

National Advisory Group

Date/Time: Wednesday 9 September 2020, 14.30hrs.

Venue: Skype via 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:

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

PPN Volunteers:

- Aileen Eglinton (Dún Laoghaire Rathdown PPN; C&V representative),
- Bibiana Savin (South Dublin PPN; Social Inclusion representative),
- Terrence Mc Donough (Galway City Community Network; Environmental representative)

PPN Resource Workers:

- Helen Howes (Wicklow PPN),
- Avril Wilson (Tipperary PPN)
- Sarah Wetherald (Sligo).

CCMA Representatives:

- Rebecca Loughrey, (Cork City Council),
- Alan Farrell, (Galway County Council)

Department of Rural and Community Development:

- Ciara Bates (Chair), Deirdre Kearney, Elaine Jennings, Caoimhín Ó Tuathail, Alan Monks.

Apologies:

- None

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

1. **Adoption of Minutes.**

The minutes of 13th Meeting of the Group held on 10th 2020 were circulated prior to the meeting via email for adoption.

2. **Matters arising.**

Query raised regarding the matter of GDPR. Dept informed the group that due to workload pressures on the Unit, the draft GDPR document was not yet ready for circulation to the NAG. Dept is working with its DP/FOI Officer to prepare draft GDPR document for the next meeting. The issue will remain on the Agenda.

3. **Operation of PPN's during Covid-19**

Following a Department request to PPNs in June regarding **business continuity plans** in light of restrictions, the Department advised that most PPNs reported holding secretariat meetings and many were planning to hold plenaries. Most reported that they continue a lot of their work remotely, and some have stated that attendance at various meetings has increased since those meetings went online.

Many PPN plenaries are due to take place in Oct/Nov and the Department has drafted a letter to PPNs to assist with their planning of these meetings, encouraging them to get in touch with other PPNs with existing relevant experience (e.g. Galway City has held a plenary already, Clare uses online voting) as well as suggesting different formats for online meetings to bring variety and encourage engagement.

An update was provided on the online **Election facility on salesforce** – issues around developing a voting system on Salesforce were discussed (potential for 31 separate voting systems). A proposal to produce 2/3 voting systems that PPNs can choose from was discussed. Those in favour spoke about the facility being useful for collecting data and information whilst those against were concerned about independence of PPN's and GDPR.

By way of clarification to a question raised, the Department stated that it can access Salesforce for the national statistics on PPNs.

There was a suggestion that there would be a need to canvass permission from PPN's individually.

The Department undertook to discuss further with SDVC who manages the Salesforce PPN Database on behalf of the Department and PPNs. It was recommended that SDVC would scope out two or three online election processes with PPNs based on agreed election formats. The use of such systems would be optional for PPNs. The Chair restated that the Department is Data Controller with SDVC and that a statement to this effect will be included in the GDPR policy.

In response to the move to online operations as a result of Covid, a concern was raised about the operations of PPNs in this context. It was emphasised that PPNs need to keep their focus on their underlying objectives and not be moving into other areas outside their remit.

Review of **Community Call**: NESC draft report is currently before Government. It was agreed that PPNs, the NAG and the CCMA would be given the opportunity to input into this review.

4. Engagement with Local Authorities-

DRCD outlined that it had met with the EECC on 2nd of September giving them an update on the work of the PPN. A presentation was given also on the PPN's Communications Strategy, Handbook and Structural Review. DRCD thanked the CCMA for their input into the Handbook and acknowledged their request to input into the Communications Strategy. The general consensus was that there is a good working relationship between LAs and PPNs despite some issues of difficulty and misunderstandings being aired.

CCMA representative thanked the Department for including their feedback in the Handbook and the invitation to feed into the Communications Strategy..

The importance of training, particularly for new elected members was discussed. In response, the Department updated the group in relation to the accredited online training being developed by SJI and WIT and highlighted this important training opportunity for new and existing PPN stakeholders. The Chair also emphasised the importance of LAs and PPNs working collaboratively together for the benefit of communities and welcomed the input of the EECC into the development of the Comms Strategy.

The issue of PPNs representatives' terms of office on LCDCs was raised – specifically should cases where the representatives' originated from the former C&V fora prior to the establishment of the PPNs be included in the 6 year LCDC term of office? The CVSP section will seek clarification from the Libraries Development and Community Policy Section on their interpretation of the relevant legislation.

CCMA welcomed Chair's comments on the LA issue. In relation to the issue of meetings during Covid –19, the Chair informed the meeting that the Department has been sending out the most up to date information and guidelines available to PPNs. The group was also informed that the Pobal website hosts information on Covid-19 guidance and re-opening protocols for the community and voluntary sector.

5. Review of PPN Structure

The Department advised that, following a commitment in the Programme for Government, the approval of the Management Board and the Minister had been obtained for the engagement of an independent consultant to undertake a review of PPN structures.

