



NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE BORDER REGION OF IRELAND EU PROGRAMME FOR PEACE & RECONCILIATION

(2014 - 2020)

CCI No: 2014TC16RFPC001

DRAFT MINUTES MONITORING COMMITTEE MEETING Tuesday 10th May 2022 Hybrid Meeting; Crowne Plaza, Belfast and via MS 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 twelfth meeting of the PEACE IV Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) 2014-2020; the first to be held in a hybrid format of in-person and online via Microsoft Teams.

The Chair welcomed all Members and tendered apologies for EU Commission Desk Officer Joanne Knight, who had intended to attend in person and had to attend online due to travel disruption.

Changes to the PEACE IV PMC membership were outlined, and newly appointed Members were asked to extend a thank you on behalf of SEUPB to the departing representatives they replaced.

The Chair extended particular thanks to Anne Marie Caulfield of DPER, who is replaced by Andrew Condon, attending in person.

Members also noted that today's meeting would be **Communication Manager John McCandless'** last, as he is leaving the SEUPB after 13 years for another role.

The Chair provided an update on developments in Programme implementation since the previous PMC meeting on 4th November 2021, as follows;

- The PEACEPLUS Programme was submitted to the EU Commission for approval in March 2022, and the first shadow PEACEPLUS PMC should be held in the coming weeks.
- SEUPB has been assisting projects with modification requests and extensions to their end dates, now that Covid emergency payments have ceased, and is working to ensure that PEACE IV projects complete and deliver on their outputs.
- In the approach to Programme closure, SEUPB has completed an exercise to review potential underspend for reallocation across the Programme objectives, and is working with Sponsor and Accountable Departments on the closure phase of the Programme.
- The SEUPB is working closely with the Department for Communities NI to ensure completion of the Shared Spaces projects, which are experiencing significantly increased costs and delays to building works caused by Covid restrictions.

2. Agree Agenda

The Agenda was agreed.

3. Conflict of Interest

The Chair asked Members to declare any Conflicts of Interest in relation to today's business. None were declared.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting -

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record and will be uploaded to the SEUPB website.

AP 1: Minutes of previous meeting to be uploaded to SEUPB website

5. Matters Arising

The Chair outlined two matters arising from the previous meeting, both of which have been actioned.

6. Video presentation: The Sports Uniting Communities project and the Journeys project

The Chair introduced short videos presenting information on two PEACE IV funded projects - the Sports Uniting Communities Project and the Journeys project.

The Chair spoke of the benefits of such updates, and of the potential for future occasions when members could engage with funded projects in person.

Before moving on to the Programme implementation update, **the Chair** discussed the uncertainties following the recent elections in Northern Ireland, and the SEUPB's hope for an established Government as soon as possible.

The DoF representative assured Members that, regardless of the political situation in Northern Ireland, successful closure of the PEACE IV Programme and implementation of the PEACEPLUS Programme remain high priorities for the Department of Finance and Finance Minister Conor Murphy.

7. Update on Programme Implementation

The Chair asked Joint Secretariat Director, Helen Donaldson to provide a presentation on implementation from the Joint Secretariat perspective. The presentation consisted of the following main points:

- While the majority of COVID restrictions have now been lifted, the JS continue to work through the effects of delays and subsequent extensions.
- The JS' main challenge is around achieving the full commitment of expenditure, 100% drawdown of EU receipts across the Programme area and full delivery of the outputs.
- Shared Education Objective: Following school closures and reduced activity over periods of Covid restrictions, the CASE project has confirmed underspend of €4.5 million, meaning commitment under this objective now stands at a value of €28.5m.
- The objective was significantly impacted by Covid yet continue to deliver a substantial
 amount of activity into 2023 as their final academic year of delivery. Despite the
 challenges, the objective will deliver close to full achievement of outputs.
- Many projects have completed activity and are undergoing final verification under the
 Children and Young People objective. The objective is reporting slight
 underachievement on phase one and overachievement on phase two, and will
 achieve fully against output targets.

