

National Advisory Group

Date/Time: Monday 9th September 10:30 am

Venue: Webex via Department of Rural and Community Development

Draft Minutes

Attendees:

Pillar Representatives:

- Catherine Lane (C&V Pillar).
- Charles Stanley Smyth (Environmental Pillar)
- Seán Healy (Social Inclusion Pillar)

PPN Volunteers:

- Gerry Kerr Dublin City PPN; (Social Inclusion representative),
- Cliona Kelliher (Kildare PPN; Environmental representative)
- Lynda O'Shea (Waterford PPN; C&V representative)

PPN Resource Workers:

- Sarah Wetherald (Sligo PPN).
- Kieran Walsh (South Dublin PPN)

CCMA Representatives:

- Brendan Jennings Cavan County Council
- John Quinlivan (Fingal County Council)

Department of Rural and Community Development:

- Ciara Bates (Chair), Aoife O'Brien, Elaine Jennings, Gillian Moore, Alan Monks.

Apologies:

- Helen Howes (Wicklow PPN)

The Chair opened the meeting which was conducted on-line via Web-ex.

Minutes

1. Opening Remarks by Chair

Ciara welcomed everyone to the meeting. A special welcome was addressed to Gerry Kerr Dublin City PPN who is the new Social Inclusion representative on the NAG, and to John Quinlivan Director of Services in Fingal County Council our new CCMA representative.

2. Adoption of Minutes of 21st Meeting of Group on 20th June 2022

No objections or additions to the minutes.

3. Matters Arising

An update was requested on Meath PPN. DRCD reported that Meath PPN has a new Resource Worker and that Secretariat elections will take place in the near future.

4. PPN National Conference- Update from Dan Bergin Laois PPN

Dan Bergin from Laois PPN joined the meeting to give an overview of plans for the National PPN Conference 21-22 October 2022 in Co Laois.

Dan gave details on the following-

- **The Venue**-The Midlands Park Hotel
- **Accommodation**- The Midlands Park Hotel and two overflow hotels Killeshin Hotel and Maldron Hotel.
- **Transportation**- The venue is accessible by car, the train station is a 2 minute walk from the hotel. Transportation has been organised with local links in Co. Laois between the conference venue and overflow hotels, and for the excursions.
- **Excursions**- A choice of excursions has been organised, to Mountmellick Embroidery and Heritage Museum, Yarn Bombing Mountmellick, Mountrath and Camross, Abbeyleix Bog Project, Portlaois Tidy Towns (walking tour)

Portlaois. Excursions will be a 10-15 minute drive away. Two walking tours provided for those who do not wish to travel.

- **Presentations and Workshops-**

Friday's presentations will be on

- Success of PPNs- Supporting Communities- Community Response Forum by Laois PPN and one other PPN (tbc) will present.
- Represent App by Nina Horan
- Mazars Report - a workshop will be run by DRCD.

Saturday's presentations will include "Positives on PPNs"- Charles Stanley Smith and "Dublin City Beta" presented by Shane Waring of DCC

- **Photographers-** Photographers will be present at excursions and at the Gala dinner.
- **Technical Support-** Issues were experienced in previous years in regards to technical support. A company has been sourced to provide technical support to keep the conference running smoothly.
- **Entertainment-** DJ after dinner and an area reserved for a sing song.
- **Registration-** Eight places have been allocated at the conference to each PPN. The registration form will be circulated in the coming weeks with a view to registrations being finalised by the end of September. PPNs are asked to return their registrations promptly.

The team in Laois PPN was thanked for all their work on the conference.

Concerns were raised that there was no policy or participatory elements to workshops/presentations. Elaine clarified that DRCD will hold a workshop on the Structural Review and Implementation Roadmap which will involve discussion and feedback from participants. Charles offered to incorporate an element of participation to his presentation too.

Sean asked if there could be workshops on policy, and Gerry requested more debate to be involved, or an opportunity for motions to be passed perhaps in place of excursions. These points will be taken on board for next year's conference in Wicklow.

