

National Advisory Group

Date/Time: Thursday, 13th May 2021, 14:30

Venue: Webex via Department of Rural and Community Development

Draft Minutes

Attendees:

Pillar Representatives:

- Seán Healy (Social Inclusion Pillar),
- Catherine Lane (C&V Pillar).

PPN Volunteers:

- Lynda O'Shea (Waterford PPN; C&V representative),
- Bibiana Savin (South Dublin PPN; Social Inclusion representative),

PPN Resource Workers:

- Helen Howes (Wicklow PPN),
- Sarah Wetherald (Sligo PPN).
- Kieran Walsh (South Dublin PPN)

CCMA Representatives:

Department of Rural and Community Development:

- Ciara Bates (Chair), Catherine Conroy, Elaine Jennings, Caoimhín Ó Tuathail, Alan Monks.

Apologies:

- Rebecca Loughrey (CCMA)
- Alan Farrell (CCMA)

The Chair opened the meeting which was conducted on-line due to the current restrictions as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic.

1. Adoption of Minutes.

The minutes of the Meeting of the Advisory Group on 11th February 2021 are adopted.

2. Matters arising. (Wellbeing; climate action; stability fund & hubs)

A welcome was extended to a new member, Kieran Walsh, elected by the RW Network onto the Advisory Group.

There is some concern over the Department of Taoiseach's control over the National Wellbeing Indicators process.

3. Review of PPN Structure

DRCD have been liaising with Mazars to agree on timelines. A range of consultation formats will be used to allow ample opportunity for all stakeholders to contribute.

1. Survey: We have received draft survey questions and shared them with oversight c'tee, which is meeting on Monday 17 May. The survey will go live for participants later in May and will be live for two weeks.
2. Focus groups are planned as a follow-on from the survey. Most focus groups (5) are expected to take place in June, with the following stakeholder groups:
 - a. PPN Resource and Support Workers
 - b. PPN Secretariat Network
 - c. PPN representatives on Local Authority boards/committees etc.
 - d. Other PPN members
 - e. Local Authorities / County and City Management Association

DRCD also currently planning for two 'mop-up' groups in September which will serve as a 'sense check' on the work Mazars will do over the summer period. The exact stakeholder groups are TBD.

3. DRCD and NAG will have the opportunity to partake in small group interview formats; details on these will be circulated as soon as they are available.

Mazars is also developing a written submission template with both predetermined questions and more free-form comment boxes, and this will be available for an extended period of time.

A view was expressed that it is important to ensure that the changes that the PPNs undergo following the structural review don't turn them into duplicates of the Volunteer Centres.

Some concern was expressed regarding the use of the OGP's framework for selection of the consultants, as the framework is not specific to the C&V sector. This was noted and similar concerns have arisen in other areas of the Department which have been brought to the attention of the Management Board.

4. Subgroups

I. User Handbook

It was suggested that the sub-group would meet to review the 'live list' of issues that the Department is keeping record of. With 2 vacancies on the group members were asked if anyone would like to volunteer to replace them. Kieran and Lynda volunteered.

II. Communications Strategy

DRCD have revised the list of services being sought following the NAG survey and feedback, and are liaising with the OGP regarding the optimal approach for procuring these services.

Next steps - To place tender on eTenders, Circulate Notice of Launch of Tender Process for Comms Strategy to PPN's/ NAG etc. The Department advised that a bespoke tender will be issued as no suitable OGP Framework is available for this project.

III. Annual Report

The AR Subgroup met on 2 occasions. New software option has been agreed and is being tested at the moment. It was sent to all NAG members for testing. DRCD happy with the software and also received feedback from NAG members which we have fed back to SJI who are updating accordingly. The link to the AR return and the link to the 'instructions video' should be with DRCD by the end of this week. It is our intention to finalise and circulate to PPN's for completion very shortly.

In the Financial Controls document the Annual Report response is listed as a funding requirement. DRCD will require the return of PPN Annual Reports prior to approving the processing of the 2nd tranche of funding to PPN's later in the year.