- The JS is currently conducting an exercise to remove any duplication in pupil engagement, which may lead to a minor reduction in numbers of no consequence to the objective.
- Under the Shared Spaces objective, the Ballycastle project has withdrawn from the Programme due to delays affecting the delivery timeframe. The JS is hopeful that the project will re-apply under the PEACEPLUS Programme.
- Seven of the remaining eight projects have requested additional funding due to significant increases in costs since their approval in 2018. The SEUPB has been working with the relevant Departments to identify underspend elsewhere in the Programme for reallocation to the Shared Spaces objective.
- A Steering Committee scheduled for the previous week to progress reallocations for the Shared Spaces objective has been affected by the non-formation of the NI Executive, as Ministerial approval is required. The JS is optimistic for a resolution in the coming weeks.
- Risks remain around the delivery timeframes running close to Programme end, which are being closely monitored by the JS.
- Under the Victims and Survivors objective, project partner WAVE has been nominated for a Citizen Educators award for their work on the Peace IV Workforce Training and Development Programme, delivered to frontline health and social care and nursing students.
- There is a high percentage of engagement against the 'resilience support' output indicator. While achievement against advocacy support is lower, the project has received an extension to August 2022 to ensure full achievement of outputs.
- Six Local Authorities have completed activity on all three themes, and a further four have completed on Building Positive Relations and Children and Young People.
- Fifteen Building Positive Relations projects have completed and are undergoing final verification. The JS Director commended projects for their resilience over the period of Covid restrictions, as all 20 projects are expected to fully achieve.

The DoF representative acknowledged the work of the SEUPB and the PEACE IV projects to date against a background of Brexit, Covid and rising costs, particularly under the Shared Education objective.

The representative emphasised that the Programme is at a critical juncture with regards to maximising expenditure and closure.

The DPER representative introduced himself and echoed these comments, attributing the current level of commitment and expenditure to the flexibility of SEUPB and the projects over the last 30 months.

The representative discussed DPER's engagement in the processes of redistributing decommitted funds and strengthening the verification process, and advised careful consideration in evaluating duplicate numbers of participants in Children and Young People projects.

The Chair thanked representatives for their comments, and commended SEUPB and project staff for their dedication and professionalism, particularly in maintaining engagement with children and young people over periods of lockdown.

The Monitoring Committee:

• Noted the progress that has been made in the Implementation of the Programme

8. Update on Programme Management

MA Director Paul Beattie provided a presentation on Programme management which consisted of the following main points:

- With less than two years of the programme remaining, the SEUPB is focused on preparation for Programme closure and close monitoring of project extensions granted.
- The PEACE Programme rules are reviewed annually, with several changes made in the 2021 review. The 2022 review is currently underway and several updates have been circulated to Lead Partners.
- The total budget allocation for PEACE IV (ERDF + match) is €269,610,965 of which €275,679,849 has been committed (102.3%). An additional €28.1m claims were submitted by projects from end of August 2021 until the 31 March 2022.
- The MA Director explained the N+3 requirement for the benefit of new PMC
 Members. The 2021 N+3 target was met and exceeded, with a surplus contributing to the achievement of the cumulative 2022 target of €44.8m.
- As at 31st March, an additional €35.2m of expenditure must be declared to the Commission to meet the 2022 N+3 target. The SEUPB have €8.977m of certified claims to declare in April 2022, and a further €37.28m is forecast to be declared in 2022. Upon declaration, the 2022 N+3 target will be met.
- The SEUPB's 2021 Business Plan target of 'certification of 80% of claims within 42 days of receipt of adequate supporting documentation' has been achieved.
- The volume of claims received and the effect of Covid on claims processing remains a challenge for the SEUPB. The FCU are focused on improving the claims throughput and completing the remaining 2020 claims by the end of this summer.
- Actions taken to improve the processing of claims and claims throughput include;
 - obtaining additional FCU resource to focus on Local Authority claims;
 - o Robust communication with Lead Partners on claim accuracy, and;
 - One-to-one support for projects.
- Since 31st March, 56 claims have been certified at a value of around €3m, in a mix of new and aged claims.

