors in the SPC process, and these are illustrated below.

Examples of SPC-related training

- Information for all SPC members on the role of SPCs, either through training courses, or through introductory material explaining the background to the establishment of SPCs, their composition and role, and where they fit within the local government structures
- Training for SPC members on different policy areas, such as housing, planning, etc.
- Policy research and development skills for directors of service and their support staff
- Facilitation skills training for directors of service and their support staff
- Information-based training offered to sectoral representatives to help them familiarise themselves on the activities of local authorities
- Coaching in effective meeting skills for SPC chairpersons.

Many of the examples of training involved presentations on the role and remit of SPCs, as well as central information seminars on different policy areas. A number of local authorities have run off-site workshops of SPC members to identify what the different participants wished to achieve from the process, and to promote team building within the SPC – these were generally considered to be very useful.

Good Practice Example – Consolidating the SPC Process

The IPA was invited by a number of local authorities to carry out high-level workshops with senior management teams, chairs of SPCs, elected and non-elected members.

The IPA facilitated discussions on the following themes and reported back to the various local authorities on the key findings under five headings. The following table illustrates the key findings for one local authority.

What an ideal SPC would look like in the future	How would an SPC effectively function in the future	Identification of the key SPC issues and themes that have worked well to date	Identification of the key SPC issues and themes that have continuously impeded work progress to date	Necessary immediate actions required by all players to move towards the ideal SPC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation • Evaluation of changes that SPCs have implemented • Effectiveness of community involvement • How the community has noticed the changes • Active participation in a strategic way • Was the county interest best served • Acceptance rate of new policies • Input from all concerned to agenda • Delivery of service and impact • Positive input to County Development Plan • Role of SPC and serving customers better • Providing proper resources • Control of our own destiny • Implementation of policies • NB. Availability of resources • Inclusivity • Quality (relevance) • Attendance (continuity and people replaced) • Structures in place to restore representatives • Equal representation • Effectiveness • Access (was access available for everybody) e.g. voluntary does not have the same level of access as elected members • Goals and objectives being met and to measure targets and actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed (all sectoral interests would have same level of information) • Policy focused • Chair impartial • Trust and buy-in by all representatives • Equal effort to present and draft documents • Production (output) • Integration (continuous learning curve) • Good attendance = good communication • Meet regularly • Input • Commitment • Energy • More control than they should have • All members should have more vision • Structured agendas • Ongoing learning • Place to go and research • Access • Structure system in the day to day policy, e.g. agendas and input into them • Full attendance as priority • Materials and documents presented at meetings in advance • Equal representation • Budget set out for various areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subgroups- Housing: Social and Cultural – good feedback • Example of policy • Openness • Absence of Politics (Party) • Understanding of other members' view points • Regularity of meetings (including subgroups): tight schedule • Some sense of achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low/poor attendance (lack of continuity) • Advance documentation for meetings • Understanding how local government works • Understanding constraints • Lack of induction training • Choice of members not possible to be reflected on membership of SPCs (personal interests not accommodated) • Resources • Confusion • Lack of understanding of the concept and purpose of SPCs • Strong personal agendas being pursued • Repetition without progress (very slow)? needs to be more structured • Delaying tactics (inappropriate matters – not being dealt with at area level) • Agenda too late • Sectoral interests disregarded – feeling of powerlessness? • Can policy readily be implemented • Lack of understanding • Frustration • Lack of response to research policy • No dedicated support • Bad attendance at sub-committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circulation of documents in good time • Include understanding of local government on agenda • Further induction training on role of SPC for sectoral interests • Timing of meetings and of training to be dealt with • Raise attendance (needs to be at least 75%) • Enforce requirements in relation to attendance • Make meetings relevant and focused • Adequate and timely information • Input to agenda by SPC members • Clarity of what boundaries actually are: where does the power really lie? (e.g. existence of Waste Policy at regional level) • More research directed towards implementation • Better back up • Feedback loop in relation to how policy/input has been effective • More discussions on progress • Template for policy development – need for clarity on what's likely to work • Greater advance warning of national policies • Better communication and support documentation • Rationale for policy • Specific support to be provided by council • Advance discussion on agenda

2.3.15 Payment of Travel Expenses to SPC Members

A particular issue for certain sectors that nominate representatives onto SPCs is the payment of travel expenses for participation in SPC work. The fact that some SPC members can avail of expenses from their constituent organisation and others cannot would appear to have some effect on the rates of attendance and participation of some sectoral interests, and might particularly have an effect in the larger counties. There appears to be a lack of clarity with regard to the current guidelines on SPCs. Section 6.7 of the guidelines states that travel expenses are generally met by the organisation that the SPC member is representing and where that is not possible, travel expenses are met by the local authority. Some local authorities have interpreted this latter point as applying only to nominees from the community and voluntary sector, while others have interpreted it as including other sectoral representatives as well. Greater clarity and the application of uniform practice would be beneficial and would enable all members (elected and non-elected) to participate in the process on an equal basis.

It is important that the SPC process is an inclusive one where all members are enabled to contribute effectively. The issue of payment of expenses (for travel) was raised with us by a number of people. There is certainly evidence of differing practices, and clearly the non-payment of expenses may make it difficult for SPC members to participate. The adoption and implementation of arrangements to deal with this issue would be a positive acknowledgement of the contribution being made by individual SPC members.

