



Ireland Wales Programme 2014-2020

Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) - Meeting 10
 Wednesday 18 November 10:30am
 Video conference on Microsoft Teams

A list of attendees is at Annex 1.

A list of apologies is at Annex 2.

Meeting Actions:

| Date / ref | Action | Assigned to | Update/ action status/ due date |
|--------------|--|------------------------------------|--|
| 18.11.2020/1 | Amend meeting 9 note to reflect accurate list of apologies. Issue updated meeting 9 note to PMC for reference | WEFO/ JS |  IW1420(Meeting 9) - 6 June 2019 - Ratified |
| 18.11.2020/2 | Provide PMC with links to the WG Regional Investment in Wales Framework. | WEFO / MA | https://gov.wales/written-statement-framework-regional-investment-wales https://gov.wales/regional-investment-wales-framework |
| 18.11.2020/3 | Develop online communications activity, using the UN Climate Change conference in 2021 as a hook to promote IWP projects from PA-2. JB to contact LC to discuss further. | Joanne Binding and Lucy Corfield | |
| 18.11.2020/4 | The WG office in Dublin and WEFO Communications Unit to explore further opportunities to amplify and promote IW programme projects and case studies, working in collaboration with the Irish Consulate in Wales. JB and KH to discuss further. | Joanne Binding and Kathryn Hallett | |

Agenda item 2 – Welcome – Opening and Introductions

1. The Chair, Peter Ryland (PR) welcomed members to PMC 10 and thanked all for joining the meeting online. PR acknowledged that under normal circumstances this meeting would have taken place face to face in Wales. However, due to COVID-19 the meeting was taking place virtually. Joint Chair David Kelly (DK) noted that face-to-face meetings hope to be resume next year.
2. PR introduced new PMC members. Joining the PMC is Abigail Phillips (Welsh Government's - Dept. of Innovation) and Amanda Wilkinson(HEFCW) . Michael McGrath reprises his role as PMC member for the Irish Government's Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), taking over from Anne Marie Caulfield. Eoin O'Neill steps into the role as Michael's deputy replacing Cora Lane. Seán O'Connor replaces Colm O'Connor representing the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.
3. PR noted formal thanks to Anne Marie, Cora and Colm for all the work they have done over the last few years.
4. PR confirmed that Gwyn Evans (Pembrokeshire CC) could join the meeting as an observer.

Agenda item 3 – Note of PMC Meeting 9 including action points – 6 June 2019 - Dublin

5. The note of the last meeting, circulated via written procedure, was ratified. One minor amendment – removal of the duplication of Sarah Clarke's name listed under apologies.

Agenda item 4 - EU Transition Update

6. Des Clifford (DC) Director General, Office of the First Minister for Wales provided the Welsh Government update on EU transition arrangements to date.
7. The Welsh Government was not part of the UK negotiating team, a decision taken by the UK Government following the December 2019 UK General Election. Briefings were being received from the UK Negotiating team.
8. DC referred to a 'deal' to be done, if there is appetite on both sides to do so. However, this was likely to be a "thin deal" limited to trading without tariffs on goods. The 'deal' was unlikely to tackle a whole range of non-tariff barriers, which would mean friction and change at UK-EU borders from January 2021. The Welsh Government was hoping there would be a deal even if it was one more limited than it would like to see.

