



Ireland Wales Programme 2014-2020

Programme Monitoring Committee - Meeting 5
 Thursday 24th November 2016 10.30a.m
 Clarion Hotel, Cork, Ireland

| | | Papers |
|---|--|------------------|
| 1 | 10:30 – 10:45 Welcome, Opening and Introduction - Stephen Blair Chair and Joint Chair Damien O'Brien | |
| 2 | 10:45 – 10:55 Minutes of PMC Meeting 4 including action points – July 7 th 2016 Conwy, North Wales – Stephen Blair | IWPMC1420(05)01 |
| 3 | 10:55 – 11:25 EU Transition and the future of ETC – Damien O'Brien | Oral |
| | 11:25 – 11:40 <i>Coffee Break</i> | |
| 4 | 11:40 – 12;10 Programme Update Report - Joint Secretariat – Linda Weaver | IWPMC1420 (05)02 |
| 5 | 12:10 – 12:25 Operation's Officers Oral Update – Bethan Thomas and Breda Curran/Emma Doran | Oral |
| 6 | 12: 25 – 12:35 Communication Update | IWPMC1420(05) 03 |
| 7 | 12:35 Date of the next meeting | |
| 8 | 12:40 Any Other Business | |

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| | | Papers |
|---|---|-----------|
| 1 | 12:40 – 12:55 2007-2013 Final Implementation Report (including position on closure) | PMC 17 01 |
| 2 | 12:55 – 13:00 Any Other Business | |

Joint Secretariat – November 2016



Ireland Wales Programme 2014-2020
Programme Monitoring Committee – Meeting 5

Pegasus 4, Clarion Hotel, Cork, Ireland

24th November 2016

A list of attendees is shown at Annex 1.

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome – Opening an Introduction.

1. The Chair, Stephen Blair (SB), welcomed members to Cork and the fifth PMC of the 2014-2020 Ireland Wales Programme. The Chair introduced Agnes Monfret, EU Head of Unit, DG Regio European Cross-Border Cooperation (AM) to the meeting who was attending instead of the Desk Officer, Maria-Auxiliadora Valpuesta-Contreras.

2. The Co-Chair, Damien O'Brien (DOB), thanked SB and Irish colleagues for the hospitality afforded to all members and officials during the previous evening's welcome meal.

3. DOB confirmed that WEFO had secured formal designation as Managing Authority (MA) for the Ireland Wales Programme. The Audit Authority had issued an unqualified opinion on the Article 72 Report and were content with MA systems. Mark Drakeford, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government had signed the designation order which meant that WEFO was able to submit payment claims to the

Commission and draw down funding, the first claim would be sent in December.

4. DOB and SB informed the PMC of apologies for non-attendance and introduced the alternates present.

Agenda Item 2 Minutes of the previous PMC Meeting – July 7th 2016 Conwy.

5. The Chair reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting asking for corrections and comments.

6. Agnes Monfret (AM) flagged up a concern regarding paragraph 19 which stated that EU Desk Officer had advised that she was unable to attend the previous PMC meeting (July 7th 2016) but had planned for a replacement to attend. . AM explained the circumstances which resulted in there being no EC representation and suggested removal of para 19.

7. AM confirmed that, in accordance with Commission guidance, she was unable to offer any comments on the EU Transition item but was content to listen to the discussion.

8. The PMC approved the minutes as a true record of the meeting, subject to removal of paragraph 19.

Agenda Item 3 – EU Transition and the future of ETC

9. The Chair stressed the importance of PMC members, as ambassadors for the programme, to be regularly updated on EU transition issues so that they were able to furnish their constituents and communities with accurate and up to date information. It was important for the PMC to be aware of the steps being taken to secure the programme.

10. The Co-chair acknowledged that there had been an unwelcome period of uncertainty. The MA and its Irish partners were keen to cascade a clear message to partners that the programme was fully open for business. The co-Chair introduced Desmond Clifford (DC), Principal Private Secretary for the First Minister of Wales and lead on co-ordinating the Welsh Government's negotiating strategy as we move forward through the period of transition.