2.3.16 Relevance of Nominees onto SPCs

It was also felt that the contribution of nominees from the community forum would be enhanced where the person selected was familiar with the subject area of the SPC – for example, the nominee to an Environment SPC might be drawn from an environmental non-governmental organisation, or a nominee to a Housing SPC might be someone drawn from a tenants' association or a voluntary housing body.

2.3.17 Ethics Framework and SPC Members

A concern was voiced by some contributors over the participation of some sectoral representatives in discussions on certain planning matters, including the zoning of land, where there might be a conflict of interest. It may be required in some cases for the SPC chairperson, where necessary prompted by the director of service, to remind *all* committee members of their obligations under section 177 of the Local Government Act 2001. The section provides that where a matter arises at a local authority meeting or a local authority committee meeting, and a member of the local authority or a member of the local authority committee (or any connected person to the member) has a pecuniary or beneficial interest, they must disclose the interest and withdraw from the meeting for so long as the matter is being discussed.

2.4 Linking the Work of SPCs with Elsewhere

2.4.1 SPC Links with the Full Council

While SPCs are expected to be a key part of the local government structure, they are also expected to link with the operation of other fora. As noted above, section 48 of the Local Government Act 2001 declares that the function of SPCs is to “consider matters connected with the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy which relate to the functions of the local authority and advise the authority on those matters”. The final decision on policy matters concerning reserved functions remains with the full council.

Clearly, however, given that SPCs provide an opportunity for a more in-depth consideration of matters related to a particular field, it is envisaged that in many cases the advice of the SPC would be taken on board by the full council. While the council reserves the right to discuss any recommendation emanating from an SPC at full council, there would be little point in the SPC meeting at all if every SPC recommendation were to be unravelled by the full council. A certain balance is therefore required. There is also little

doubt that the work of SPCs, by allowing members to discuss a particular issue at length in committee and arrive at an agreed consensus, has freed up at least some time for other issues to be raised at full council. At the same time, some contributors expressed a degree of frustration to the review group that issues which had been exhaustively discussed at SPC had sometimes to be thrashed out a second time within full council.

In some local authorities SPC recommendations were introduced to full council by the SPC chairpersons, while in others they were introduced by the relevant director of service or the county/city manager. Practice even varied within individual local authorities, with some SPC chairpersons seemingly reluctant to introduce SPC recommendations to the full council. It was generally accepted by contributors that where SPC recommendations were introduced by the SPC chairperson, they tended to have a more positive impact and carry more weight among their fellow councillors. This positive development whereby the SPC chairpersons are undertaking a more proactive role and presenting the collective views of SPCs to the full council was noted by a number of county/city managers as part of the CPMR study on the local government modernisation programme.

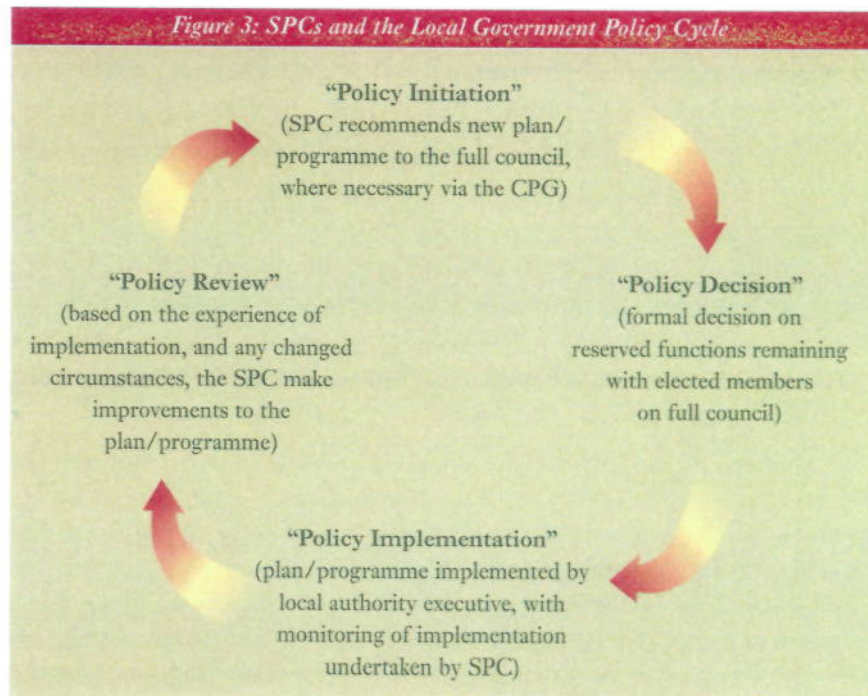
2.4.2 SPC Links with the Corporate Policy Group

Better Local Government envisaged a particular structure to connect the work of SPCs to the full council, as well as playing a co-ordinating role between SPCs – this was the Corporate Policy Group (CPG), consisting of the cathaoirleach/mayor of the council and the chairperson of each SPC. The CPG would co-ordinate the discussion of issues that might transcend more than one SPC (such as the development plan) and would also be the focus for discussion of and have a role in the preparation of corporate issues such as the local authority budget and the local authority’s corporate plan. The activity of the CPG is supported by the county/city manager.

