



Special EU Programmes Body
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**NORTHERN IRELAND, THE BORDER REGION OF IRELAND AND WESTERN
SCOTLAND**

INTERREG VA PROGRAMME

(2014 - 2020)

CCI No: 2014TC16RFCB047

DRAFT MINUTES MONITORING COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday 28th November 2019

AFBI Conference Hall, Large Park, Hillsborough

Attendance

A list of attendees and apologies is attached at Annex II.

1. Welcome and Introduction by Chairperson

The Chair welcomed attendees to the tenth meeting of the INTERREG VA Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) 2014 – 2020, hosted in AFBI premises as a Lead Partner venue.

The Chair welcomed **EU Commission Desk Officer, Marianne Van De Vorle** to the meeting, as well as **Pascal Boijmans, Head of Unit for INTERREG and cross-border cooperation with DG Regional and Urban Policy**, on his first visit to Belfast and the INTERREG VA Programme.

A welcome was also extended to **Jim Millard of the Scottish Government**, who replaces **John Maxwell**. **The Chair** recorded the SEUPB's thanks to John for his years of work on the Programme.

The Chair also welcomed a number of new Members and Advisors to the PMC, including;

- Kerrie Morton of the Scottish Government, joining the meeting as an Observer;

- Alderman Allan Bresland of NILGA and the DUP;
- Cllr Enda McGloin, Gerry Doyle and Cllr Frank McBrearty of NWRA, and;
- Siobhan McAlister of NICVA.

The Chair provided an update on developments in Programme implementation since the previous PMC meeting on 30th May 2019 in Edinburgh, which consisted of the following;

- Focus has shifted to project delivery, implementation and spend while the political environment remains uncertain. Elections in Whitehall as well as by-elections in Ireland will have taken place by the end of 2019;
- The EU Commission, as well as the Irish and British Governments are committed to completion of the current Programmes in their entirety, and to the delivery of the PEACE PLUS Programme, an update on which will be provided later in the agenda;
- **The Chair** outlined the numerous PEACE Plus stakeholder engagement events planned throughout January and February 2020, which will be elaborated upon in **the Communication Manager's** presentation;
- A number of internally-led communications workshops have been held since the previous PMC, attended by 134 representatives across both the PEACE and INTERREG Programmes, and;
- ThinkPeople Consultancy was appointed to undertake a robust review of internal and external training Programmes. The SEUPB is progressing work on the report's recommendations, as received in August 2019.

2. Project Presentations

The Chair informed Members of two project presentations being provided under today's agenda.

Providing the first presentation, **the Chair** welcomed **Martin Gillen of NI Water** as Lead Partner in the SWELL project. The project was awarded €35m, under Specific Objective 2.3: Improving Quality of Transitional Waters, in January 2019.

The Committee welcomed **Tim Weir of the Department for Infrastructure NI**, and **Michael Spillane of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport Ireland**, providing the second presentation on behalf of the North West Multi Modal Transport Hub

project. The Multi Modal Hub project was awarded €23 million in August 2017 under Specific Objective 3.1: Cross Border Sustainable Transport.

The Chair thanked the project representatives for their presentations, highlighted the importance of the SWELL project, and complimented the Hub on the refurbishment of previously unused buildings. She highlighted the Hub as an excellent example of complementarity between the PEACE and INTERREG Programmes infrastructure, linking the Greenway and the Peace Bridge.

The DG Regional and Urban Policy Head of Unit thanked the presenters and made the following main points;

- Highlighted similarities between the Multi Modal Hub project and the projects presented at the 14 November Sustainable Transport conference in Dublin;
- Discussed complementarity between the PEACE and INTERREG Programmes and the potential to combine and utilise financing from different funding streams, and;
- Speaking of the relevance of this project, he advised of the Director of DG Move's interest in working with similar multi modal transport projects in the future, presenting new opportunities under a different funding source.

The IBEC representative thanked the representatives for their presentation, and queried whether the project has collaborated with the City Deal project in the North West.

The DfI representative responded, stating that, while the Department for Infrastructure is in collaboration with the City Deal project to improve public transport infrastructure in Northern Ireland, the Multi Modal Hub project is not directly linked.

