Stakeholder Consultation on a new Strategy to support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland

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

The Government's five-year strategy for the Community and Voluntary sector: Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities 2019-2024 set a general direction of travel for government policy in relation to the community development, local development and the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. It also provided an important strategic framework for engagement, support programmes, policies and research related to the sectors for both central and local government, over the past five years.

The strategy aimed to provide communities with both the means and opportunity to be involved in decisions that affect them. The high-level objectives and actions supported consultation, inclusion and participation of communities, particularly disadvantaged communities, in public policy and decision-making at all levels.

The strategy also copper-fastened the renewed relationship and partnership between government and the community and voluntary sectors which had developed during its preparation.

Implementation of the strategy was overseen by the Cross-Sectoral Group (CSG) on Local and Community Development, which includes representatives of community and voluntary organisations, Local Development Companies, Government Departments, Public Participation Networks (PPNs), local authorities and academics.

The development and implementation of the strategy included agreement and monitoring across Government of a set of clearly defined, shared Values and Principles for collaboration and partnership working with the community and voluntary sector. An annual Civic Forum has been held to enable dialogue between the state and the community and voluntary sector.

Over the lifetime of the strategy a range of support programmes and initiatives, have been put in place along with policies and strategies for volunteering, social enterprises, philanthropy and a roadmap for Public Participation Networks (PPNs). Additional support measures were introduced to compensate for the

suspension of fundraising during the Covid Pandemic and to compensate for higher energy prices.

Research and analysis on the commissioning of social, community and personal services was undertaken, along with analysis of the training needs of community and voluntary organisations, charity trustees and Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs).

The strategy has positively impacted on the relationship between the state and the community and voluntary sector, reinforced partnership arrangements and provided a framework for a wide range of structures, policies and support programmes at local and national level.

Towards a new strategy

Minister of State for Community Development and Charities Jerry Buttimer TD, has announced that the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht will lead on the development of a successor to Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities 2019-2024. The Department will work in partnership with the Cross-Sectoral Group (CSG) on Local and Community Development, adhering to the values and principles for collaboration and partnership working. This will build upon the existing structures, strategic objectives and achievements of the previous strategy, while taking account of new contexts, challenges and priorities for the community and voluntary sector.

An important part of the strategy development process will be inclusive consultation with stakeholders across the local development, community and voluntary and charity sectors in relation to the vision, objectives and actions to be included in the new strategy. We will also be consulting with Departments and Agencies across government and with local authorities.

We look forward to receiving your organisations' inputs in relation to the following key elements of the new strategy:

A. The Vision

The vision of the current strategy was to create vibrant, sustainable, inclusive, empowered and self-determining communities that support the social, cultural and economic well-being of all members.

Is this vision still valid? Do you have any suggested changes to the vision?

500 words max

A. Vision — Response from the Society of St Vincent de Paul Position The existing vision ("vibrant, sustainable, inclusive, empowered and self-determining communities…") remains broadly valid. To reflect current context and strengthen deliverability, we recommend targeted refinements. Proposed wording (vision) Vibrant, inclusive and self-determining communities where everyone can live with dignity, free from persistent disadvantage; where rights are upheld; and where needs-led, preventative and co-produced supports enable people's social, cultural and economic well-being—powered by a strong, collaborative community and voluntary sector. Rationale for refinements In light of recent fractures in social cohesion, rising hate incidents and the spread of disinformation, the vision should explicitly emphasise dignity, rights, and needs-led, co-produced supports that build inclusion and trust. Centre dignity and rights Make human dignity and rights explicit so the vision speaks to outcomes for people as well as places. This anchors inclusion in a rights-based approach and underscores respect for the whole person. Address poverty and persistent hardship Name the intent to reduce persistent disadvantage and support pathways to economic independence, signalling an ambition beyond crisis response towards sustainable well-being. Commit to needs-led, co-produced supports and wider reach Emphasise that services should be needs-led, co-designed with people who use them, actively extend reach to groups at higher risk of poverty, and reduce stigma to build trust and accessibility. Embed prevention and a life-course approach Highlight prevention and early intervention across education, skills, employment, housing and family supports to interrupt inter-generational poverty and improve long-term outcomes. Name the enablers of a strong sector Reference evidence-informed practice, continuous quality improvement, robust governance, volunteer development and workforce capacity as conditions for consistent delivery and better value for public investment. Closing statement SVP welcomes the Department's partnership with the Cross-Sectoral Group and the inclusive consultation process. We stand ready to contribute practical insight from local engagement and frontline experience so that the refined vision translates into measurable improvements in people's lives.