Thus the expected practice would be for an SPC recommendation on the

adoption of a new plan/programme to go to the full council, or alternatively to the council via the CPG (the latter particularly applies where the recommendation concerns a cross-cutting issue where it might impact on other SPCs). Following a decision by the full council, the SPC can play a role in tracking decisions, in other words monitoring implementation of the plan/programme, and reviewing whether decisions are having an effect or not, and whether any adaptations are required in the light of progress made. Findings should be fed back through a recommendation to review/adapt the policy to new circumstances or developments, or in the light of experience in implementation.

SPCs can in this way play an important role at a number of stages within the “policy cycle”, as is illustrated in Figure 3.



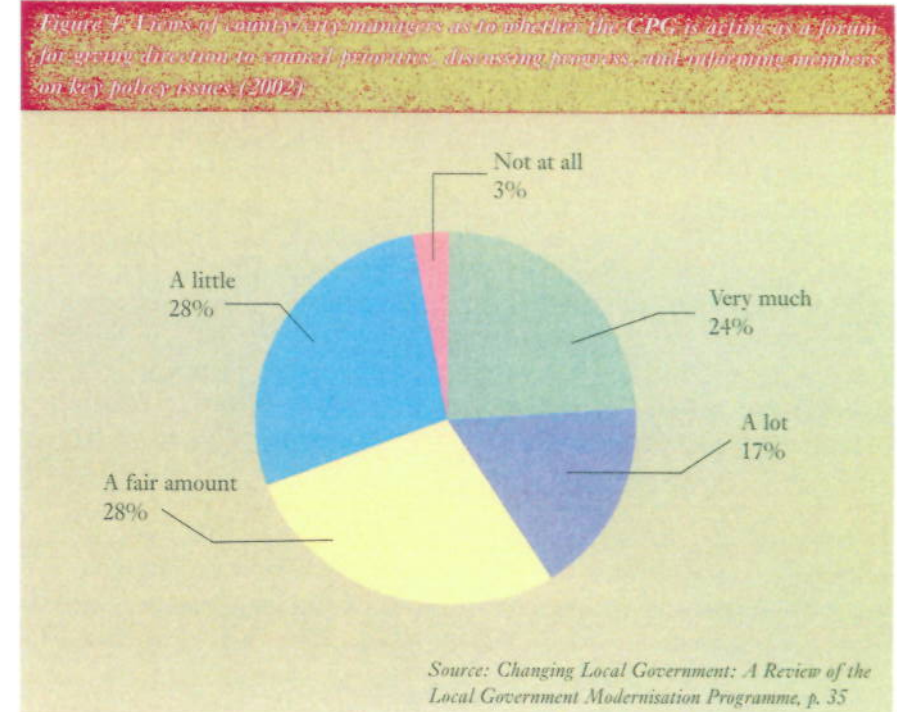
The DEHLG's 2001 survey on the establishment and operation of SPCs asked local authorities whether at that stage their CPG had addressed specific policy issues facing the council. Some 70% of county and city councils responded that by April 2001 their CPG had addressed specific policy issues. The following were among the issues that different local authorities identified as having been discussed by the CPG.

- The Corporate Plan and Customer Services Plan
- The Draft Local Authority Budget
- The Financial Position of the Council
- The Housing Strategy – Part V
- The Development Plan
- Strategic Planning Guidelines
- Implementing *Better Local Government* Structures and Staffing Arrangements
- Infrastructural Development in the Area
- Issues relating to the National Development Plan
- Office Accommodation
- Procedures for SPC Meetings/Streamlining Procedures at Council Meetings
- Public Relations Policy

However, only 22% of CPGs had identified particular policy issues for discussion by an individual SPC of the local authority.

In the 2002 survey of city and county managers as part of the CPMR study on the local government modernisation programme, there was a relatively wide divergence of views on the effectiveness or otherwise of the CPG. Just under a third of managers felt that the CPG was only a little or not at all acting as a forum for giving direction to council priorities, discussing progress and informing members on key policy issues. At the same time,

almost a quarter felt that the CPGs were very much a positive forum. The full results are illustrated in Figure 4.



The review group discovered that in practice the CPG often meets before monthly council meetings, to discuss the agenda and whether any particular topics might dominate discussion. It was felt by some contributors that this provided a useful “sounding board” as to what was happening in different SPCs, and what issues were likely to arise at full council. The CPMR study (p. 39) identified the key ingredients to the success of the CPG as the openness of managers and members to working together, and the efficiency of members at feeding back information to their own parties about discussions at CPG meetings. Our findings tend to concur with that view.

In the interests of effective communication, it may be worthwhile circulating the minutes of CPG meetings to all SPC members as a matter of course.

Agreement was reached in one local authority by the CPG and the county manager on local interpretation of SPC guidelines, and processes to be adopted at SPC meetings. This was conveyed to the directors of service and implemented uniformly within all SPCs.

A number of contributors to the review commented that some local authorities had taken the initiative of organising joint meetings of certain SPCs to discuss a particular issue that affected them. One example given by a local authority was a joint meeting of the Housing SPC and the Planning SPC to discuss different views on the housing strategy, provided for under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

2.4.3 SPC Links with Area Committees

There can be difficulty in drawing a clear line between what is “policy” and what is “operational” (a point made above). This can lead to overlapping discussions within SPCs and area committees. It was remarked that area committees can have a positive impact on the SPC process, because the chairperson, where necessary prompted by the director of service, can point out to an SPC that strays too far onto an issue in the “operational” sphere, that the proper forum for that level of detail is the relevant area committee. Many contributors in fact felt that it is at area level that meaningful work is done.