The IBEC representative made the following main points;

- IBEC and CBI, in their collaboration on Northern Ireland and Ireland's infrastructure, welcome the creation of the hub as a best practice template for the region;
- Requested further detail on the Hub in terms of connectivity, particularly the bus service users and the 1 million journeys across 3 border routes;
- Discussed assessment of projects pre and post Brexit, and the sustainability of cross-border transport projects post-Brexit;
- Asked whether the Hub was open to all transport service providers in Northern Ireland and Ireland, and;

- Discussed the importance of online connectivity for Hub users, given the relative isolation of the North West Region.

The DfI representative made the following points in response;

- Confirmed the Hub is accessible to service providers in both regions, and outlined details of private operators using the facilities;
- Welcomed the points raised in the context of wider projects being implemented across the public transport sector in the two regions, including a North-South ticketing system upgrade and the introduction of the Belfast rapid transit system;
- The Multi Modal Hub project represents essential capital investment in public transport funding in Northern Ireland, and;
- A modal shift, which sets public transport at the most cost effective option for service users, requires political input which is unavailable in the absence of a functioning Northern Ireland Executive.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their contributions.

3. Agree Agenda

The agenda was agreed.

4. Conflict of Interest

The Chair informed Members that the PMC Conflict of Interest register is updated on an annual basis, and requested any conflicts relating to today's meeting be declared.

No potential conflicts of interest were declared.

The Environmental Pillar representative encouraged the SEUPB to ensure the use of environmentally friendly options in the hospitality receptacles used at future PMC meetings, which was noted by **the Chair**.

5. Minutes of previous meeting – 30 May 2019

The Monitoring Committee approved the minutes of 30 May 2019 as a true and accurate record of the previous meeting. The minutes will be uploaded to the SEUPB website.

6. Matters arising

The Chair provided an overview of the matters arising from the previous meeting, all of which have been actioned.

7. Update on Programme Implementation

The MA Director provided an update on Programme implementation which consisted of the following main points;

- The INTERREG VA Programme has achieved commitment levels at the end of October 2019 of 98.9%, with a total value of €279.6m supporting project delivery;
- The Annual Implementation Report (AIR) was submitted in June 2019 and approved by the Commission;
- Both N+3 and business plan targets have been achieved;
- All Year 1 Impact Evaluation reports have been received by the Managing Authority, and will be tabled at the next Evaluation Steering Group meeting on 14 January 2020;
- On 04 September 2019, the Steering Committee approved the iSIMPATY project under the Population Health sub-theme, to a value of €3,280,714;
- An application under Priority Axis 3 Sustainable Transport for the creation of a cross-border Electric Vehicle (EV) network will be considered by Steering Committee in January 2020;
- Additional monies for the SWIM project and an extension to the ONSIDE project have been approved by Steering Committee via written procedure;
- Both the Sustainable Transport and the Health and Social Care Evaluation conferences took place in October 2019 and were well attended;
- An over-commitment paper highlighting potential opportunities for further funding was submitted to both Member States in November;
- 6 outstanding Audit Authority Semester 2 Article 27 reviews will complete by 20 December 2019;
- 3 Internal Audit reviews of the SEUPB's management and control systems will conclude by the end of the year, with one deferred to 2020;
- Page 5 of the implementation paper features a revised format for presenting data, which mirrors how data is presented to the Commission on the SFC reporting system and includes public match and private match funding;
- **The MA Director** outlined a forecasted overachievement of the N+3 targets by around €23.5million by the end of 2019;

- Noted that verification of payments was not progressing at the preferred pace, for various reasons;
- A number of evaluations are ongoing. A sixth evaluation, recently implemented in conjunction with CPD, will develop a support and research function for PEACE PLUS activity;
- Following EU Commission observations on the AIR, the MA has begun a review of the outputs and result indicators across the Research and Innovation and the Sustainable Transport objectives. Any modifications as a result of this work to the INTERREG VA Cooperation Programme will follow a formal process, and be submitted to this PMC for consideration, and;
- Zero Carbon Futures have been contracted to examine the relevance of Electric Vehicle targets.

