



Open Government Partnership (OGP) – 15th Round Table Meeting Minutes – 12th October 2023

1. Welcome

Members welcomed to the meeting and apologies noted. No observations received on the 31st August minutes. The minutes were deemed accepted by the members.

2. Updates on commitments under the Third Open Government's Partnership National Action Plan 2021-2023 (NAP3):

Ciara Morgan - Department of Public Expenditure National Delivery Plan and Reform (DPENDR) provided an update as follows;

Review of Ireland's Statutory Framework for Ethics in Public Life

Government approved the publication of the *Ethics Review report* and preparation of a General Scheme based on the recommendations on 13 December 2022. The review report was published on 7 February 2023. Its recommendations focus on five main themes:

- A legislative framework for Ethics to be underpinned by a set of overarching integrity principles;
- New specific statutory prohibitions, including on the use of insider information;
- Strengthening disclosures requirements to improve transparency and examining whether the regime should encompass more office holders;
- Strengthening the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO); and
- Post-term employment restrictions for elected officials/public servants that address matters not already covered by lobbying regulation and should align closely with that legislation.

A General Scheme is being prepared by the Department. An indicative outline has been agreed and drafting of the heads is progressing. Awareness raising activities of the review report and its recommendations is ongoing as the General Scheme is being prepared. An update on progress was brought to Government on 10th July 2023. It is intended that the General Scheme will be brought to Government for approval to publish during 2023.

Review of Ireland's Freedom of Information (FOI) Regime

A Memorandum for Information updating Government on progress on the review was brought to Government on 13 December 2022 and published. The update sets out the review themes and gives an indication as to the direction of reform. The themes are:

- A more coherent approach to information governance and access;
- Supplementing formal FOI requests; and
- Improving the request process.

The review report is nearing completion and it is intended to seek Government approval to the final review report in Q4 2023. The Minister intends to then bring legislative proposals, informed by the review, to Government.

Review of the Operation of the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015

The review recommendations informed the drafting of an amendment Bill to strengthen the existing legislative framework. The Regulation of Lobbying and Oireachtas Allowances (Amendment) Act 2023 was enacted in June 2023 and will:



- Improve the operation and functionality of the Lobbying Register;
- Strengthen the existing legislation and its enforcement; and
- Make failure to comply with the post term employment restrictions set out in Section 22 of the Regulation of Lobbying Act as amended a relevant contravention and introduce civil and administrative sanctions which SIPO can apply to those who contravene the 'cooling off' provisions.

SIPO will need time to make the necessary changes to the Lobbying register, its published guidance, and its procedures so it is intended to commence the provisions of the legislation in the Autumn. The Department is also progressing a Programme for Government commitment to “extend the lobbying register so that the lobbying of senior officials in bodies like the Central Bank of Ireland, Comreg, the NTA and the HSE which have significant policymaking or development functions will need to be reported on the same basis as central and local government”. This commitment will be delivered by way of statutory instrument following extensive consultation with Departments and the bodies under their aegis to identify the roles in public bodies to be added to the category of designated public official for the purpose of the regulation of lobbying legislation.

Kieran Moylan - Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) provided an update as follows;

- **Progressing civic participation with the objective of further enhancing the proactive and meaningful participation and engagement with citizens in the decisions that affect them**

Publication of Values and Principles

The *Values and Principles for collaboration and partnership working with the community and voluntary sector* were approved by Government and were launched in 2022

All Government Departments have recently reviewed their Statements of Strategy. DRCD used this opportunity to remind Departments of the Values and Principles and of the recent publication of a guide to engagement of the marginalised in local planning processes.

DRCD is responsible for disseminating the Values and Principles and will be undertaking a monitoring exercise later this year as part of the 2023 work programme.

