

PPN National Advisory Group

Date/Time: 10.45hrs Wednesday 13th February 2019

**Venue: Department of Rural and Community Development,
Conference Room, 5th Floor, Trinity Point, 10-11 Leinster
Street South, Dublin 2, D02 EF85.**

Minutes

Attendees:

Pillar Representatives:

- Catherine Lane, (C&V pillar),
- Sean Healy (Social Inclusion Pillar).
- Michael Ewing (Environmental Pillar).

PPN Volunteers:

- Aileen Eglinton (Dún Laoghaire Rathdown PPN; C&V representative),
- Bibiana Savin (South Dublin PPN; Social Inclusion representative),
- Theresa O'Donohoe; Clare PPN; Environmental representative),

PPN Resource Workers:

- Helen Howes (Wicklow PPN),
- Annette Barr Jordan (Westmeath PPN),
- Jamie Moore (Fingal PPN).

Department of Rural and Community Development:

- Officials – Ciara Bates (Chair), Deirdre Kearney, Niall Hayden, Ellie Corcoran.

Apologies:

- Alan Farrell (Galway County PPN; CCMA representative),
- Rebecca Loughry, (Cork City Council; CCMA representative),

Ciara Bates, the Chair, welcomed all to the meeting and introduced the new members, Bibiana Savin and Theresa O'Donohoe. Ciara also proffered apologies from Alan Farrell and Rebecca Loughry, also new members, who had prior engagements.

1. The Agenda, as set for the meeting, was agreed.
2. With a number of new members joining the NAG, the Chair reaffirmed the Terms of Reference of the National Advisory Group.
3. The minutes from the previous meeting were adopted with no amendments.

4. Brexit

- All Department stakeholders are being advised to be cognisant of any implications for their operations arising from the expected departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union and to inform the Department of any such implications.
- The Chair expressed a call from Central Government for consideration of any potential implications of Brexit, particularly for the border counties under the schemes and programmes delivered by Departments, including issues such as supplier contracts and data storage.
- The risk to funding streams for both environmental groups and vulnerable groups in the border region particularly where a no deal Brexit may cause further pressure on local authority resources.

5. Report from Environmental Pillar.

- An overview of the report on the recent undertaking by Environmental Pillar (EP) to foster increased engagement between Environmental Pillar and PPNs was presented. It was noted that there was difficulty in getting information and engagement from some PPNs.
- There was a general discussion regarding the membership criteria for the EPs and suggestions were made as to how this could be addressed to allow for membership by community groups such as tidy town committees.
- Lack of awareness of the PPN structures was discussed as it was mentioned that this issue had come to the fore as part of the research for the report. The EP plan to conduct regional events with thematic

training to be rolled out during the coming year to address this issue and consideration of pillar admission criteria is to be considered which should allow for increased membership.

- The Chair reiterated that all groups must be given the opportunity to be equally represented. The availability of mechanisms via LEADER whereby all groups can be funded to ensure equal representation was highlighted.
- Low PPN environmental involvement is problematic for the pillar. It was also cited that PPNs lose expertise because interested parties are not Environmental Pillar approved.

It was agreed that:

- (i) an educational and training piece across all PPN members in this area to be considered as part of the overall training programme for PPNs;
- (ii) the Environmental Pillar were asked to discuss the issue of the membership criteria with their members as this was seen as a potential impediment for groups; and
- (iii) a proposal for a pilot project was to be drafted and brought by the Environmental Pillar to the working group in DCCAIE on climate action.
- (iv) It was also agreed that a coalesced approach to delivery of training/education through PPNs may be mutually beneficial.

6. Review of PPN Structure –

There was a follow up on the Discussion Document circulated by DRCD to the meeting of 7 November 2018. Inadvertent dissemination of that document precipitated unnecessary and often negative correspondence to some group members. It was agreed that it is imperative that all matters discussed at NAG remain confidential until agreed unanimously by the group as discussion documents are circulated in good faith for group consultation and eventual accord to allow frank and uncompromised analysis.

