



**Community Workers'
Co-operative**

Community Workers' Co-operative,
c/o Galway Traveller Movement,
1 The Plaza, Headford Road, Galway
Phone: +353 (0) 87 9326467
Email: info@cwic.ie Website: www.cwic.ie

Community Work Updates

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Public Participation Networks

Update on Department circular to local authorities

PPN

Public Participation Networks (PPN) have now been established in all local authority areas. In June the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government announced a mechanism to fund and manage the PPNs which will allow for their continued development and operation.

A circular ([CVSP1/2015](#)) was issued to all local authorities providing detail of the funding. It allows for up to €50,000 from the Department provided that the local authority provides €30,000 to the PPN. Any amount lower than €30,000 will result in a corresponding reduction of the central contribution.

The job description for the resource worker requires that the person has a minimum of three years' experience in community development and will operate independently of the local authority. This is something that the CWC has been promoting.

Expenditure in excess of the €12,000 that was allocated to each local authority to support the establishment of the PPN is allowable for recoupment under this fund.

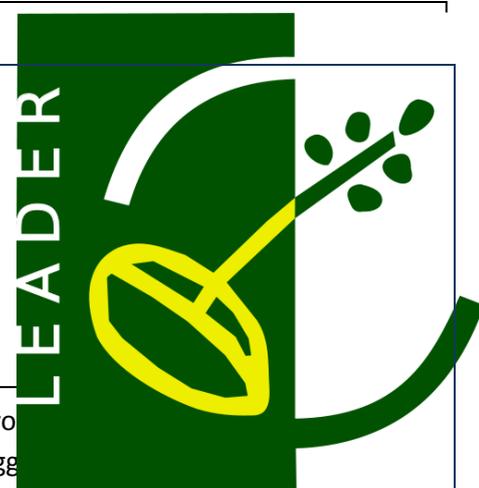
The funding is ring-fenced and can only be used for the purpose of developing and maintaining the PPN. It can be used for:

- Cost of employment of a resource worker (full time equivalent)
- Office space, infrastructure and materials for the resource worker
- Expenses incurred by the PPN in carrying out its activities i.e. holding meetings, training, elections, publicity materials, insurance etc.
- Expenses of Secretariat and PPN representatives on Local Authority committees (where these cannot be recouped elsewhere).

It is an express condition of funding that the resource worker operates independently of the local authority and be answerable to the PPN Secretariat in the performance of their duties.

If an existing local authority worker is assigned they cannot undertake duties which are not related to the running of the PPN. Possible structures for the employment of a resource worker are provided in a draft document providing further details, including a draft Memorandum of Understanding and a draft Job Description. This can be downloaded [here](#). It states that a range of options are open to the local authority:

- PPN is the employer
- Local Authority is the employer
- Existing Staff member
- New recruit to Local Authority
- "Host" organisation employs worker
- Worker is retained on contract for service basis



Update on LEADER

The new LEADER programme provides for significantly enhanced potential to support social inclusion and anti-poverty work. The Local Area Groups (LAGS) will be chosen by mid-July. The CWC has been working to ensure that this is made explicit in guidelines to be issued by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The CWC met with Minister Ann Phelan recently. Among the suggestions and the Minister were:

- Local Action Groups be required to set out clear social inclusion goals and expected outputs for the programme and demonstrate how they will promote poverty reduction and social inclusion across all actions in the Local Development Strategy.
- A definition of social inclusion and a requirement in relation to how the LEADER objectives of promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas are to be achieved be made explicit to all LAGs;
- The Department encourage Local Action Groups to ensure that the consultation process for the development of Local Development Strategies specifically targets groups experiencing poverty, social inclusion and inequality. Unless these groups are specifically targeted in consultation processes there is a significant danger that they will not engage. “The central element of a CLLD or LEADER approach is that communities are the key decision makers when it comes to funding to support the development of their own areas. This is founded on the belief that people who live and work in rural communities are best placed to decide what support is needed to facilitate the development of their communities” <http://www.environ.ie/en/media/Media,40932,en.pdf> . To this end we requested that the Department encourage Local Action Groups to make every effort to contact the representative groups of communities experiencing poverty, social exclusion and inequality including those representing; older people, disadvantaged women, long term unemployed people, young people experiencing poverty, Travellers, Roma, migrants (including asylum seekers and refugees), people with disability.
- Training and support for the LAGs in this area;
- A professional community worker would be employed by the LAGs (or their implementing organisations) for every €1 million LEADER funding.

REDZ

Following the CEDRA report, the Department are to establish Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) on a pilot basis. These will be situated in functional areas surrounding towns and are thought to represent Ireland’s actual economic geography in that they are the spaces from which most employers in an area source labour. The CEDRA report identified potential Economic Development Zones in all areas of Ireland and recommended the implementation of a pilot initiative that supports the formulation of a localised strategies approach to the development of REDZ. The recommendation envisages full engagement with and participation by communities at a local level in order to foster a sense of ownership of REDZ. The pilot will identify 18 REDZ projects with a view to determining best practice.

At the recent meeting with the Minister the CWC recommended including a social development dimension to the REDZ.

Bi-lateral between the Community & Voluntary Pillar and DECLG



On Wednesday July 8th the CWC was one of two representatives of the Community Platform to attend the bi-lateral with the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government. There were DECLG representatives from the community, local government and LEADER sections. There were a number of updates from the department and the CWC raised a number of issues outlined below:

Local Economic & Community Plans

The LECPs are underway in all areas though the rate of progress varies considerably. The Department believe that there is good engagement with stakeholders and all are still working to the end of the year deadline.

