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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
Thursday 25th November 2021
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 thirteenth meeting of the INTERREG VA Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) 2014 – 2020, the third to be held remotely via Microsoft Teams.

The Chair welcomed **Ramses Grande-Fraile** to the meeting as the new **INTERREG VA EU Commission Desk Officer**, accompanied by **Noel Farrell**, observing.

The Committee also welcomed **Helen Donaldson as the new JS Interim Director** following Leanne Massey's departure in October 2021. The Chair paid tribute to the work of Leanne during her three years with SEUPB, and wished her well in her new post.

The Chair outlined changes in the INTERREG VA PMC membership, and asked newly appointed Members to pass on the sincere gratitude of the SEUPB to departing representatives whom they are replacing.

The Chair also offered thanks to **Ken Nelson**, who will step down from his role as **Chairman of Intertrade Ireland** in December 2021. While unable to attend today's meeting, the Chair passed Ken Nelson's regards to the Committee.

The Chair provided an update on developments in Programme implementation since the previous PMC meeting on 25th May 2021, which consisted of the following;

- Since the last PMC meeting, easing of restrictions imposed since Christmas 2020 in all three jurisdictions allowed for project visits and SEUPB attendance of project closure and evaluation events. With this week's NI Executive announcements amid rising Covid cases however, the SEUPB is returning to reduced physical meetings and encouraging staff to work from home where possible.
- A total value of €288,716,398 (102.1%) has been committed to 33 projects across the Programme, including Technical Assistance. As such, there has been no additional funding available to help projects navigate the effects of Covid 19 restrictions.
- Instead, the SEUPB have been assisting projects with modification requests and extensions to project end dates. The extensions have taken the majority of INTERREG projects into completion in 2022 or 2023.
- The effects of Covid and Brexit have been keenly felt under the Environment and Sustainable Transport objectives, particularly the Greenways projects, due to the rising cost of deliveries and materials.
- The SEUPB is delighted that the PEACE PLUS Programme was approved by the NI Executive and Irish Government in the previous month, and subsequently approved by the North South Ministerial Council. The Programme will be formally submitted to the EU Commission for approval ahead of the first calls opening in 2022. A combination of PEACE and INTERREG activities in the interest of peace and prosperity in the region, it is critically important to get the Programme operational so that the impact of the €1.144bn can begin to be felt.

The Chair gave the floor to **Ramses Grande Fraile** who introduced himself to the Committee, outlining his background in architecture and urban policy and previous experience working across various European and international organisations to promote low carbon and sustainable regional and urban development. Mr Grande Fraile also manages the Flanders- Netherlands and Spain-Portugal Programmes.

2. Agree agenda

The agenda was agreed.

3. Conflict of Interest

The Chair thanked those Members and Advisors who have returned Conflicts of Interest and Code of Conduct forms to the Secretariat in the mandatory annual exercise.

No further conflicts were declared.

4. Video presentation: The Sea Monitor and Renewable Engine projects

The Committee heard how the Sea Monitor project was awarded €4,664,864 in July 2017 under objective 2.2: Manage Marine Protected Habitats and Species. The project aims to facilitate the development and growth of a regional 'blue economy' based on its maritime resources and the alignment of regional activities with the EU's Atlantic Strategy, developing and strengthening the growth of Marine Tourism, with Management Plans enabling sustainable development to occur in often sensitive environments.

The Committee also heard how the Renewable Engine project was awarded €5,802,426.20 under objective 1.1 Research and Innovation: Health and Life Sciences and Renewable Energy and commenced in January 2017. The project aims to facilitate direct knowledge transfer and technology development in the Renewable Energy and Advanced Manufacturing sectors through the provision of industrial research support and technology development grants to industrial partners.

The Committee was provided with a short video on the two projects, featuring Lead Partners the Loughs Agency and South West College.