11. DC clarified his role to the members as cohering the Welsh Government position on all Brexit issues, confirming that the Government greatly regretted the outcome. The First Minister had campaigned vigorously for a remain vote but the First Minister was clear that democracy had to be followed.

12. DC explained that his team are working closely with the UK Government in representing Wales' interests through transition and had clear views what Brexit should look like in the Welsh Government.

13. DC confirmed the Welsh Government's commitment to the Ireland Wales programme and its funding referring to the HMT funding guarantee. The relationship between Wales and its neighbours in Ireland was highly important and would carry on outside the EU, given the close bond between both nations and its shared maritime geography – collectively it would be important to work towards establishing structures and funding sources to enable us to continue to co-operate.

14. DC referred to the British- Irish Council meeting which would be held in Cardiff on 25th November. Ministers were talking bilaterally and the Welsh Government was drawing up a negotiating position, one of its demands would be to continue access to an Ireland Wales programme post-exit; there were precedents for engagement, including those operated for example by Norway – there would be a need to negotiate the relationship with the EU to continue to allow access to ETC programmes.

15. DC summarised the events regarding the UK High Court case and impending Supreme Court Case on 5 December concerning the triggering of Article 50; both the Welsh and Scottish Governments would be joining this hearing. . The EU aimed s to trigger Art 50 before March 2017. Should the High Court judgement be upheld, UK Government would have to inform Parliament how it was approaching negotiations. The Welsh Government would welcome this as it was advanced in its thinking. DC was of the view that the UK Government should still meet the March deadline to trigger Article 50 even if legislation needed to be introduced

16. The co-Chair reaffirmed the continued commitment of both the Irish and Welsh Governments to the Ireland Wales programme, which had been re-emphasised at a Dublin Ministerial meeting in October where the desire to develop and deepen the relationship had been confirmed. The UK Funding Guarantee was now in place which meant that the UK Government would underwrite funding to projects whilst the UK remains in EU even if expenditure is incurred after the point of exit.

17. The guarantee meant that projects approved whilst the UK remains in the EU will have the funding stream from the UK secure. As things stood, it was likely that the programme would continue to fund projects up to Spring 2019. The intention was to ensure that the entire programme commitment would fall under scope of the guarantee by March 2019.. However it was made clear that the MA and its partners would not sacrifice quality for speed and that projects would continue to be evaluated against the robust appraisal procedures that had been agreed for the programme by the PMC.

18. The PMC was informed that that discussions had been held between WEFO, the Irish Government and the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) regarding adjustments to the wording of the Ireland Wales Funding Offer Letter A final text had been agreed which includes a programme financial review in the second half of 2018. The co-Chair pointed out that this should not be translated as any risk to funding and stressed the importance of continuing to send positive and confident messages to stakeholders on both sides of the water. The cross-border programme was open for business, there was no risk to programme

funding, the programme continued to be worth engaging with and all parties wanted it to be a success.

19. The Chair thanked his co-Chair and DC for their openness and their positive comments. The Chair suggested that further work might be required with third sector interests to offer reassurance and encourage programme engagement.

20. AM was unable to comment on the discussion but had listened with interest to the pragmatic approach. The best way to influence a case for the future was to successfully implement the current programme; a convincing start to 14-20 programming was key. AM welcomed conclusion of the designation exercise and the intention to submit a claim to the Commission in December.

21. Some comments were made by PMC members, one about the position post-2020 and whether there was a commitment to funding given the desire to work jointly in the future. The Chair mentioned the importance of the common resource of the Irish Sea to both Member States which post- Brexit would still need to be managed and maintained through co-operation.

22. A question arose about practicalities concerning retention of staff including researchers in the light of the UK EU Referendum. It would be important to relay a positive message that all money committed would be paid to beneficiaries so that those approved operations and those coming through the assessment process could be reassured of the way forward. Communication was important in this context as much rested on direct engagement between the MA and SRA and beneficiaries in ensuring that people properly understood the period of transition, i.e. that funding will extend to 2023 where required. The co-Chair stated that there were a number of channels through which these messages could be strengthened including the Programme web-site. As more operations were funded, momentum would be built and in turn raise the positive profile of the programme and its long term outlook.

