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**Minutes of the  
Stage Two INTERREG VA Review Panel Meeting**

Wednesday 30 November 2016, 10.00am  
SEUPB Offices, Belfast

**Project Applicant** – Action Mental Health  
**Project Title** – ‘Engage’

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In Attendance:	Gina McIntyre	SEUPB (Chair)
	Sean Cronin	MC Panel Member
	Avril Hall Callaghan	MC Panel Member
	Robert Gompertz	MC Panel Member
	Robbie Davis	Independent Member
	Sarah Reid	SEUPB (Secretariat)

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**1. Introductions**

The Chair welcomed Members to the first Stage Two Review Panel meeting of the INTERREG VA 2014 – 2020 Programme and explained the Review Procedure.

**2. Register of Interests/Conflicts of Interest**

The Panel confirmed that they had no conflicts of interest

**3. Review**

The Chair reminded the panel that the applicant has requested a review on the grounds that; “the outcome was a decision that no reasonable person would have made on the basis of the information provided to the Steering Committee”.

The project was assessed under 7 scoring criteria, with a minimum score of 3/5 required in each. Following assessment and Steering Committee consideration, the application failed to score the minimum (3) under three of the criteria, namely;

- Criterion One: Contribution of the project to the defined results and outputs of the Programme
- Criterion Five: Value for money
- Criterion Six: Sustainable Development

The Panel noted the scoring.

The Chair confirmed that in line with Section 4.0 of the Review Procedure, the panel would consider ten-minute presentations from both the applicant and the Joint Secretariat; both parties then entered the meeting.

The Chair apologised to the applicant for the delay in asking them to join the meeting, and introduced the Panel to Audrey Allen and Gavin McConvey, representing Action Mental Health, and John Greer and Brenda Hegarty of the SEUPB's Joint Secretariat.

The Action Mental Health representatives proceeded to provide a ten minute PowerPoint presentation which outlined their reasons for requesting a review of the Steering Committee decision. The main points of the presentation included;

- The scoring of the application did not take due cognisance of the project assessment by the Technical Advisor;
- Evidence of the differing scoring provided by the 3 sources (Joint Secretariat, Technical Advisor and Steering Committee) leaves doubt as to the understanding of the project and business plan;
- In relation to **criterion one** (Contribution of the project to the defined results and outputs of the Programme);
  - Project partners have developed a range of effective initiatives targeted at the need to work closely with individuals which in turn builds their confidence to come forward and seek support;
  - A clear rationale was provided in terms of the prevention/intervention approach which is demonstrated to be the most effective;
  - The project has been designed to meet the needs of rural communities where there is hidden pain requiring a range of supports;

- The impact of the programme should not be assessed in terms of duration or intensity rather based on appropriateness to the needs of the individuals;
  - There is a clear strategic fit of the prevention/intervention approach aligning to the Making Life Better framework (HSC Public Health Agency), the HSE A Vision for Change Strategy, the HSE Health Promotion Strategic Framework and endorsement of the WHO 2011 by NHS Scotland all of which have been endorsed by the Department of Health Delivering Together (Bengoa) & Health and Wellbeing;
  - The application demonstrates a clear rationale for the tiered approach proposed which is consistent with funded programmes through HSE, PHA and the NI Executive Office (Social Investment Fund);
  - The Together for You evaluation highlights the benefits of a prevention approach and the potential for long term benefits;
  - In relation to beneficiaries, the project does not seek to duplicate local provisions with signposting of local services embedded in the project. Intensive supports are provided in the absence of local provision or not meeting the access needs of the participant.
  - In terms of the feedback relating to potential duplication of beneficiaries, participants are counted as a beneficiary at the point of exit from the project as was advised by the Financial Controller in SEUPB.
- In relation to **critterion five** (Value for Money);
    - The final scoring of this criterion is contrary to the technical advisor's assessment;
    - The partners contend that the strategic fit and proportionate responses of evidence based population and targeted interventions make a significant contribution to the outputs/results thereby representing value for money;
    - The cost of €219 per beneficiary provides excellent value for money to provide lasting mental health and well-being and the prevention of ill-health;
    - 70% of suicides that occur involve individuals who are not known to mental health service providers.

- In relation to **criterion six** (Sustainable Development);
  - Whilst the JS awarded a score of 3 and assessed the application as having paid due attention to EU and national sustainable development strategies and the requisite level of screening had been undertaken, the steering committee downgraded the score to 2 stating that the sustainable development section was poor – the rationale for this decision was unclear.