The Chair discussed the enthusiasm of staff involved in the two projects, which the SEUPB were able to visit before Covid restrictions were put in place.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted the project presentation videos

5. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 25 May 2021

The Monitoring Committee approved the minutes of 25 May 2021 as a true and accurate record of the previous meeting. The minutes will be uploaded to the SEUPB website.

AP 1: Minutes to be uploaded to the SEUPB website
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6. Matters arising

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

7. Update on Programme Implementation

Members noted the new format of Implementation papers, now split into a Programme Implementation paper and a Programme Management paper, as provided prior to the meeting. **The Chair** asked **JS Director, Helen Donaldson** to provide a presentation on implementation from the Joint Secretariat perspective. The presentation consisted of the following main points;

- The JS are forecasting that over 80% of INTERREG projects will now complete in 2022/ 2023, leading to additional risks to delivery timeframes and expenditure as any underspend late in the Programme is difficult to re-allocate;
- JS Case Officers are working with all Lead Partners to ensure understanding of the requirements with regards to the programme end date, eligibility of spend and output achievement;
- The JS are also closely monitoring all associated risks to implementation and to Programme and financial targets;
- All the **Research and Innovation** projects requested extensions, which have now been processed and granted, with the majority of closure dates in June 2022. The theme is on track to meet or exceed all of its original output targets, and projects are forecasting they will meet the PhD hours output now the extensions are in place;
- Two outputs - “Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions” and “Number of enterprises engaging an innovation intern” – are currently recorded

as amber risks however, the project is confident of full achievement and the JS is continuing robust monitoring;

- **Environment:** The CABB project has been extended until September 2022 and the SWIM project is working through issues relating to the installation of signage to complete in December 2021.
- **The JS Director** highlighted a cattle boat purchased by the CABB project, which allows for effective land management among the islands of Lough Erne, as well as stock-proof fencing in Pettigo Nature Reserve in Donegal. Delivery of agreed work plan activities directly impacts the outputs by contributing to an improved conservation status for the habitats where the work is being delivered;
- Realisation of the Environmental outputs is weighted towards project end;
- **Sustainable Transport:** The Greenways element of the programme is currently carrying risks around delivery;
 - Carlingford Lough Greenway is discussing planning issues where a section of Greenway crosses a road with the Department for Infrastructure NI, which impacts on delivery timeframes.
 - The North West Greenway is unable to deliver the Derry-Buncrana section before Programme end or within a proposed grace period and have requested its withdrawal. The project has proposed alternative routes to meet the original kilometres target.
 - Similarly, the Ulster Canal Greenway has requested the withdrawal of 12 km of their route, and are unable to propose alternatives.
- Due to a combination of the above issues as well as rising costs due to inflation, COVID and Brexit, each of these Greenways projects have requested additional funding, which are under consideration.
- An external consultant is reviewing the Economic Appraisals of completed INTERREG projects and the SEUPB is undertaking a forecasting exercise to identify any potential underspend across the Programme, with a view to potential reallocation of thematic level budgets. Should additional funding be available, the Greenways element will downgrade to an amber risk;
- The completed North West Multi Modal Hub is fully operational and recently nominated for a REGIOSTARS award, and the FASTER project has launched;
- Health projects are performing well against their output targets;
- The remaining framework for the target outputs for vulnerable families is going through procurement, and expected to be contracted in the next quarter.

- The outputs for the 'vulnerable families' indicator 4:117 have increased substantially since the last PMC, with the MACE project increasing outputs from circa 150 to over 2,000 as at September 2021, and;
- The MACE Project was awarded a 24 month extension to June 2023. Previously a cause of concern as outputs at the time of the extension stood at 150 against a target of 3,125, the appointment of a new programme manager has yielded significant improvement. The current self-declared output from the project as at October 2021 is in excess of 2,000 beneficiaries.

