



Nora Fahy, Roscommon Women's Network and Martin Lydon, Roscommon County Council, at a seminar, organised by Longford Women's Manifesto Group in association with Irish Rural Link.

Seminar to be held on rural citizenship engagement

The challenges facing rural communities, new local authority structures, and the centralised nature of Irish policy, were some of the themes discussed at a recent seminar at the Longford Women's Link.

The seminar, organised by Longford Women's Manifesto Group in association with Irish Rural Link provided an opportunity for the voluntary, community and statutory sectors to reflect on the im-

pacts of the reforms in local government, particularly in terms of citizenship engagement.

The seminar heard from speakers who are actively involved in the new structures, coming from the perspectives of being volunteers and workers within county councils and community organisations.

There was much discussion on PPNs, the Public Participation Networks, which are the main link through which local authorities now connect with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors.

Sara Bourke, Policy Officer with Social Justice Ireland who works closely with PPNs gave an overview of how the new structures are working around the country, emphasising that they are still 'under construction'.

While acknowledging structures, Sara said it is starting to work in practice.

She has been delivering training and supports to PPN representatives and emphasised that this ongoing support and nurturing is vital.

On a positive front she said representatives are engaging at Municipal District level, see themselves as key actors in drawing up the Local Economic and Community Plans and having a real input into decision-making and feel 'equal' at the table.

A panel of speakers involved in various local authority committees was chaired by Sheila Reilly, Group Head Digital, Iconic Newspapers. The panel included Fiona

McCaffrey Jones, Monahan Women's Network, Martin Lydon, Roscommon County Council, Tess Murphy, Longford Women's Manifesto Group, Denise Feen, Galway County Council and Nuala Haughey, TASC.

Martin Lydon, Director of Services at Roscommon County Council, praised the work of the LCDC in Roscommon and highlighted the valuable role the PPN reps are playing in bringing local knowledge to the table.

Tess Murphy described how being involved in monthly meetings of the Longford Women's Manifesto Group helps to support her in her role as representative and described how difficult it would be to go on to a committee without having supports in place.

Tess also emphasised the importance of supports to monitor a

The issue of gender balance on committees was raised — Martin Lydon stated that Roscommon County Council now has a rule that when vacancies become available on committees, groups must nominate a woman and a man.

Roscommon County Council is also planning to web cast its council meetings which will make them more accessible to citizens who wish to hear council discussions.

This was a recommendation from a report produced by Longford Women's Manifesto Group, 'Making our Councils more open, transparent and accountable' which was launched in 2015.



Tara Farrell, Longford Women's Link; Brenda McNicholas, Roscommon PPN, and Martin Lydon, Roscommon County Council, at a seminar, organised by Longford Women's Manifesto Group in association with Irish Rural Link.

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