

PPN National Advisory Group

Date/Time: 11.00hrs Wednesday 7th November 2018

Venue: 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:

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

PPN Volunteers:

- Aileen Eglington (Dún Laoghaire Rathdown PPN; C&V representative),

PPN Resource Workers:

- Helen Howes (Wicklow PPN),

Department of Rural and Community Development:

- Officials – Deirdre Kearney (Chair), Ciara Bates, Niall Hayden, Ellie Corcoran.

Apologies:

- David Collins (Galway County PPN; Social Inclusion representative),
- Annette Barr Jordan (Westmeath PPN),
- Jamie Moore (Fingal PPN).
- Dymphna Farrell, (Dublin City Council),
- Donal Brennan, (Director of Services, Laois County Council)

Deirdre Kearney, in the Chair, welcomed all to the meeting and advised that Ciara Bates would be late due to her required attendance at another event. Apologies were conveyed for those who could not attend including Donal Brennan (Director of Services, Laois County Council), who, due to work changes, has had to step down from his position on the Group.

The Agenda as set for the meeting was agreed. The minutes from the previous meeting were also agreed.

1. Assessment of 2018 National Conference and preparation for 2019 Conference.

The Chair, on behalf of the Group and the Department, thanked the Conference sub-group for what had been a very successful event. Being the second year to hold a National Conference, it was acknowledged that the 2018 event had built on the experience of the previous year's inaugural conference. Looking ahead to the 2019 conference, the Chair invited the group members to comment on their experiences. These included:

- Lack of sufficient time allocated for workshops was the principal issue commented on. While it was acknowledged that the subjects down for discussion were well suited to the work and development of PPNs, the overall feeling was that more time should have been allowed for workshops as there was insufficient opportunity to fully discuss matters.
- Briefing for one or two facilitators may have been somewhat prescriptive, but it was acknowledged that time constraints might have contributed to this.
- Timing of the Conference was briefly discussed. One view was that in future the national conference could be held the week before social inclusion week, and would allow for the possibility of conference launching SI week.
- It was recommended that it be ascertained in advance whether any other related events were scheduled for the time intended for the national conference, as better alignment of related events, could maximise impact of the PPN conference. Additionally, it was recommended that the timing of the conference should not clash with national events, such as the budget, as this could take away from impact of the PPN conference.
- Media coverage of the conference was very sparse and it appeared that there was very little on social media about this year's conference.
- Choice of Venue – Sheraton Hotel Athlone and the service provided received all- round approval.
- Field Trips were very good, well received and a positive experience which should be a feature in future events.

ACTION: The Group agreed that the work preparing for the 2019 Conference would commence its work in early January.

2. Recommendations from 2017 Annual Report:

Review of and Updating of User Guide,

The status of the existing PPN User Guide was discussed with the point being made that currently it is being read by some to be a document that **advises** and by others as a document that **directs**. The problem seems to stem from the interpretation of the word 'Guide' in this instance. The Chair advised that the Guide is made up of a

series of guidelines and official circulars issued at different stages by the Department. In that regard it was both advised and directed.

ACTION: It was agreed that following the review of the existing document, it would be renamed as a User Handbook to be followed by all PPNs and a circular to this effect would issue from the Department to all PPNs and Las.

The subgroup of the Advisory Group, which will commence its work early in 2019, will include a representative from a secretariat to ensure maximum inclusion. The feedback from the workshop at Conference will be the first step in a consultation process with all stakeholders.

It was suggested that training might need to be provided for stakeholders on the new handbook, in view of local elections in 2019, changes of personnel within local authorities and PPNs including the arrival of Support Workers.

The Chair advised the Group that the LCDC review will be finalised shortly and that the opportunity would be taken to co-ordinate training for PPN reps with LCDC training, with, in the case of LCDC training, a focus on volunteers rather than Chief Officers. It was also recommended that if training time is to be shared, care must be taken to ensure that PPN matters are not merely subsumed into LCDC training.

3. Funding (Additional Resources 2019),

The Chair advised the meeting that funding for the employment of Support Workers in 2019 had been confirmed. While funding had been secured, the meeting was advised that it was in respect of 2019 only, with no commitment on the Department's behalf for a continuation beyond a 12 month contract in each case. The Department would of course strive to obtain agreement to funding beyond what is currently approved but that would be part of the work required to be done in 2019 as part of the estimates process.

There was general agreement that irrespective of the status or hosting arrangements in play, recruitment of the Support Worker had to be flexible and should be a matter for each PPN. As Local Authorities were expected to contribute towards the cost of employment, there should be no objection to their involvement in the selection process.

In the matter of Hosting Charges, the Group believed that as these are being currently paid in respect of the Resource Worker/PPN, it would be reasonable to believe that there would not be a significant increase. The Chair reminded the Group any costs associated with the employment of a Support Worker would have to be met from the amount being allocated.