Catherine asked about the possibility of live-streaming or recording the conference. Dan explained that this had been investigated, however is not a financially viable option as the cost of technical support etc is prohibitive. Recording the conference would raise GDPR issues and would not be manageable from a logistics point of view. Dan explained there will be a report issued after the conference which will include material on all sessions.

It was agreed that the agenda would be amended slightly to move the discussion on the PPN Structural Review call for input/ implementation roadmap to the end of the meeting.

5. Additional Supports- Adare HRM

Gillian gave an update on the additional supports project. An introductory webinar was held on 31st August by Lynn Simpson and Hugh O'Reilly of The Wheel and Sarah Fagan of Adare HR. It was attended by 21 PPN stakeholders. Lynn presented information on the needs assessment survey carried out by the Wheel, and Sarah spoke about the HR supports that will be put in place as part of the project, including a HR Helpdesk for PPNs. A session on how PPNs can access this helpline will be run shortly. Lynn offered her email address and encouraged anyone with an issue or query to contact her directly. She also asked that any PPN that had not yet completed the needs assessment survey do so as soon as they can.

A discussion was held on the webinar and it was agreed that it had been disappointing and did not have enough detail or information. Charles expressed his dissatisfaction with the needs assessment as you could only choose one option out of six, even if all options would be of benefit, so the assessment will not be an accurate reflection of the need. He also requested more engagement between the Wheel and PPNs to explain what they will be doing. Ciara said that Charles' points will be taken on board; the contractors have also been asked to work directly with each PPN and have assigned a specific number of hours to do so under the contract. DRCD has also been engaging with the contractors to request that a plain English HR manual be produced for PPNs with advice on topics of relevance such as maternity leave, sick leave, etc. A sub-group has been set up on the Additional Supports project; when The Wheel have submitted their project plan a meeting will be held with that group to discuss the project in detail.

6. Subgroups

(i) PPN Handbook-

The handbook procedure is still under review. The sub-group involved needs to be expanded and PPN representatives will be invited to take part.

A list of suggested changes has been collated based on queries and issues brought to DRCD's attention following the publication of the Handbook. When changes are agreed by the sub-group, the rationale behind these changes can be explained.

(ii) Annual Report-

The final draft of the annual report 2021 is complete. DRCD sent a request for tender (RFT) for the print and design of the report to 5 printers, with a closing date of Monday 12th September. The report was sent for Irish translation at the end of August, this process takes 5-6 weeks to complete. Once RFT applications have been received DRCD will review and award the tender.

(iii) Communications Campaign

Elaine provided an update on the recent webinar presented by Alice PR and Language. This webinar focused on PPN Branding and gave information on new logo options.

- **Option 1 Current Logo A**

All PPNs keep their current logo with no changes. This option was not recommended by Language as it will not support messaging at a national level. Language explained this would result in the image of PPNs as an adhoc patchwork of initiatives across the country.

- **Option 2 Current Logo B**

All PPNs will retain their current logos with a shared typeface and naming system. This would create a consistent look nationally, but still allow for individuality between networks while communicating that this is a national, co-ordinated initiative. Examples of this new look were shown during the webinar and to the NAG.

- **Option 3 New Logo A**

All PPNs would adopt a new shared logo design; this option is a circular rope motif developed for the purpose. Local PPNs will each have their own version of the logo, based on county colours (examples shown to the NAG). The networks together will be represented by a multi-coloured national version. This was the recommended option by Language as it creates a strong visual connection between individual PPNs and builds a national identity.

- **Option 4 New Logo B**

All PPNs would adopt a new shared logo design; this option is an intersecting disk design. Again, local PPNs would each have their own version, based on county colours (some examples shown to the NAG). The networks together will be represented by a multi-coloured national version. As for Option 3, this option was recommended as it would

create a strong visual connection between individual PPNs while building a national identity.

Each PPN has now been asked to vote for their preferred option and the closing date for votes is 9th September.

