



## European Union

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### Minutes of the INTERREG IVA Review Panel Meeting

Wednesday 3 June 2009, 10:15

SEUPB, Belfast

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In Attendance:	Adrian McNamee	SEUPB (Chair)
	Michael Hughes	Panel Member
	Brian Callanan	Panel Member
	Peter Osborne	Independent Member
	Lisa McMullan	SEUPB (Secretariat)
	Lisa Kelly	SEUPB (Secretariat)

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#### 1. Agree Agenda

The agenda was agreed.

#### 2. Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### 3. Register of Interests/Conflicts of Interest

None

#### 4. Review

##### **NILGA- Achieving Sustainable Councils (ASC) (000620)**

*Representatives from NILGA and the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) were invited to enter the room.*

In Attendance:	Karen Smyth	NILGA
	Nora Winder	NILGA
	Sam Knox	NILGA
	Cllr John Matthews	NILGA
	Howard Keery	JTS
	Eimear Murphy	JTS
Apologies:	Lorraine Fitzgerald	NILGA

After introductions, the Chair outlined the procedures to be followed at the review meeting. The Project applicants were then invited to outline the reasons for their request for a review.

A representative for NILGA presented their case. The main points from this presentation included:

Concerns that the scoring of the project was reduced on an arbitrary basis by the Steering Committee, who did not have regard to the view of the economic appraisers and professional support staff. Value for money was an area of particular concern given Economic Appraisal recommendation.

Lack of understanding of local government responsibilities and that climate change is not currently part of the core business of local government. The ASC project would be completely additional to the work of the local government.

Currently there is no climate change legislation in NI and no resources for mitigation or adaptation provided to councils.

Northern Ireland and Ireland are peripheral regions in the EU. The emphasis on sustainable development policy is diluted, and evidenced in the lack of public resources currently available to address the issue. Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are significantly behind their European counterparts in relation to progress made to sustainable development.

Benefits of the strategic cross-border nature of this project are

- A single system of measurement across the island of Ireland.
- Councils, North and South, will work together to plan, develop joint working, measure the effectiveness of interventions, and avoid duplication in effort and bench mark progress.
- Greater cross border co-operation in the development of ultimate policy change at local and national levels. This in turn will enable the effective implementation of EU policy over the two jurisdictions.

It was agreed by all that it would be more appropriate to liaise directly with the Dept of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and the county councils who would be involved in the scheme, rather than the council membership organisation in Ireland.

With regard to the concern over the long term sustainability of the post, NILGA believe that the opportunities presented by the Review of Public Administration (RPA) have not been considered by the committee.

Without the ASC project there will be no strategic direction or consistency to work done on climate change in partner councils.

The bid presents a valuable opportunity for a system to be developed which all residents in Ireland can understand and use as a comparator.

A representative from NILGA added that the panel may be familiar with the STEM project which was recognised as good practice and had informed the ASC project.

*The Chair thanked the Project Promoters for outlining their points and invited the JTS to respond.*

A representative from JTS made the following points:

The Economic Appraisal was conducted by KPMG. This was broadly positive and recommended funding at a reduced rate of £2,013,544.

Scores presented to Steering Committee by JTS were indicative and had been informed by the Economic Appraisal.

It was explained that the indicative score is presented to the Steering Committee for consideration and it is a requirement of the Steering Committee to agree scores and ensure that there is consistency across the theme.

The minutes of the Steering Committee meeting reflect that there was a discussion around the additionality of the proposal. Concerns were expressed that this may be the core business of the councils and that councils themselves should be in the advanced stages of taking forward such work in climate change and sustainability, funding this work themselves.

Issues around complementarity were expressed by the Steering Committee. The scores reflect the fact that the Lead Partner had not linked up with the umbrella body for the Local Authorities in the border counties or liaised with the INTERREG IVA Partnership Groups.

The Steering Committee decided to re-score the proposal in light of significant discussions. They believed that the match with priority and theme objectives was not strong and that the scores presented were too high. In addition to this, the Steering Committee reduced the scores for efficiency and effectiveness.

It was noted that scores for all applications were compared for consistency. For the cross cutting themes the Steering Committee identified that the consultants had not been consistent in their comments for the four themes and scores were adjusted in these areas across all applications.

The review panel was briefed on the re-scores of the proposal.

Other issues arising in relation to the application included the fact that there was no Scottish Partner, although this was not raised as an issue by the Scottish representatives; and the sustainability of high staffing costs.

*The Chair thanked the JTS for their comments and asked if the Review Panel had any questions.*

A review panel member asked NILGA to explain the role of Lorraine Fitzgerald.

A representative from NILGA explained that Lorraine was a consultant engaged by DOEHLG.

A review panel member then asked NILGA to respond to the point made that the proposal didn't engage with the umbrella organisation for councils in border region.

A NILGA representative stated that there isn't the same organisation in Ireland to engage with and that contact had been made with the Departments, individual councils and relevant groups. The appointment of a consultant by the Department was indicative of the level of support for this activity.

A review panel member asked if this work was core council business.

A NILGA representative stated that the Councils are working collaboratively but they do not have statutory duties to meet requirements of environmental change. There is no legislation for this at local level. He further stated that government departments can only go so far in the work that they carry out, it is local people that can make a significant change. This proposal would give councils the opportunity to do greater things with local people and businesses.

A representative from NILGA confirmed that councils are working together on both sides of the border which will enhance learning and collaboration from each other.

A panel member stated that although the project is a good idea there are concerns over;

- The involvement of partners in the border counties. He asked if Counties Wicklow, Cork etc are aware of this work as the proposal states it is all island.
- The fact that sustainable development would become European Legislation and would happen in due course. Therefore the funding/ money would be sourced from somewhere even if not from INTERREG IVA.