The Chair thanked **the MA Director** and invited **the JS Director** to provide a presentation on implementation by thematic area.

Following the JS Director's presentation, **the Chair** reiterated that the progress being made across all Programme objectives is underpinned by effective North-South collaboration in areas of mutual interest.

The DG Regional and Urban Policy Head of Unit thanked the JS Director for her presentation and made the following points;

- The INTERREG VA Programme is unique among the INTERREG Programmes, due to the history of the Northern Ireland-Ireland border and its unique position in Brexit negotiations;
- Commended the SEUPB on the level of N+3 overachievement and noted the significant increase in the 2020 target;
- The INTERREG VA Programme's 106% commitment rate, inclusive of other public and private match funding places it in the top 10% best performing Programmes across Europe. The Programme performs slightly below average in terms of expenditure declarations. The representative noted the SEUPB's explanation for the variance, and suggested consideration be given to the procurement of additional resources for certification and verification, and;
- Requested detail on the measures being taken to mitigate the impact of Brexit and ensure the continuation of the rate of delivery.

The EU Commission Desk Officer stated that the EU Commission's comments on the AIR focused on the relevance of the assumptions made during Programme design. The proposed Programme modification documents will be examined in the context of both the current INTERREG Programme and to benefit the future PEACE PLUS Programme.

Committee Members made the following comments and observations;

- **The Intertrade Ireland representative** noted the limited capacity of micro-businesses and SMEs to manage Brexit implications, combined with the absence of a NI Executive, and the fact that existing public sector construction projects are coming to an end;
- **The IBEC representative** commended the SEUPB on the strong network of relationships with Project Partners and management of the effect of Brexit to date;
- Highlighted micro-business and SME assessment of and reaction to Brexit implications as indicative of the future effects on the wider business environment;
- **The Highlands and Islands Enterprise representative** commended the quality of the papers and presentations in conveying Programme information;
- Queried whether the reassessment of the common output indicators mentioned will align with the work of the Evaluation Steering Group (ESG);
- **The Environmental Pillar representative** highlighted the significance of environmental projects as a "Brexit-immune" common interest;
- Requested further detail on the Electric Vehicles objective, and;
- Queried whether the overcommitted funding must return to the EU Commission or can be invested elsewhere in the Programme, and;
- **The CBI representative** commented on the Electric Vehicles call in the context of wider environmental issues and the current reliance on fossil fuels.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their comments, and made the following points;

- The SEUPB has asked all projects to consider and report how Brexit may affect their delivery, beyond the reassurance provided by the continuation regulation. A degree of impact remains unknown, and the SEUPB remains committed to implementation of the PEACE and INTERREG Programmes in full;

- **The Chair** explained the verification process and emphasised the system of providing cash advances to all projects, to avoid cash flow difficulties, especially if payment of claims are delayed.

The JS Director stated that Brexit poses a risk to Health projects in particular, and the SEUPB is working closely with Lead Partners to mitigate impact on the innovation being developed.

In addition, the JS Director provided a response on the Electric Vehicle objective, stating that assessment of the one application received was extensive and included external technical expertise, before recommendation to Steering Committee.

The DoF representative thanked the project representatives and reiterated the importance of maximising expenditure and asked the SEUPB to provide Member States with sight of any Programme modification proposals and papers, in the absence of NI Executive approval.

The DPER representative echoed DoF comments in congratulating the SEUPB and project partners on the Programme's successes and commitment level. The representative highlighted successful INTERREG projects including the Community Paramedic Programme under the Health objective, and outlined the additional environmental benefits underpinning the Multi Modal Transport Hub. Lastly, **the DPER representative** thanked the EU Commission for their continued support for the current and future Programmes.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted the progress in implementation of the Programme.

8. Update on Implementation of the Communications Strategy

The Communications Manager provided a presentation which outlined upcoming project launches, the positive or neutral tone of media coverage surrounding the Programme and SEUPB's engagement with stakeholders over social media.

