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**Sligo PPN : Community Representatives Feedback**

**Strategic Policy Committee 3 : Planning, Community & Economic Development, Arts & Culture**

**SPC** – Strategic Policy Committee

**SCC** - Sligo County Council

**PPN**- Public Participation Network

Devised by PPN Representative on SPC 3 : Patricia Gardiner (Environment)

NB : These are **NOT** the official minutes of this SPC meeting.

This is the feedback and perspective of the Sligo PPN representative on SPC3. They are intended only to generate discussion and potential follow up activity for PPN representatives and interested PPN member groups.

4th March, 2021 via Zoom

**Background**

I attended my first Strategic Policy Committee meeting last Thursday and firstly reminded myself what what they’re all about. This is taken from the Sligo Co. Co. website: *They (the SPCs) were introduced as part of an ongoing process of local government reform and in keeping with the policy of broadening involvement in the local government through participation by community and sectoral interests.*

*The role of the SPCs is:*

* *To formulate policy proposals, evaluate and report on policy implementation for consideration*
* *Provide policy centred committees which can harness the experience of external bodies in the formulation of policy*
* *The Committees are not designed to deal with routine operational matters in relation to the delivery of services. These are dealt with thorough the Area Committees*

The format of last week’s Committee meeting was that of a reporting session and lasted just over an hour.

**Agenda Item 1:**

Update on the preparation of the County Development Plan/Sligo Environs Local Area Plan

From the outset, this update was full of references to National and Local planning standards and guidelines that I had no knowledge of. The Committee was updated on the Section 28 guidelines that were published by the Government in December regarding housing. The 2018 National Planning Framework changed a lot of things for Sligo as we were re-categorized as a regional growth centre with new growth targets, and with regard to house it seems to be approximately 4,000 new houses throughout the County. This meant that the County Development Plan may require a Variation and new targets meant that the Sligo Environs Plan also needs to be updated.

**Agenda Items 2 & 3:**

The second item on the agenda was an update on the Local Enterprise Office’s promotion of ICT for business. I can forward the report to anyone interested. Similarly the report on the new Public Art Programme can be sent on to PPN members who may be interested.

**Agenda Item 4:**

The fourth item on the agenda was regarding the Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP). Again, I had not knowledge of the old plan never mind that a new one was being developed. As Sligo is now a ‘region in transition’ in a European context the dynamics of the Plan have changed and Sligo County Council have chosen KPMG to assist in framing the Plan (LECP) project prior to the public and stakeholder consultation process. The guideless for the new LECP are also being reframed by the Dept. of Rural and Community Development. I’m not clear if/how the two processes are working in tandem but hopefully it will make sense…

**Agenda Item 5:**

We moved onto the Healthy Ireland Programme and Community Resilience report (which is also available to anyone interested) and having read the report prior to the meeting, I had a specific question on this item (below), as well as follow up questions. My general sense was that the programme was seen as another project and there was no building on or integration with other programmes such as Sligo Age Friendly or the Active Travel programme, which encouraged people to walk or cycle instead of driving, and which included cycle training for adults, and certainly no connection to climate change reduction targets.

**Agenda Item 6:**

The last item was about transitional funding for Sligo LEADER which will bridge a gap between the wind-up of the current 2014-2020 LEADER Programme and the start of the next EU programme, which is not likely to commence until 2023 due to delays at EU level. The initial allocation of €20 million nationally to support locally-led rural development and the key focus on building capacity in communities. Sligo has been allocated a budget of **€521,976** for projects.

The key features announced are:

* Project approvals under the Transitional Programme will commence from 1st April 2021. However, Local Action Groups can work on identifying and animating potential projects from 1st January 2021.
* Funding will also be provided in 2021 to the Local Action Groups for the on-going management and delivery of projects still running under the 2014-2020 LEADER programme.
* A key focus of the Transitional Programme will be on building capacity within communities which have not received LEADER funding to date.
* The programme will also support job creation, foster and encourage entrepreneurship, and support projects which address the climate agenda, digital transformation and encourage rural communities to build on their existing strengths and assets.

Dorothy Clarke, Director of Services who provided the report to the Committee, noted that to date in 2021, a significant number of queries on the transitional programme have been received so far and it is hoped that these will progress to EOI and application stage under the Transitional programme commencing in April 2021.

A spirited debate on issues of good corporate governance followed my question (below).

Don’t hesitate to contact me with any thoughts, questions or feedback on SPC 3 in the context of the PPN.

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***Update on Healthy Sligo Programme & Community Resilience Plan*** My question: *“The national climate change strategy and indeed Sligo County Council’s Climate Change Adaptation Strategy require that these strategies are not stand-alone policies, but must be integrated into all areas of local authority policy, activity and decision making.

In light of this can I ask if the Healthy Sligo Programme & Community Resilience Plan**could integrate active travel components into the plan, like offering free cycle training to adults and children, and mapping the times it takes to walk/cycle from major residential areas around Sligo and other towns, to local amenities so that people reduce their carbon footprint while getting healthy?

Adding seating to O’Connell Street and other busy streets to encourage pedestrians, who know they’ll be able to rest after walking into town, would fit with the aim ‘to create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland’. It would also signal that the public realm encourages walking and pedestrians generally.”*

**Transitional Rural LEADER programme**
Two questions:

1) “*I became concerned with issues around good corporate governance and transparency at Sligo LEADER about 18 months ago. As a result of extensive discussions with both the Board and other agencies, including the European Network for Regional Development, there have been important changes in the make-up of the Board.

Given the transitional funding being put in place before the next round of EU funding for LEADER programmes, I would like to ask if the Director of Services is confident that these moves toward better corporate governance and transparency are ongoing and will be central to the future operation of Sligo LEADER?*”

2) *“My second question relates again to climate change, and how the projects being proposed and approved under the Transitional Programme are being assessed with regard to their carbon footprint or cost/benefit to climate change and biodiversity improvements.”*