4. Communications Campaign

ACTION: It was agreed that the Department would seek tenders to develop a communications campaign for PPNs. It was further agreed that that a clear criteria of requirements be determined by the sub group in consultation with the Advisory Group before any tendering process would be undertaken. It was also suggested that POBAL could be approached for advice as they have most likely addressed these matters previously. A rough template for the tender specification could be circulated to the Group to ascertain what might be required in any plan.

The sub group charged with the task of developing a Communication Campaign could, it was agreed, add members to it from outside the Advisory Group. It was suggested and agreed that with so much work to be undertaken by the various sub-groups, that their membership could be enhanced by the inclusion of other qualified stakeholders outside of the National Advisory Group.

5. 2018 Annual Report

The meeting reaffirmed the nominations for the sub-group that would be charged with producing the 2018 Annual Report. That group comprised Seán Healy, Jamie Moore Helen Howes and a representative from the Department.

Seán Healy commented that there has been a very positive response in relation to the 2017 Annual report. He advised that in preparation of the 2018 report that SJI had developed an automated survey monkey version of the return and that it was almost ready. The sub group is to meet early in January, review the automated version, discuss and decide the questionnaire etc. for 2018. It was recommended that greater use be made of case studies to deepen the impact and engagement of the Annual Report.

The Department confirmed that it intends to engage with CCMA in the New Year advancing the case of PPNs and their relevance in all areas of the LAs operation.

6. Insurance/Indemnification update.

The Advisory Group was informed that some Local Authorities are insisting, as a precondition to the payment of travel and subsistence, that PPN representatives have taken steps to indemnify the particular Local Authority. The group agreed that this insistence by those authorities seemed unnecessarily onerous on PPNs. The Department agreed that in those cases which had been specifically referred to them they would communicate with the local authorities' concerned seeking clarification of the position.

The question it seemed to the group revolves around whether the LAs concerned considered the use of an individual's car as for PPN business or LA business. Whatever the case the Department would attempt to resolve the issue in discussion with the authorities concerned.

7. Discussion of DRCD document on:

Review of PPN Structure,

A number of issues under this heading were down for discussion namely, status, hosting, resource worker and political affiliation. A discussion paper for consideration by the Advisory Group had been circulated for consideration.

Status

On foot of the recommendations of the Auditors report on the structure of the Limerick PPN, there was a discussion regarding those PPNs currently established as Companies Limited by Guarantee.

A number of members suggested that the whole ethos of the flat structure, a crucial component in the operation of PPNs, was completely at odds with make-up of companies which by their very nature require a hierarchy of boards of Directors, Chairs, and Secretaries etc.

Members also suggested that companies of this nature place unnecessary burdens on the directors and have many, often unforeseen implications, least of all employment and financial implications.

It was acknowledged that some companies were operating quite well and the question would be, why in the circumstances, dissolve them. The flat structure and financial implications were considered as factors militating against the continuation of company status.

Resource Workers,

It was generally agreed that it should be left up to each PPN to decide how the Resource Worker is hosted, with the proviso of the need to involve the local authority as an equal stakeholder in the process of recruitment. The Group agreed to the participation of the LA and the PPN in future recruitment of resource workers as opposed to appointments being made solely by the LA.

From the Department's perspective the group was advised that it is imperative that no contract of employment offered to any PPN worker should pose any risk to DRCD. This absence of risk applied across the board irrespective of the PPN's structure.

It was suggested that Resource Workers should liaise with Directors of Service in Local Authorities to ensure uniformity in the operation and support of PPNs as some Local Authorities are more accepting of and helpful to PPNs. Guidance on this issue along with existing hosting arrangements which it was suggested need to be reviewed might be dealt with in any review of the PPN User Guide (Handbook).

Political Affiliation

The meeting concurred with the view expressed in the discussion paper that any representative of the PPN should not while representing the PPN, demonstrate any political affiliation.

Report from Environmental Pillar.

As this matter was reached after Michael Ewing had left the meeting, it was agreed to defer it until the next meeting.

Community Wellbeing – Proposal.

The group was advised about the roll-out of the Community Wellbeing Toolkit, developed by the Environmental Pillar and SJI, to remaining PPNs (who were not involved in the pilot process and have not, alternatively, developed their own Wellbeing Statement).

8. Representative Charter & Code of Conduct

It was agreed that all PPNs should have a Representative Charter and a Code of Conduct in place. Most PPNs already have Representative Charters and some, though not all, have a Code of Conduct. The Meeting accepted a proposal that a sub group be established and set the task of producing a template of a Code of Conduct which, as soon as practical would be presented to the Advisory Group for consideration.

The agreed template would, in due course, be part of the new User's Handbook

AOB.

There was no other business for discussion.

Date for next meeting

Wednesday 13 February 2019 @ 11.00 am, Trinity Point.