It was emphasised that all members of the NAG are advising based on their own experience and expertise in the first instance and are their role as members of the NAG is to provide advice to the Department on foot of their experience within the PPN structure. Members of the NAG are, therefore, not permitted to disseminate documents to a wider audience until a decision has been taken by the NAG on this course of action. All decisions of the NAG are unified. Any member who wishes to recommend a change to this structure is invited to put forward a proposal for discussion at the NAG; in the interim the existing arrangements will remain in place.

A further document with the Department's proposals was circulated to all NAG members on Thursday 7 February. Key points discussed:

- On the substantive matter of the establishment structure of PPNs, it was agreed that PPNs who operate successfully by or as limited companies have no need to alter their arrangements, provided a strong MOU is in existence between the PPN and the local authority.
- The requirements relating to such MOUs will be set down in the revised User Guide/Handbook.
- In addition, it is necessary to ensure that Directors of such companies are fully aware of their obligations and potential liabilities under the company structure and that neither the Department nor the local authority has any liability or obligations arising from the operation of PPNs as private limited companies.
- Moreover, these PPNs, in addition to having memoranda of understanding with the relevant local authority/or the hosting company, may also require a separate memorandum of understanding between the limited company and the PPN.
- There may also be separation of management roles between the limited company and the PPN, for example, the limited company acts as administrator but can/should/must have no line manager function for the Resource Worker.

It was agreed by the NAG:

- (i) That no further PPNs are to establish private limited companies without first having explored all possible alternative structures. The approval of DRCD will be required if the PPN is of the view that a company structure is the only route available for their purposes.
- (ii) The revision of the User Guide/Handbook should outline the requirements of company status particularly the responsibilities of directors and the differing time constraints of roles.
- (iii) All arrangements must ensure the independence and autonomy of the PPN.
- (iv) Any PPNs who operate through or as companies should have relevant training and conduct all matters in compliance with the Charities Regulator Code of Governance

The agreed next steps:

1. The Department will revise the discussion document on foot of deliberations and circulate to NAG
2. The Department will circulate to PPNs for final comments
3. Return with any amendments for final sign-off from the NAG.

7. Update on Sub Groups

2018 Annual Report – Sub Group established and held its first meeting on 24 January 2019. A new reporting template will be deployed, *jotform* enabling better communication with all relevant parties. It was agreed that 2019 funding would be linked to the completion and return of the Annual Report.

User Guide/Handbook - Sub Group constituted and held its first meeting on 7 February 2019. A text will be ready for consultation with stakeholders with submissions enabled electronically or on hard copy. The local elections will deliver a new cohort of councillors who will require PPN guidance thus indicating a recognisable date for completion. It is important to get local authority support. Draft guide will be circulated to CCMA reps for onward transmission to LA CEs.

Code of Conduct - to be addressed as part of User Guide subgroup. The group agreed that in general, where disputes arose, a major problem for those involved was where they could turn to resolve matters. It was agreed that dispute resolution mechanism will be included as part of the revised handbook including the issue of the binding nature of dispute resolution. Decisions, following a resolution process needed to be binding on all parties and all involved needed to be signed up to that principle from the outset. It was further agreed that the sub-group would consider the issue of litigation by members of the PPNs in the context of decisions made and also against each other. It was suggested that the code of conduct might be the area for this.

Conference Sub Group – no volunteers yet. 2019 Conference – the Department sought expressions of interest from PPNs willing to host Conference; there were 2 responses from Carlow and Monaghan.