The Chair invited the group to input into the TOR for the consultant, which would be circulated (to the full NAG, rather than the Structural Review subgroup, as originally proposed) following the meeting. Members urged that the proposed review would be wholly independent and not be influenced or subjective. It was also requested that the successful tenderer would have a good understanding and knowledge of the PPN's. The Chair also clarified that the Structural Review subgroup would liaise with the successful tenderer and invited the members to participate on the evaluation committee.

The Chair also requested those potentially conflicted in terms of the tender process by their membership of the group to notify to the Department.

It was agreed that due to the importance of consulting with all relevant stakeholders, that sufficient time be allowed for this purpose. The Department agreed and informed the group that the timeline for completion of the review, was Q3, 2021 at the earliest.

6. Subgroups

User Handbook

Elaine informed the meeting that the Handbook was now complete and ready for design and publication. The document is to be uploaded as a printable pdf document on the Department's website. The information contained within is targeted at various stakeholders; it is a live document with a lot of mandatory information and templates for the various users. This will be a living document which will be continuously kept under review. The Department will host a Webinar launch in late October, which SJI will participate in

Tenders for the document are currently being sought by DRCD. Elaine thanked SJI their work on the document. Harriett Emerson, Facilitator has been forwarded a pre-publication draft to assist in the facilitation process with Cork County PPN.

There was a request to look at a modern online "flickbook style" version and the Department agreed to consider. In response to a request to have the document reviewed by NALA, the Department advised that due to the volume of the document, the costs involved are prohibitive however the document had been written in a very simple plain English format which would be easily accessible to all.

Communications Strategy

The Department advised that the Draft RFT for the Communications Strategy is ready and there is to be a two pronged approach, i.e. Public Awareness/ Communications guidance/protocol. The draft RFT is to be provided to the EECC of the CCMA for any views they may have. Tenders for this campaign will be sought shortly.

It is also proposed to organise an annual Awards ceremony for PPNs: 4/5 categories of awards which will be presented by the Minister at the Conference dinner. NAG were requested to provide input as to categories and how to assess applications. Two submissions had been received so far with a suggestion being made that they be non-competitive in nature similar to the Community Radio Awards. Department reiterated its view that it was open to suggestions as to how the awards scheme should be run. Aileen agreed to follow up the Community Radio proposal with CRAOL.

Outside the direct context of the Communications Strategy, a suggestion was made that DRCD (and perhaps Minister of State O'Brien) might hold online meetings for both the RW network and the Secretariat network to update them on PPN activities, similar to the NAG updates. DRCD advised that it is open to this suggestion if RW and Secretariat networks can organise a date and agenda.

Annual Report

Department advised that report has been drafted; final version will be complete soon. Caoimhín thanked Colette and SJI for their help. Translation will be done by Europus. Carlow PPN are carrying out procurement for design and printing. No date set for launch of AR yet, which will be a soft launch.

Annual Conference

Helen confirmed that the date agreed with venue for conference is 13/14 May 2021. There was a note of caution surrounding the Hotel's cancellation policy and the possibility of having to cancel again – this is something for the subgroup to discuss at the next meeting. Alternative options eg an online conference might have to be considered.

7. Funding 2020 & Returns

Department advised that all returns received and a review of these has been carried out. As a result of the review, queries have been raised with the PPN's however replies to some of these are still awaited. The Chair informed the meeting that there were issues of serious concern arising from the review and that additional clarification had been requested from certain PPN's.

The Advisory Group were quite surprised and concerned at the issues raised and agreed that a financial control procedure was necessary and supported the measure to introduce a standard template for financial reporting and to issue a circular once approved.

8. Training Needs

DRCD thanked SJI for the training programme being developed with WIT. It will no longer have a 'blended learning' format, but will be online-only. Will commence in October with a pilot cohort from the South-East. Seán Healy gave an overview of how the modules will run. Groups will consist of 25

participants per session (5 reps from each of 5 counties). Invitations will be issued shortly and DRCD encourage all groups to participate.

9. Secretariat Network

DRCD updated the NAG on the work of the Facilitator. Final deliverables have been received from the current facilitator. Highlights from his report were very positive. DRCD met with a representative group from PPNSN who presented a number of recommendations on network (e.g. term limits and a system of alternates, key focal points for next year). They also recommended 2-yr extension of facilitation. DRCD advised that it was amenable to the suggestion, would include an option for a second year, subject to funding. Draft RFT for next facilitation has been prepared.

10. Community Wellbeing

Those PPN's who had already started are continuing with the programme, most will be complete by EOY. 8 others received a letter and are now starting or continuing the process that they had already begun. There is a misconception circulating among PPNs and stakeholders that we require the wellbeing statements to be complete by EOY 2020 – this is not the case! It was requested that a communication be circulated to PPN's to clarify this matter.

11. A.O.B

- I. Department Nominees to NAG. To be discussed at next NAG meeting as a heading of its own.
- II. A question was raised regarding struggling PPN's – DRCD informed that they were dealing with 7 live issues of varying degrees. Facilitation has worked out in those PPN's who have already engaged. Good governance and the Handbook should help.

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

Meeting Ends