- The SEUPB has reviewed its procedures in verifying and reporting on output indicator achievement, to ensure full verification of all outputs before Programme end. Their approach has been developed in cooperation with NISRA and has recently been subject to Internal Audit.
- Resulting actions include the development of indicator guidance for each output, and recommencement of annual verification, which was previously disrupted over Covid.
- The MA Director thanked the relevant Departments for engaging in the process. The SEUPB will ensure the accuracy of verification in the approach to Programme closure, benchmarked against international best practice where possible.
- Currently, €13m underspend has been confirmed across the Programme, with a
 further €8.4m anticipated by Programme end. Managing Authority has written to
 Sponsor and Accountable Departments with proposed reallocations. These would
 unlock underspend in Shared Education, Local Authority Action Plans, Victims and
 Survivors and Building Positive Relations to cover overcommitment under the Shared
 Spaces and Children and Young People 14-24 themes.
- Members noted the four main risks on the SEUPB's risk register; project extensions into 2023, non-delivery of Shared Spaces projects, achievement of N+3 targets and Internal Audit findings on the Performance Indicators.
- The Evaluation Steering Group met on 15th March to review progress of the implementation of the Evaluation Plans for the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes. Three impact evaluations are ongoing Children and Young People 14-24, Children and Young People 0-24 and Shared Education. Final reports and conferences are in planning, with all current evaluations due to complete by December 2022.

The DoF representative commended the SEUPB on the levels of commitment and spend achieved and was encouraged by progress towards 2022 N+3 targets. The approach to claims and claims throughput was welcomed and the contents of the risk register noted for particular consideration.

The representative highlighted that the positions on underspend and overcommitment are continuously changing and the political situation in Northern Ireland will directly impact the Programmes, presenting further challenges for the SEUPB.

The DPER representative queried whether the N+3 position as an amber risk on the risk register should be reviewed, given the positive performance reported at today's meeting.

The representative asked the Committee to view the achievements reported at today's meeting in the context of the complex audit environment and high standards under which the SEUPB must operate.

Lastly, the representative outlined the challenges ahead in allocating ERDF funding in challenging economic circumstances.

The EU Commission Desk Officer echoed comments made by the Departments on achievements and queried the risk to SEUPB staffing and staff workloads, as the SEUPB works on both the closure of the current Peace Programme and the implementation of PEACEPLUS.

The Chair provided a response, detailing the ongoing staffing review, internal reorganisation, and innovative temporary measures such as seeking secondments from completed projects.

The EU Commission Desk Officer referred to the MA Director's statement on benchmarking SEUPB's verification processes against best practice in Europe, stating that the EU Commission often refer other Programmes to the SEUPB as an example of best practice in Programme implementation.

The CNCC representative commended the achievement in the Shared Education objective, and discussed how the funding motivated schools to take part in shared education until it appeared to be deprioritised during Covid.

The Chair agreed that a small number of schools and parents may have been interested in the funding on offer but reluctant to participate in shared education, initially. However, as projects gained momentum, greater numbers of children and parents became involved and began interacting socially outside the project activity, creating benefits and soft outcomes which must not be underestimated in terms of impact and legacy.

The Department of Education NI representative stated that schools had to make difficult decisions on where to focus their resources over Covid however, they remained dedicated to shared education, as evidenced by the achievement in the objective. Engagement with children was maintained online and in outdoor settings, and teachers reported that the relationships they developed across the partnerships were beneficial during Covid.

The JS Director welcomed comments on Shared Education, particularly as the objective was subject to high targets however, their achievement is reflected across all objectives in the Programme.