Taking into account the numbers expected to attend, the availability of a suitable venue, travel and accommodation requirements, Carlow was agreed to be the preferred option and it was agreed that Carlow PPN/County Council should be invited to make a formal proposal to host the 2019 conference. 3 and 4 October suggested as dates, provided they don't clash with other events

Communications Strategy Sub Group – Aileen Eglington, CCMA Rep (Alan/Rebecca), and the Department's communications section. The Department agreed that funding is available for a Communications Strategy

Insurance Indemnification

Following last NAG meeting, the Department wrote to Cork County Council in November 2018 seeking full details of the issue. The Council are awaiting a report from their Finance Office, before issuing a report to the Department. It was noted that outstanding T&S claims had been paid in the interim. Defer issue to next NAG meeting

Update on Limerick PPN

The meeting was informed of the recent visit to Limerick by the Department. A group made up of representatives of a number of local community organisations has been set up with the task of making recommendations to the LA and Secretariat for the regeneration of the PPN in Limerick. The group had wished to speak with the Department prior to commencing its work to ensure it was neither duplicating anything the Department was engaged in, nor was it overreaching in its role.

The Department will continue to liaise with the LA in the matter.

Circular letter 9/2018 related to the provision of €25,700 from the Department for engagement of a Support Worker to assist the Resource Worker. €22,500 paid to each PPN in December 2018 with the balance to be paid with first tranche of 2019 funding.

Department requested all LAs to provide a further €5,000 from their resources for this purpose. To date, all LAs have responded, apart from Offaly, Galway County, Westmeath – It was subsequently confirmed that Westmeath County Council has agreed to the increase and the Support Worker is due to commence in a week, similarly for Offaly County Council.

Department will be following up with PPNs regarding the recruitment and appointment process including date of commencement of SW's tenure.

Training needs.

There was a general discussion regarding the LCDC review. Work is underway to better co-ordinate LCDC and PPN training, with, in the case of LCDC training, a focus on volunteers rather than Chief Officers.

Draft training plan submitted to DRCD by SJI. Department to discuss proposals with SJI –Sean Healy to provide the NAG with short summary of proposals. It was acknowledged that environmental education needs to be

included in this context. Michael Ewing will forward relevant contact details of environmental trainer.

Secretariat Network.

The Department issued memo to all PPNs in January in relation to the nomination process for Secretariat members. Returns were sought by 8 February and have been received from all but 13 PPNs. It was agreed to contact all PPNs who had not sent nominations and invite them to do so by the end of February.

It was agreed that an experienced Facilitator would be engaged for the Secretariat network, certainly for the initial meetings. NAG members were asked to forward any suggested names for this role to the Department who will organise the first meeting once a facilitator has been selected. The facilitator will be tasked with approving the structures for the network and importantly, the Terms of Reference. It was suggested that the resource worker network could provide some advice if required. Terms of Reference will be important. Resource Workers network to liaise with Secretariat Network on their experience with such a network.

Community Wellbeing.

The roll-out is commencing in all apart from the 4 pilot PPNs, or other PPNs who have WB statements in place, with Harriet Emerson facilitating. 21 of the 23 eligible PPNs applied. Three initial regional meetings will take place, in Athlone, Limerick and Carrick-on-Shannon. All the information is available on the Social Justice website. There will be special events for the 4 pilot PPNs to further their projects.

National Community Weekend.

Ciara provided an update on preparations for the National Community Weekend. All PPNs would be asked to support and get behind events in their areas. (May Bank Holiday)

AOB

Annette Barr Jordan advised the group that she had attended the World Community Development Conference in Maynooth in 2018 at which there was no voice for PPNs. Quite apart from the absence of a PPN perspective, some sections of the event which dealt with citizen engagement were less than that kind in their comments on PPNs. A similar conference is to be held in Scotland in 2019 and Annette suggested some representation by and for PPN's was essential given her experience of the 2018 Conference. Jamie, Helen and Bibiana agreed to consider representing the NAG at the Scottish event.

Review of SPCs – Annett Barr Jordan to provide some text to be returned to D/Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Invitations

Developmental Perspectives – to be requested to submit report

An Cosán – looking to attend Conference. A matter for the Subgroup to decide.

Date for Next Meeting

Thursday 02 May at 10.45hrs, Trinity Point.