23. More widely there was a need to keep people interested. MP (for the MA) mentioned the option of targeted publicity and communication;

the PMC too had a role in this respect. JM re-affirmed PMC members' role to engage with their respective networks and sectors to deliver positive messages. The Chair was open to the possibility of targeted sessions for Irish partners.

Agenda Item 4 Programme Update Report – Joint Secretariat

24. Linda Weaver (LW), Head of the Joint Secretariat introduced the Programme Update Report which summarised the position with implementation of the co-operation programme since the fourth PMC meeting in July 2016. It included a progress report on those joint operations in the appraisal system, an overview of grant commitment levels, and initial information on forecast outputs for those operations in the system. The N+3 expenditure targets were also highlighted for information. The Head of the JS reviewed the key points.

25. The Head of the JS summarised the progress of each Priority Axis (PA) noting that 3 operations had now been formally approved in PA1 and PA2, with another three approved by the PSC and awaiting the issue of formal letters of offer. A total of 13 business plans had been considered by the Programme Steering Committee (PSC).

26. Taking these six operations into account, the position on headline financial commitments for PA 1 and PA 2 was very promising and there were now more PA 3 operations in the pipeline together with some early stage enquiries particularly in Wales. Overall, significant progress was being made with commitment levels rising to some €29m, 36% of allocation. Annexes to the paper provided details of progress by PA, however details of the indicator targets should be treated with some caution as those operations currently being assessed had not had their costs challenged through the JS assessment process.

27. The next progress report would contain more detailed information on progress against programme expenditure and indicator targets as programme implementation accelerated, using the template previously

circulated to members and in accordance with the Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy approved by the PMC.

28. At the request of the Chair, the JS provided a brief synopsis of the CALIN, pISCES, Dwr Uisce, Acclimatise and Bluefish operations. The Chair noted the encouraging engagement with the community and industry.

29. The PMC noted progress with programme implementation. There were questions around presentation of projects to the PMC. The MA had recognised this as good practice and the intention was for a number of approved projects to present to the PMC in future. The MA felt it would be inappropriate for projects in planning to present to the PMC as the consideration of projects had been mandated to the PSC and make funding decisions.

30. The Head of the JS drew attention to paragraph 21 which sought seeking PMC authorisation for handling financial and delivery re-profiling and project extensions. The JS proposal was to limit the re-profiling of delivery profiles to one at post mobilisation unless there were exceptional circumstances. Any requests for project extensions should be discounted and any resultant underspends brought back into the central programme financial pot for re-allocation.

31. The PMC discussed the mechanics as there was some concern about penalising projects. The MA stressed the importance of imposing reasonable rigour in place at an early enough stage to monitor spend and outputs - decisions would be made on a case by case basis, however it was essential for beneficiaries to understand the rigour that would be applied to the decision making process and in managing the programme in general. All operations were being given the opportunity to implement a mobilisation phase which allowed for completion of all preparatory work. The MA view was that excessive re-profiling could result in significant de-commitments at project closure and ultimately underspends at programme closure.

32. The Head of JS clarified a point raised about deliverables. These constituted the intended outputs at project level which were included in

the funding agreement and had to be achieved by project partners, the pace of delivery and achievements against the spending profile.. The MA stressed the importance of delivery to profile. In the case of indicators, failure to deliver at project level would have a knock-on effect at the programme level where targets had been agreed with the Commission.

33. A question was raised about special dispensation for extensions to be considered for PA 3 projects, given that funds had not been allocated to the same degree. The Head of JS explained that projects would need to deliver additional indicators to be considered for any extension; the best course of action would be to re-allocate the funding to a project that could deliver. In response to a question about decommitment levels in the 2007- 2013 programme, David Kelly confirmed that the programme was over-committed by 2% during implementation and the drawdown will eventually be 97% of allocation.

34. Responding to a question about exchange rate fluctuations and the need to factor this into any re-profiling, the MA confirmed this as part of its role in managing the delivery of the programme and was something that was monitored regularly.