The CWC asked if the LECP was to include everything that was already planned for the area of whether it was to be a plan of added value initiatives. The Department stated that the LECP was not be a plan of everything and was not to duplicate actions and initiatives already planned or underway. Their view is that it should be a plan that includes a finite number of actions based on the priorities identified for the six year period.

National Framework Policy on Community Development and Local Development

The public consultation resulted in 75 submissions being made to the Department. The main issues that arose included:

- The need for consistency in the definitions of local development and community development;
- The need for the autonomy of the sector to be maintained;
- The need for capacity building, including for local authorities;
- A stronger reference to the role of the PPNs;
- Clarification regarding the role of the National Policy Group;
- The need for a greater role of the community in policy development;
- The need for more in-depth community input into the LCDCs and the PPNs.

A report is to go to the Interdepartmental Group by the end of July. An internal Working Group has been established to consider how the feedback can be incorporated into a revised Framework Policy and this will then be considered by the Interdepartmental Group.

The Department said that they were not advancing this as quickly as they would like but are still hoping for the final draft to be ready by the end of the year.

SICAP

The Department stated that SICAP is now being rolled out in all areas but one. It is initially a nine-month programme with a budget of €28 million (equivalent to €38 million over a full year). The Department emphasised that the programme is to work with people who are unemployed even if they are not on the live

register. They are particularly concerned to work with young people who are NEET (Not in Employment, education or Training) and have attracted co-funding from the ESF to work with this cohort worth €3 million in 2015. There are quite onerous monitoring and reporting requirements associated with this funding.

The Department stated that they are conscious that they are in a new space as a result of the competitive tendering processes and the fact that the programme will be monitored by the LCDC but they say that it is looking so far so good. They stated that support need to be provided to the LCDC to enable them to do the job in hand in a consistent way.

There are 44 companies and one consortium delivering the programme. Six companies were unsuccessful in their applications. The Department provided financial and technical supports to the unsuccessful companies including legal supports and supports for redundancies.

They are expecting the first Quarter report based on the IRIS system soon. There will be a mid-term review of the programme in the autumn. A number of companies have already expressed concerns at the targets that have been set and while the Department is conscious of this they state that the companies tendered on the basis of these targets and their ability to achieve them.

They stated that they are coming under increasing pressure from other departments to prove that SICAP is adding value and complementing services they provide.

In response to a question from the CWC, the Department stated that it will be the LCDCs that will carry out the mid-term review but they will be supported by data and back-up from the Department and Pobal.

Public Participation Networks

The PPNs are being rolled out with local authority areas at various stages. Each area was provided with €12,000 from Dormant Accounts. The Department have now made a fund available – up to €50,000 will be made available subject to matching funds of €30,000 from the local authority. The funding is to be ring-fenced for PPNs and to include a Resource Worker. The role is to operate independently of the local authority.

The Department are to establish a small Oversight Group, though neither the membership nor the terms of reference for this group were made clear.

The CWC pointed out that there is still confusion in relation to the Electoral Colleges at local level and suggested that additional information was required and that each PPN be required to review the membership of the Electoral Colleges on this basis.

The CWC also pointed out that additional information is required to clarify requirements in relation to the development of a Statement of Wellbeing for This and Future Generations.

Social Justice Ireland stated that they are working with a number of PPNs.

LEADER

The Department then gave an update in relation to LEADER. A total of 45 Expressions of Interest (EOIs) have been received for 28 sub-regional areas. There was a single EOI in 19 of the 28 areas and at least two were received for the other 11 areas. In these the Department is working to facilitate a single EOI.

The Selection Committee has been convened and is due to select the LAGs in as many areas as possible ASAP. There is an information session scheduled for successful LAGs in Tullamore on July 16th.

The LAGs will be given six months to develop the Local Development Strategy in their areas. Engagement with stakeholders will be key. The plans are expected to be in place for 2016.

In response to a question from IRL, the Department stated that they are working to simplify reporting and administration requirements. They stated that the last programme was the first to come under the mainstream Rural Development Programme and this was very onerous in terms of administration and the Department had to install new IT systems. They said that they had learned a lot from that process and are now looking to reduce the admin burden as much as possible.

They added that they expect to approve the Local Development Strategies as they are received – they will not have to wait until they are all submitted. A number of the LAGs, the Department stated, have already worked on the LDS and these are quite well developed.

The CWC asked (1) what plans the Department had for ensuring that social inclusion and anti-poverty work will underpin the LDS, and (2) given that in a number of areas the planning processes for the LECP and the LDS will be going on at the same time what plans the Department had to ensure that stakeholders do not suffer from consultation fatigue.

In response to the first question, the Department stated that they had noted this request put by the CWC at the earlier meeting with Minister Phelan and have written to their colleagues in Rural Development.

In response to the second question, the Department stated that they realise that there is a timing issue. Ideally they would have liked the LECP to be in place and the LDS to be a part of the LECP but this is not going to happen. They said that they are advising local authorities that where there are two consultation processes they should be amalgamated as much as possible.

In response to another question, the Department stated that it is government policy that the LCDCs are the preferred LAG for the LEADER programme.

SSNO & General

There was a discussion regarding the Support Scheme for National Organisations (SSNO). The Department stated that they are currently reviewing SSNO and would welcome observations.

As a general comment the Department stated that they are well aware of their role in relation to LCDCs. They stated that they are aware that the Department is the policy maker, funder and ultimate monitor of programmes. They stated that the Department continues to endorse the White Paper (on the Relationship between the State and the Community & Voluntary Sector). They also stated that they are under pressure to provide evidence of added-value from all their programmes, including SSNO, to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.