9. The key issues still requiring negotiation, surrounded the Irish border, state aid, fisheries and governance structures, this in terms of how the EU and UK manage governance dispute resolution with the UK as a non-member state.
10. In respect of the Internal Market Bill (IMB), DC reported the significant discontent of the Welsh Government on two counts:
 - i. That the UK Government, through the IMB, could effectively renege on binding international agreements relating to issues around the Irish border.
 - ii. The proposal for the UK government to hold specific powers to spend its money in devolved territories and in devolved areas of competence.
11. The Welsh Government agreed that there should not be any trade barriers between areas of GB and that there should be a properly functioning internal market (caveated regarding provision in relation to Northern Ireland because of previously agreed international obligations). The Welsh Government felt the IMG was not the correct course of action.
12. DC provided an update on recent communications between the new Taoiseach and the First Minister for Wales. They had touched on a number of issues including COVID-19, common challenges in relation to Brexit and cross border cooperation. Feedback from the engagement was positive, with both parties keen to meet in person once circumstances permit. There was now an Irish Consulate in Cardiff with a formal opening to take place in the near future.
13. During a recent British Irish Council meeting, the First Minister had used the platform to express his deep disappointment with the negotiating approach of the UK Government. The Welsh Government had lobbied for the inclusion of Third Country access to ETC Programmes, but they had so far chosen (aside from PEACE Plus) not to include this in the negotiating framework. The WG had not given up on challenging this decision and was actively exploring avenues to continue ETC participation. In parallel, the Welsh Government was also considering other dimensions through which Wales and Ireland could continue to co-operate in the long term. The PMC was reassured that as Managing Authority, the Welsh Government remained firmly committed to this programme.
14. PR emphasised that the Welsh Government was very much open to dialogue with the Irish Government to explore avenues for cooperation for the medium and longer term.
15. PR confirmed that the UK Comprehensive Spending Review announcement was due on 25 November, which should make clear the UK Government's intentions in respect of the Shared Prosperity Fund; this would be essential to informing the Welsh Government and other Devolved Administrations' plans in terms of supporting economic development in the future.

16. The Welsh Government had today (18 November) launched its Regional Investment in Wales Framework, which included plans for building upon international and cross border cooperation. Web links would be shared with PMC members.
17. PR emphasised that the framework had been developed with delivery partners across Wales and invited members to review the framework and consider opportunities for future cooperation.
18. Anne Marie Caulfield (AMC), DPER, thanked both DC and PR for their warm words and expressed her sincere hope that a deal might be reached. She noted that the EU is negotiating on behalf of all member states, including Ireland, so it would not be appropriate to comment further.
19. AMC echoed DC's comments regarding the recent exchanges between the Taoiseach and First Minister, noting the positivity of communications.
20. The Irish Government's permanent diplomatic office in Cardiff was testimony to its commitment to fostering Ireland Wales relationships in the future.
21. AMC acknowledged the UK Government's position on ETC and thanked Welsh Government colleagues for a recently produced paper highlighting co-operation opportunities in the Irish Sea space which had been shared with DPER during the tri-lateral meeting earlier in the month. DPER had shared the paper within the Irish Government and colleagues in Ireland's Department for Foreign Affairs and AMC confirmed that they were actively looking at ways to maintain and foster the Wales Irish relationship after 31 December 2020.
22. DC and PR thanked AMC for her positive comments.
23. PR confirmed that the important thing in context of this PMC is that the withdrawal agreement allows the current IW programme to carry on as planned for the duration of its programme lifespan.

Agenda item 5 - Programme Situation Report Autumn 2020

24. MP presented the report on behalf of the Managing Authority. It expanded on the usual JS report to the PMC given the time lag since the last PMC in June 2019 and the more advanced state of play with implementation.
25. The paper complemented the facts and figures provided by the JS with a state of play narrative covering progress with commitment and spend, progress against targets - with a focus on those indicators in the performance framework, a snapshot of measures taken to work with stakeholders in the light of the pandemic and a forward look.

26. The headline position was very strong with significant progress made. 98% of the allocation was committed with a good balance across the operational Priority Axes. A small number of projects were in the pipeline and business planning with an indicative ERDF value of circa €7m.