The Chair thanked **the JS Director** and made the following points;

- During a recent visit to the CABB project, SEUPB learned the cattle boat was deemed essential travel over Covid restrictions and acted as an additional resource in feeding cattle and managing farms;
- In the majority of requests for extensions, projects are not asking for additional funds, only further time to complete on activity which was curtailed due to Covid, and;
- The SEUPB is sympathetic to the significant challenges faced by the Greenways projects, and are working to support them towards completion.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted the progress made in the implementation of the Programme

8. Update on Programme Management

The Chair drew Members' attention to the second part of the new paper format, an update paper on Programme Management, and asked **MA Director Paul Beattie** to provide the update presentation.

The MA Director's presentation consisted of the following main points:

- Certified expenditure has now exceeded 50% of total committed spend;
- The first projects, SWIM and the Changing Lives Initiative, are approaching completion as management focus shifts to Programme closure;
- 80% of projects are expected to complete in 2022/ 2023. The SEUPB continues to engage with all projects around adaptations to activity, extensions and budget modifications within the value of the Letter of Offer;
- The Programme is fully committed to a value of €288.7m commitment or 102.1% - around €6m overcommitted;

- The N+3 target for 2021 has been met and a surplus of €16.8m generated. A further €2.1m of certified claims to declare to the EU Commission means a forecast surplus of €18.9m to carry forward and contribute towards the cumulative 2022 N+3 target;
- New processes are being considered to increase the efficiency of claims processing. The SEUPB aims to complete certification of the remaining 2020 claims, while contributing to work on 2021 claims, by the end of December;
- There has been considerable improvement in the claims throughput. Increased project training, more consistent communication with projects and additional FCU resource are being considered in maintaining the flow of claims;
- Current forecasts have identified potential project underspend at around €9.5m, which equates to the additional budget requested by all three Greenways projects. However, this figure is not static and is being monitored;
- Additional MA and JS resources are being sourced in the focus on Programme closure, and;
- In an overview of the Evaluation Plan, the Sustainable Transport annual report is due December 2021, while final reports for Environment, R&I and Health are due Spring 2022. 2022 Evaluation conferences are likely to proceed in a virtual format.

The Environmental Pillar representative provided comments in the MS Teams chat, regarding sourcing the extra funds requested by the three Greenways projects.

The Chair responded, describing the complexities in identifying and assessing underspend.

Additional funds are not currently available as the Programme is overcommitted and projects which are able to complete their outputs are not eligible for further assistance. Work to identify potential underspend is ongoing, and decisions will have to be made in the best interests of the Programme overall.

The DPER representative thanked the SEUPB for comprehensive updates and extended the Department's thanks to SEUPB staff for their work on Programme delivery in difficult circumstances.

Lastly, the representative welcomed news of 2021 N+3 achievement and approval of the PEACE PLUS Programme, and reiterated DPER's support in all forms.

The DoF representative made the following points;

- The representative echoed DPER's comments on the SEUPB's efforts to deliver projects over the course of Programme and the challenging Covid period;
- Reinforced comments on ensuring projects reach full spend by Programme end;
- Welcomed news of N+3 achievement with a healthy surplus towards the 2022 target;
- Requested further information on the timeframe in decision making around the Greenways element;
- Requested an update on the next steps in implementing the FASTER project, following the identification of a number of potential charging sites in Scotland, and;
- Acknowledged the significant work undertaken to improve the claims throughput, thanking the SEUPB's Financial Control team.

The Chair noted the comments and assured Members that all efforts will be made by SEUPB to avoid underspend or the return of unused funds.

Responding on the Greenways timeframe, **the Chair** outlined the need for further consultation with the relevant Accountable Departments, as the three Greenways projects in question have different issues and timescales. However, the SEUPB is aware of the need to act for the health of the overall Programme in a timely manner.

The JS Director provided an update on the FASTER project. Site selection work has mostly taken place in Scotland. The SEUPB is working with relevant Accountable Departments in Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland to review the selected sites against regulations and the existing charging infrastructure.