The DG Regional and Urban Policy Head of Unit complimented the overview provided and the Communications Plan as a best practice model for other INTERREG Programme in terms of design, delivery and monitoring.

The DG Regional and Urban Policy Head of Unit informed Members of events taking place in 2020 to celebrate 30 years of the INTERREG Programmes, assisted by various Managing Authorities.

The Monitoring Committee made the following comments and observations;

- **The Scotland Europa representative** commended the SEUPB for organising the September Scottish INTERREG VA Exhibition in Edinburgh as a showcasing and networking opportunity for Scottish projects;
- **The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission representative** queried the approach to identifying and engaging with stakeholders around the PEACE PLUS public engagement events;
- **The SEPA representative** commented on the environmental impact of a number of INTERREG projects against the current state of climate emergency. The representative queried the opportunity to showcase INTERREG Environment projects in the upcoming COP26 event, being held in Glasgow in 2020.

The Scottish Government representative extended appreciation from the Scottish Minister Ben Macpherson to the SEUPB Communications team for their work on the September event in Edinburgh.

The following responses were made;

- **The Chair** noted the importance and added value of Scottish contribution within the Programme;
- **The Communications Manager** described a multi-channel approach in engaging with stakeholders, including print advertising in daily and weekly titles, and use of social media ahead of the public engagement exercise in January 2020.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted the Communications Activities since the last PMC meeting, and;
- Noted progress in implementation of the Communications Strategy.

9. PEACE PLUS Programme update

The Transnational Manager, Managing Authority provided a presentation which outlined the PEACE PLUS Programme development process.

The Chair made the following points;

- Outlined the challenges in adhering to the design timetable;
- The draft regulations provide a degree of flexibility in choosing Programme areas based on functionality rather than geographical area, and allowing participation from outside the Programme area;
- Welcomed Accountable Department input in the Programme design;
- Outlined the importance of spreading the consultation events throughout the geographical region, to encourage input from local communities and individuals, and;
- Consultation documents will be available on the SEUPB website and via postal request.

The ICTU Ireland representative queried whether the format of stakeholder engagement will include social partners, civil groups and trade unions.

The Chair responded that these groups are represented on the PMCs and PDSG, and will receive the full suite of consultation documents.

The Scottish Government representative highlighted the Scottish contribution to the current INTERREG Programme, and their interest in involvement in future Programmes. The representative outlined support for Scottish involvement in future ETC Programmes resulting from Scottish stakeholder events, and offered to provide the SEUPB with a summary report.

The DG Regional and Urban Policy Head of Unit made the following points;

- Negotiation of the Multi Financial Framework (MFF), is ongoing, determining the budget for the next Programming period. The proposed MFF will be submitted on 10 December 2019;
- Realistic estimates show a decreased budget for INTERREG activity in the next Programming period;
- Trilogue negotiations between the EU Parliament, the EU Council, and the EU Commission to define the Cohesion Policy regulations are in the advanced stages. The EU Commission is aware of preparatory work taking place for the new Programmes and encourages informal dialogue on Programme design until the finalisation of the Cohesion regulations;
- The EU Commission is available to participate on the PDSG and in any required advisory capacity;
- Reiterated that PEACE Plus is one Programme, combining the social policy elements of the PEACE Programme and the economic development elements of the INTERREG Programme;
- The EU Commission is committed to a reduction of legal, institutional and administrative burdens in the new Programmes;
- The EU Commission is working to include functional areas in the new Programme, which will indeed allow participation from partners outside the Programme area and therefore Scottish involvement, and;
- The UK is currently placed as a third country in the draft regulations, in a model similar to Switzerland and Norway for the purposes of inclusion in ERDF funding.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments and outlined opportunities to channel part of the technical assistance budget in the current Programmes into preparatory work for PEACE Plus.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted progress in preparing for the PEACE PLUS Programme

10. Date of next meeting

The Chair stated the next meeting of the INTERREG VA Programme Monitoring Committee will take place in Spring 2020 in the Border Region.

11. AOB

The Chair stated that all presentations from today's meeting will be circulated to Members, and asked Members to contact the SEUPB with any queries.

