



## **Ireland Wales Programme 2014-2020**

Programme Monitoring Committee - Meeting 13  
Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2023  
White Sands Hotel, Portmarnock, Dublin

A list of attendees and apologies is at Annex 1.

### **Agenda item 1 – Welcome – Opening and Introductions**

1. The Chair (David Kelly) and co-Chair (Peter Ryland) welcomed everyone in Welsh and Gaeilge (Irish Gaelic) and continued the meeting in the English language. The Chair noted this was the final PMC of the 2014-2020 Programme; a historic occasion marking the end of some 30 years of co-operation, as there was no successor EC Programme in play for 2021-2027. Whilst this was disappointing, the Chair recognised the opportunity to look forward to a new period of co-operation, albeit in a different format. He thanked the PMC for supporting a Programme which had evolved considerably through its various iterations and had delivered quality projects and good outputs; just as importantly the Programme had provided the framework to establish important networks across the Irish Sea and he thanked the organisations involved throughout the years for their commitment, innovation and creativity. The Chair thanked colleagues in WEFO for the continuing effective working relationship with SRA which provided a firm foundation for continuing co-operation. The Chair also recognised that the European Commission had been very supportive of the Programme.
2. The co-Chair echoed these comments and the air of optimism surrounding future co-operation which would be very difficult to walk away from. There was no intention to do this with Ministers on both sides of the water firmly committed to the relationship. New structures needed to be considered and future co-operation would be subject to discussion at Friday's celebration event in Portmarnock.

### **Agenda item 2 – Note of PMC Meeting 12, including action points**

3. The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting with the one action point dealt with.

### **Agenda item 3 – Programme State of Play Report**

4. Mike Wallwork (MW) as Head of the Joint Secretariat (JS) presented the report. Members were invited to note progress on implementation since the last PMC meeting, consider the estimated out-turn position on commitment against allocation and latest position on progress against indicators.
5. The Programme was moving into its final stage of implementation with eight of the joint projects now closed and the others preparing for closure in the coming months. As previously reported, the MA and JS had continued to adopt a flexible approach with partners in the light of the pandemic including authorising no cost extensions and virement between expenditure categories where these had been justified. The JS would work very closely with project partners as the Programme headed towards closure with lead payments officers in WEFO closely engaged with the process as final claims were being prepared by partners.
6. The headline commitment position remained very similar to that reported to the November 2022 meeting with commitment at 106% of programme allocation. €84 million in ERDF grant has been awarded to 23 cooperation projects, 7 of which had been successful with phase 2 operations.
7. The financial table in the report updated the PMC on estimated decommitment levels from underspend monies being returned to the Programme. The funds returned to date (some €640k) were in line with JS estimates which provided a level of comfort on out-turn projections, which suggested that the Programme would close at circa 100% expenditure and it was unlikely that a re-allocation of resources between Priority Axes would be required. These figures had to be treated with some caution however, as the final claims requiring completion in the coming months would be fairly large. On expenditure, €59.5m had been paid out (75% of total) with a further €2m in the pipeline and awaiting processing. N+3 expenditure targets for 2023 had been met but there was still €19.7m to go out of the door to meet overall targets. As reported previously key performance indicator targets were all on target to be met or exceeded.
8. Mike Pollard (MP) for the MA noted that the Programme was in a very healthy position and commended the work of the JS on both sides of the water for getting it in this position in the light of key challenges including Brexit and Covid-19. Credit was also due to the partners in Ireland and Wales for driving delivery through against this difficult backdrop.
9. DPER colleagues referred to the final paragraph of the report which neatly reflected their views that it is extremely positive that that co-operation across our sea border remains as strong as ever and the Programme is delivering accordingly.

10. The co-Chair noted that despite this positive position there was still much to do to ensure effective closure including approval of the Final Implementation Report by the PMC. He provided reassurances to the PMC about MA processes and resources which at the regional programme level in Wales had been subject to a recent audit without any issue being raised.
11. The EC desk officer made it clear that the EC would welcome Ireland Wales co-operation back and the door was very much open to participation in the context of post-2027 programming with opportunities for third country access. The Commission were watching with interest any developments within the UK at the political level and were very interested in any pragmatic developments, for example the work of the Straits Committee. The co-Chair welcomed these comments, re-iterating that Welsh Ministers had made clear their positive views on co-operation and ETC programmes – future intentions would of course be informed by discussions with the UK Government in that a non-obstructive stance was required from them. Discussions had been held with DPER and Department of Foreign Affairs officials in Dublin today about plans to keep co-operation alive in the interim. MP mentioned that contact had been made with the Straits Committee and that the Welsh Government was being pro-active, including through Agile Cymru, in working closely with others across the EU to maximise Welsh interests and influence co-operation policy.

