

Cork County PPN, Secretariat meeting ADOPTED

Tuesday 13th April 2021, by Zoom

Present: Brid Coakley, Tommy Collins, Colum Cronin, Pat Dooley, Michael Doyle, Peter Dineen, Gavin Falk, Anne Finch, John Fuller, Jude Gilbert, Carol Harpur, Tom Howard, Sean Kelly, Liam McCarthy, José Ospina.

Apologies: Pauline O'Dwyer

Facilitation: Harriet Emerson

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1. Welcome & Agenda: All members were welcomed to the meeting, reminded of the agreed ground rules for conduct during the meeting, and also to raise their hands or say their name to indicate that when they wished to contribute to discussions. The draft agenda was adopted.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising: The Draft Minutes (circulated) of the previous meeting held on 23rd March 2021 were adopted. The following matter arising was discussed.

- i. The Department of Housing has now circulated all PPNs requesting their input to the present consultation on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), following a request from Cork County PPN Secretariat. The potential importance of this whole new area of planning for different types of marine parks, especially to communities on the coast, was recognised. Following discussion, it was AGREED that Carol Harpur will draft a response on behalf of the PPN to this initial consultation, which is on the government's expert report on MPAs. There will be further consultation in relation to the Marine Planning Bill which will follow in due course. It was also AGREED that Jose Ospina will accept an offer from Cork Environmental Forum (CEF) to host a joint seminar/ workshop, including presentation(s) to explain further to people about the concept of MPAs and consider member groups' views. It will be necessary to work with the new staff, once they are in place and there is access to the members database, before confirming a date for this. There will need to be communications priorities identified i.e. re-establishing communications, re-registration, etc. prior to launching new initiatives.

3. Staff Recruitment: Jude Gilbert reported that the preferred candidate has accepted the Resource Worker position, completed her medical and her references have been taken up. The contract is now being worked out and it may take 4 weeks from that being signed for her to be in position, depending on whether she has already given notice to her current employer. It is hoped that she will be in post by mid-May. The Council is presently undertaking recruitment for temporary clerical staff, one of which would be assigned to the PPN Support Worker role. Since this is to form a panel of administrative staff, the PPN has not been invited to participate. It is hoped that the Support Worker would be in a position to take up their role at the same time, or shortly after, the Resource Worker arrives. The Council has undertaken to keep Jude (as link person) informed of developments. The Department has indicated that free, on-demand training in Salesforce (the software used for the PPN database) is available. Harriet will look into having this available to the new staff as soon as possible after they arrive.

Staff Liaison Committee: It is important that the Committee has the benefit of some basic training in Human Resources to support them in their role. Harriet has contacted the Wheel about possibilities and will investigate other organisations that might be in a position to deliver appropriate training.

4. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) & Service Level Agreement (SLA): Liam McCarthy reported that the MoU and SLA have now been signed, without inclusion of a commitment from the County Council to pay the expenses of representatives attending Council committees. Contact was made with the Department (DRCD) about this and their understanding that the Council should pay these costs was made clear. However, the Council refutes this and there was not time to resolve the issue before the deadline for the MoU to be signed and submitted to DRCD, which is necessary to access this year's budget.

Council payment of representatives' expenses: Since the Council has indicated that there would be a budgetary implication involved, as well as their different understanding about whether they are required to pay these expenses or not, it was considered important that the Secretariat takes up this issue without delay since it is likely to be a lengthy and complex matter to resolve. Following discussion, it was AGREED that a Secretariat subgroup of Peter Dineen, Jose Ospina and Liam McCarthy will work on making the PPN's case and pursuing a change from the Council. In the first instance, the group will write a letter to the Council requesting that this matter be reviewed promptly so that there is time for clarity to be reached between the government departments (Dept. of Rural & Community Development and Dept. of Housing, Local Government & Heritage) and for representatives' expenses to be included in next year's budget. It was felt that retrospective payment, for representatives who never received reimbursement, will be a debate for a later time once fundamental agreement by the Council to pay expenses has been achieved.

5. Budget: An email (pre-circulated) had been received from the Department (DRCD) indicating support for the roll-over of the unspent 2020 budget to this year. However, a question is raised about the level of expenditure proposed under two headings; the proposed training programme and communications activities. The Secretariat considered more details, such as a spreadsheet itemising proposed activities with estimated costs, and some supporting explanation is required to convince the Department that these figures are realistic. While it is important not to tie the PPN down since the Resource Worker's input will be essential in determining exactly what expenditure is needed, it should be possible to provide more detail for the Department. It was AGREED that the Secretariat subgroup that worked on generating the 2021 budget (namely Peter Dineen, Liam McCarthy and Jose Ospina) will develop this. Examples of budgets developed in other Counties may be useful for reference.