Lastly, **the Chair** informed the Monitoring Committee that **Mark Feeney, Managing Authority Director**, is leaving the organisation after 2.5 years for a new role. She recorded her thanks to Mark for his work on the Programmes.

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ANNEX I

ACTION POINTS/ISSUES OF CLARIFICATION

ARISING FROM MONITORING COMMITTEE

Thursday 28 November 2019, AFBI Conference Hall, Hillsborough

ACTION POINTS

No Action Points recorded.

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ANNEX II

**Attendance – INTERREG VA Programme Monitoring Committee – Thursday 28
November 2019, AFBI Conference Hall, Hillsborough**

Chair

Gina McIntyre Chief Executive Officer, SEUPB

Members

Cllr Alex Baird NILGA/ UUP

Pascal Boijmans DG Regional and Urban Policy

Anne Marie Caulfield DPER

Prof Sue Christie CNCC

Sean Cronin Environmental Pillar

Sam Curran SEPA

Michael D’Arcy IBEC

Gerry Doyle NWRA

Dr Maura Farrell Irish Rural Link

Mark Feeney MA Director, SEUPB

Ruth Gallagher IHREC

Francesca Giannini Scotland Europa

Blair Horan Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Ireland

Leanne Massey SEUPB

Jim Millard Scottish Government

Brian McCann	CBI
Dominic McCullough	Department of Finance NI (DoF)
Cllr Enda McGloin	NWRA
Ken Nelson	Intertrade Ireland
Geoff Nuttall	NICVA
Paul Sheridan	Corporate Services Director, SEUPB
Linda Stewart	Scotland Europa
Marianne Van De Vorle	EU Commission

Advisors

Susan Bardon	Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation (DJEI)
Catherine Clynes	DPER
Caroline Coleman	National Contact Point, Scotland (SEUPB)
Elaine Colgan	Department of Health
Wendy Cooke	DAERA
Dave Loyal	Department for the Economy
Owen Lyttle	DAERA
Cllr Frank McBrearty	NWRA
John McCandless	Communications, SEUPB
Declan McGarrigle	Managing Authority, SEUPB
Philip McMurray	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
Michael Power	NISRA

Wendy Robinson	Department of Health
Michael Spillane	DTTAS
Mark Stranaghan	Department for Infrastructure
Jim Sutherland	Department for Infrastructure
Tim Weir	Department for Infrastructure
Maura Young	Managing Authority, SEUPB

Observers

Paul Boylan	JS, SEUPB
Wendy Cooke	DAERA
Sam Dunn	McAdam Design
Phil Heaton	Managing Authority, SEUPB
Siobhan McAlister	NICVA
Emer McGeough	NSMC
Peter Molloy	DPER
Philip Palmer	DAERA
James Russell	Managing Authority, SEUPB

Secretariat (SEUPB)

Tara McCormick	Managing Authority (minutes)
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Apologies

Wesley Aston	Ulster Farmers Union
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Susan Bardon	DBEI
Robin Clarke	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Ivan Cooper	The Wheel
Pamela Dooley	ICTU Northern Ireland
Louise Kenny	Department of Health Ireland
Gillian MacDonald	Scottish Natural Heritage
Geraldine McGahey	The Equality Commission NI
Nicola Mellis	Scottish Government International Innovation

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ANNEX III

Glossary of acronyms used in the minutes:

CNCC	Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside
DAERA	Department Of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs
DBEI	Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation (Ireland)
DfC	Department for Communities (Northern Ireland)
DfC (NI)	Department for the Economy
DHPCLG	Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government
DoE	Department of Education (Northern Ireland)
DoF	Department of Finance (Northern Ireland)
DoH	Department of Health (Northern Ireland)
DJEI	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Dfi	Department for Infrastructure
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HMT	Her Majesty's Treasury (UK)
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
NICVA	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
NILGA	Northern Ireland Local Government Association
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

NSMC	North South Ministerial Council
NWRA	Northern Western Regional Assembly
SCVO	Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
SEUPB	Special European Union Programmes Body
JS	Joint Secretariat
MA	Managing Authority

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