Scotland will be the first to proceed with the next stage - procurement, with appropriate expertise engaged across all three jurisdictions.

The Chair and **the MA Director** thanked Member States and Accountable Departments for their ongoing support and input and will pass their compliments on to SEUPB staff.

The Scotland Europa representative made the following comments;

- Welcomed the actions implemented to improve upon the claims throughput and processing of current claims;
- Queried whether the current issues with claims will have an impact on the ability to achieve 100% expenditure;
- Queried any further mitigations to improve the quality of claims, and

- Requested that claims as a percentage of commitment and payments as a percentage of claims be included in the Management paper.

The MA Director stated that the tables currently show the claim and payment amounts but not the percentages, which can be provided in future papers if necessary. **The MA Director** offered to meet the representative separately to discuss specific projects, and welcomed Member suggestions on improving the processing time or quality of claims beyond the internal measures already in place.

The IBEC representative added to his comments from the previous meeting regarding using lessons learned from the INTERREG VA Programme to the benefit of PEACE PLUS, particularly around the impact of Brexit and Covid. The representative made the following points;

- Project evaluation reports should ask projects to provide practical feedback on Covid and Brexit, as two external events which had to be navigated;
- The evaluation reports should give projects opportunity;
 - To report the outcomes of their work, as opposed to achievements against outputs, and how these outcomes supported the project and the overall purpose of the INTERREG Programme;
 - To state the key lessons learned in operating a cross-border project in the Brexit-Covid environment;
 - To outline the practical impacts of Brexit on their project, and;
 - To outline advice they would give new project managers
- Queried how outcomes over outputs could be effectively evaluated, and;
- Queried the support the SEUPB will provide to PEACE PLUS PMC and Steering Committee Members, to assist them in managing the increased workload and responsibility.

The Chair responded, stating that the project evaluation report questions are being finalised, with sections specific to Brexit, Covid and lessons learned.

The Chair also detailed an ongoing scoping exercise to identify the challenges projects face in implementing cross-border activity and challenges affecting new projects. This exercise will inform mitigating measures and the upcoming PEACE PLUS calls.

Lastly, **the Chair** highlighted ongoing discussions with the EU Commission around the practicalities of implementing PMCs and Steering Committees for the new Programme, including resourcing, training, representation and remuneration.

AP 2: Future papers to include claims as a percentage of commitment and payments as a percentage of claims

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted the progress made in the management of the Programme

9. Update on Implementation of the Communications Strategy

The Communications Manager provided a presentation which contained the following;

- The Communications team's involvement in a number of virtual project closure events, and upcoming activity for the remainder of 2021;
- Of particular note, the 10 September visit to SEUPB from the Vice-President of the European Commission Maroš Šefčovič;
- Detailing the new design of the Your EU! Magazine;
- Reporting on the Communications team's achievement against Programme output indicators, all of which have been exceeded;
- Reporting on media coverage and tone, and engagement with the SEUPB's website and social media accounts, and;
- An overview of anticipated 2022 Communications activity.

The Chair thanked **the Communications Manager**, emphasising the importance of Communications activity in encouraging participation in the PEACE PLUS Programme.

The Chair stated hosting Maroš Šefčovič was an honour, and thanked the projects involved in the visit for presenting at short notice. Visits from the Permanent Secretary to the Northern Ireland Office, a German Minister and a Swiss Parliamentarian were also highlighted, and a delegation from Austria are seeking a meeting in the coming weeks.

The Highlands and Islands representative complimented the Communications team on the quality and coverage of communications activity, which he felt led to a high level

of Scottish engagement with Programmes in previous years. The representative reminded the Committee that Scottish stakeholders are keen to continue previous and current collaborations.