Referring to the Closure paper, **the TEO representative** stated it is under consideration within the Executive Office in the absence of a Minister and a response will be provided in due course.

The representative welcomed progress on the claims throughput, and asked for assurance of realisation of claims against the TEO's 2021 budget profile.

The Chair thanked all Departments for their flexibility around claims and reallocations, particularly the Department for Communities NI and the Department for Rural and Community Development Ireland.

The Monitoring Committee:

Noted the progress made in the management of the Programme

9. Annual Implementation Report 2021

The Chair informed Members of the Managing Authority's obligation to submit an Annual Implementation report (AIR) to the EU Commission by 31st May each year, following Monitoring Committee approval.

Comments on the report received in recent days will be incorporated before final submission.

The Chair also drew Members' attention to the new AIR infographic, which provides an overview of the number of Programme beneficiaries and the impact in a reader friendly format.

The Monitoring Committee:

- Approved the 2021 PEACE IV Annual Implementation report for submission to the EU Commission.
- Approved the PEACE IV AIR infographic

10. Update on Implementation of the Communications Strategy

The Communications Manager took the opportunity to thank the Chair and Corporate Services Director Paul Sheridan for his experience in the SEUPB over the last 13 years, and provided a presentation which included the following;

- The Communications team's involvement in a number of virtual and in-person project closure events;
- Legacy videos as part of project closure during Covid restrictions have proven so successful that they will now be a mandatory Communications requirement for PEACEPLUS projects;
- Details of the 10th December Children and Young People pre-development workshop;
- Details of DPER Minister Michael McGrath's visit to SEUPB's Belfast office and projects in March;
- Details on the Winter and Spring editions of Your EU online;
- Details of an editorial in the Sunday Independent newspaper for Europe Day 2022 in May;

- Reporting on the Communications team's achievement against Technical Assistance 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;
- An overview of anticipated 2022 Communications activity;
- Details of the Annual Perception and Awareness Survey;
- Updates to the SEUPB Communications Strategy, taken to reflect the increased use of online approaches as a result of COVID-19.

The EMRA representative requested a copy of the Annual Perception and Awareness survey findings, and queried the level of involvement from cross-border Local Authorities.

The Chair clarified that six Local Authorities are within the PEACE IV Programme area, each with allocated budgets to develop Local Action Plans, working across historical partnerships in the cross-border region which have developed over many years of Peace funding.

The NILGA representative spoke of how the community in her constituency of Aughnacloy collaborated to request a new 3D pitch at Aughnacloy College, and asked how the Council could seek Peace funding for ladies rugby and further sports.

In addition, the representative encouraged linkage between new projects under the PEACEPLUS Programme and projects which are already in place and which, like Aughnacloy College, have new facilities to accommodate activity.

The Chair directed the NILGA representative to pre-development support for the PEACEPLUS Programme and the Small Grants objective, which will be advertised on the SEUPB's website, social media and nationwide news.

The DoF representative complimented John McCandless' work with DoF's European division over the years and wished him luck for the future.

The representative queried the difference in awareness/appreciation of the SEUPB and/or the PEACE Programme in the border region compared to East and West Belfast.

The Communications Manager attributed the difference to the current political situation in Northern Ireland, combined with debate around Brexit and the Northern Ireland protocol. The agency commissioned to undertake the survey has drawn a similar conclusion.

The Chair welcomed the findings, which reflects the SEUPB's emphasis of promoting the programmes rather than the organisation per se. However the profile of the SEUPB has the potential to increase with the upcoming launch of the PEACEPLUS Programme.

The DPER representative spoke of the high standard of communications around Minister McGrath's recent visit, and wished John McCandless luck for his future role.

The DRCD representative echoed comments on the challenges the PEACE projects have faced and overcome before thanking John McCandless for his advice and guidance over the years.

The EU Commission Desk Officer also extended best wishes to John McCandless, describing the use of the SEUPB's communications under his time in the organisation as a benchmark for best practice.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted the communications activity since the last Programme Monitoring Committee meeting, and;
- Noted the updated Communications Strategy for PEACE IV.

