

Cork County PPN, Secretariat meeting - AGREED

Tuesday 12th January 2021, by Zoom

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

Apologies: Pauline Dwyer, Sean Kelly,

Facilitation: Harriet Emerson

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1. Welcome & Agenda: All were welcomed to the meeting and apologies were noted from Pauline Dwyer and Sean Kelly. Brid Coakley proposed a vote of sympathy to Pauline on the recent sad death of her father. John Fuller kindly undertook to send the Secretariat's sympathies to her. The draft agenda was adopted.

2. Minutes: The previously circulated Draft Minutes of the meeting held on 8th Dec. 2020 were adopted.

3. Update from Working Group on Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Service Level Agreement (SLA) and Recruitment: Liam McCarthy, Carol Harpur and Jose Ospina gave feedback on the positive meeting they held with Kay Keegan and Sharon Corcoran in the County Council on the 22nd December. This face-to-face meeting was limited to an hour due to Covid restrictions and so not all material was covered. While some minor changes in terminology (e.g. "Cork County Council" in place of "Local Authority") were requested, it seems that the MoU and SLA is likely to be agreed largely as submitted by the PPN. It is hoped that this can be finalised when the group meets with the Council staff again.

Sharon (Director of Services) recognised the very considerable amount of work and responsibility associated with the post of Resource Worker. Given this, she is keen that recruitment be open to staff outside the Council who may be more likely to have community development expertise and experience and be less likely to consider the post as a career stepping stone, and to move on quickly. Since the meeting, it has been established that the Human Resources section in the Council has approved an open recruitment process. The working group members are due to meet with Kay and Sharon again next week with the aim of agreeing the Job Description and Person Specification so that the recruitment process can begin. After some discussion, it was agreed that there is no advantage in seeking to have the Support Worker appointed ahead of the Resource Worker. Both positions will be 37hrs/ week.

As has happened previously, it is understood that the Secretariat will provide two of the three interviewers for the Resource Worker recruitment process. It was AGREED that which Secretariat members will be involved is to be discussed at the next Secretariat meeting.

4. Response from the Department regarding carry over of unspent 2020 funds: An email (circulated) has been received from the Department indicating that Cork County PPN may retain unspent funds from 2020 to cover costs arising in 2021. These will need to be set out in the Workplan, comply with the Department Circular (7 December 2020) and Financial Controls, and be fully accounted at the end of the year. This good news was welcomed.

While the Council provided a statement of the PPN's finances at the end of 2020, it was proposed that Harriet contact Andrew Lewis in the Council and seek information on how budget allocations have been handled for the next meeting.

While face to face meeting activities may be limited for much of 2021, it was felt that these funds will enable the PPN to successfully re-engage members. Brid Coakley and Peter Dineen pointed towards the need to establish a communications plan, possibly engage some help with this, and there was widespread support for effective publicity. The importance of building close links with local development companies

and other organisations that could support the PPN in reaching and mobilising its member groups was stressed.

Michael Doyle recognised that given restrictions and the sheer volume of work for the PPN this year, there may be a need to request a further roll-over of unspent funds into 2022 from the Department. There was a general feeling that such an approach would be more successful once the PPN has commenced on work projects, such as the Vision for Community Wellbeing, etc.

5. Draft Workplan: The current Draft Workplan, as circulated in December and submitted to Kay Keegan and Sharon Corcoran, is a very comprehensive document. It was AGREED that this should remain in its current form until the discussions with the Council on the MoU and SLA are completed. The Council is aware that it remains a Draft until ratified by the Plenary. It may be revised by the Secretariat prior to the plenary in light of discussions.

It was AGREED that Tommy Collins will work with Harriet to produce a simple timeline of known activities for the PPN this year (including, staff appointments, plenary, re-registration of member groups, elections, inductions for new representatives, Vision for Community Wellbeing, etc.) ahead of the next meeting to assist the Secretariat in considering the Draft Workplan and budget allocation.

6. Realistic plenaries: Harriet reported that she had made enquiries as to how Cork County PPN might structure itself and practically organise its plenary given the high number of 8 municipal districts (MD), the unique situation of having 3 LCDCs, and the very large size of the County. Feedback suggests that provided the structure can be built around the Municipal Districts, it should be possible to adjust how the plenary operates to facilitate greater participation. Brid Coakley felt this would mean there was a better chance of getting groups to participate as they would identify more closely with the area. It may be that online plenaries represent an advantage to encouraging attendance at this point for Cork County PPN since travelling long distances is a disincentive, especially when people are not *yet* sure of the value of what they are participating in.

7. Applications from New Member Groups: Harriet reported on a Zoom meeting that she and Ronan Kenneally had before Christmas with the Atlantic View Residents Association (AVRA) whose representative indicated that they were upset at the delay in the processing of their membership and the lack of activity within the PPN, particularly the absence of Linkage groups. Elected representatives had advised the group that the way to raise their issues with the County Council was via the PPN. This was specifically in relation to their continued attempts to get the Council to take their estate in hand. Harriet indicated that the long email strings expressing discontent have been copied consistently very widely. The Association wished to be provided with a list of Secretariat members and Harriet had undertaken to raise this with the Secretariat. This information is not currently available on the PPN website although it is commonly found available for other PPNs.

There was general frustration amongst the Secretariat that this situation demonstrates a continued lack of understanding amongst the Council staff and elected representatives as to the role and purpose of the PPN, which is not to champion the individual concerns of single member groups unless agreed by the plenary (all members) or a linkage group. Tommy Collins highlighted the complex nature of the matter that is causing AVRA concern. There was also concern expressed that volunteer Secretariat members should not have to handle what may be difficult interactions with member groups.

In the course of discussion, a number of points were made:

- A complaints procedure needs to be put in place.
- There is a need to include sanctions within the Constitution to ensure that successful and respectful relationships can be protected.
- There needs to be clarity on how applications for membership are handled.

It was AGREED that Harriet will draft a response to AVRA suggesting that, given the absence of a PPN representative, they make a direct approach to the Housing Strategic Policy Committee of the County Council about their concerns. In addition, she will explain that the Secretariat (which is a body of volunteers) is working to get staff in place and hold a plenary as soon as possible, which they will be notified of. The Secretariat hopes that they will participate in that and also with Linkage Groups as these are established. She will circulate this to all Secretariat members for feedback before sending it to AVRA.

Kay Keegan has forwarded to Harriet some 38 applications from community organisations seeking membership of the PPN. These were found in the PPN email. After discussion, it was felt that until staff are in place, it is difficult to progress these applications. It was AGREED that Harriet will send an email to all these groups explaining that it is hoped to have staff in place soon at which point they will be contacted further about their application. A draft of this email will also be circulated to all Secretariat members before it is sent out. It was also AGREED to circulate the list of all new applicants to Secretariat members who will treat it as confidential given GDPR constraints. This is for information only and no Secretariat members will make enquiries or take action in relation to this information.

8. Any other business: No other items of business were raised.

9. Next meeting: It was AGREED that the next meeting will take place

via Zoom at 7.30pm on Tuesday 26th January

*(If it has not been possible for the Working Group to meet with Council Officials before that date, in which case it will be moved back to **Tuesday 2nd February** at the same time.)*