27. MP drew attention to the following points:

- an update following the mandate from the 2019 PMC to pursue Phase 2 project development and the significant boost to commitment levels as a result.
- the €3m over-commitment in PA 2, noting that the MA anticipated money being returned from projects as has been the trend with previous programmes.
- the considerable progress made in increasing commitment levels in PA 3 where there were also projects in the pipeline.
- good progress on meeting the delivery of the Key Performance Indicators for the programme - the expenditure figures will improve as implementation accelerates – the position at 2023 will be key.
- Priority indicators – the introduction of a simple “traffic light” system to provide a more visual insight into progress and supporting commentary reflecting a very positive forecast overall. Explanations have been provided where a potential shortfall against a small number of targets is anticipated.
- a brief situation report on the impact of the pandemic reassuring the PMC that the JS is in close contact with all Lead Partners to identify any issues and respond accordingly – the JS is also adopting a flexible approach in terms of project timelines and lags in expenditure, including offering extensions where necessary. The JS will continue to monitor the situation vigorously.
- progress against spend and confirmation of meeting the programme expenditure target for 2020.
- the MA position on the state of play with the programme, which is considered to be in a good place, despite the extraordinary challenges which have been thrown up.

28. Responding to a query about overspend in PA 2, MP referred to experience with previous programmes. In general terms, projects did not spend to the levels agreed at approval stage. The JS expected money to come back from projects, which would be returned into the pot. A rebalancing of allocations across the PA's was an option if required at a later stage.

29. DK added that for the 2007-2013 programme, the average project spend was 93%. As projects evolve, they find savings along the way therefore based on this experience it would be safe to overcommit.

30. The PMC welcomed inclusion of the traffic light system in the paper. The MA noted PMC comments about monitoring commitment levels, the financial indicators and progress with spend.
31. In response to a question raised about N+3 expenditure targets and whether they would be extended to allow for delays caused by Covid-19, the MA confirmed the closure guidance for the ETC cross programmes is yet to be published, but the latest draft shows no indication that there will be any relaxation of targets or extensions of the N+3 period. This will be kept under review in light of the current climate.
32. The PMC thanked the MA for the update, commenting on the clarity of the report, noting the good progress, and thanking the MA and JS for all the work done in difficult circumstances, particularly in the current climate and the difficulties projects are facing in the light of Covid-19.

Agenda item 6 - Project Presentation – Acclimatize

33. PR welcomed Professor Wim Meyer (WM), Professor David Kay and Joanne Chadwick, who provided an informative presentation to the PMC on the Acclimatize project and associated work to support the response to Covid-19 in the cross-border area.
34. WM outlined that 'Science Foundation Ireland' funding is enabling the Acclimatize project team to measure levels of SARS-CoV-2 at wastewater treatment plants in Ireland. This activity is providing insight into the prevalence of the virus in the community and could serve as an early warning system for new waves of infection.
35. WM stated that 'Science Foundation' fund material costs associated with the project and Acclimatize provides the staff, resources and test environment.
36. WM noted that the project also aims to work out what happens to the SARS-CoV-2 virus in nearby bodies of water such as rivers, streams and sea, including swimming waters. To this end the decay rates of viable virus and that of its genetic material in river and seawater has been determined enabling modelling of the fate of the virus in the environment.
37. WM stated that the project is currently providing weekly reports of their findings to the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), which is the Irish equivalent of SAGE.
38. WM acknowledged thanks to the Ireland Wales Programme and highlighted that without ERDF funding the project would not have been able to respond so rapidly to the new area of work or had time to recruit staff to carry out the research.

39. Members noted the shift in the project to react to the challenges of the current virus as extraordinary and highlighted that this project is a really good example of how EU funding can be used to contribute to the reaction to COVID-19, not only in terms of economic factors but also in the context of the front line fight against the virus.
40. PR thanked the project representatives for their very useful presentation and noted the positive responses from the PMC in the Q&A session. Thanks were extended to the project partners for their contribution to the world-wide fight against this pandemic.

Agenda item 7 - Communications update

41. Jo Binding (JB) summarised the key information in the Communications Strategy report noting that the report provided an overview of the last two years of programme activity.
42. JB confirmed communications activity has moved online in the light of the pandemic with the intention to focus more activity at project and programme level on virtual events and conferences in the near future.
43. The high profile UN Climate Change Conference in the UK in 2021 could provide a good hook and additional opportunity to promote programme activity, particularly for priority axis 2 projects. JB agreed to consider further, how the IW Programme could tie in with the Climate Change Conference.
44. In response to an offer to use the Welsh and Irish consulate bases in Dublin and Cardiff as possible venues for future events, it was agreed the WG office in Dublin and WEFO Communications Unit would explore further opportunities to amplify and promote the IW programme projects and case studies, working in collaboration with the Irish Consulate in Wales.