11. PEACEPLUS Programme Update

Apologies were noted for PEACEPLUS Programme Manager, Declan McGarrigle.

The MA Director provided a presentation detailing progress on preparing for the PEACEPLUS Programme, which included 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 and formally submitted to the EU Commission in March 2022:
- Approval and adoption is expected in May/June, with the majority of calls opening in late 2022 into early 2023;
- The SEUPB are composing a shadow PMC; the programme will open following the first PMC meeting;
- Development of individual calls for applications is underway, with nine currently in progress;
- A suite of pre-application support is in development, with an aim to improve the quality of applications from an early stage;
- Three elements of pre-application support, to include workshops and one-to-one
 assistance, are currently in planning; the Youth Programme, Victims and Survivors,
 and Local Authority Action Plans. Sustainable Transport, Geothermal and Water will
 be the next areas under which pre-application support will be developed;
- Work is also underway in developing a user-friendly draft programme manual and online support portal as well as the main JeMs database;
- Managing Authority has concluded a specification for a new monitoring tool for data collection, for a real-time capture of how the Programme functions and engages with projects.
- The Small Grants Programme is scheduled to launch in Q1 2023.

The EMRA representative asked where the pre-application support workshops will take place, and how stakeholders could engage with them.

The Chair explained that the SEUPB have procured external facilitators for a large element of the pre-application workshops, to maintain an independence from applications.

When dates have been established, the workshops will be advertised over multiple channels. **The Chair** encouraged Members to register on the SEUPB's PEACEPLUS stakeholder database to receive updates and communications.

The NILGA representative discussed issues with transportation links west of the River Bann, and detailed how previous consultation has been unsuccessful, when transport is of great importance to peace-building and bringing people together.

In addition, **the NILGA representative** asked how the SEUPB will engage with stakeholders from rural areas, where broadband connectivity is limited and there is a majority older population.

In response, **the Chair** outlined SEUPB's plan for a wide geographical spread of preapplication workshops, as undertaken during the PEACEPLUS consultation. In addition, the workshops will be promoted in a multi-channel communication approach, including print advertising, radio, press releases and partnering with organisations such as NILGA to reach as wide an audience as possible.

The EU Commission Desk Officer stated the Programme's assessment under the Commission's adoption process is progressing smoothly facilitated by informal consultation with the SEUPB and a positive working relationship.

Excellent progress has also been made on composing the Finance Agreement, and a decision is expected in the coming four weeks.

The Monitoring Committee

Noted progress in designing and implementing the PEACE PLUS Programme

12. AOB

No further business was declared.

The Chair stated the next meeting will be scheduled for Autumn 2022, most likely in a hybrid format; Managing Authority will eb in touch with potential dates.				

<u>ANNEX I</u>

ACTION POINTS/ISSUES OF CLARIFICATION ARISING FROM MONITORING COMMITTEE

Tuesday 10th May 2022; hybrid meeting online via Microsoft Teams and in-person in the Crowne Plaza Belfast

ACTION POINTS

<u>Agenda</u>	Action	Action	Responsibility
<u>Item</u>	<u>Point</u>		
4	1	Minutes of previous meeting to be uploaded	Managing Authority
		to SEUPB website	

ANNEX II

Attendance – PEACE IV Programme Monitoring Committee, 10 May 2022, held in a hybrid approach; in person in Crowne Plaza, Belfast and online via Microsoft Teams

Chair

Gina McIntyre Chief Executive, SEUPB

Members: In-person

Paul Beattie Managing Authority, the SEUPB
Paul Sheridan Certifying Authority, SEUPB
John McCandless Communications, SEUPB
Helen Donaldson Joint Secretariat, SEUPB