A discussion was held on the logo options and it emerged that there may have been some confusion among PPNs on what they were voting for. It was felt that PPNs did not understand that if they chose option 1 or 2 that there would still be a national logo. In addition, the voting options given meant that any PPN voting for 1 or 2 did not get a chance to vote on the national logo. It was agreed that PPNs were not given clear instructions when voting and PPNs were not given a fair chance to vote for their preferred national logo. Ciara stated this is a misunderstanding that will be addressed with Alice PR.

Elaine provided information on the next element of the Communications Campaign, which will focus on slogans/tag lines. Alice PR will develop local campaign material for PPNs and training and guidance will be made available.

7. Ploughing Championships

Alan gave an update on the National Ploughing Championships. All PPNs were invited to attend. Eight PPNs responded and a rota for attendance is being drawn up. Laois PPN will attend all the 3 days as they are the host county. This year in the marquee there will be round tables with chairs to sit and discuss issues with the public. PPNs attending were asked to submit videos/photos that could be displayed in the marquee. Ciara noted the Ploughing was a great opportunity for PPNs to showcase their work to a huge audience.

8. Review of the role of the National Advisory Group

A full review of the National Advisory Group was recommended in Mazars report on the Structural Review. The review would involve re-examining the Terms of Reference of the NAG, along with the current role the group is playing.

It was suggested that an outside facilitator might be best placed carry out the review. Ciara asked if anyone had names of suitable candidates, to please let DRCD know. A draft TOR and project plan will be drawn up by DRCD and circulated to NAG members for input. A standalone session/separate meeting will need to be held to discuss issues with an outside facilitator. Sean stressed that this facilitator must have sympathy towards PPN process and understand what they are trying to do.

9. Requests for additional funding for PPNs

The Department received numerous requests for additional funding from PPNs, which were discussed by the group. Issues raised in submissions included

- the assertion that core funding for operational costs has not increased since 2014 (excluding the salary for the Support Workers) and the difficulty of expecting service provision to remain at 2014 levels considering the current climate. Also in the submissions
- the practice in departmental budgetary allocations of including approximately 3% per annum 'standing still' money to account for demographic and wage changes.
- the need for budgets to be planned on a 3 year cycle as opposed to the current annual returns method.

Addressing these areas, Ciara emphasised the Department's support for additional funding for PPNs, particularly in the current economic circumstances. DRCD have put forward the case for an increase in funding on PPNs behalf, stressing the cost of living crisis and the effects it has on PPNs especially around staff salaries (and retention of staff), rent, and facilities. DRCD must now wait to find out what their budget allocation will be for 2023. This information is released formally in December but DRCD will inform PPNs informally before this time if they have the information.

It is important to note, however, that DRCD operates on an annual budget, so a 3 year cycle would not be possible. Also, the 3% per annum increase is not correct information.

NAG members thanked the Department for their understanding and support. A discussion was held on funding, which included the need to increase staff wages, the need for an additional support worker in each PPN and the contractual terms and conditions of some members of staff. Ciara explained that should additional funding be secured for PPNs, each PPN will have scope to examine the salaries of their staff members. Some of the issues arising around staff terms and conditions may be examined with the contractors as part of the Additional Services project, but it is important to note that DRCD cannot mandate staff terms and conditions as we are not the employer. DRCD can only provide guidance/give advice and provide the additional funding.

Lynda raised some concerns about paying staff and asked about setting up a single support company to administer pay and conditions; Charles undertook to share a paper he previously prepared on setting up such a body, setting out the pros and cons on same.

10.AOB

Review of financial controls document

Kieran asked whether a review of the Financial Controls document has been carried out. DRCD is reviewing the document on foot of the audit carried out earlier this year. A number of minor issues were identified which will be included but in general everything seems to be working well. A Circular will be issued in relation to Tranche 2 funding and then the Financial Controls document will also be updated. DRCD will welcome any suggestions NAG members may have on the document, especially around clarity, etc.