35. The PMC agreed the JS recommendation as set out at paragraph 21 of the paper and would keep the matter under review.

Agenda Item 5 Operation's Officers Oral Update

36. The Welsh and Irish Operations Officers provided the PMC with an update on operations in the system. There were another dozen or so ideas at an early stage of interest, however there was a perception that interest levels had fallen off in Ireland. The Operations Officers were looking in conjunction with the MA, JS and Irish authorities to re-energise efforts, galvanise interest and reassure partners; as previously mentioned, it would be helpful if the PMC could input to this work. Discussion about promotion of the programme would be picked up at the

next agenda item

Agenda Item 6 Communication Update

37. MP (for the MA) introduced the paper on behalf of WEFO's Communications and Briefing Unit which had been prepared as an update to the Programme Communications Strategy which had been approved by the PMC in 2015.

38. The MA referred to some points of note;-

39. The MA and its partners in Ireland fully recognised the importance of communicating effectively with programme stakeholders, particularly on the back of the EU referendum result in the UK. Collectively, there was an understanding of the need to reassure partners about commitment to the programme and its longer term stability. One option was to explore a programme event in 2017 with this in mind.

40. The bespoke Ireland Wales web site has been well received as reported at the last meeting and is at the heart of promoting the benefits of the programme and of the INTERREG/ETC identity. It was at the level of about 3000 visits at present.

41. The MA was utilising social media, particularly twitter and @ Ireland Wales is expected to reach 500 followers by year end – as an aside, the intention was to tweet a photo of today's PMC.

42. The PMC were directed to publicity surrounding the formal approvals announced at present - examples of the publicity/media coverage afforded to these were in the paper – the MA would follow these with more on the other approvals which were anticipated very shortly.

43. The MA was continuing to work with project partners to maximise publicity through project life cycles - including maximising Ministerial announcements and press notices to mark project approvals and are encouraging partners to share case studies for the website and twitter, which have the potential to hone in on results orientation demanded by the new raft of programmes - it's something which has been challenging

across the piece for ETC programmes but the MA felt this was a way to make progress, to tell the story behind the facts and figures demanded by the programme in the context of its indicator targets. Social media was used recently to highlight the October meeting in Dublin between Welsh and Irish respective Ministers at which they reiterated the importance of the Ireland Wales Programme.

44. The Commission stressed the importance of this area of work and welcomed the reference to results orientation and “telling the story” . A number of specific comments were made:-

- The need to fix targets within the strategy and illustrate what success would look like, honing in on the added value of ETC, telling the story supported by facts and figures.
- There remained a challenge of connecting with people - to consider the perception of particular demographics i.e. older people and youth looking to undertake activity;
- Consider the use of providing facts and figures as a hyper link (exploiting use of the EC open data platform) with annual reports being fed in.
- Strive for greater visibility online and look to include links to the irelandwales.eu and INTERACT websites
- Strive for greater nationwide exposure including the use of tv etc. - interested in communicating with opinion performers - potential benefits - added value of cross-border co-operation

45. The EC offered to help with communication efforts if required, for example by sharing journalistic info with programmes and suggested direct dialogue between the Programme and its Communications people with REGIO who were prepared to provide assistance, also referring to dialogue with INTERACT

46. The MA made a point about the programme’s track record of working with specific age groups quoting the visibility of the FUTSAL project which had been extremely visual and successful with media engagement and had certainly connected with people, yet had not drawn much interest from the Desk Officer at the time. The MA therefore questioned the consistency of messaging.

47. The PMC noted the need to offer reassurances initially and establish exactly what lines we wanted to communicate, using existing channels and further targeting/connecting.

48. The PMC felt that promotional efforts needed to be prioritised in Ireland given the perception of a falling off of interest there. It would be important to escalate connections, including consideration of specific targeting in Ireland to include LA contacts.,

49. The PMC echoed the co-Chair's proposal to revisit and refresh the Communications Strategy to reflect on the points raised and the climate we were now working in post UK Referendum.