The Monitoring Committee;

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

10. PEACE PLUS Programme update

The MA Director provided a presentation on the work to develop the Peace Plus Programme since the previous meeting, which consisted of the following main points;

- The overall Programme budget has been confirmed at around €1.145 billion across six themes and 21 individual investment areas;
- The Programme was approved by the NI Executive, the Irish Government and the North South Ministerial Council in October 2021;
- The initial calls are scheduled to open in 2022, with pre-application support available. The majority of calls will release across 2022 and 2023.
- MA are continuing work to develop a call schedule and will approach the relevant Departments individually;
- The initial calls for applications will focus on Children and Young People, Shared Spaces, Victims and Survivors and Local Action Plans. The pilot pre-application support workshop is taking place on 10th December 2021;
- Application processes are under review with DoF and DPER, and the first drafts of Programme guidance are under internal review;
- Small grant programmes are being progressed in partnership with Pobal, with a focus on simplifying the application process for smaller organisations who were unable to apply to the current Programme;
- An extensive support programme for Local Action Plans has been developed with Blue Zebra Consultants;
- The establishment of a new IT system for PEACEPLUS – JeMs – is underway;
- Scoping work continues on themes including Smart Towns and Villages, Social Economy, Tourism and Impacts and Challenges of Brexit, and;
- The Managing Authority's next key tasks include the following;
 - Developing Individual Calls for Applications

- Putting in place pre-application support
- Developing Application and Assessment processes
- Developing Programme Rules and Guidance
- Setting up and establishing the new Programme Monitoring Committee.

The Chair provided further information on the monitoring arrangements for the PEACE PLUS Programme, and highlighted the scoping work in developing pathways and frameworks for the new calls.

Special thanks were recorded to **MA Programme Manager Declan McGarrigle** and his small team who have worked to advance the PEACE PLUS Programme to this point, and to the Programme Development Steering Group (PDSG) members. **The Chair** also thanked the teams in DOF and DPER for their support.

The DPER representative acknowledged the level of work involved in developing the PEACE PLUS Programme and also extended thanks to **Declan McGarrigle**. The representative outlined Minister McGrath's brief discussion on the PEACE PLUS Programme with Commissioner Ferreira at the General Affairs Council Meeting on Cohesion Policy the previous week, where she voiced her support.

The DoF representative also acknowledged the SEUPB's work since Christmas 2019 to develop the PEACE PLUS Programme in tandem with the current Programme. The representative will feedback the update on pre-application support to their Minister and expressed his hope for a smooth approval process with the EU Commission.

The Chair provided further information on the 10th December support workshop for the Children and Young People theme, which will allow potential applicants to begin planning their projects and partnerships in advance of the call release in Spring 2022.

The Scottish Government representative also congratulated the PEACE PLUS team and spoke of Scotland's wish to continue collaborations and partnerships which developed under INTERREG VA, contributing added value from beyond the Programme area.

The Chair described Scotland as an excellent partner to the current Programme and asked for continued external collaboration in the PEACE PLUS functional area, as allowed by EU Commission rules.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted progress in preparing for the PEACE PLUS Programme

10. AOB

No further business was declared

11. Date of next meeting

The Chair stated the next meeting will take place in Spring of 2022, in a manner consistent with NI Covid guidance of the time, and concluded the meeting by wishing Members a Happy Christmas.

ANNEX I

ACTION POINTS/ISSUES OF CLARIFICATION

ARISING FROM MONITORING COMMITTEE

Thursday 25th November 2021, Remote meeting via MS Teams

ACTION POINTS

ACTION	TIMING	RESPONSIBILITY
1. Previous minutes to be uploaded to SEUPB website	Immediately following meeting	Managing Authority
2. Future papers to include claims as a percentage of commitment and payments as a percentage of claims	Next meeting	Managing Authority

ANNEX II

**Attendance – INTERREG VA Programme Monitoring Committee –Thursday 25th
November 2021, remote meeting via Microsoft Teams**

