

3rd Meeting of the PPN National Advisory Group held in the Withdrawing Room, Custom House, Dublin on 1st February 2017.

Attendance:

Stakeholder Group: PPN Volunteers:

- Siobhán O'Dowd (Cork City PPN – Social Inclusion representative)
- Charles Stanley-Smith (Tipperary PPN, Environment representative)

Stakeholder Group: Pillar Representatives:

- Seán Healy (Community & Voluntary Pillar)

Stakeholder Group: PPN Resource Workers:

- Annette Barr-Jordan (Westmeath PPN)
- Helen Howes (Wicklow PPN)
- Geraldine Timlin (Sligo PPN)

Stakeholder Group: Local Authorities:

- Bernie Doherty, (Dublin City, SEO Community Services)
- Donal Brennan, (Laois County Council, Director of Services)

Stakeholder Group: Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government:

- Officials - Diarmuid O'Leary (Chair), Deirdre Kearney, Niall Hayden, Ellie Corcoran

Apologies:

- Michael Ewing (Environmental Pillar)
- Tess Murphy (Longford PPN, Social Inclusion representative)

Opening and Introductions

The Chair welcomed all participants, and agreed amendments to the order of the agenda to enable some participants to leave early to attend other meetings.

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

PPN Events organised by Social Justice Ireland

Seán Healy outlined the outcome of four regional networking meetings organised by Social Justice Ireland for PPN Resource Workers, Secretariat members and representatives on Boards and Committees in November/December 2016. 75 representatives from 28 of the 31 Public Participation Networks attended.

The key objectives of these events were to (i) share national information on PPN issues; (ii) facilitate members from different counties to network and share best practice; (iii) identify key successes and challenges and (iv) build capacity of PPN reps on Boards and Committees

These events highlighted the fact that PPNs are at various stages of development, most seats are filled and representatives are active. Much progress has been achieved in the development of PPNs but challenges remain. Continued national support, training and publicity for the PPN process were identified as essential to allow the PPN process develop as intended. It was acknowledged that the Advisory Group has a key role to play in this context, in terms of on-going monitoring and training, particularly training for local authority staff and members so there is a greater awareness of PPNs and their potential.

Linkage groups are, in some areas, over abundant: efforts are being made to amalgamate and rationalise groups for administrative ease. Virtual meetings are proving beneficial for some with social media gaining popularity also.

The Chair provided a report of his positive visit to Limerick PPN in December 2016. The approach taken in meeting with the Local Authority, the PPN resource Worker

and Secretariat, as well as PPN members, was a useful model for future such familiarisation visits.

Questions arose as to whether PPN secretariats are insured under the Local Authority policies: this is/should be the case, other than where PPNs have opted to be an independent entity. Provision of insurance in such cases would be a matter for each individual PPN. This may however give rise to the need for procurement policies to be developed.

Action: It was agreed that Bernie Doherty, Dublin City Council, Charles Stanley Smith, Tipperary PPN, Helen Howes, Wicklow PPN and Geraldine Timlin, Sligo PPN would make short presentations at the next Advisory Group meeting on their respective PPN structures vis a vis the Local Authority.

Charities Regulator

While it was originally understood that all PPN members are required to be registered with the Charities Regulator, some loosening of this requirement may be apparent.

Some smaller groups find the registration process onerous. If all PPNs are required to be registered, the question arose, for example, as to who registers the PPN – the Secretariat or the Plenary?

Action: The Chair to discuss the matter with Michael Ewing, who initially raised the matter, following which the Chair would write directly to the Charities Regulator, on behalf of the Advisory Group, setting out the concerns expressed.

Environmental Pillar

The absence of a sufficient number of groups aligned in the main, but not confined to, the Environmental Pillar is leading to the need for some individuals to occupy more than one seat on certain Committees. This matter was highlighted at the last meeting of the Advisory Group and remains an issue. Where the Environmental Pillar is not properly represented, imbalance occurs weakening the PPN structure.

Representatives from the Environmental Pillar met with the Resource Workers at their January 2017 meeting. There has also been liaison between the Environmental Pillar and the Dept of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in relation to the Tidy Towns initiative, specifically in relation to the proposed review of the TT scheme.

Action: As the issue must to be urgently addressed, the matter is to be considered again at the next meeting of the Advisory Group.

User Guide

The meeting was advised of feedback from stakeholders on the User Guide.

Some members expressed concern regarding the proposal to reduce the requirement for PPN membership to groups with 4 rather than 5 members. It was agreed to reserve the matter pending the outcome of the proposed Activity Report (further details below). .