2.4.4 SPC Links with Town and Borough Councils

Table 4 gives a breakdown of county councils (according to the DEHLG 2001 questionnaire) that had a representative from a town or borough council on their housing, planning, environment, transportation and/or recreation/culture SPCs.

Table 4: Town/Borough Council Membership of SPCs

SPC type	Number of county councils having such an SPC and a town council within their area	Number of county councils with a town council representative on relevant SPC	% of county councils with a town council representative on SPC
Housing	25	20	80%
Planning	25	14	56%
Environment	25	13	52%
Transportation	25	11	44%
Recreation/Culture	11	8	73%

Source: DEHLG

Representatives from town councils expressed the view that towns, as major centres of population, and as major users of and financial contributors towards county services, are under-represented in the SPC system. The case made was that many town council members feel alienated and excluded from the process, and it was argued that in a county that contains one or more town or borough councils, each SPC should have one representative from each town authority. It might be difficult to accommodate this request in counties with a number of town authorities, while also preserving the two-thirds/one-third split between elected members and sectoral interests. It was also suggested by town council representatives that a reporting mechanism be adopted whereby town councils are informed of discussions and deliberations by SPCs at county level – certainly, it should be possible to have a more systematic practice of relaying information to town councils on the discussions of SPCs. directors of service have a clear responsibility to ensure effective communication with town councils.

In the light of the above, the review group proposes that the SPC scheme should provide for one town council representative on each SPC, subject to

no town council having more than two representatives on the SPC structure as a whole.

The review group considers that this option would be a healthy development, and should help to facilitate a more co-operative approach between county and town, as recommended by the 1996 report of the Local Government Reorganisation Commission, *Towards Cohesive Local Government – Town and County*. This in turn should mean that town councils have regard to policies that have been drafted by SPCs, as they apply to their area.

2.4.5 SPC Links with the County/City Development Board

There was doubt among a number of contributors as to whether the discussion within SPCs was properly reflected in the county/city development board (CDB) forum by SPC chairpersons. In addition some SPC members felt that there could be better feedback to SPC members on the activities of the CDB, and those elements of the county/city strategies that impinge on the activities of the SPC. One CDB invited all SPC members (including sectoral interests) onto one of their four implementation committees to review implementation of the CDB strategy relevant to the work of their SPC.

2.4.6 Feeding Back on the Work of SPCs

Some contributors to the review expressed the view that there is generally an inadequate feedback structure in place. This was seen to be true at a number of levels.

Firstly, a number of contributors questioned whether sectoral interests were feeding back information on SPC discussions to their nominating bodies and community forum (as appropriate). If individuals were there to represent a particular interest (environment/conservation, construction/development, and so forth), mechanisms should be in place to ensure that there was a regular dialogue between the representatives and their “constituency”. This work

could be facilitated by the director of service through the provision of a short summary of the activities of the SPC, which could be used by sectoral interests for the purposes of feedback to their own organisation.

Secondly, some sectoral representatives appeared to be unaware as to whether or not SPC recommendations had in fact been accepted by the full council. Feedback on whether or not SPC recommendations have been discussed at full council and, if so, what decision was arrived at, should be given at the next subsequent meeting of the relevant SPC. This is important to ensure the continued interest and motivation of SPC members.

As indicated earlier, it appears that there is confusion, particularly but not exclusively among sectoral representatives, over what the different remits of participative fora are. In some cases, the same representatives are sitting on SPCs, CDBs and area committees. The review group also felt that while there was clarity among councillors about the role of area committees, on some occasions this clarity was not apparent with regard to SPCs.

Some contributors to the review argued that even though SPCs had a relatively limited policy remit, they should be able to consider local issues which are not the direct responsibility of the local authority but which have a local dimension, for example issues such as education. In this manner the local authority could provide a focus for local leadership on certain issues, even if it does not have a direct remit for the service. This would be consistent with local government’s role, identified under the Constitution (Article 28A) as “providing a forum for the democratic representation of local communities, in exercising and performing at local level powers and functions conferred by law and in promoting by its initiatives the interests of such communities”. This point was also made by the CPMR study on the local government modernisation programme (p. 36), which stated that “in this context SPCs could be seen as being involved in the process of local needs identification, and determining how the local authority should

subsequently work with others to address these needs". It is suggested that the CDB strategies for economic, social and cultural development provide a useful starting point for identifying these issues.

In the context of SPC work not being confined solely to the local authority remit, it was also suggested to the review group that SPCs should make recommendations to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and other central government departments when particular schemes or activities are not working on the ground. These recommendations could usefully be channelled through the relevant sub-committees of the CCMA responsible for co-ordinating national responses to certain initiatives. Elected members can also clearly use other channels open to them (for example the representative associations).

2.5 The Impact of the SPC Process

In order for participants to find the SPC structures worthwhile, there has to be a result or an impact from deliberations. Thus, while there are benefits in the SPC system as a process in itself, the process is unsustainable unless all participants are actively engaged. And participants will only remain actively engaged as long as they feel that the SPC process is producing results.

