

**2nd Meeting of the PPN National Advisory Group held in the East Room,  
Custom House, Dublin on 14 October 2016.**

**Attendance:**

**Stakeholder Group: PPN Volunteers:**

- Siobhan O Dowd ( Cork City PPN – S.I. rep)
- Tess Murphy (Longford PPN – S.I. rep)
- Charles Stanley-Smith (Tipperary PPN, Env rep)

**Stakeholder Group: Pillar Representatives:**

- Michael Ewing (Environmental Pillar)
- Sean Healy (Community & Voluntary Pillar)

**Stakeholder Group: PPN Resource Workers:**

- Annette Barr-Jordan (Westmeath PPN)
- Helen Howes (Wicklow PPN)

**Stakeholder Group: Local Authorities:**

- Bernie Doherty, (Dublin City, SEO Community Services)

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

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

**Apologies:**

- Geraldine Timlin (Resource Worker - Sligo PPN)
- Martin Lydon (CCMA)

### **Opening and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed all participants, reminding them that the Advisory Group's mandate would be to focus on national issues and challenges faced by PPNs. The meeting would be as decision orientated as possible, so that its outcome would be a series of agreed actions.

### **User Guide**

The meeting was advised of feedback from stakeholders on the User Guide. Themes in the feedback could be summarised as follows:-

- Eligibility of Groups - Inclusiveness of and eligibility for the PPN is a key consideration for the success of the PPN process. Some community groups that do not have formal structures in place because of their size appear to be excluded from the process. The Advisory Group advised that the intention was never to exclude legitimate community groups and the solution may lie in a validation process which would allow for flexibility to reflect local circumstances.

Action: Department to propose amended User Guide text to reflect the discussion.

- Representative Seats - An issue was identified concerning the filling of seats on some Committees. 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. For their part the Environmental Pillar representatives suggested that where this issue arises, they be contacted for suggestions on an appropriate representative.

Actions:

- The Environmental Pillar to consider this issue, including its own criteria for membership, at its next plenary session and revert to the Advisory Group meeting to be scheduled for January, 2017.

- *Advisory Group to consider alternative definitions for “community and voluntary” and “social inclusion”, with specific consideration given to text used by Cork PPN.*
  - *User Guide to be reworded in an effort to resolve this difficulty pertaining to the occupancy by individuals on a number of representative seats on the various Local Authority committees.*
- *Political Cooling off period.* To protect the integrity of the PPN as the primary means through which local communities engage with Local Government, the Advisory Group agreed following discussion that a cooling off period of 12 months for membership of the PPN should apply to both successful and unsuccessful candidates to political office, the period to commence from completion of a term of office or date of election if unsuccessful.  
*Action:* *The User Guide to be amended accordingly.*
  - *Monitoring deadlines.* It was agreed that the various compliance deadlines set out in the User Guide would be extended to the end of the year (2016).  
*Action:* *Department to write to all PPNs/local authorities requesting a report on these compliance issues at end December, including a timed action plan from all PPNs/LAs.*
  - *Resource Workers role & responsibilities.* This issue arose at the first meeting of the Advisory Group. The Group agreed that, as the Recourse Worker takes direction from the Secretariat, in turn it follows that the worker reports to the Secretariat.  
*Action:* *User Guide to be updated to clarify this reporting structure.*
  - *Role of the Local Authority.* *The Chair* emphasised the role for local authorities in the areas of corporate governance and oversight and control of spending. Funding is channelled through local authorities who are themselves bound by a strict governance code. In the matter of funding of PPN’s generally, the Advisory Group was advised that the original intention of the Department was that local authorities would fund the PPN’s in the first instance, with the

Department recouping the local authority at the end of the year. However, a number of issues have arisen with this approach in recent months.

Action: The Department to review means of funding PPNs in 2017.

## 2. Advisory Group

- Transparency – nomination and appointments. 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.

To this end it was agreed that the various stakeholders – PPN Resource Workers, Environmental, Community & Social Pillars, PPN Participant Volunteers and Local Authorities - would be invited to nominate, following their own election/nomination processes, their respective candidates who will make up the Advisory Group. It was proposed that a new Advisory Group should be in place by June/July of 2017 which will make a full 12 month term of the current Advisory Group. The Group acknowledged the absence of an umbrella body covering the grass roots volunteers associated with every PPN and the difficulty in devising a fully representative election/nomination process for the three PPN Volunteer members. It was agreed that the best approach might simply involve asking each PPN to nominate a representative and then picking names from a hat. It was also agreed that strong representation would be necessary from local authorities. In addition, it was suggested that the newly constituted Advisory Group should exist for a period of three years but that, in initial years, individual membership might be staggered to ensure both knowledge continuity and expertise.

Action: Department to prepare a draft working paper on a nomination/election process for membership of the PPN Advisory Group for consideration at the Advisory Group's January meeting.

- 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.

### **3. Financial issues**

- Resource Workers expenses. It was acknowledged that the PPN User Guide is quite clear that, when a PPN Representative attends a Board or Committee meeting (including a local authority Board or Committee), the expenses should be recouped by that Board/Committee. There are, however, different approaches being taken on the ground.

Action: *The Department recognises the difficulties involved for both PPNs and local authorities, and undertook to consider how best to address the matter in a manner that is acceptable for all.*

- Cork Co. PPN. The Advisory Group was apprised of the particular set of circumstances faced by the PPN in Cork County and resultant financial implications involved. Cork County Council for its part recognises the difficulties posed for the PPN and, together with the Department, agrees to increase its annual contribution to support the PPN.

Action: *Funding for Cork Co. PPN to be increased from 2017 (from existing budgetary provisions).*

### **4. Communications/co-ordination**

- Advisory Group / PPN's/ Advisory Group. To ensure effective communication with the stakeholder groups, the Advisory Group agreed that this would be best achieved if the different representatives on the Group communicated directly with their own stakeholder groups. Normal communications between the Department, PPN's and local authorities would continue as normal.

Action: *Minutes of the Advisory Group would continue be made available to PPN's/LA's and in due course be placed on the Department's website, which will also be upgraded insofar as PPNs are concerned.*

- National PPN coordinator. 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 merits or otherwise of the proposal 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 no future provision.

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

## **5. Charities Regulator.**

- Following on from the last meeting of the Advisory Group at which this issue was discussed the advice received by the Department is that all groups must be registered with the Charities Regulator.

## **6. Capacity Building/Training.**

- To enhance and further support PPN's and their structures, the Advisory Group acknowledged that training was essential if the project was to work. Capacity building and training was required at all levels, both at PPN level and for Local Authorities and their 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 such a programme.

Action: *The Advisory Group to discuss this issue at its next meeting.*

## **AOB**

- Annual Reports from PPN's. A methodology or tool for evaluation is required to establish how PPN's are operating.  
*Action: This matter is to be discussed at the January meeting.*
- Next Meeting. January 2017. Date, time and location to be agreed.

Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes

Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government

November, 2016