Some Local Authorities have stipulated that community groups must be part of PPN to obtain community grants which is prohibitive to smaller, less formal, groups. It was agreed to include a question on this matter in the proposed Activity Report in order to inform the overall process.

It was agreed to revamp the text on the 3 PPN pillars to provide greater clarity and also to amend some of the text in relation to the political cooling off period.

Proposed textual changes in relation to the flat structure were not adopted – the text to remain largely unchanged

Action: Based on the text agreed by the Advisory Group, the Department is to publish the revised User Guide. Textual changes not agreed can be returned to at a later date pending a better evidence base for proposals.

Capacity Building/Training.

To enhance and further support PPNs and their structures, the Advisory Group again acknowledged the importance of training for all relevant stakeholders. Capacity building and training is required at all levels, both at PPN level and for Local Authority members and Local Authority management and staff. The Group agreed that there is a general appetite for training and this could be achieved by rolling out a capacity building programme in a systematic way. Both Social Justice Ireland and University of Limerick have carried out training programmes. For its part the Department indicated its willingness to support the national roll out of agreed training programmes, both to build capacity but also increase awareness of the PPN process and the potential of this initiative.

Training/Guidance which may be advantageous to PPN representatives include;

- General overview of PPNs
- Local Authority Structures/budgeting
- How to influence policy
- Effective communication
- Linking local and County
- Representational skills
- Making evidence based proposals
- Monitoring and evaluation of policies
- Managing PPN Resource Workers
- Budgeting
- Induction

Action: Sean Healy to provide further details of the types of courses proposed by Social Justice Ireland and the Advisory Group to discuss this issue at its next meeting.

2017 Funding Arrangements

The Chair outlined the changes to the funding arrangements in 2017 whereby the Department paid €30,000 of the 2017 allocation in January 2017 to each Local

Authority in respect of its PPN, with the balance of the Department's contribution due later in 2017.

All Advisory Group members expressed their satisfaction with these arrangements.

While it is understood that in certain cases, LCDCs are not paying the expenses of PPN reps attending their meetings, the Chair advised that there is no additional funding available to PPNs for this purpose in 2017 but that the matter will be reviewed for 2018.

Expenses of members. A point of information, the Department confirmed that it will reimburse the travelling expenses of group members using public service rates and conditions.

Monitoring/Evaluation

Sean Healy presented a draft Activity Report Questionnaire for PPNs which was briefly discussed. Some amendments were suggested including a question on the structure of the PPN and a question regarding a requirement for PPN membership in order to qualify for community grants.

The aim is that the results of the Questionnaire would be collated into a PPN Annual Report to be published on the Department's website

Action: Sean Healy to review document and resubmit to Department following which the document will be circulated to Advisory Group for comments before issuing to PPNs and LAs.

Advisory Group – Nomination Process

The Chair advised that, while the current Advisory Group had been born out of an urgency to have a body in place to assist, support and develop the PPN's, members had been appointed as opposed to being elected/nominated by the various stakeholders. There was now a need to initiate a process that would

enable Group members to be elected or nominated to the role from within their stakeholder group in a fully open and transparent manner.

The Chair circulated a draft working document outlining possible options for an approach whereby the PPN National Advisory Group could be made more representative, by ensuring that its members are transparently nominated or elected by the Group's various PPN stakeholder groups. This document was fully discussed and two main issues remained outstanding: the manner in which Volunteers from the 31 PPNs might be "elected" and the term of office of Advisory Group members.

Action: The Chair would amend the document to reflect the discussion and circulate again to the Advisory Group for further comment in advance of the next meeting. The aim is to find agreement on the approach at that meeting.

Communications/co-ordination

National PPN coordinator. A document was presented as agreed by the Resource Workers at their meeting on 26 January, in which the case was made for a national coordinator (for PPN Resource Workers) citing, amongst other factors, the belief amongst the resource workers that there is a role for an individual who will liaise with all stakeholders on a national level. A discussion on the issue took place. Although there were arguments in favour, there were also concerns expressed on issues such as the actual role, extent of its remit, how the role fits into present structures and employment status. For its part, the Department advised that there was no funding available for such a role and it could not be employed by the Department.. The Department also advised that many of the tasks envisaged for this role were already being undertaken by the Department, including with the input of the Advisory Group.

Action: *It was agreed to discuss the issue at the next meeting of the Advisory Group.*

Protocols for PPNs

Action: Advisory Group members requested to submit proposals for a proposed PPN protocol setting out the basic principles for direct engagement with third parties who seek the PPN's assistance in conducting public consultations.

AOB

- Next Meeting. Tuesday 05 April 2017. Withdrawing Room, Custom House, Dublin.

Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes
Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government
2 March 2017