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**INTERREG VA PROGRAMME
NORTHERN IRELAND, THE BORDER REGION OF IRELAND AND WESTERN
SCOTLAND
(2014 - 2020)**

CCI No: 2014TC16RFCB047

MINUTES MONITORING COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday 24th November 2020

Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Attendance

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

1. Welcome and Introduction by Chairperson

The Chair welcomed attendees to the eleventh meeting of the INTERREG VA Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) 2014 – 2020, after the May meeting was cancelled due to ongoing Covid restrictions and Members were issued with a written update.

The unusual method of meeting via MS Teams was acknowledged, and Members consented to the meeting being recorded for the purpose of assisting with minutes

The Chair welcomed **EU Commission Desk Officer, Marianne Van De Vorle** to the meeting, accompanied by Peace Desk Officers **Kris Magnus** and **Joanne Knight**, observing.

The Chair outlined changes in the INTERREG VA PMC membership, and asked newly appointed Members to extend the sincere gratitude of SEUPB to departing representatives whom they are replacing. In particular, **the Chair** thanked **Frank Duffy of the Department of Finance** for years of service to the PEACE and INTERREG Programmes; he is replaced by **Dominic McCullough**.

The Chair provided an update on developments in Programme implementation since the previous PMC meeting on 28th November 2019 in Hillsborough, which consisted of the following;

- **The Chair** outlined the SEUPB's response to the Covid restrictions implemented since March 2020, with all staff working from home and JS Case Officers engaging with projects on a one-to-one basis to ensure continued implementation.
- Emergency payments provision has been put in place. Emergency payments were explained as automatic payments made on submission of a project claim, in advance of verification.
- A small number of projects have furloughed staff. The SEUPB is committed to ensuring projects remain viable and eligible for funding.
- **The Chair** also referred to the end of the Brexit transition period on 31st December, at which time the Ireland-Northern Ireland Protocol comes into effect. The impact of the changed environment will be monitored and addressed with projects.
- Development of the PEACE PLUS Programme is at an advanced stage. The SEUPB eagerly anticipate the finalisation of the PEACE PLUS Programme budget, to be discussed later in the agenda.
- In a meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) on 30 October, Ministers were updated on project responses to Covid restrictions and the development of the PEACE PLUS Programme. As the NSMC had not met since November 2016 due to the suspension of the Northern Ireland Executive, business plans and corporate plans were formally approved during the meeting.
- The Chair outlined, for the information of Members, that the SEUPB was subject to a cyber-attack during Summer 2020. Correct procedures were followed and internal systems were restored within weeks, and thanks are extended to the IT Department, DoF(NI) and DPER for their support during this time. **The Chair** provided assurance that project information is held separately and was uncompromised, and offered to share lessons learned from the experience.

2. Project Presentations

The Chair introduced a pre-recorded video from **Professor Tony Bjournson** of the University of Ulster's Clinical Centre for Personalised Medicine - Clinical Decision Making

and Patient Safety (CPM) project, which was awarded around €8million under Theme 1.1 Health and Life Sciences.

The IBEC representative queried the project's approach to cross-border testing and collaboration.

The JS Director explained that projects have remained cognisant of cross-border requirements while trying to continue implementation and achieve their original outcomes, and the SEUPB have supported Covid responses where possible. Further examples of cross border collaboration will be outlined in the JS presentation.

3. Agree Agenda

The agenda was agreed.

4. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts were declared.

5. Minutes of previous meeting – 28 November 2019

The Monitoring Committee approved the minutes of 28 November 2019 as a true and accurate record of the previous meeting. The minutes will be uploaded to the SEUPB website.

AP 1: Minutes to be added to 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

James Russell, Managing Authority Manager, tendered apologies for **Managing Authority Director, Maura Young**, and provided a Programme-level presentation on Programme implementation which consisted of the following main points;