Civic Forum

The first Civic Forum for dialogue between the state and the community and voluntary sector took place at the Aviva stadium on 21st November 2022. A report on the proceedings has now been received and is available on gov.ie. <https://www.gov.ie/en/news/37401-national-civic-forum-for-dialogue-with-the-community-and-voluntary-sector/>

Arising from the feedback on the first Civic Forum, it has been agreed to develop a Terms of Reference for the Civic Forum and to provide a clear statement of its purpose, having regard to the sectoral fora hosted by several other Departments and Agencies.

The Department is now engaging with the sub-committee of the Cross Sectoral Group on the Government's Strategy for the community and Voluntary Sector to agree on the theme and format of the second Civic Forum, which is scheduled to take place on November 15th.



- **Strengthening inclusion and civic deliberation in local decision making for Public Participation Networks (PPNs)**

PPN Roadmap

A Working Group was established to oversee the development and implementation of the *Roadmap of future actions* following the publication of the report on the PPN Structural Review in June 2022. Its members come from a range of PPN stakeholder groups, including PPN staff and volunteers, civil society groups, local authorities and relevant government departments. Participatory and co-design processes were used to ensure that stakeholders were actively involved in designing the actions that will affect PPNs over the coming years. The Group is the main forum for developing and making recommendations to the Minister on future actions arising from the review report and stakeholder feedback.

A draft Roadmap has been agreed by the Working Group. DRCD, with input from Working Group members, has now appointed an independent service provider to consult more widely with the PPN stakeholders on the draft Roadmap and make recommendations on its content based on the feedback received. The consultation process aims to give the broader PPN stakeholder community the opportunity to feed back on the draft Implementation Roadmap developed by the Working Group and DRCD.

The Draft PPN Implementation Roadmap along with a survey questionnaire was circulated in July. The Independent Service Provider developed the survey questionnaire to give all those involved in or with PPNs an opportunity to have their say on the draft Roadmap. Feedback from this survey will be used to help finalise the Roadmap. A closing date of September 1st has been given to complete the survey.

The Working Group has met five times to date, including an in-person meeting held in April. The draft Roadmap agreed by the Working Group has now been presented to stakeholders for feedback and input; it is expected that it will be submitted to the Minister of State for approval by the end of the year.

The Working Group will remain in place to oversee the implementation of the Roadmap and ensure it enhances the effectiveness of the PPNs.

Research on Diversity in PPNs

DRCD is also commissioning a research project to

- explore the demographic characteristics of groups and individuals involved in PPNs,
- investigate the diversity involved,
- establish an evidence base on the area, and
- make recommendations on increasing the involvement of under-represented groups in PPNs, drawing on the *'Values and Principles for engagement and partnership working with the community and voluntary sector'* and the *'Guidelines for Inclusive engagement in local planning processes'*.



It is envisaged that the research will involve extensive consultation with groups found to be under-represented on PPNs.

Draft Terms of Reference for the research were circulated to the PPN National Advisory Group, and to PPN staff and Secretariat networks for their observations and feedback.

The request for tender was published on the eTenders on 11 July and remained open until 8 September 2023. An evaluation group has been convened and will meet shortly to evaluate tenders received. It is expected that the contract will be awarded to the successful candidate, with a view to research commencing this quarter.

An Oversight Group of PPN stakeholders will be established to provide advice and monitor the project. A call for expressions of interest in participating in the Group has been circulated among stakeholders.

Diarmuid O Leary – Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) provided an update as follows;

Strengthening inclusion and civic deliberation in local decision making for other Local Authority Committees’ functions, membership and procedures with which the PPNs engage.

The independent review of local authority Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) is progressing and the independent reviewer continues to engage with the representatives of all participants/stakeholders involved in SPCs at local level. A series of visits to 6 local authorities to examine the operation of SPCs in those areas is nearing completion. A survey will issue to all SPC participants in all local authorities shortly. The review itself is expected to be completed towards the end of this year.

Victoria Gbafah – (DPENDR) provided an update as follows;

Update of 2016 Consultation Principles and Guidance for the Public Sector

The final draft of the consultation guidelines was received on 19th September from the IPA and has been shared with Dept. Taoiseach for observations. The Secretariat is currently considering further public consultation for the report.