Research on Barriers to Participation in PPNs

Catherine asked if there was any update on the research on barriers to participation in PPNs, and expressed an interest in being a member of the research oversight group. Work is still ongoing on drafting terms of reference for the research, but will be circulated to the NAG when ready. Terms of reference will also be drafted for the research oversight group. Catherine mentioned the work of IHREC Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, a public body working with wider government to prevent discrimination as a possible resource for this project. Sarah mentioned a report by Pobal on how to involve groups in the LECP policy planning process, which contained no mention of PPNs. Ciara spoke about the need for DRCD as a Department to be aware of crossover, to ensure that PPNs are included in all areas which they have input on.

11.PPN Structural Review- call for input/ implementation roadmap (Moved by Chair to last item)

Ahead of this item, a discussion was held on potential conflicts of interest arising. As some NAG members may be interested in submitting a tender to carry out the consultation element of the Implementation Roadmap, it was agreed that anyone in that position would state their conflict and would leave the meeting when that element was to be discussed. Sean stated that he had a conflict of interest in this regard, and agreed to leave ahead of that discussion.

An update on the Structural Review of PPNs and where it stands at present was given. Mazars report on the Structural Review was published in June and a call for input was issued to PPN stakeholders on foot of the report, with a closing date of end August. Ciara emphasised to the NAG that Mazars recommendations are merely a starting point for the discussion and are not

binding. DRCD will analyse all call for input submissions this month to identify common themes and a webinar will be held in October, at which it is planned Mazars will present on their report and recommendations and DRCD will present an overview on the findings from the call for input. Stakeholders will then be invited to take part in a discussion on both.

A Working Group has now been established to oversee the development and implementation of the Roadmap of future actions. The Group's first meeting took place last Tuesday (6th Sept); 14 members attended and there was a great level of engagement and energy at the meeting. DRCD have circulated a draft terms of reference to the Group for their feedback, as well as a draft approach to the project, which we have asked them to consider and provide input on by the end of the month, at which point the date for the next meeting will be set. Catherine asked for a list of members of the Working Group and the list of member groups was provided; they come from a range of PPN stakeholder groups: the Resource Worker and Secretariat Networks, the 3 Pillars, the CCMA, Dept of Health, Dept of Housing Local Government & Heritage, Dept of Children Equality Disability Integration & Youth, Comhairle na nOg, and PPN representatives elected to Local Authority boards/committees.

A discussion on Mazars report took place. NAG members felt the report was too negative, and concentrates only on the bad parts of PPNs without focusing on all the good things PPNs are doing. It is also very corporate, and is not written in plain English so it is unclear.

A discussion also took place on the legal standing of PPNs. DRCD undertook to provide a paper to the NAG setting out the various hosting options and detailing the risks/challenges of each.

It was agreed that it is important not to lose sight of the destination of the Roadmap – the objectives set out for PPNs when they were established in 2014. The purpose of the structural review is to see if the structures in place are delivering, identify any issues being experienced, and strengthen relationships so PPNs can achieve what they were set up to do. The roadmap will be the process by which any improvements/changes needed can be made so that the original objectives for PPNs can be achieved. All recommendations are open for discussions.

Sean Healy left the meeting at this point.

Ciara then set out the 3 options for the roadmap discussed with the Working Group at their last meeting:

- Option 1- DRCD carries out whole process, final draft roadmap ready for submission to the Minister for his final decision by early 2023
- Option 2- External contractor carries out whole process, final draft roadmap ready by mid-2023
- Option 3- DRCD to develop draft roadmap, after this an external contractor will present the draft to stakeholders for their feedback, develop a further draft taking the feedback into consideration, with final draft roadmap ready by early 2023.

The NAG stressed the need to push on with action. This process has been running for nearly 2 years. People will start to lose interest and get the impression that this project is not a top priority.

12. Next Meeting: Nov/Dec 2022 *via Webex (To be agreed, DRCD sent out doodle poll)*