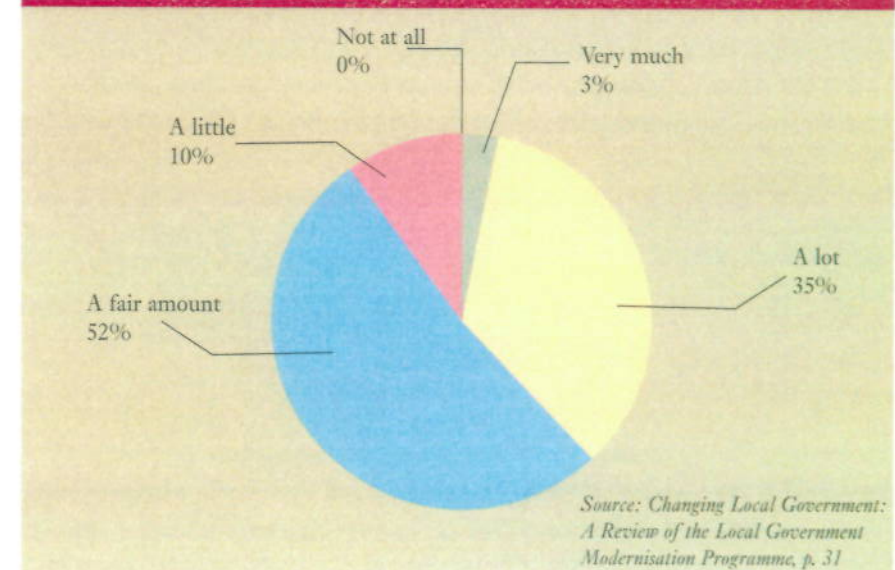
2.5.1 A Better Working Relationship

In terms of outputs, the review group feels that an important by-product of the SPC process has been a better relationship between elected members and groups representing different interests within the local area. While this is a rather intangible outcome, it is worth highlighting that the SPC structures, along with other activities, have led to a better understanding and trust between local government and other stakeholders in the local community. While individual representatives might have known each other by name (or reputation) beforehand, there is now in most cases a far more solid working relationship between such individuals. That relationship cannot be measured,

but the gradual breaking down of invisible walls between "us and them", and the potential that this brings with it, should not be underestimated.

This important positive impact of SPCs was highlighted by a number of contributors to the review, including elected members, sectoral interests, and local authority officials. It is also confirmed by the 2002 survey of county and city managers as part of the CPMR study on the local government modernisation programme, the results of which are presented below in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Views of county/city managers as to whether councillors and sectoral interest representatives are working well together on SPCs (2002)



2.5.2 The Need for Concrete Results

While a better working relationship between local elected members and local interests and stakeholders is a recognised benefit of SPC structures, this benefit will only last as long as all participants remain actively engaged in the

SPC process. There is a real danger that interest in SPCs is on the wane, and that attendance is falling off. While acknowledging the longer-term benefits of the SPC process as helping to build strategic links between various stakeholders at local level, many contributors felt that there was also a need for more concrete results in terms of output and impact in order to make their participation worthwhile. Among the concrete results pointed to by various contributors were the adoption of new bye-laws, the introduction of a new recycling scheme with a greater number of bring centres, the improvement of services for the homeless, a new arts development plan, and developing and implementing a new urban and village renewal scheme.

2.5.3 Inclusiveness and Consensus-Building v. A Results-Oriented Approach

The review group encountered a number of different approaches, perceptions and expectations surrounding what participants wanted out of the SPC process. On one end of the spectrum, some contributors to the review took a very result-oriented approach to SPCs and were eager to be able to point to concrete achievements. Where SPCs are not perceived to be making progress, but rather confined to the role of “talking shops” without making any meaningful contribution to local authority policies, attendance and participation within SPCs from such participants is likely to drop off, if it has not done so already.

On the other end of the spectrum, some contributors expressed a preference for a consensus-building, participative process which facilitates involvement of all parties, pointing out that policy development requires some time to establish that the approach adopted is the right one.

There is a fundamental difficulty in reconciling these two points of view. On the one hand, the SPCs are part of a medium to long-term process of involving elected members and stakeholders in policy development. On the other hand, there is an understandable desire among many participants to see the SPCs making real differences and an impact on the ground in the

short term. Striking an appropriate balance between these two approaches will require skill and tact on the part of SPC chairpersons and directors of service. The review group believes that if SPCs are perceived by their own members as nothing more than “talking shops” without any real purpose or impact, then attendance will fall away and the process could be in danger of a slow, silent death. On the other hand, those advocating a “results-oriented” approach need to appreciate that time needs to be invested in any inclusive process.

The review group believes that SPCs would benefit from clear objectives and, where appropriate, measurement criteria that could be outlined in a work programme (referred to above). The objectives might target the development of a policy/plan in certain fields that would provide a focus for SPC discussions and set the agenda for meetings. By developing clear priorities for the SPC's work, the committee could agree, for example, to develop an arts plan within one year, monitor implementation over two years, and subsequently make any reviews or changes deemed necessary.