The Chair thanked the applicant for their presentation and invited the Joint Secretariat to provide their ten minute verbal presentation, which included the following main points;

- The Health and Social Care specific objective (4.1) has a total budget of €53m ERDF and aims to, through collaboration on a cross-border basis, improve the health and well-being of people living in the region by enabling them to access quality health and social care services in the most appropriate setting to their needs;
- As anticipated, this specific objective was the most sought after across the programme with 21 applications seeking funding of €115m ERDF;
- 14 projects progressed to stage 2 seeking €80m ERDF with 7 projects approved at a total budget of €47.5m ERDF and 2 deferred seeking €11m ERDF;
- As a result, the limited funds available were significantly over-subscribed and therefore inevitably, not every application would be successful.
- In order to process Stage Two Business Plan applications, the approach adopted by SEUPB in accordance with the published selection criteria was;
  - All Stage Two Business Plans were to be assessed by SEUPB and an external Health Advisor, who is not asked to score, however in this case the advisor did provide scores unrequested;
  - The Steering Committee consider the Stage Two Business Plan, the SEUPB assessment report (with a recommendation) and the Health Advisor Report;
  - The Steering Committee is the final decision maker.

- In terms of the issues raised by the applicant through the review request, the JS made the following responses;
  - Applicant issue raised: *'We contend that the scoring of the application did not take due cognisance of the project assessment by the Technical Advisor and the evidence of scoring presented from the 3 sources leaves doubt as to the understanding of the project and business plan'* – both the JS and steering committee took due cognisance of the Health Advisor Report. Under five of the seven distinct criteria, the score of the Health Advisor Report was agreed by either the JS or the steering committee or both. In the appraisal of the other applications, the recommendation of JS or indeed the decision of the steering committee did not always agree with the technical advisor. Notably, the minutes of the Steering Committee illustrate that the representatives of the departments of health in Northern Ireland and Ireland respectively confirmed agreement with the Assessment Report and stated that the application failed to meet the criteria;
  - In relation to the issue raised around potential duplication of beneficiaries, the JS stated that the proposed 13,128 beneficiaries would strictly not all be unique because some participants under intervention 1 and/or intervention 2 would have been counted again under intervention 3.
  - In terms of value for money, the assessment was impacted by a number of weaknesses such as the high volume low intensity model proposed and a number of inconsistencies of formatting and treatment of costs across the application.
  - In relation to the downgrading of the Sustainable Development score by the steering committee, the JS stated that there was a general feeling that there was a lack of detail provided. In addition the technical report raised concerns around the salaries and job descriptions of some staff which could impact on recruitment and ultimately delivery of outputs and sustainability.

In summary, the JS stated that an unbiased, evidenced assessment was carried out based on the information provided by the applicant.

The Chair thanked the JS for their presentation, and invited questions from the Panel.

The Panel asked the applicant the following;

- Given the project had a remit to cover all three jurisdictions, the activity in Scotland appears to be restricted to tier 1 only, could they therefore provide a rationale for this approach?
- Can the applicant provide an example to substantiate their claim that there was an unreasonable understanding of the information provided?
- What metric would be used to measure some of the outcomes?
- In terms of the perceived lack of scoring detail, did the applicant not receive this in their rejection letter?
- Why were the HSE or other statutory agents not involved in the project?
- What would be the legacy of the project?

The applicant provided the following responses;

- In terms of project coverage, the Lead Partner has worked closely with the Scottish partner who is of a view that priority should be given to tier 1 activities in that jurisdiction. In addition, the Scottish Association advised that there are already a large number of organisations delivering tier 2 and 3 activities and therefore duplication was always a risk. A key role of the Scottish Association would be to provide advice and guidance and share learning;
- In relation to the potential misunderstanding of the information, the applicant referred to the summary reference in the report about the intensity of interventions and stated that there is a clear rationale which is not necessarily about duration. It proposes a holistic approach which is the most appropriate way forward in terms of prevention and well-being and building a resilience to allow individuals to stay well;
- In terms of a proposed metric, the applicant stated that they were looking at the potential to use the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) to evaluate improvement in individuals, which may lead to a reduction in intervention at a later stage. Acting promptly with an individual may lead to them not having to go through tier 2 or 3.

- The applicant confirmed that whilst they did receive the final scoring of the project in the rejection letter, detail in relation to steering committee decisions including why the Sustainable Development score was downgraded was limited. This information was provided during the debrief;
- In relation to the lack of involvement by the HSE and other statutory agents the applicant stated that they had approached HSE however they confirmed that as they had their own bid into the programme, they were unable to support any other bids. In addition, Action Mental Health (NI) already have influence in terms of policy direction and are involved in other ongoing work that is impacting policy such as 'Together for You';
- The applicant stated that the project's legacy would be improved well-being in rural communities and an increase of individuals who are prepared to come forward for care.