Q&A

DHLGH acknowledged that there has been a delay in the **Research on Diversity in PPNs** but the process is now progressing. It was also clarified that the ownership of the *Public Consultation Guidelines* lies with DPNDPR.



3. Discussion and decisions on proposed potential commitments for Ireland's fourth Open Government National Action Plan (NAP4) by policy holders followed by Q&A

The secretariat provided an overview of the process carried out to date to develop NAP4;

- Ranked potential commitments further reviewed.
- High level template shared with RT members
- RT policy holders reviewed consultation output and provided 11 potential commitments below;

Local and national government will engage more effectively with the community and with under-represented groups

- Encourage greater diversity in local government by continuing to reduce barriers to participation. (DHLGH)
- Open, accessible communications campaign to promote voter registration and understanding of how the electoral register works. (DHLGH)
- Support more inclusive policy making in Ireland. (DRCD)
- To ensure the messaging from the national awareness campaigns foreseen by the *Third National Strategy on Domestic Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* (DSSGB) reach marginalised and traditionally harder to reach communities. (Justice)
- To embed a culture of interdisciplinary open research in criminal justice in Ireland (Justice)

Government will engage more fully and more effectively with citizens about policies and plans that are going to affect their lives.

- To promote best practice model of public engagement and involvement in policy development. (Taoiseach)
- To strengthen, modernise, simplify and streamline the statutory framework for ethics/standards in public office with a robust institutional framework for oversight, investigation and enforcement. (DPENDPR)
- To ensure trustworthy and ethical AI is deployed in Ireland. (DPENDPR)

Make government transparent, in particular day-to-day operations, lobbying, government expenditure and the environment

- To enhance the regulation of lobbying by designating senior public servants in public bodies with significant policy making and/or development functions as designated public officials for the purposes of the Lobbying Register. (DPENDPR)
- Implement the recommendations of the Freedom of Information (FOI) review report, subject to Government approval, to move to the next phase of FOI policy with increasingly proactive release of records and information by public bodies. (DPENDPR)
- To improve the quality and quantity of data published on the open data portal (data.gov.ie). To increase the engagement with data publishers and users and also directly between publishers and users. (DPENDPR)



Each Department was invited to speak to their potential commitments as outlined above. An open discussion followed with the civic side responding to the Department's presentation and the Department clarifying any issues raised. The key messages were as follows;

- Importance of building transparency into commitments, Open Data and into the forthcoming new agency on DSGBV.
- Vital to engage all stakeholders from the start of the consultation process. Good practice was noted in DRCD who work with a number of organisations, who have and continue to contribute significantly to the work of the Department, especially with PPNs.
- Messaging is important; the mentioning of "harder to reach" communities can ignore the existing networks already in place such as the Immigration Council and Irish Rural Link.
- D/Justice acknowledged historically the Dept. had been perceived as "closed" but there has been a huge culture change regarding transparency and the increased accessible to data on public platforms.
- The OECD has published a report on *Strengthening Policy Development in the Public Sector in Ireland* and acknowledged there is good practise of public engagement but it is not consistent across the Civil Service.
- Communication strategy to the public needs to clearly communicate the link between policy making, public engagement and the lived experience of citizens. Reference was made to the Gunning Principles used for public consultation in the U.K. [The Gunning Principles.pdf \(local.gov.uk\)](#)
- It was acknowledged that focus needed to be on the conception to implementation phase of commitment so that action happens that makes a difference to peoples' lives.

4. 4. Actions arising /AOB/Next meeting/ close

Actions arising

- Civic side to send a written response to Dept. presentations to the Secretariat
- Departments to complete OGI commitment templates by 26th October.
- The Secretariat to batch/merge the potential commitments across themes.
- Slide deck, minutes and OGI templates to RT members for review.
- Explore possibility of in person meeting on 16th November to aid this phase of the process.
- The Secretariat to start drafting non template sections of NAP4.

A.O.B:

No items tabled.

Next meeting:

16th November 11:00 – 12:30am