- The INTERREG VA Programme is committed to the value of €228 million, or 101.9%. The Sponsor Departments permit 5% overcommitment;
- The Letter of Offer has been issued to the FASTER project, which fully commits the Sustainable Transport objective in terms of outputs;
- Under Health, the Steering Committee has approved additional funding for both the CHITIN and ACUTE projects. The increased numbers of beneficiaries have led to full commitment against results and outputs under the Health objective;
- Certain projects under the Research and Innovation and Health objectives have been able to adapt aspects of their delivery to respond directly to the Covid crisis, in line with updated EU guidance;
- An N+3 overachievement of around €15 million is forecast. As achievement of the N+3 target becomes more difficult towards the end of the Programmes, this provides a level of reassurance;
- The SEUPB has appointed consultants to conduct an appraisal of the additional costs around the Greenway projects and advise on next steps, in response to a request by all three Greenways for additional resources due to increased costs. Upon completion of this exercise, the SEUPB will have a better understanding of the position and in particular if there will be a need for Programme modification;
- The Implementation Evaluation is complete and available on the SEUPB website, and four third-phase impact evaluations are underway. All evaluators have dedicated resources to assessing the impact of Covid on project delivery, and the Research and Innovation and Environment conferences have been postponed until 2021.

The Scottish Government representative complimented the SEUPB's Covid- 19 response, performance and achievement of N+3, and queried project expenditure performance.

The Managing Authority Manager responded, outlining that expenditure at project and Priority level is healthy, and some issues exist around submission of claims under the Health objective. The SEUPB are monitoring resources to ensure submitted claims are verified and processed as efficiently as possible.

The Chair elaborated on further measures to ensure maximisation of spend, including extensions to project closure dates and encouraging projects to declare underspend, to allow for redistribution to areas of greater need across the Programme.

The EU Commission Desk Officer also complimented the SEUPB on their work under challenging circumstances; the INTERREG VA Programme ranks among the top ten in Europe with regards to commitment, and was among the first to adapt and assist projects under lockdown. The representative encouraged the SEUPB to maintain monitoring levels and engagement with the EU Commission.

The Environmental Pillar representative noted a delay between payment stages under the Freshwater Basins and River Quality objective, and sought clarification on payment deadlines.

The Chair stated that projects have fixed, individual deadlines for submission of claims. However, the SEUPB have worked with projects on a case-by-case basis to ensure timely submission of documentation, and to introduce flexibility around Letter of Offer end dates where appropriate.

The JS Director provided a presentation at project level which included the following main points;

- While Covid has created challenges, the majority of projects have continued their implementation around local and differing national restrictions, with some delays and suspensions.
- Three projects chose to furlough staff during the original lockdown.
- Some Health and Research and Innovation experts have been directly involved with the Covid 19 response; Prof. Jim McLaughlin of the ECME project has become a UK Government Advisor on the Rapid Test Consortium, and Prof. Murphy of NUI Galway and the CHITIN project is involved in the Covid response work of Oxford and Imperial Universities.
- Under the Research and Innovation objective, underspend is emerging due to a suspension of activity due to Covid restrictions, as well as requests for extensions from PHD students.
- While the Co-Innovate project displayed agility in adapting to restrictions, five SMEs have withdrawn from the business-to-business collaboration activity as a direct result of Covid.

- Previously, the PMC had agreed a review of the Bryden Centre's output targets; this exercise is nearing completion and any change will be brought to Steering Committee and the Monitoring Committee for approval.
- The main challenge facing the Environment objective has been the postponement of seasonal testing, water sampling and data collection due to restrictions; extensions and adaptations are subject to discussion.
- As covered by local media, the Source to Tap project is facing an unprecedented challenge and the largest pollution event in the history of Northern Ireland and Ireland, after the Meenbog burst. The Loughs Agency are conducting an assessment after the resulting peat pollution travelled into the River Derg and caused huge losses of fish. The Source to Tap equipment may have recorded the event, and the SEUPB will inform the PMC of developments at the next meeting.
- The FASTER project's Letter of Offer has been returned at a value of €6.4 million. The project aims to install 73 rapid charging points across the Programme area.
- As outlined by the MA Manager, the Greenways projects' requests for additional funds are undergoing a Value for Money assessment. The PMC will be updated on its conclusion.
- **The JS Director** outlined two outputs at risk under the MACE project. A large scale review and a request for an extension will be brought to Steering Committee for approval in the coming weeks.
- **The JS Director** concluded by thanking SEUPB colleagues and project staff for their work over a challenging year.

The DPER representative commended the SEUPB and Lead Partners for their work against a background of Brexit and Covid, and welcomed news of the FASTER project's approval.

This was echoed by **the DoF representative** and added they may use the JS Director's implementation presentation in other forums, to champion the Programme.

The Chair agreed use of the presentation, and took the opportunity to inform members that **MA Programme Manager James Russell** will be leaving the SEUPB in December. She extended her thanks to James and wished him well for the future.