B. Mission - what the strategy aims to achieve

The previous strategy identified six high level ambitions to be attained:

- A thriving community and voluntary sector
- A strengthened partnership between Government and the community and voluntary sector
- Community supports underpinned by societal value and community need
- Resilient communities empowered to meet emerging challenges
- Empowered communities informing and shaping responses to their needs
- A thriving volunteering culture

Taking account of the current environment, challenges and priorities for the C&V sector, do these six high level ambitions still reflect the priority for the sector, do you propose any amendments or additional ambitions be included in the new strategy?

500 words max

B. Mission — Response from the Society of St Vincent de Paul Are the six ambitions still priorities? Yes. They remain broadly valid. However, the current context—rising hate incidents and community tensions, online disinformation fuelling polarisation, and evolving legislative responses—requires clearer outcomes, stronger enablers and an explicit focus on social cohesion and prevention. Recent Garda data show a 4% rise in recorded hate crimes and related incidents in 2024 (676, up from 651 in 2023). The State has adopted a National Action Plan Against Racism and is advancing counter-disinformation measures following the November 2023 Dublin unrest, where misinformation amplified harms. Refinements to the existing ambitions A thriving community and voluntary sector Define "thriving" to include multi-annual, full-cost-recovery funding; proportionate regulation; evaluation and data capacity; workforce wellbeing; and structured volunteer management, training and safeguarding. A strengthened partnership between Government and the C&V sector Specify co-design and parity of esteem; cross-Government coordination; place-based planning; shared outcomes and data standards; and feedback loops that demonstrate how community input changes decisions. Community supports underpinned by societal value and community need Make supports explicitly needs-led, evidence-informed and culturally competent, with trauma-informed, anti-racist practice; clear pathways to income security and economic independence; and intentional outreach to groups at higher risk—reducing stigma and barriers. Resilient communities empowered to meet emerging challenges Broaden "resilience" to include social cohesion, anti-racism, community safety, climate resilience/just transition, digital inclusion, emergency preparedness, and strong local social infrastructure (advice, advocacy, family and youth supports). Empowered communities informing and shaping responses to their needs Embed lived-experience participation through resourced mechanisms (participation payments; childcare/transport; accessible formats) and community leadership development, with transparent "you said / we did" reporting. A thriving volunteering culture Clarify that "thriving" means diverse, inclusive and safe volunteering, with flexible roles, training and recognition; removal of practical barriers (costs, scheduling, caring responsibilities); and digital tools that support—not replace—human connection. Additional ambitions for the new strategy Social cohesion and anti-racism (new) Build welcoming, connected communities by resourcing local anti-racism initiatives, victim support, dialogue and mediation, rapid counter-disinformation capacity, and media/digital literacy—delivered with, not for, affected communities. (Aligns with the State's anti-racism and counter-disinformation agendas.) A sector-wide learning and quality system (new) Create a shared outcomes framework and proportionate monitoring; invest in data, evaluation and safeguarding; and support continuous quality improvement and workforce/volunteer development to ensure consistency and value for public investment. Optional refreshed wording (for clarity and measurability) A sustainable, outcomes-focused C&V sector. Genuine partnership with Government (co-design; cross-Department coordination; shared outcomes; place-based delivery). Needs-led, evidence-informed community supports that reduce stigma and enable social, cultural and economic wellbeing. Resilient, cohesive, digitally and climate-ready communities. Resourced participation and community leadership shaping policy and services. A diverse, supported and safe volunteering culture. (New) Social cohesion and anti-racism, including counter-disinformation. Oireachtas Data (New) Sector learning and quality for continuous improvement. We welcome the Department's partnership with the Cross-Sectoral Group and stand ready to help translate these ambitions into measurable improvements in people's lives.

C. Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives which define the scope of the previous strategy were:

- Strengthen and develop participative approaches to the development of public policy and programming underpinned by an autonomous community and voluntary infrastructure
- Support and facilitate communities to participate in community development and local development
- Develop and strengthen processes and mechanisms to secure meaningful consultation, inclusion and participation in local, regional and national decision-making structures, particularly by non-engaging and marginalised communities and their representative organisations

- Develop capacity of organisations supporting communities to participate in community development and local development, with a specific focus on marginalised communities
- Supporting commitments in Our Public Service 2020, develop the strategic and operational capacity of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), including in coordinating, monitoring and supporting community development and local development
- Strengthen and build understanding and capacity to meet Public Sector Duty obligations in local government and community and voluntary organisations
- Supporting commitments in Our Public Service 2020, continue to develop and strengthen Public Participation Networks as the primary mechanism for communities to engage with local government decision-making
- Strengthen and build understanding and capacity to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) National Implementation Plan
- Strengthen the Local Economic and Community Plan process, enhancing community participation in the development and implementation of plans and securing more effective collaboration and partnership working nationally, regionally and locally.
- Support, develop and enhance capacity in the local government sector in community development and local development
- Support community development and local development to engage with Climate Change adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Which of these strategic objectives do you consider to be most relevant and are there further objectives that should be considered?

500 words max

.Most relevant existing objectives All of the listed objectives remain relevant. In the present context—marked by persistent poverty, cost-of-living pressures, fractured social cohesion, rising hate incidents and disinformation—the following require particular emphasis and clearer delivery outcomes: 1. Meaningful participation by marginalised groups Strengthen participative approaches to policy and programming; support communities to participate; and develop mechanisms that secure genuine consultation and influence in decisions (local, regional, national), especially for people who are least engaged and most affected by poverty and exclusion. 2. Capacity to act on community need Build the capacity of organisations that support communities, with a specific focus on culturally competent, trauma-informed, anti-racist practice; high-quality signposting and referral; and pathways to income security and economic independence. 3. Place-based coordination and accountability Advance the strategic and operational capacity of LCDCs; strengthen the LECP process to enhance community participation and achieve practical, measurable outcomes; and continue to develop PPNs as the core channel for public participation—with clear "you said / we did" feedback loops. 4. Equality and rights in practice Strengthen understanding and capacity to meet Public Sector Duty obligations across local government and the community and voluntary sector, ensuring proportionate, stigma-free access to services and supports. 5. Whole-of-society sustainability Embed the SDGs at local level, and support community engagement with climate adaptation and mitigation—framed as a just transition that protects low-income households and builds cohesion. 6. Local government capability Continue to support and develop the capacity of local government for high-quality community development and local development, with consistent governance and quality standards. Additional / amended objectives for the new strategy A) Social cohesion, anti-racism and counter-disinformation Resource local initiatives that build connection and safety; support victims of hate; promote dialogue and mediation; and strengthen digital/media literacy and rapid counter-disinformation capacity—delivered with, not for, affected communities. B) Prevention and life-course approach Make prevention and early intervention explicit across education, skills, employment, housing and family supports to interrupt inter-generational poverty; require shared outcomes and routine evaluation. C) Sustainable, outcomes-focused funding Commit to multi-annual, full-cost-recovery funding and proportionate monitoring, enabling stability, evidence-building and continuous quality improvement. D) Workforce and volunteering sustainability Invest in recruitment, retention, supervision, training, safeguarding and wellbeing for staff and volunteers; reduce practical barriers to participation (costs, caring responsibilities, scheduling). E) Data, learning and quality system Create a shared outcomes framework and learning network across programmes (including common indicators, proportionate data standards, and public reporting), to drive consistency, value for money and improvement. F) Digital inclusion and access Ensure services are accessible to people with low digital access and skills; use technology to enhance—not replace—trusted, person-centred support. Closing Note These adjustments keep the previous strategy's scope intact while sharpening delivery on dignity, rights, prevention and cohesion—so communities are not only engaged in decisions but also supported to achieve tangible, measurable improvements in social, cultural and economic wellbeing.