While some contributors felt there was a lack of focus, the review group did in fact uncover a number of concrete results that SPCs could point to, such as the adoption of specific plans, each of which led to specific actions. In many cases, SPCs also played a role in monitoring implementation of policy decisions to ensure that policy translated into results “on the ground”. It appears to the review group that this monitoring of the implementation of policy decisions, usually on the basis of reports on activities under certain plans from the executive, is a useful role played by SPCs. However, there is a danger here that SPCs may become bogged down in detailed operational issues concerned. It is important that monitoring of implementation take place on a county/city-wide basis rather than discussion turning to highly localised issues that might be more appropriately dealt with within area committees. This is an aspect of SPC meetings that the chairperson, where appropriate advised by the director of service, should keep a watching brief on.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1 Conclusions

The review group concludes that, despite the problems identified, the SPC process does offer local elected members and sectoral interests an opportunity to engage in policy development to a greater extent than had been the case before *Better Local Government*. Whether or not SPC members take that opportunity is partly up to themselves and their level of commitment to the process, and partly dependent upon whether or not they receive the support needed to fulfil a policy development role.

Overall, our findings have shown that the progress being made by SPCs appears to vary from local authority to local authority, and even between SPCs within individual local authorities. In some locations and among some service areas, SPCs appear, for the most part, to be working well, and the review group has encountered some very positive comments on SPCs. It should be noted indeed that some contributors to the review had begun their participation on SPCs with a negative impression, but changed their view as practice improved and SPCs became more embedded in the local government structure, individuals became used to working together, and these contributors began to see the results of their deliberations and decisions. On the other hand, some entered the process enthusiastically and have become disillusioned or impatient with the lack of clear progress.

The review group must recognise that in many areas elected members and sectoral interests have expressed dissatisfaction. Some contributors to the

review, it has to be acknowledged, have been extremely negative about SPCs. The review group believes that dissatisfaction will ultimately lead to a falling attendance at SPC meetings, and that there is a need for remedial action to address some of the problems identified in this review. Such action would contribute to the process being sustained over the long term.

We present below a number of recommendations that are advanced as positive suggestions with a view to making attendance at SPC meetings as worthwhile and meaningful as possible for all participants.

Some of our recommendations are relatively straightforward and involve minor but important changes, for example in the way meetings are run, the timing and location, etc. Others however, are more profound and will require a culture change for a number of key actors in the SPC process. Some of the actions required by the different actors are outlined below.

Role of Key Actors in the SPC Process

County and city managers

Clearly the city and county managers have a key role to play in this process: by ensuring that the corporate agenda of the local authority is reflected in the work of the SPCs; by regular inclusion of the outcome of SPCs in senior management meetings; by ensuring that standard processes are implemented. Such actions will underpin the importance of the process, and will encourage the active engagement of directors and their staff.

Directors of service and their staff

Supporting SPCs in policy development is an intrinsic part of the director's job and managers should consider using the quality of the servicing of SPCs as one of the key factors in their assessment of the performance of individual directors of service. There is a need for further development of the support role provided to SPCs by the local authority staff, beyond administrative arrangements and presentations for SPC

members. In particular, the support role must involve the preparation of policy papers for SPC members, research into policy options in particular areas to give a focus for discussion, and follow-up after meetings to communicate results to SPC members and other relevant interests.

Central government departments

It is difficult for SPCs to function where local authorities are operating in a straightjacket. It is important that a “policy space” be left so that central government priorities can be adapted to local circumstances. Government departments, when they are issuing guidelines (as opposed to explicit direction), need to make it clear that they are just that: guidelines, rather than instructions.

SPC members themselves

SPCs will not work unless members treat them seriously and demonstrate a commitment to engage in policy matters and take “ownership” of issues. This means both elected representatives and sectoral interests actively contributing to SPC discussions and accepting responsibility for SPC recommendations. Focusing on the achievement of concrete objectives for meetings and the adoption of policies which will have a downstream impact “on the ground” may also encourage more members to become active in policy development. Understandably, elected members want to be able to see the link between policy decisions and service delivery to their constituents.

We do not for one moment underestimate the difficulties involved in these changes. Nor do we expect 100% of SPC members to be turned into developed policy-makers overnight. However, we do believe that there is an adequate proportion of SPC members who have a genuine interest in furthering their role in policy development, and who want to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by SPCs in this regard. Also, recommendations of SPCs have to be seen to “deliver” – policy decisions have to be followed up with implementation, so that members can see concrete results.

3.2 Recommendations

3.2.1 Practicalities of SPC Meetings – Procedures

Prior to SPC meetings being held, the SPC chairperson and relevant director of service should meet to go through the agenda and agree on their objectives for the meeting, and what they would like to be decided. By reaching agreement on the key areas they would like the committee to address during the meeting, the chairperson can then keep the meeting focused on these topics.

Each SPC should have a work programme running for a number of years – members of the SPC themselves should participate in identifying issues they would like to address as part of their work. The work programme could be updated as and when necessary. The work programme should also be linked to priorities identified in the local authority’s corporate plan. Such a work programme would give some continuity in terms of meetings, and form the basis for agendas for individual SPC meetings. In addition, at the start of each year, a calendar of SPC meetings should be agreed among members.

SPC meetings should be held at a suitable time for the members (including the evening where appropriate). Generally, SPCs meet four times per year. However, when the need arises, they could meet more often, and, conversely, when the agenda is relatively light, there may be a case for meeting less frequently.