Chair

Gina McIntyre

Chief Executive Officer, SEUPB

Members

Jim Millard	Scottish Government
Dominic McCullough	Department of Finance NI
Anne Marie Caulfield	DPER Ireland
Francesca Giannini	Scotland Europa
Prof Donna Heddle	Scotland Europa
Blair Horan	ICTU Ireland
Brian McCann	CBI
Donna Brodie	SEPA
Hugh O'Reilly	The Wheel
Prof Julian Orford	CNCC
Paul Beattie	Managing Authority, the SEUPB
Robin Clarke	Highlands and Island Enterprise
Maura Farrell	Irish Rural Link
Déarbhla Sloan	NICVA
Sean Cronin	The Environmental Pillar
Michael D'Arcy	IBEC
Wesley Aston	Ulster Farmers Union

Advisors

Colin Breen	DAERA
Noel Farrell	The EU Commission
Ramses Grande Fraile	The EU Commission
Joanne Knight	The EU Commission
Helen Donaldson	Joint Secretariat, the SEUPB
Paul Sheridan	Certifying Authority, the SEUPB

John McCandless	Communications, the SEUPB
Fiona Lennon	Department for Infrastructure NI
Wendy Cooke	DAERA
Ciaran Crosbie	Department for Infrastructure NI
Deirdre Donohoe	Department of Transport, Ireland
David O'Neill	DBEI
Dave Loyal	Department for the Economy NI
Jacqueline McDevitt	Department of Health NI
Sean Howlett	Department of Health Ireland

Observers

Andrew Lightfoot	Scottish Government
Caroline Coleman	Scottish Contact Point
Denise Tully	North South Ministerial Council
Tanya Gillanders	North South Ministerial Council
Pamela Meekin	The CEO's Office, the SEUPB
Peter Molloy	DPER
David Lynch	Department of Finance NI
Mary Maguire	Department of Finance NI
Orla Ruddle	DAERA
Glenny Whitley	Joint Secretariat, the SEUPB

Secretariat (SEUPB)

Tara McCormick	Managing Authority (minutes)
Phil Heaton	Managing Authority (technical support)

Apologies

Geraldine McGahey	The Equality Commission NI
Donna Brodie	Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
Jean O'Mahoney	IHREC
Sam Curran	SEPA
David McNeill	SCVO
Pamela Dooley	ICTU Northern Ireland

Ivan Cooper	The Wheel
Joanne Knight	The EU Commission
Kristoffer McKeown	Scottish International Innovation
Geoff Nuttall	NICVA
David Flynn	DHPLG Ireland
Brendan Fitzpatrick	Department for Infrastructure
Gearoid Cassidy	Department of Health NI
Loran Conway	Department of Health Ireland
Sarah Taylor	Department of Transport Ireland
Declan McGarrigle	Managing Authority, the SEUPB
Betty Tyrell-Collard	ICTU Ireland
Julie Leathem	Department for the Economy NI
Orla Gray	Department for Infrastructure NI
Tim Weir	Department for Infrastructure NI
Deirdre Bourke	NSMC
Sean McAteer	NSMC
John Murray	DAERA
Nicholas Meny	Scottish Natural Heritage
Ald. Allan Bresland	NILGA
Cllr Alex Baird	NILGA
Cllr Enda McGloin	NWRA
Cllr Frank McBrearty	NWRA
Ken Nelson	Intertrade Ireland
Maeve Hamilton	Department for the Economy

Departing Representatives

- Linda Stewart of Scotland Europa is replaced by Professor Donna Heddle;
- Professor Sue Christie and Sean Kelly of the Council for Nature, Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC) are replaced by Professor Julian Orford;
- Louise Kenny of the Department of Health Ireland is replaced by Lorna Conway,
- Susan Bardon of DETE is replaced by David O'Neill, and;
- Orla Gray of the Department for Infrastructure NI is replaced by Brendan Fitzpatrick, with Fiona Lennon as his Alternate

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