D. Strategic Actions

The previous strategy included 43 strategic actions/commitments, summarised here:

- Develop processes for meaningful consultation, inclusion and participation of all communities in decisions that affect them
- Develop capacity in community and voluntary organisations to support communities
- Support education and training opportunities for community workers, volunteers in community organisations and voluntary board members
- Ensure local decision-making and participatory structures are fit for purpose (e.g. PPNs, LCDCs)
- Introduce a sustainable funding model for the community and voluntary sector

- Develop capacity at all levels to deliver key policy initiatives including UN SDGs, Climate Action and Public Sector Duty

Considering the current context, challenges and opportunities, what specific strategic actions/commitments do you consider could be included in the new strategy?

500 words max

D. Strategic Actions — Response from the Society of St Vincent de Paul Proposed strategic actions /commitments Resource meaningful participation Provide participation payments, transport/childcare supports and accessible formats (Plain English, Easy Read, translation) so people most affected by poverty can engage. Publish clear "you said / we did" feedback after consultations. Co-design with lived experience Establish local lived-experience panels to co-design policies and programmes with LCDCs/PPNs and service providers, with independent facilitation for contentious issues. Strengthen PPNs and LCDCs Fund dedicated capacity (training, data and admin support) for community reps; set minimum standards for engagement quality; require annual participation plans and public reporting. Sustainable, outcomes-focused funding Introduce multi-annual, full-cost-recovery contracts (including core costs, indexation and safeguarding/training); reduce duplication through proportionate reporting; align funding cycles across Departments and local authorities. Build organisational capacity where need is greatest Offer targeted grants and technical assistance to organisations serving groups at higher risk of poverty, including culturally competent, trauma-informed and anti-racist practice; require safeguarding and complaints mechanisms. Equip the workforce and volunteers Fund accredited training for community workers, volunteers and boards in governance, case-work boundaries, data protection, safeguarding, anti-racism, disability inclusion and trauma awareness. Cover expenses and create flexible volunteering options. Prevention and life-course pathways Back early-intervention supports (advice and advocacy, family and youth work, money/energy guidance, education/skills bridging) with clear referral routes to income security, housing and employment services. Social cohesion, anti-racism and counter-disinformation Resource community dialogue/mediation, hate-incident support pathways, local communications using trusted messengers, and digital/media literacy. Create a rapid response protocol to address harmful misinformation while protecting civil liberties. Digital inclusion without exclusion Invest in devices, connectivity and skills; maintain offline access for essential services; ensure accessible digital tools for participation and case management. Climate action as a just transition Support community-led climate resilience (local warm hubs, retrofit and energy-advice outreach prioritising low-income households, disaster preparedness) and link these to skills and employment pathways. Public Sector Duty in practice Provide templates and coaching to embed equality and human-rights assessments in programme design, procurement and commissioning; monitor for stigma-free, proportionate access. Common outcomes and learning system Adopt a shared outcomes framework across programmes with a small set of common indicators (participation, access, inclusion, wellbeing, income security); fund independent evaluation; create a sector learning network to share practice and scale what works. Strengthen the LECP process Require needs assessments that combine official data with community insight; mandate co-produced delivery plans; align LECP priorities with funding and procurement decisions. Simple, fair access to funding Introduce a single front-door application and due-diligence process for small grants; publish clear timelines and appeals; provide pre-application clinics for smaller or emerging groups. Result These actions make participation real, shift effort towards prevention, build trust and cohesion, and ensure consistent quality and value for public investment—so communities see tangible improvements in social, cultural and economic wellbeing.

Name of Organisation:

Society of St. Vincent De Paul

County:

National

The Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, together with the Cross-Sectoral Group on Local and Community Development, wish to thank you for completing this online stakeholder consultation.

Contact

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