A contact person in the relevant section should be available to all SPC members wishing to discuss SPC matters between meetings. Given that the director may often not be available, it may be appropriate to assign this responsibility to a named senior official.

Generally, where possible, members should remain on an SPC for the full duration of the council (five years).

An atmosphere conducive to discussion should be engendered – the formalities should be kept to a minimum. SPC meetings are not meant to be a subset of council meetings. Their purpose is to examine and discuss policy options in detail, and encourage the free flow of ideas. Part of this involves the creation of an informal and collaborative atmosphere where participants can be encouraged to give honest views and opinions on issues.

At the same time, meetings should be conducted in a professional manner. SPC members should give an undertaking to arrive on time to meetings and switch off mobile phones when the meeting commences.

Local authorities could consider varying the location of SPC meetings, and making greater use of community halls/centres.

Documentation should be circulated to SPC members well in advance of meetings to allow elected members and sectoral interests to discuss matters in advance with their constituents. Good practice in this regard would suggest a period of four weeks in advance of meetings.

The agenda and minutes of SPC meetings should be circulated to SPC members, other councillors, and any town or borough councils in a county council area.

3.2.2 Practicalities of SPC Meetings – Policy Support and Development

Our section on findings revealed a frequent tendency for SPC meetings to descend into general discussions on particular topics, whether it be topics such as homelessness, litter prevention, or road safety.

There is an important duty on directors of service to undertake research on possible avenues open to the local authority in terms of formulating policy. Ideally, these should be presented to members in a clear format. Executive summaries of no more than two pages should be provided in cases where

documentation runs into more than fifteen pages. The agenda should also list issues to be decided (if possible) for each meeting.

While providing a general presentation on a particular policy area is useful in giving SPC members an orientation as to the main issues to be addressed in a particular local authority plan/strategy/programme, this is probably only appropriate at the very first meeting addressing the topic in question. What tends to follow such presentations is a general discussion by members around the topic. In order to give the discussion greater focus, this needs to be followed up by presenting to members what the options or avenues are for the local authority. In this respect, local authorities need to further develop the policy support role within individual sections, as well as perhaps making use of the research capacity created by the establishment of community and enterprise development officer (CEDO) positions within county and city councils. They could also avail of links with local third-level institutions. There is also a need for greater networking and cross-learning between local authorities to avoid duplication of effort in this sphere – the development of a research capacity within the Local Government Management Service Board could facilitate the exchange of information on policy options in this regard. The model of the Housing Unit provides an example of an attempt to promote cross-fertilisation of ideas between practitioners within a specific local government service, while the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network is an example of a network focused on local government activity in the sphere of tackling social exclusion.

Once potential options and avenues have been identified for the SPC, these need to be presented to SPC members in a clear and understandable way. The resource implications of each option also need to be explained. Once the members come to a conclusion on an agreed approach, the policy, programme, plan or bye-law (as appropriate) can be drafted for presentation at the next meeting, in accordance with the approach agreed upon by the SPC members.

The point was made to the review group by elected members, sectoral interests, and local government officials that in some areas local authorities enjoy limited discretion in terms of policy options, and that circulars can often be very prescriptive about approaches to be taken when local authorities are drawing up local policies or programmes. This probably applies to some programme groups more than others. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that guidelines (as opposed to an explicit direction) issued by the centre need to be interpreted as guidelines rather than instructions.

We do not underestimate the significance of the culture change that this element of discretion requires at both central and local level. On the part of central government, it requires a willingness to allow local authorities flexibility in the determination and implementation of local plans and programmes.

On the part of local government, more discretion for the SPC, and ultimately the full council, will require a willingness on the part of members and officials to think through the implications of various options, as well as a willingness by elected members to take greater responsibility for decisions (which at times in the past appears to have been lacking, when officials or central government could be blamed for decisions).

Nevertheless, this element of local discretion is essential for SPCs to function properly – the rationale for SPCs is that they should focus on the medium to long-term policy options for the local authority, and be able to adapt national decisions to suit local circumstances. There is little point in them meeting if central government does not give them the necessary “policy space” to do this. Given that this is the case, it is important that SPCs are encouraged to exploit the opportunities that do exist for them to influence and adapt national policies or guidelines to local needs. There is a continuing need for the Department of the Environment, Heritage and

Local Government itself and, through it, other government departments and agencies, to involve SPCs in policy deliberations wherever possible. Indeed, *Better Local Government* (sections 2.27 and 6.11) envisaged a greater degree of contact between both SPC chairs and directors of service and the relevant sections of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. This process is already under way.

3.2.3 Practicalities of SPC Meetings – Media and Expenses

The review group believes that it is up to each local authority to decide on arrangements for informing media of SPC operations.

We recommend that the arrangements for payment of travel expenses for SPC meetings for sectoral interests be reviewed.

3.2.4 Practicalities of SPC Meetings – Training

Training would be beneficial for a number of actors:

- information for all SPC members on the role of SPCs – this could be provided either through training or the preparation of an introductory pack or handbook for new SPC members explaining the background to the establishment of SPCs, their composition and role, and where they fit within the local government structures
- training for SPC members on different policy areas, such as housing, planning, etc.
- policy research and development skills for directors of service and their support staff
- facilitation skills for directors of service and their support staff
- information-based training could be offered to sectoral representatives to help them familiarise themselves on the activities of local authorities
- effective meeting skills training could be offered to SPC chairpersons (and indeed members), where it was requested.

