

National Advisory Group

Date/Time: Thursday, 11th February 2021, 14:30

Venue: Webex via Department of Rural and Community Development

Minutes

Attendees:

Pillar Representatives:

- Seán Healy (Social Inclusion Pillar).
- Charles Stanley-Smith (Environment 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),
- Avril Wilson (Tipperary PPN)
- Sarah Wetherald (Sligo).

CCMA Representatives:

- Alan Farrell, (Galway County Council)

Department of Rural and Community Development:

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

Apologies:

- Rebecca Loughrey, (Cork City Council),
- Catherine Lane (C&V Pillar).
- Terrence Mc Donough (Galway City Community Network; Environmental representative)

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 15th Meeting of the Group held on 12th November 2020 were adopted.

2. Matters arising.

A welcome was extended to two new members Charles Stanley-Smith and Lynda O'Shea, and the Chair congratulated other members on re-election – Sean, Helen and Catherine.

The Advisory Group welcomed Catherine Conroy, who is taking on Deirdre Kearney's role in DRCD.

Charles raised the matter of input into the Department of the Taoiseach's Wellbeing Indicator process.

3. Local Economic & Community Plan review and the LCDC needs assessment project

Finola Moylette from DRCD's Libraries Development and Community Policy Unit joined the meeting to discuss this item. Most LECPs are due to be renewed soon, and DRCD is updating the guidelines for successor LECPs. The NAG was asked to consider how best to consult with PPNs as part of this review. Many of the NAG members present offered their views on current LECP practices.

Finola advised that objective 2 of the five-year strategy for the C&V sector (Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities) addresses the sector's training needs. The first research project in this area will focus on LCDCs due to the upcoming renewal of LECPs.

4. Salesforce access for Secretariat members

Tricia Nolan of South Dublin Volunteer Centre (SDVC) joined the meeting to discuss items 4 and 5.

DRCD has been approached on a number of occasions to request that Secretariat members be granted access to Salesforce, particularly where there are issues with RW/SW cover. Tricia outlined concerns regarding the appropriateness of this suggestion, particularly privacy and GDPR questions. It is also currently beyond the scope of DRCD's contract with SDVC to train Secretariat members.

NAG members agreed that a mechanism was needed for covering staff leave/periods of vacancy. A number of options were discussed, however it was agreed that the matter required further consideration.

5. Update on development of technical supports, including E-Voting System

Tricia highlighted that the number of responses to the Salesforce needs survey to date had been poor. E-voting was not emerging as the highest priority.

Tricia suggested that other PPNs might use the e-voting solution used by South Dublin County PPN, which is a pay-per-election solution. The mass emailing solution is to be updated.

SDVC will hold webinars with PPNs on technology best practices for PPN purposes.

6. Review of PPN Structure

As agreed at the previous meeting, the RFT was circulated to all NAG members and also the Secretariat and Resource Worker Network.

An evaluation group was established and undertook the evaluation of the tenders to select a preferred bidder. The next step was a project initiation meeting between DRCD and the selected consultancy firm to agree a Project Initiation Document, including timeline.

DRCD invited members of the NAG to work with the Department on the Structural Review Oversight Committee to ensure that the review meets its terms of reference.

7. Subgroups

User Handbook

In 2021, DRCD will begin auditing compliance with the mandatory elements of the handbook. DRCD expects that the PPNs will commence work on its implementation as soon as is possible, allowing for the fact that it will take time for practices to bed down.

DRCD invited NAG members to suggest areas where webinars might be a useful tool to assist with compliance. Helen suggested that hosting arrangement, including costs, could be one such area and referred to an email she circulated.

Communications Strategy

The Department circulated a survey to NAG members seeking to establish the services that the PPNs could benefit most from.

Feedback from Resource Worker network/Secretariat network meetings suggested that stakeholders would like to postpone the rollout of the awareness campaign until the structural review has concluded. However, the NAG agreed that the awareness campaign should be rolled out as soon as possible, as the core function of PPNs will not be changed by the structural review.

Annual Report

The Annual Report Subgroup are due to meet the week commencing 22 February to discuss a replacement for the "Jotform" template which has been in use for the last few years. In advance of this meeting DRCD provided the subgroup with the feedback raised by PPN's related to "Jotform"'s use in the previous year's Annual Report.

Two nominations to the subgroup were received from the RWN, Sarah Ferrigan (Clare PPN) and Muriel Tobin (Waterford PPN), to join NAG members Helen and Seán.

Annual Conference

While the venue remains booked for November, the NAG agreed to decide at its May meeting whether to retain this booking and hold the 2021 conference in-person.

8. Funding, Finance & Returns

DRCD issued a Financial Controls Document and Circular Letter CVSP 7/2020 in November 2020 providing guidance to all PPN's to avoid some of the issues that came to light in the 2019 Income and Expenditure returns.

DRCD also informed PPN's in Circular Letter CVSP 4/2020 that it intended to offset any underspend in 2019 Support Worker funding from PPN's from the 2nd Tranche of 2020 funding. It was decided to postpone the offset until the 1st payment this year instead to avoid any additional workload for the PPN's in 2020.

The Department have decided to use the unspent funding for other PPN projects and are happy to accept proposals from the Advisory Group on how we can best utilise the reconciled funding e.g. items identified as of lower priority in the communications strategy survey.

9. Online training

Online training for Group 1 (pilot group) is continuing. Induction took place on the 8th of February. Not all available places were taken up, due in part to the short timeline between PPNs being notified and the deadline for registration. Some frustration has been voiced on this matter, however the necessity for WIT to move all of its learning programmes online impacted the timeframe for notification. This issue was set to be resolved for the next group of participants.

An evaluation process will take place when the pilot is complete. All of the issues and learnings from the training will be discussed and addressed with a view to amending the process/ programme for future training.

10. Climate Action Plan consultation

There is a consultation process being run by Dept of Environment Climate and Communications in advance of the 2021 Climate Action Plan. They initially hoped to include 10 PPNs in these initial 'Climate Conversations'; however due to the high level of responses, they expanded it to include 16 PPNs. These were selected primarily on the basis of geographical factors.

DRCD agreed to liaise with DECC and the consultation team to ensure Wellbeing statements were incorporated into the consultations.

11. A.O.B

SPC Guidelines review

We have engaged with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to request an update.

SJI report

DRCD welcomes SJI's report on *Delivering Deliberative Democracy* and will ensure it forms an input into the structural review.

LGMA contact

Sara advised of an email from Bridget Fitzgerald in LGMA relating to the Community Support/Response Fora.

Emails from DRCD to Secretariat

Avril advised that RWs want emails addressed to the Secretariat to include a note in the Subject Line to say 'FAO SECRETARIAT' or similar.

Avril Wilson is moving on from the position of RW with Tipperary PPN. The NAG members thanked her for her interest and input into this Group, and wished her the very best for the future.

Next meeting: DRCD to conduct doodle poll for suitable date.

Meeting Ends