6. PPN Governance Documentation: Drafts of all the proposed PPN governance documents had been made available via email, Google docs (online) and written copies circulated to all those members who requested them, including the Draft Constitution that was AGREED by the Secretariat at the last meeting. Harriet thanked everyone who had fed back comments, corrections, clarification and amendments. She indicated that where these make no substantive change to the document, such as where a rewording has made something clearer, these have all been included. Each of the documents was considered in turn and where any clarifications or queries remained, these were discussed. The following is a list of the documentation approved by the Secretariat, which will now be forwarded to the Plenary for ratification:

- Standing Orders
- Gathering Signatures
- Expectations & Responsibilities of Boards/ Committees with PPN Representation
- Electoral Process
- Complaints Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Grievance procedure
- Dignity in the Workplace Policy
- Vulnerable Adults Policy
- Travel and Subsistence Policy
- Email and Internet Usage Policy
- Nomination Form
- Re-registration Protocol
- Representatives Charter
- Representatives Reporting Template
- Driving for Work Policy

There was discussion about the vital, but very challenging, responsibility of representatives to speak on behalf of the PPN membership, not themselves or their own group, when the PPN has yet to develop clear positions. PPN positions will be developed in the Vision for Community Wellbeing (scheduled in the

Workplan to begin later this year) and from deliberations at Linkage Groups and consequently it was recognised that it is immensely important to get these up and running effectively to support representatives. It is equally important that the PPN continue to pressure the Council to actively support representatives; understanding the need for reps to have time to consult on items to be discussed, with provision of timely information and other measures (such as payment of expenses) to accommodate and support PPN members. This is a commitment in the MoU now but the reality to date has not indicated that the Council fully understands the challenges for PPN representatives.

The PPN's draft Travel and Subsistence Policy does not currently require evidence that a claimant's car insurance indemnifies the PPN. However, this is a requirement for anyone receiving expenses from the County Council. Several Secretariat members have indicated that such an indemnity would usually add to the cost of a person's insurance premium but more importantly is generally refused in cases where the "work" involved is voluntary i.e. in this case where the person is not employed by the PPN or the Council. This could raise a further problem for representatives seeking expenses from the Council, should the Council agree to meet these in the future. It appears that, while the expenses policy of individual Council's may vary around the Country, it is accepted that representatives must meet the requirements of that policy. It was AGREED that Harriet will endeavour to discover whether car insurance companies would consider noting driving involved with voluntary work for a particular body (such as the Council or PPN) and whether this would satisfy the Council requirements. An example of this was given by Liam McCarthy who is a volunteer driver for the Irish Cancer Society, for whom this is an acceptable arrangement that two different insurers have been prepared to make. Harriet is also to try to find out whether other counties that pay expenses make such requirements and if so, do they insist that PPN representatives comply.

Completing this suite of governance policies has been a huge piece of work undertaken by the Secretariat members themselves and not outsourced to consultants. This documentation forms the reference manual for the operation of the PPN. Harriet congratulated the Secretariat and thanked all those members who have given considerable time to initial drafting and amendment of these policies and procedures, then to reviewing them all, and to providing feedback and ensuring that the PPN has governance arrangements that are fit for purpose. It was appreciated that these documents can always be improved and should be regularly reviewed.

7. Any other business:

WIT Course on Public Participation Networks: In response to the (pre-circulated) call from the Department (DRCD) for those who wish to participate in the blended learning programme on PPNs being run by Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), a request has been submitted that places be made available for the two new staff and for Tommy Collins and Liam McCarthy who put their names forward.

The Celtic Interconnector Community Forum (Eirgrid): Irish Rural Link, who are appointed as facilitator for this group which is being set up as "*part of ongoing engagement and community benefit for communities impacted by the Celtic Interconnector project over the coming months and years*" have invited all interested rural communities to a Zoom information evening that will take place on Wednesday 21st April 2021 at 7pm. The Secretariat discussed the problem of not being able to advise all member groups in East Cork about this initiative and invitation. It was AGREED that Liam and Carol will attend on behalf of their own community groups but will communicate with the organisers to explain the challenge for the PPN and ask that member groups can be informed and join the Forum once communications are re-established.

The Ireland Funds: Gavin Falk drew attention to the existence of these funds and their potential usefulness to the PPN and its member groups. While applications for this year are now closed, it was AGREED that the PPN should ensure that it is notified when further funding opportunities arise so that it can share this information with members. Harriet is to look into how this may be done.

Information on Water-related Works by Cork County Council: Prompted by concerning information from the UK, Gavin Falk proposed that the PPN ask to be notified of works being undertaken in the County so that it can, in turn, keep member groups informed and so enable them to take an interest and support use of appropriate and best practice activities. Michael Doyle pointed to the wide number of positive initiatives that are also being undertaken in aquatic environments like the Blue Dot Programme for farmers on the River Blackwater and suggested that the PPN should share information that is positive as well as potentially of concern.

9. Date of next meeting: The next meeting will take place later in May in the hope that the new Resource Worker will be in post by then and able to participate. It was AGREED that the next meeting will be

via Zoom at 7.30pm on Tuesday 25th May

The Department (DRCD) has requested a list of future meeting dates in order that they might attend at one of these. They are seeking to have a representative attend a Secretariat meeting in all the PPNs. To facilitate the Department in identifying a date, the Secretariat set out a schedule of meetings for the rest of the year which will be communicated to the Department. The first two dates may move to accommodate new staff and related training activities.

- Tuesday 25th May 7.30pm*
- Tuesday 22nd June 7.30pm*
- Tuesday 14th September 7.30pm
- Tuesday 12th October 7.30pm
- Tuesday 16th November 7.30pm

** These dates may move depending on arrival and training commitments of new staff.*

Meeting closed at 9.15pm