

**1st Meeting of the Second PPN National Advisory Group,
25 Clare Street, Dublin on 11th October 2017.**

Attendance:

Stakeholder Group: PPN Volunteers:

- Aileen Eglington (Dun Laoghaire Rathdown PPN; C&V representative)
- David Collins (Galway County PPN; Social Inclusion representative)
- Sadhbh O'Neill (Kilkenny PPN; Environment representative)

Stakeholder Group: Pillar Representatives:

- Michael Ewing (Environmental Pillar)
- Catherine Lane (C&V pillar)

Stakeholder Group: PPN Resource Workers:

- Helen Howes (Wicklow PPN)
- Annette Barr Jordan (Westmeath PPN)
- Jamie Moore (Fingal PPN)

Stakeholder Group: Local Authorities:

- Donal Brennan, (Laois County Council, Director of Services)

Stakeholder Group: Department of Rural and Community Development:

- Officials - Jason Kearney (Chair), Deirdre Kearney, Ellie Corcoran

Apologies:

- Bernie Doherty, (Dublin City Council,)
- Seán Healy (Social Inclusion Pillar)

Opening and Introductions

Jason Kearney welcomed the new group on behalf of Minister for Rural and Community Development, Michael Ring, T.D., and Minister of State Seán Kyne. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

As all the 31 PPNs are operational, it was agreed that the future emphasis should now move on how best to progress PPNs. There was a general update on various items including the 2016 Annual Reports - while it had been intended to launch this report at the Sligo PPN conference, due to timing concerns it was not possible to meet this timeline but it was agreed to do so subsequent to the Sligo event.

Action Point: 2016 Annual Report to be launched in late October/November

Communications and co-ordination

There was a general discussion regarding the desirability of a communications campaign to raise awareness of PPNs eg local or community radio. The desirability of a common logo and branding was also raised, but with the caveat that a national branding campaign must not supersede local identities. It was also suggested that a PPN promotion campaign would be most successful at local level, perhaps following a broader national campaign.

It appears that some disparity exists regarding the requirement in some Local Authorities for groups to join PPNs in order to access grant funding. Whereas uniformity of organisational procedure is necessary, so too is the need for individual PPN autonomy, and it was agreed that any condition to join a PPN must not be unnecessarily onerous. Some Local Authorities are using the obligation to join PPN as a means of encouragement and awareness raising in relation to PPNs. Community groups are diverse and often numerous and do not always know about PPNs therefore joining to avail of funding may be mutually beneficial

It was related that one Local Authority compelled the Local Chambers group to join the PPN, which would be contrary to the PPN being a platform for community groups as commercial entities have a separate line of communication with Local Authorities.

A query was introduced relating to an increase in 2018 funding but as budget lines are limited, the Department advised that this is unlikely. One group member remarked that the lack of additional funding disallows further development; as a result PPNs may need to review outputs/deliverable in light of scant resources.

A request to meet the Minister was made which the Department agreed to progress.

Action Point: The Department to organise a meeting with Minister Kyne

Salesforce

There was a general discussion regarding the fact that a small number of PPNs have not to date engaged with the Salesforce database. One such PPN has raised specific concerns regarding data protection. The Department reiterated its requirement for all PPNs to use this system, as it has immense functionality alleviating excessive workload thereby releasing workers for other tasks.

Action Point: Tricia Nolan (SDVC) to be invited to address new Advisory Group on Salesforce at December meeting. A representative from the Data Protection Commission also to be invited to address December meeting. Department to consider additional Salesforce training in 2018.

National PPN conference and seminar

There was a general discussion about the forthcoming PPN Conference in Sligo which Minister of State Seán Kyne will address... The Advisory Group expressed its appreciation to Sligo PPN for organising the event.

It was agreed that future events should be organised by the Advisory Group, with the possibility for sector specific events.

Audit

The Department advised that 9 PPNs were selected for audit and were requested to provide expenditure details for 2016 with 4 replies received so far.

The possibility of alternative models of PPN funding was raised. One member recounted that in July there were 11 calls for public consultation but the cost of responding to each was prohibitive.

The desirability of demonstrating value for money by PPNs was highlighted.

Action Point: Review of PPN funding mechanism to be placed on Agenda for next meeting.

Environmental Pillar

Michael Ewing reiterated the ongoing work facilitated by the Department's fiscal support to increase EP membership on PPNs... He advised that the EP had engaged a full-time member of staff for 6 months to encourage environmental groups to join the PPNs.

A question was proposed as to whether this was the most beneficial approach as low Environmental Pillar membership could also be due to the Environmental Pillar's criteria for membership.

Capacity Building & Training

There was general support for increased capacity building and training across PPN structures, including Resource Workers, PPN reps, local authority members and staff. An induction pack for new PPN members was recommended. Some members favoured the provision of training on specific policy areas while others recommended more generic capacity building in terms of speeches, media training etc. Some members felt that the Department should organise training as this should not be from the individual PPN budget. Deliberative processes and discussion type sessions may be preferable to some rather than information dissemination.

A specific recommendation was that training courses be run for new Councillors following the 2019 local elections. The Department undertook to engage with Local Government Division in D/HPLG on this matter.

Other issues discussed included formalising capacity building for volunteers and reps with SICAP.

The Department agreed to follow up potential linkages with LCDC training.

Action Point: Department is to engage with D/HPLG in relation to training on local government structures.

Department is to consider linkages re LCDC training.

Monitoring & Evaluation

There was a general discussion in relation to the 2016 Annual Reports and disappointment was expressed that returns were not received from all PPNs. Due to timing issues, it was not possible to launch the report at the Sligo PPN Conference but it would be launched shortly afterwards

It was agreed that preparations in relation to the 2017 annual report must be commenced early and that the process would be informed by the outcome of the 2016 process.

Action Point: 2017 Annual Report to be placed on Agenda for next meeting.

Benefacts

Prior to any invitation to Benefacts to attend National Advisory Group, background information on Benefacts should be circulated to members.

Action Point: Information on Benefacts to be circulated to AG. Representative from Benefacts to be invited to next AG meeting.

Wellbeing

Environment Pillar representative outlined the status of this project including proposal to invite four PPNs to develop and pilot a toolkit for wellbeing with support from the Environment Pillar and Social Justice Ireland. Funding for the project of €44,000 has been provided by the EPA. PPNs will be invited to become involved following the national PPN Conference in Sligo.

Disquiet was expressed that any communication directly to PPNs about this project would imply Advisory Group consensus which has not been reached.

Action Point: Debriefing and discussion at next AG meeting.

AOB

- It was acknowledged that insurance remains an issue for some PPNs – Department to examine potential with LCDC insurance
- Ambiguity persists regarding the requirement for PPNs to register under Charities legislation. It was agreed that a representative from the Charities Regulator's Office would be invited to address the new Advisory Group.

Date for next meeting; 11.00hrs, Tuesday 5th December 2017, 25 Clare Street.