AOB

50. The Commission drew attention to a new initiative arising from the State of the Union speech - the EC European Union Solidarity Corps which looked to build on a European voluntary system (youth portal). The EC would dedicate €1m in Technical Assistance in a 2017 pilot to offer volunteers opportunities within MA's, JS's and projects. The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) would do the matchmaking using INTERREG collaborators – who would be hands on in projects willing to host them. The EC would cover T&S.

51. There was a concern aired about volunteering opportunities being utilised at the expense of permanent full time posts. The idea was welcomed but care needed to be taken about how this could be perceived. The EC suggested a length of secondment of around 2 to 6 months might be about right if there was interest and confirmed that the opportunity would be open to individuals aged 18-30 but not just university students.

52. The Chair asked PMC members to reflect on this opportunity.

Agenda Item 7 Date of the next meeting

53. The JS had proposed Thursday April 27th 2017 for the next PMC meeting, however the EC drew attention to the importance of attendance at the 2017 INTERREG Annual Event which was taking place at this time. The JS would circulate a new date in due course.

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Agenda Item 1 Final Implementation Report (including position on closure)

1. SB informed the PMC that formal closure of the 2007-2013 programme required the completion of 3 documents one being the Final Implementation Report, tabled today. This report is due to be submitted to the EC by the end of March 2017 and will require final sign off by PMC members.
2. DK explained that SRA had been required to wait for the final audit report to be completed in to allow the outcomes to be fed into to the Final Implementation Report. DK noted that there had been a minimal number of errors and re-claim of grant.
3. DK confirmed that comments on the FIR will be invited via written procedure with a 10 working day turn around for those who wish to provide feedback. If no comments or feedback are received the report will go forward noting the approval of the PMC.
4. DK confirmed that SRA are in the process of submitting the final claim.
5. DK agreed to extend the narrative following a request from a member for further narrative on the coding system used on the 'Breakdown of use of Funds' table detailed on page 9.
6. DK confirmed that the issues regarding the First Level Controls had been resolved.
7. A member queried the 5% retention DK confirmed that the final 5% would be released when the EU were content that the programme had been successfully completed.
8. DK advised a final commitment level of around 96%

9. The report was met with positive comments from the members.
10. AM asked that in addition to making the document available on line that extracts could be produced for the Communication Tool Project
11. Both DK and SB confirmed that in due course a user friendly glossy document celebrating the success of the programme will be produced.

Agenda Item 2 – Any Other Business

12. Nothing to report.
13. The Chairs closing remarks.

The Chair offered his thanks to all PMC members for a positive meeting, and wished those with long journeys ahead, a safe one.

Annex 1 – List of Meeting Attendees

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Organisation</u> |
|------------------------------|---|
| Damien O'Brien | WEFO (Co-Chair) |
| Jane McMillan | WEFO |
| Mike Pollard | WEFO |
| Linda Weaver | WEFO |
| Bethan Thomas | WEFO |
| Phillipa Morgan | WEFO |
| Stephen Blair | SRA (Chair) |
| David Kelly | SRA |
| Breda Curran | SRA |
| Emma Doran | SRA |
| Caitriona Phelan | SRA |
| Patricia Hennessy | DPER |
| Desmond Clifford | Welsh Government |
| Agnes Monfret | EU Desk Officer |
| Cllr Ronnie Hughes | WLGA |
| Barbara Burchell | WLGA |
| Sian Williams | Natural Resources Wales |
| Janine Downing | WCVA |
| Peter Quantick | Private Sector |
| Jonathan Earl | Chambers Ireland |
| Danielle Martin | WHEEL |
| Dave Corcoran | Environment, Community and Local Government |
| Cllr Brian McDonagh | E&MRA |
| Bernard O'Shea | Transport, Tourism and Sport – Irish Government |
| Jennifer Billings | Dept of Job Enterprise and Innovation |
| Ciaran Kelly | Marine Institute |
| Sarah Clarke | ICTU |
| Cllr Seamus Cosai Fitzgerald | |
| Stewart Roche | HE Authority |
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