IV. Annual Conference

Helen provided update to the meeting on current status of event and invited Advisory Group members to join the conference subgroup. Sarah and Lynda volunteered. Ciara informed Helen that she would nominate some DRCD staff to assist at the next meeting. The weekend of 4th/5th March 2022 was agreed as the preferred date for the next conference.

Webinar suggestions

- Our Rural Future: Due to interest being shown by many of the PPN's in the Rural Development Policy since its launch in March we are in discussions with our colleagues in the Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise Unit to host a webinar on the topic and are hopeful that Minister Humphreys will attend. Community Participation section of Policy references PPNs and LCDCs as key pillars in achieving community participation. Structural review will feed into it.
- Health and Wellbeing Visions (with NESCC)

On the matter of Wellbeing, Helen asked if the DRCD submission could be circulated to the PPN's.

5. Funding, Finance and Returns

Update was provided on the Income and Expenditure returns with all but one having been received. Of the seven received early, six have received their 1st tranche of funding. We are currently reviewing the returns from those who have yet to receive their 1st tranche and are hoping to make these payments in the coming weeks.

As previously communicated in Circular CVSP 1/2021 DRCD will recoup unspent Support Worker funding in 2019 if any from the 1st tranche of 2021 funding and unspent Support Worker funding in 2020 if any from the 2nd tranche of 2021 funding.

Requests for carryover of funds were received from nine PPN's. Seven were approved and further details are required from the remaining two.

As outlined at the last meeting, there is a funding underspend as a result of this exercise and suggestions are sought in how we could utilise this funding to best support the PPN's.

Catherine gave a briefing on a proposal in respect of additional supports and informed the Advisory Group that DRCD would be interested in their feedback or any other suggestions in terms of supports.

A discussion followed the briefing. The Department's proposal for additional supports for PPNs was well received. There were plenty of positive suggestions coming forward.

6. Online Training

Seán Healy gave a briefing on the Training explaining that the first 100 participants from the pilot region had completed their training. An evaluation of the course is taking place at present. Following the evaluation, any necessary changes to the course will be made and comments will be used to tailor training for next cohort.

The model has changed slightly to take account of the need to train stakeholders in as many PPN's as possible. To facilitate this, we have 5 Group settings, with 4 Groups of 25 being trained each time over 5 terms. (May/ September/ January/ May/ September).

Ciara informed the Advisory Group that the work involved in setting up the training and trying to ensure that all PPN's get a fair opportunity to participate is very demanding on our small business unit. With PPN's not responding and not meeting deadlines it is creating an enormous amount of unnecessary additional work for the unit. The staff spent the final two days trying to get almost half of the 2nd cohort to register. 89 of the 100 places were finally filled by the time the induction began at 2pm on the Tuesday.

7. PPN's and Climate Action

PPN's have participated in the 2021 Climate Action Consultations with DECC. We would welcome any feedback on PPNs' engagement in this type of consultation for future consideration.

PPNs are also mentioned in the Climate Action Bill. Five-year Local Climate Action Plans and consultation. This is the first time that PPNs have been named in legislation.

A number of options were discussed for delivering climate change training to PPNs in terms of community projects, building climate change initiatives into organisations, etc.

8. A.O.B.

PPN members will be eligible for free time in remote working hubs. A list of relevant hubs will follow soon.

Wellbeing: two-pillar structure to wellbeing consultation: Departments and other stakeholders. Our paper, including NAG feedback, is being supplied to DRCD's rep on the interdepartmental group. The process involves the other stakeholders, including PPNs, responding separately. Our paper is not a substitute for that process. Colette Bennett in SJI is on stakeholder subgroup, she has circulated a survey to all PPNs in that capacity.

Stability Fund and the CEP were launched by the Minister over the weekend.

Query raised as to whether PPN's are FOI'able and if there is central guidance available for PPN's.

9. Next Meeting

Webex/Trinity Point, September DRCD to conduct doodle poll for suitable date.

Meeting Ends