

Cork County PPN, Secretariat meeting ADOPTED

Tuesday 25th May 2021, by Zoom

Present: Brid Coakley, Tommy Collins, Colum Cronin, Pauline O'Dwyer, Gavin Falk, Anne Finch, John Fuller, Jude Gilbert, Carol Harpur, Liam McCarthy, José Ospina.

Apologies: Michael Doyle, Tom Howard, Sean Kelly,

Facilitation: Harriet Emerson

* * * * *

1. Welcome & Agenda: All members were welcomed to the meeting and there was real celebration that so many people have now received, or are about to receive, the Covid-19 vaccination. Community activities are seen to be swinging back into action and people are very busy.

Everyone was reminded of the agreed ground rules for conduct during the meeting, and 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 13th April 2021 were adopted (prop. Liam McCarthy, sec. Anne Finch).

3. Grievances/ Complaints – none received

4. Staff Update: Jude Gilbert reported that both the new Resource Worker, Ms Sandy Groarty, and the new Support Worker, Mr. Patrick Buckley, will take up their positions on Monday 31st May. Sandy has been co-ordinator with Transport Mobility Forum in Cork and comes to the PPN with considerable community development experience. Patrick's appointment, on a one year contract, was made internally within the Council.

The three members of the Staff Liaison Subcommittee have agreed to meet with Sandy on her first day and will propose to her that 3 short evening Zoom meetings be held for the staff to get to meet the Secretariat members. These would be smaller groups of members either representing or based within the different LCDC areas to allow more opportunity for conversation and getting to know one another. The proposed dates are Thursday 3rd June (South Cork), Tuesday 8th June (North Cork) and Wednesday 9th June (West Cork) and these will be confirmed (or amended) once the staff are in position. Kay Keegan had requested permission to authorise purchase of new laptops and phones for the staff in the hope that these would be available when they arrive and the Staff Liaison Subcommittee had approved this in the expectation that the Secretariat would consider this a necessary expense. This was approved by the Secretariat.

All the governance documentation, Secretariat agendas and minutes, Departmental circulars, etc. will be made available to the Resource Worker. She will receive an email address, passwords and other details on arrival and will communicate these to Secretariat members when she introduces herself. (Both staff have places on the Waterford Institute course concerning PPNs and how they operate, which begins just after they start work, lasts 7 weeks part-time, and will provide an excellent introduction to the PPNs, how they operate and interact with Local Authorities.) Kay Keegan will be providing an induction to the Council in addition to that provided by the PPN Staff Liaison Subcommittee. It was agreed that Sandy should be formally introduced to senior personnel within the Council and to Councillors that she does not already know. Michael Doyle has indicated that he would like to introduce Sandy to key individuals that it would be advantageous for her to know and it was agreed that all Secretariat members should contribute support and information of this sort. It was agreed that Sandy will be asked to familiarise herself with the Workplan and Budget and can discuss this with the Staff Liaison Subcommittee. It was agreed that her first task will be exploring how the communications strategy can be developed to ensure relationships are built and managed successfully with member groups from first contact onwards.

5. Department of Rural & Community Development (Department) and PPN Budget: Following agreement of the Secretariat a submission had been made to the Department regarding the roll-over of unspent funds from previous years, with additional details under communications and training headings supplied by the working group (Peter Dineen, Jose Ospina and Liam McCarthy). Subsequently, Harriet responded to a telephone enquiry about the details of this, which was followed by a further request for information. After consultation with the working group a written response was given to this.

It appears that the Department saw the training proposals as positive since they have since requested that they share this list as suggestions with another PPN that was looking for information on the types of training they might carry out.

Shortly before this meeting, an email was received that indicated that the Department will be “recouping the amount of €20,581.51 from it’s first tranche payment contribution for 2021 of €55,700, leaving a balance now being paid of €35,118.49.” It is understood that this means the unspent amount currently in the PPN account, amounting to around €109,000 will be retained and that the amount withheld by the Department in 2021 amounts approximately to the amount not spent on staff wages for the first half of the year. This should leave the PPN with the resources to carry out its Draft Workplan as proposed. It was agreed that Harriet will approach Andrew Lewis in the Council to clarify the exact situation and report back to the Secretariat on this.