- The level of staffing costs especially in light of the budget constraints on recruitment in the Republic of Ireland.

A NILGA representative stated that they had more contact/communication with the councils in the South of Ireland than the Northern Ireland councils. Discussions have been held with Department of Heritage and Local Government to ensure consistency within the councils and this includes councils beyond the border region. The ASC Project would be used as a pilot scheme to roll out among all councils in Republic of Ireland.

A panel member asked for an indication of how Social Partners have been involved with the development and appeal of the proposal.

NILGA stated that social partners have been involved in the process from the beginning. A small sub-group has been formed, including a NICVA representative. Information was sent to other partners to inform them that the bid had been rejected.

A review panel member asked for further information on the Job Description of the Community Project Officer, and questioned why it is only deemed desirable for the post holder to have experience in community development.

A NILGA representative explained that the Community Officer Post would be designed to provide environmental expertise and would work along side Community Development Staff.

A review panel member raised the issue of sustainable development being considered by the Steering Committee as a global issue rather than a cross border issue. He asked JTS of the other cross border problems rather than climate change that had been discussed during the Steering Committee meeting.

The JTS representative said the committee did not elaborate on these issues.

A review panel member noted that the information in the Steering Committee minutes would indicate that other global issues had been considered a suitable cross border project, in particular he mentioned a road safety project.

JTS explained that this project provided information and statistics that demonstrated the cross border nature of this issue.

NILGA stated that there is a difference between councils, north and south in service provision. The project will develop a cross border measurement tool which will allow people to have a common understanding and approach to sustainable development.

A NILGA representative commented that there is no question that the Island of Ireland will be a better place to live in if sustainable development goes ahead.

A review panel member commented that whilst there had been a significant reduction in scoring, the minutes did not record a detailed rationale for this reduction. He asked the JTS to explain why there was a significant reduction and explain the impact on the success of the application.

The JTS stated that they stand over the integrity of the Steering Committee and the score is a genuine reflection of discussions that would have taken place at the meeting. JTS further explained the reduction in scoring as follows:

Priority / Theme – there was a clear rationale for the scoring of this section and there was not a deliberate effort to reduce the score. The Steering Committee did not consider this to be a pressing cross border issue.

Value for Money – The Steering Committee considered the Economic Appraisal's recommended option and did not feel that it represented value for money; the level of staff costs was of particular concern.

Equality of Opportunity – a basic answer had been provided demonstrating statutory obligations would be met.

Partnership – this was scored down as there appeared to be limited cross border involvement.

A JTS representative confirmed that if the score remained at 13, the application would still have been below the threshold mark.

With regard to Partnership, NILGA confirmed that they had made contact with the cross border partnerships to ensure complementarity. The only partnership where there is a possible clash was identified to be COMET.

Furthermore the bid had been put together by a network of partnerships and councils across Northern Ireland and Ireland and involved significant collaboration and consultation.

A member of the review panel asked about the number and location of the proposed 12 staff members and how the posts would be affected by the forthcoming RPA.

NILGA stated that this is full time work and additional to council staff work. The delivery mechanism required is the same as that of the STEM project. If action is not taken now, the pace of change and action will be slow. The project team will have specific needs and as such training needs.

NILGA further noted that councils are clustering and working together in pilot schemes now and that project staff will not be lost during RPA. The bid demonstrates that staff allocation is designed to reflect how councils are already working together reflecting RPA grouping. This project is designed to enhance RPA not work against it.

A member of the panel asked why the application's section on poverty focussed on fuel poverty.

NILGA representative accepted that this aspect could have included further information on how the project would address poverty at a wider level.

Further information was requested from NILGA on the proposed staffing arrangements. It was stated that:-

- Project officers would have environmental experience.
- There will be a need for intense and specific training.
- Staff would be located in Northern Ireland, though working cross border through county council satellite offices.
- It is anticipated the NILGA offices would be the hub for the project.

JTS made a final statement recognising that this was a good well structured application. The panel were asked to note that there was little mention of the STEM project in the application, although it had arisen discussion during the review meeting. It was the Steering Committee's view that the application was dominated by Northern Ireland Partners and activities; and it was concerned over additionality and the project's value for money.

The Chair asked the Project applicants and the JTS if they were happy with the way the Review Panel had been conducted, and if they felt they had been given the opportunity to convey all the main points of their argument. Both the Project applicants and the JTS confirmed that they were content with the process.

*The Project Promoters and the JTS exited the room.*

The Review Panel discussed the application and information presented and noted:

1. The level of additionality of the project in the context of the responsibilities of local government;
2. the process and reasonableness of scoring the application;
3. the value for money aspects of the project;
4. the level of partnership working demonstrated in the application.

The Review Panel concluded that in light of the information provided and the arguments put forward the Steering Committee's decision was not unreasonable. The Panel also acknowledged that the proper decision making procedures had been followed.

However, the Panel was concerned about the level of information recorded in the Steering Committee minutes. Therefore, it is requested that the Joint Technical Secretariat ensure that minutes of future Steering Committee meetings detail the rationale for any changes made to indicative scores presented to the Steering Committee for consideration. In addition, the Panel recommended that any areas identified as priorities for cross-border working are clearly communicated in future calls and reflected in assessment procedures.

#### **5. Any Other Business**

None

#### **6. Conclusion**

The Chair thanked the Review Panel members for attending and informed them that he would write, on behalf of the Review Panel, to inform both project applicants and the JTS of the Review Panel's decisions. He also stated that the minutes from the meeting would be e-mailed to Review Panel members in due course for their approval, before being posted on SEUPB's website.