AP 2: PMC to be informed of developments in the Source to Tap project regarding the Meenbog pollution event at next meeting

AP 3: PMC to be updated on conclusion of Value for Money exercise; Greenways projects requests for additional funds

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 contained the following;

- Details of the Communications Team's approach to ensuring Covid 19 guidance was accessible to projects and promoting project COVID-19 adaptation work on SEUPB's social media.
- **The Communications Manager** detailed a socially distanced presentation on the PEACE IV Programme to EU Ambassador to the UK, Joao Vale De Almeida, with project introductions at Lanarak Way Peace Wall.
- Detail on public engagement with the INTERREG@30 social media campaign.
- In October, online communications training was held for all INTERREG VA funded projects
- Reporting on media coverage, media tone, and engagement with the SEUPB's websites and social media channels

The EU Commission Desk Officer informed Members that the INTERREG Annual event was held digitally this year, and recommended Members view the Commissioner's speech and the Youth manifesto.

The Environmental Pillar representative congratulated the Communications team.

The SEPA representative reminded **the Communications Manager** of the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), as a forum for sharing exemplary environmental projects and stories.

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 Chair discussed the high level of interest in the PEACE PLUS Programme, and recent meetings with both the Finance Committee and the Executive Office Committee to report on progress.

Ministers Murphy and **McGrath** also joined an October meeting of the Programme Development Steering Committee, to outline their priorities around the Programme.

The Chair asked **Declan McGarrigle, MA Programme Manager**, to provide an update to the Committee on developing the PEACE Plus Programme, which will be a standing item on PMC agendas going forward.

The Committee noted the delay in quantifying the Programme budget or opening the proposed Programme to public consultation at the present time, as the final budget is subject to UK/EU Brexit negotiations.

Querying the timeframe, the **InterTradeIreland representative** outlined the urgent need for the Programme funding on the ground.

The Chair explained those elements of the timeframe which are outside the SEUPB's control as Northern Ireland and Ireland await confirmation of budget allocations. Initial planning envisages the roll-out of funds in late Summer/ September 2021, with Local Authorities among the first to receive funds, as they can circulate funds within communities almost immediately. The SEUPB have been working with Local Authorities to prepare.

The IBEC representative complimented the work achieved to date. He encouraged the sharing of any benefits of INTERREG projects' involvement in the Covid response in an all-island, functional approach, rather than limited to the Programme area, and called for partnership and collaboration between Northern Ireland and Ireland in any vaccination strategy.

Secondly, the representative encouraged project partners to give careful consideration to the conditions they must work in post-implementation of the Ireland- Northern Ireland Protocol, and how to embed cross-border collaboration in the new conditions before the PEACE PLUS Programme opens.

The Chair thanked the representative and responded, outlining that;

- The SEUPB have endeavoured to include flexibilities in the PEACE PLUS Programme, with cognisance of the post-Brexit and post-Covid environment.
- The functional area in the PEACE PLUS Programme offers opportunities which could benefit a wider geographical area, as per the flexibilities the EU Commission has included in the post-2020 Programmes.
- The SEUPB have begun an awareness raising campaign, to be expanded upon in 2021, informing people of the functional areas, the all-island reach of the PEACE PLUS Programme, and outlining the outputs.

The Scotland Europa representative thanked **the Chair** for expanding on the concept of the functional areas and the flexibilities, which is welcomed by Scottish stakeholders.

Declan McGarrigle outlined that the Managing Authority are also working with the Programme Development Steering Group to develop a core information document for the public consultation process, which will refer to the functional areas.

The Chair stated that the SEUPB wish to develop particular studies and road maps in 2021, including Smart Towns, Cities and Villages, regional tourism and social economy.

The EU Commission Desk Officer noted the EU Commission also await the budgetary outcome of the UK-EU negotiations however, the latest negotiations have seen INTERREG Priority Objective 2: A Greener Europe, and Priority Objective 4; A More Social Europe become obligatory for all INTERREG Programmes. The next round of talks begin on 30 November.

In response, **the Chair** discussed the opportunities afforded by the inclusion of Theme 6: Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration in the Programme, in addressing the administrative and legal obstacles of a border.

The DPER representative complimented the presentation, and reiterated Ireland's support at a ministerial level; Ministers McGrath and Murphy continue to engage with the PDSG and NSMC and look forward to a substantial Programme.