#### **Agenda Item 4 - Cross-cutting themes report**

12. MW introduced the report, highlighting key points. The report included a number of case studies which had been included as a means of illustrating the diversity of approved projects and the coverage of the cross-cutting themes (CCT's). The final evaluation of all projects would include the delivery of CCT's and would be fed back to the evaluation contractors to inform their considerations of evaluation of the Programme. The PMC noted the report and recognised the importance that the CCT's brought to delivery of the Programme with the Chair commenting that the case studies were a good idea that should be picked up for incorporation into the Final Implementation Report.
13. Responding to SRA colleagues, the JS confirmed that the MA were working on the scoping exercise with ex-post evaluation to be carried out in 2024.

#### **Agenda Item 5 - Future Co-operation and the Irish Sea framework – update**

14. Geraint Green (GG), for the MA, provided an update, referring to the Regional Investment Framework approach in Wales which the Welsh Government was looking to strengthen with co-operation across borders a key ingredient. The work on Agile Cymru has progressed very well, despite its external challenges, with Wales reaching out across the Irish Sea space, to EU regions and beyond. Related seed funding calls were currently 'live' and in high demand.

15. A key component of Agile Cymru was the establishment of an Irish Sea Framework, published in February, which had brought in interests from Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, North West England and further afield from Brittany. It also reflected and built on the activity of the Ireland Wales programme with priorities around innovation, sustainable blue growth and culture & communities. The Framework offered a scalable approach with the opportunity to bring partners in at their own speed to co-operate with Wales. There were therefore synergies with the Straits Committee approach and potential to explore links with Atlantic regions.
16. GG referred to the second Irish Sea Symposium which was held virtually in May at which the Irish Consul General in Wales and colleagues from the Southern Regional Assembly spoke. As well as reinforcing ministerial commitments the event had an animated and very positive session exploring options for co-operation across the Irish Sea geographical space. There was now a broad range of individuals and organisations working on this agenda and this 'coalition of the willing' was developing strongly. The response to the Agile Cymru seed funding call specifically supporting the Irish Sea Framework had also been extremely positive with the bids for funding significantly out-stripping the allocation. This demonstrated a clear demand to continue co-operation across the Irish Sea and an appetite for short term action as well as medium term plans. The PMC was asked to take this message back to those who might have an interest as momentum was important and quick wins were needed over the next six to twelve months to maintain the capacity needed for longer term solutions.
17. The Chair stated that Irish partners were keen to continue to co-operate; the Irish Sea was a constant and would continue to provide significant opportunities for partnership working.
18. Mike McGrath (for DPER) referred to a "pilot light" analogy, with a clear opportunity to keep this light on. It was clear that the Programme had been successful and a positive force for the relationship between Ireland and Wales. MM confirmed that DPER were looking at options, referencing Ministers' expectations as part of the Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan. Whilst these considerations were at present progressing slowly, DPER fully understood the Agile Cymru concept and agreed on the need for quick wins; the challenge was how to get this in motion. The Chair commented on the aim to switch the "pilot light" to "full beam".

#### **Agenda Item 6 – Celebration event**

19. The Chair provided brief details of the event to take place on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June which would not only be a chance to celebrate the work of the projects and success of the Programme, but also an opportunity to continue discussions on the potential for future co-operation.

## **Agenda Item 7 – AOB**

20. The MA updated the PMC on progress with the 2022 AIR which was submitted to the Commission on 24<sup>th</sup> May following consideration by the Committee via written procedure. The first stage of a two-stage checking process has been completed with the AIR having been deemed admissible by the Commission on 7<sup>th</sup> June. Any further comments or questions from the Commission would be considered in due course through the second stage.

21. The Chair thanked the PMC and the meeting was closed

**Managing Authority**

**June 2023**

## Annex 1

### List of Attendees:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
<b>PMC</b>	
Gavin George	Welsh Government
Lilla Farkas	Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Donal Nolan	Chambers Ireland
Suzanne Harte	Department for Public Expenditure, NDP and Reform
Michael McGrath	Department for Public Expenditure, NDP and Reform
Adam Flanagan	Department for Public Expenditure, NDP and Reform
Tadhg O'Shea	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
<b>Other</b>	
Noel Farrell	EU Desk Officer
Peter Ryland	Welsh Government
Geraint Green	Welsh Government
Mike Pollard	Welsh Government
Mike Wallwork	Welsh Government
David Kelly	SRA
Enda Hogan	SRA
Breda Curran	SRA
Samantha Richardson	SRA
Marie Harnett	SRA

### List of Apologies:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Veronica Cunningham	The Marine Institute: Foras na Mara
Brigid Manton	Cllrs Finegal
Paul Spencer	Pro Vice Chancellor – Research and Innovation
Abigail Phillips	WG – Dept. for Innovation
Jason Thomas	WG – Dept. for Culture, Sport and Tourism
Chriss O'Connell	WEFO – Equal Opportunities & Environmental Sustainability
Iain Quick	International Relation and Trade
Patrick Lilly	Ireland Wales Operations Officer (Joint Secretariat)
Bethan Thomas	Ireland Wales Operations Officer (Joint Secretariat)

Sian Benson	Ireland Wales Policy Officer (Joint Secretariat)
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