The Panel asked the Joint Secretariat representatives the following;

- To explain the role of the technical advisor and if it is normal for them to score an application;

The Joint Secretariat representatives provided the following responses;

- The technical advisor is an expert resource in the particular sector and form part of the layer of intelligence required for a rounded assessment which includes the Joint Secretariat, the relevant accountable departments and steering committee;
- The advisor receives all documentation relating to the project including the JS scoring, however, they are only required to provide a narrative assessment without scoring. The process is not iterative in nature and the JS do not use any scoring provided to inform the final assessment report.

The Panel commented that the applicant had provided additional key data for the review meeting and queried why this was not provided during the application process. In response, the applicant stated that they do not believe that new information had been provided and that this data was supplied during the pre-assessment stage but did not appear to be in the review file.

The JS representative stated that the data supplied only referenced some points but the additional data was not received.

The Chair thanked the applicant and JS representatives and invited them the opportunity to provide a summary as follows;

The applicant reinforced the need for this type of upstream work in terms of the preventative approach.

The Joint Secretariat thanked the applicant for the work put into the application and indicated that they would be happy to work with the applicant if the decision was overturned or if a future opportunity arose.

The Chair also thanked the applicant for the work they had put into the process and advised the applicant and Joint Secretariat that written notification of the Panel's decision would be issued within 14 days of today's meeting.

The JS and Action Mental Health representatives left the meeting, and the Chair opened the meeting to Panel discussion.

In advance of considering the three criteria, the Panel made the following observations;

- Whilst the project appears to be in line with policy direction, there was a lack of evidence of policy engagement and an absence of policy agreement at the steering committee by the relevant accountable departments. If accountable department support had been in place this would have been the rationale for the project and would have demonstrated a level of sustainability;
- The Panel questioned the reference to the Bengoa Report, given that it had only been issued a few weeks previous to the review meeting;
- The rationale provided in terms of Scottish participation was not sufficient and questions whether a comprehensive service would have been provided;
- It is important that the role of the technical advisor is clear and if scoring is not required, this should be advised by the Joint Secretariat;

- The steering committee minutes do not provide sufficient information in relation to the rationale for their scoring decisions – the Panel recommended that more information is included in the minutes.

The Panel considered the scoring awarded in the 3 criteria that did not meet the threshold for approval;

In relation to the score of 2 awarded to Criterion 1 – Contribution of the project to the defined results and outputs of the Programme, the Panel made the following points;

- The information presented for assessment of the project does not contain a sufficient level of data and therefore a score of 2 is justified;
- There was no evidence of a metric to analyse for example the cost of suicide and prevention;
- The intervention logic appeared flawed in terms of how participant numbers are calculated which makes it difficult to assess actual results and impacts of the project;
- The absence of key stakeholders (accountable departments) even as associate partners is an issue;
- To achieve a score of 3, there would be an expectation that the application would include studies and evaluations to provide concrete deliverables on a long term basis;
- It appears that some of the key statistics provided at the meeting were not provided during the assessment process, however, the applicant indicated that they had been made available – it would be useful to ascertain whether this was the case.

In relation to the score of 2 awarded to Criterion 3 –Value for money, the Panel made the following points;

- The issues around value for money are linked to those sited in criterion 1 and therefore a score of 2 is regarded as appropriate;
- If the ‘additional’ data was available during the assessment process, it would have strengthened the value for money aspect of the project.

In relation to the score of 2 awarded to Criterion 6 – Sustainable Development;

- No structures, policies or procedures have been provided to enable long term services to be provided;
- The Partner in Ireland is a voluntary organisation with voluntary staff which prevents knowledge retention within the organisation and therefore questions the scope for sustainability;
- The absence of the appropriate departmental support questions the scope for any form of mainstreaming of interventions, in addition, the Ireland departmental representative highlighted concerns around sustainable development before the steering committee took place ;
- There is a reliance in Scotland that others would pick up activity beyond tier 1 activities which questions the scope for policy influence when so removed.

**The Panel agreed the Steering Committee score of 2 awarded to Criterion 6 – Sustainable Development.**

The Review Panel concluded that in advance of a final panel decision on the appeal, the Joint Secretariat would be requested to review the information provided by the applicant and confirm whether the ‘additional’ new data discussed today had been made available by the applicant but not utilised during assessment. The Chair suggested that she would ensure that someone independent within SEUPB to the original assessment undertook this review.

The Panel agreed that when the review is complete the findings will be circulated in an email from the Chair, and at that time 2 options will be available:

1. If the review reveals that the data had been available, and would have been significant in the assessment of outputs, then the project will be referred back to the steering committee.
2. If the data had not been provided during the assessment, the decision of the steering committee will be upheld.

The Chair thanked the Panel for their participation and closed the meeting.