It is also suggested that some SPCs could benefit from an informal workshop involving all members, identifying key priorities and concerns, and to engender a closer working relationship and familiarity between members. This might be particularly appropriate following the appointment of new members to SPCs after the 2004 local elections.

3.2.5 Linking SPCs with Elsewhere

SPC chairpersons should be encouraged where possible to introduce SPC recommendations for approval by the full council. This appears to give such recommendations greater weight. If necessary, follow-up queries or questions could be handled jointly by the SPC chairperson and relevant director of service.

The usefulness of the CPG seems to depend on the willingness of CPG members and the manager to work together, identifying issues to be discussed by SPCs, issues likely to arise at council meetings, and the willingness of members to feed back information on CPG discussions to their fellow party members. The minutes of CPG meetings should be circulated to all SPC members.

SPCs could usefully engage in identifying local needs (which could extend to areas outside the local authority's remit), and seek to support the local authority's leadership role in representing the interests of the local community and working with other agencies. In this respect, SPC chairpersons, who are represented on the county/city development boards (CDBs), could provide a link between the needs identified by the SPC and the activities of other public bodies in the area.

SPC chairpersons should be obliged to report to SPC members on the activities of the county/city development board and their monitoring committees as they affect the work of their SPC.

Each sector should have a system in place to ensure structured feedback by

members on the activities of the SPC to their nominating organisation/community forum (as appropriate). This is an important factor in ensuring that the SPC process extends not just to individuals representing sectoral interests, but also to those interests themselves.

There should be automatic feedback to the relevant SPC on whether or not the recommendations of an SPC were approved or not at the full council, and, if not, the reason for non-approval/amendment. This would be particularly for the benefit of the sectoral representatives, who do not sit in full council.

Appendix I

Meetings and Submissions Concerning the SPC Review

- Meeting with Housing and Social SPC, Carlow County Council
- Meeting with Housing SPC, Waterford City Council
- Meeting with Roads and Transportation SPC, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council
- Focus group with Planning and Economic Development SPC, Clare County Council
- Focus group with Environment SPC, Waterford County Council
- Meeting with Arts, Culture, Leisure and Youth SPC, Dublin City Council
- Meeting with Community, Social and Cultural SPC, Waterford City Council
- Meeting with Transport SPC, Laois County Council
- Meeting with a delegation from the General Council of County Council (GCCC), including a written submission
- Meeting with a delegation from the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland (AMAI), including a written submission
- Meeting with a delegation from the Local Authority Members Association (LAMA)
- Meeting with a delegation from the Chambers of Commerce of Ireland (CCI)
- Meeting with a delegation from the Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI) Justice Commission
- Meeting with representatives from the Irish Business and Employers

- Confederation (IBEC), including a written submission
- Meeting with representatives from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), including a written submission
- Correspondence with representatives from the Irish Farmers Association (IFA)
- Correspondence with representatives from the Community Workers Co-operative (CWC), including a written submission
- Interviews with representatives from the City and County Managers Association (CCMA)
- Workshop with a group of directors of service spanning different county and city councils and different service areas

Appendix II

Issues Being Addressed by Strategic Policy Committees

Housing	Planning	Environment	Transportation	Recreation/Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness Strategy • Housing Strategy – Part V • Traveller Accommodation • The House Building Programme • Affordable Housing • Policy on Anti-Social Behaviour • Housing Needs for the Disabled • Estate Management • Scheme of Letting Priorities • Promoting and Encouraging Voluntary Housing in the Area • Integrated Policy for Asylum-Seekers • Playground Facilities • Heritage Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County/City Development Plan • Housing Strategy – Part V • Planning and Development Act 2000 • Land-Use and Transportation • Forward Planning for the Area • National Spatial Strategy and its Implications • Rural Housing and Rural Resettlement Policy • Strategic Planning Guidelines • Urban/Town/Village Renewal Scheme • Economic Development opportunities • Tourism Development • Industrial Development/Industrial Promotion/Enterprise Development Policy • Heritage Plan • Parks Strategy • Community Development Levy • Impact of EU and EU Structural Funds after 2006 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste management • Litter Control Policy/Management/Pollution • Recycling Policy/Water Quality Standards • Agricultural Bye-Laws and Agricultural Waste Management • Environmental Education and Awareness Strategy/Campaigns • Fire Services Plan • Management of Water and Sewerage Infrastructure • Service Indicators for Water Services, Waste Management, Street Cleaning and Refuse Collection • Impact of EPA Decisions • Implementation of EU Directives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road Safety Policy • National Roads/Non-National Roads Programme • Rural Transport Initiative/Corporate Plan • Land-Use and Transportation • National Spatial Strategy and its Implications • Progress on Major Capital Projects and their Implications • County Roads Programme/Road Works Scheme • Condition of Local Roads/Road Up-Keep Policy • Parking Bye-Laws • Provision of Cycle Lanes/Cycling Policy • The Roll-Out of Broadband in the Area (Transport/Infrastructure SPC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library Development • Arts Plan/Strategy • Promotion of Irish Language • Development and Prioritisation of Amenity Facilities • Parks Strategy • National Children's Strategy • Sports Partnerships and Sports Strategy • Heritage Plan • Community Development Levy • Playground Facilities