Cllr Frances Burton NILGA/ DUP

Cllr Mary Freehill EMRA

Dominic McCullough Department of Finance NI

Andrew Condon DPER

Members: online

Jacqueline Healy IHREC
Emma Murtagh The Wheel
Tom Lavin Irish Rural Link

Cllr Steven Corr NILGA/ SF

Wesley Aston Ulster Farmers Union

Emily Smyth CNCC
Michael Power NISRA

Advisors: In-person

John Barr Department for Communities NI
Tony McKibben Department for Communities NI
Catherine Powell Department for the Economy NI

David Lynch Department of Finance NI

Catherine Clynes DPER Ireland
Ramses Grande-Fraile EU Commission

Advisors: Online

Kris Magnus EU Commission
Joanne Knight EU Commission

Frances Curran Department of Education NI
Fiona Hood Department of Education NI

Orla Dowling Department of Education Ireland

Anne Tohill The Executive Office NI
Marie Matthews The Executive Office NI
Tanya Hamilton The Executive Office NI

Anita Fitzgerald DFHERIS
Sarah Goldberg DFHERIS

Ryan Donaldson Department of Finance NI

Shauna Markey DCEDIY
Rosie Smyth DRCD

Observers

Glenny Whitley Joint Secretariat, SEUPB
Paul Boylan Joint Secretariat, SEUPB
Geraldine McKenna Joint Secretariat, SEUPB
Eimear Coleman Joint Secretariat, SEUPB
Matthew Magrath Joint Secretariat, SEUPB

Michael Doyle NISRA/ SEUPB

Peter Molloy DPER

Sean McAteer North South Ministerial Council
Brian Coleman North South Ministerial Council

Secretariat (SEUPB)

Tara McCormick Managing Authority (minutes)

Nora Winder Managing Authority (remote tech support)

Ciera Kane Managing Authority (remote tech support)

Pamela Meekin CEO's office, SEUPB

Phil Heaton Managing Authority, SEUPB
Emma Purdy Communications, SEUPB
Sarah Carlin Communications, SEUPB

Apologies

Cllr Enda McGloin NWRA
Gerry Doyle NWRA
Cllr Frank McBrearty NWRA
Cllr Conor Keelan EMRA

Hazel Francey The Equality Commission NI

Declan McGarrigle Managing Authority, SEUPB

Cllr Jenny Palmer NILGA/UUP

Cllr Margaret Anne McKillop NILGA
Ald Michael Henderson NILGA

Jean O'Mahoney Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Dr Aedin McLoughlin The Environmental Pillar

Seamus McAleavey NICVA

Ivan Cooper The Wheel
Pamela Dooley ICTU NI

Tim Smith ICTU Ireland

Damian Duffy CBI
Michael D'Arcy IBEC

Kathryn McCamley Department for the Economy

Deirdre Kearney DRCD

Departing Members

- Anne Marie Caulfield of DPER, replaced by Andrew Condon.
- Hugh O'Reilly of the Wheel is replaced by Emma Murtagh on this PMC. Hugh will continue his role on the INTERREG PMC.
- Dr Ruth Gallagher of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is replaced by Jean O'Mahoney.

<u>ANNEX III</u>

Glossary of acronyms used in the minutes:

AIR Annual Implementation Report

CBI Confederation of British industry

CNCC Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

CPD Central Procurement Directorate (Northern Ireland)

DAERA Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

DCEDIY The Department of Children, Equality, Disability,

Integration and Youth Ireland

DfE Department for the Economy

DRCD Department of Rural and Community Development

DoF Department of Finance (Northern Ireland)

DFHERIS Department of Further and Higher Education, Research,

Innovation and Science, Ireland

DJEI Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

DoH Department of Health NI

DPER Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

EMRA Eastern & Midland Regional Authority

eMS Electronic Monitoring System

ESG Evaluation Steering Group

EUC European Commission

IBEC Irish Business and Employers Federation

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

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development NI

SEUPB Special European Union Programmes Body

JS Joint Secretariat

MA Managing Authority

VSS Victims and Survivors Service