Agenda item 8 - AOB

45. The PMC raised a couple of questions regarding GDPR. Seeking clarity from the MA on what actions will be taken to address GDPR issues and working arrangements of the JS post 2020 to ensure, going forward, cooperation continues.
46. GG for the MA, confirmed that GDPR is something being looked at very closely. The 'deal' or 'no deal' over the coming weeks is key to that. An 'adequacy decision' is 'Plan A' and will address the issues around data. There are Plans 'B' and 'C' also being considered in the absence of this agreement. Working with legal advisors one of the options is to include a clause in offer letters. This would be dealt with in early December, to make sure, if necessary, that Lead Partners

have sufficient time to sign up to and return variation letters. The MA would monitor the position closely to determine next steps.

47. In response to the second point, the MA re-iterated its commitment to the programme. From the MA point of view, there is no issue with progressing things beyond 2020 and delivering the programme in full.

48. Breda Curran noted a “good news story” from the ‘Dwr Uisce’ project. Using low-carbon, smart energy solutions, the project has been looking at reducing the amount of energy in water distribution on their demonstration site in Wexford. Over the past year, the amount of electricity used at the site has reduced by a value of circa €2k. Instead of distributing those funds back to individual households, which equates to approximately €3 per household, it had been agreed to donate the money to ‘Wells for Life’. A charity, which provides safe drinking water to communities in India.

49. Members expressed their thanks to the MA and JS for organising and delivering the virtual PMC meeting.

Agenda item 9 - Date of Next Meeting

50. The next PMC meeting will take place in spring 2021. In light of Covid-19, a decision will be taken closer to the time as to whether the meeting will take place virtually or in-person (in Wales).

Annex 1 – List of those attending

| Name | Organisation |
|-----------------------|--|
| PMC | |
| Abigail Phillips | Welsh Government - Department for Innovation |
| Cllr Brigid Manton | E&MRA Councillor |
| Cllr Phil Baker | Welsh Local Government Association South West Wales |
| Donal Nolan | Chambers Ireland |
| Hugh O'Reilly | WHEEL |
| Lucy Corfield | Welsh Government - Department for Economy, Skills and Natural Resources Wales-Decarbonisation and Climate Risk |
| Mike McGrath | Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) |
| Prof Paul Spencer | Higher Education Wales (Universities Wales) |
| Sarah Clarke | Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) |
| Sean O'Connor | - Irish Government – Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media |
| Veronica Cunningham | The Marine Institute: Foras na Mara |
| Other | |
| Marianne Van De Vorle | EU Desk Officer |
| Gwyn Evans | Observer |
| Joanne Chadwick | Acclimatize Project |
| Prof David Kay | Acclimatize Project |
| Prof Wim Meijer | Acclimatize Project |
| Anne Marie Caulfield | DPER |
| Eoin O'Neill | DPER |
| Des Clifford | Welsh Government - Office of the First Minister and Cabinet Office |
| Peter Ryland | WEFO |
| Geraint Green | WEFO |
| Mike Pollard | WEFO |
| Linda Weaver | WEFO |
| Bethan Thomas | WEFO |
| Kate Murray | WEFO |
| Mike Wallwork | WEFO |
| Jo Binding | Welsh Government - Communications and Briefing Unit |
| Kathryn Hallett | Welsh Government - Overseas Team (Ireland) |
| David Kelly | SRA |
| Derville Brannan | SRA |
| Breda Curran | SRA |
| Samantha Richardson | SRA |

Annex 2 – List of apologies

| Name | Organisation |
|--------------------|--|
| PMC | |
| Amanda Wilkinson | Higher Education Wales (Universities Wales) |
| Cllr Ronnie Hughes | Welsh Local Government Association North Wales |
| Chriss O'Connell | WEFO - Equal Opportunities & Env. Sustainability |
| Deirdre Garvey | WHEEL |