It was also agreed that the working group would draw up a simple one page draft of financial guidance, indicating authority required for different levels of funding and financial reporting, for the Secretariat to review at its next meeting.

Jose Ospina reported that following an initial enquiry to UCD regarding training options, he has been contacted to ask whether the PPN wishes to take up any of these. It was agreed that such possibilities should be referred to the Resource Worker, who can compile details of what is available so that appropriate selections can then be made.

6. Annual Report: The Department has requested completion of the Annual Report for 2020 by all PPNs before 14th June. This year the Report will be made entirely online and is in a 64 page Survey Monkey format. This should be relatively straightforward to complete because of the low level of activity during 2020 and, following discussion, it was agreed that this should be completed promptly before the new staff arrive as the situation of being without staff is consistent with the reason for lack of inactivity in 2020, which will need to be explained in the Report.

Liam McCarthy volunteered to assist Harriet in completing the online form and Carol Harpur will help with transforming this into a readable format for the Secretariat to see. Most of the information contained in the Report is straightforward to complete. Secretariat members who, apart from one known exception, were the only continuing representatives attending meetings during 2020, were asked about their experience in these roles of being able to input to agendas and meetings and influence outcomes. Secretariat members shared their experiences and the consensus was that they did not contribute to agendas (although this might be a possibility) but did make inputs in discussions and had the opportunity to affect the outcomes of these. This information will be represented in the Report.

In some cases, and for a range of legitimate reasons, individuals have previously represented the PPN on multiple committees and worked conscientiously in these roles. It is understood that the PPN constitution sets out that individuals should only take on one representative role at a time but it was recognised that there have been, and are likely to continue to be, real challenges in securing sufficient representatives, being confident that they were attending, and getting feedback from them were pointed out. John Fuller pointed to the need to move swiftly to introducing Linkage Groups operating via Zoom while this is familiar to people, in order to improve the numbers participating in these structures. There remains an issue of insufficient numbers of places for PPN representatives on the different LCDCs in the County.

6. Any Other Business:

- a) Covid Stability Fund** Kay Keegan had been asked to send notification of the Covid Stability Fund to PPN member groups since the timeline for applying to this was so short. This was done but it was noted that this suggests that the Council – which the Secretariat understands does not have access to the Salesforce software - is using an email listing of the PPN members. Once staff are in place, emails should only issue to the member groups from the PPN in order that communications can be properly managed.
- b) Review of County Development Plan & Cork Harbour Economy** Carol Harpur had circulated information about these to Secretariat members. It was agreed that these are issues that the PPN will need to invite member groups to participate in once communications are re-established.
- c) Celtic Interconnector Community Forum** Liam McCarthy and Carol Harpur reported that the PPN was referred to at the initial meeting of the Forum. It appears that the PPN's role is primarily as a means for the Forum to establish the *bone fides* of groups that express an interest in being involved. In addition, there are several hundred community groups that might legitimately wish to engage in the Forum but realistically the Forum could not accommodate this many. In the event that too many groups request to participate, it appears likely that the PPN may be invited to create a Thematic Network for these groups around this issue, from which representatives would be selected to participate in the Forum.
- e) Confirmation of Secretariat membership** It was agreed that those members not actively participating in the Secretariat should be contacted to find out whether they wish to continue or whether their position will be vacant and added to the list of elections to be held following the next plenary. According to the Draft Constitution, Secretariat members that do not attend three meetings without reasonable explanation will be deemed to have resigned. Members who have not been attending regularly may be unaware of these conditions, so Harriet will make contact with them to discover their position.
- f) Communications from The Wheel** Gavin Falk raised a concern that notification of events, activities and training provided by The Wheel (a national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises) was not being received by the Secretariat. It was pointed out that by virtue of Cork County Council's membership, the PPN can access services and supports provided by The Wheel and that it is likely that emails have been arriving into the main PPN mailbox. However, since this has not been staffed information is not being shared further. The new staff will have the daunting task of taking over email inboxes with many thousands of unopened emails dating back well over a year. Hopefully, once they are in place, the staff will be in a position to ensure that information from The Wheel and others relevant to member groups is circulated, most probably through newsletters and social media.

7. Date of next meeting: The next meeting was previously agreed and will take place

via Zoom at 7.30pm on Tuesday 22nd June

Meeting closed at 9.15pm approx.