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 2021, in a format consistent with the NI Executive's Covid Guidance at the time.

11. AOB

The Highlands and Islands Enterprise representative updated Members on the work of the Shared Prosperity Fund in Scotland, which includes consideration of EU Territorial Cooperation and a key message on the value of transnational and cross-border collaboration, such as the upcoming PEACE PLUS Programme. The Fund demonstrates Scotland's aspiration to continue such collaborations through all possible means, so the representative welcomed the news of flexibilities around the functional areas.

The Scotland Europa representative also provided an example of good practice, informing Members that Prof. Lockhart of the BREATH project recently received a letter from Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, acknowledging how the project aligns with Scotland's new Respiratory Care Action Plan.

The Chair noted the Members' comments and concluded the meeting.

ANNEX I

ACTION POINTS/ISSUES OF CLARIFICATION

ARISING FROM MONITORING COMMITTEE

Tuesday 24 November 2019, Remote meeting via MS Teams

ACTION POINTS

ACTION	TIMING	RESPONSIBILITY
1. Previous minutes to be added to SEUPB website	Following today's meeting	Managing Authority
2. PMC to be informed of developments in the Source to Tap project regarding the Meenbog pollution event at next meeting	Next meeting – Spring 2021	JS/ Leanne Massey
3. PMC to be updated on conclusion of Value for Money exercise; Greenways projects requests for additional funds	Upon conclusion of exercise	JS/ Leanne Massey

Geraldine McGahey	Equality Commission NI
Aedin McLoughlin	Environmental Pillar
Ken Nelson	InterTradeIreland
Geoff Nuttall	NICVA
Paul Sheridan	Corporate Services Director, SEUPB
Linda Stewart	Scotland Europa
Marianne Van De Vorle	EU Commission

Advisors

Catherine Clynes	DPER
Caroline Coleman	National Contact Point, Scotland (SEUPB)
Louise Kenny	Department of Health Ireland
Dave Loyal	Department for the Economy NI
David Lynch	Department of Finance NI
Cllr Frank McBrearty	NWRA
John McCandless	Communications, SEUPB
Declan McGarrigle	Managing Authority, SEUPB
Michael Power	NISRA
Wendy Robinson	Department of Health NI
James Russell	Managing Authority, SEUPB
Michael Spillane	DTTAS
Betty Tyrell Collard	DBEI

Observers

William Archbold	DAERA
Paul Boylan	JS, SEUPB
Caroline Coleman	Scottish National Contact Point
Wendy Cooke	DAERA
Deirdre Dunworth	DHCLG
Phil Heaton	Managing Authority, SEUPB
Joanne Knight	EU Commission
Emer McGeough	NSMC
Kris Magnus	EU Commission
Philip Maguire	CBI
Pamela Meekin	Chief Executive's Office, SEUPB
Peter Molloy	DPER
John Murray	DAERA
Hugh O'Reilly	The Wheel
Philip Palmer	DAERA
Orla Ruddle	DAERA
Glenny Whitley	JS, SEUPB

Secretariat (SEUPB)

Tara McCormick	Managing Authority (minutes)
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Apologies

Cllr Alex Baird	NILGA/ UUP
Ald. Alan Bresland	NILGA
Brian McCann	CBI
Gillian MacDonald	Scottish Natural Heritage
Cllr Enda McGloin	NWRA
David McNeill	SCVO
Nicola Mellis	Scottish Government International Innovation
Mark Stranaghan	Department for Infrastructure NI
Jim Sutherland	Department for Infrastructure NI
Tim Weir	Department for Infrastructure NI
Maura Young	Managing Authority, SEUPB

Departing Representatives

Ruth MacDonald of Scottish Government, replaced by Jim Millard

Ruth Gallagher of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, replaced by Jean O'Mahoney.

ANNEX III

Glossary of acronyms used in the minutes:

CNCC	Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside
DAERA	Department Of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs NI
DBEI	Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation (Ireland)
DfC	Department for Communities (Northern Ireland)
DfE	Department for the Economy (NI)
DfI	Department for Infrastructure (NI)
DHPCLG	Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Ireland)
DJEI	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Ireland
DoE	Department of Education (Northern Ireland)
DoF	Department of Finance (Northern Ireland)
DoH	Department of Health (Northern Ireland)
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Ireland)
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
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
SEUPB	Special European Union Programmes Body
JS	Joint Secretariat
MA	Managing Authority