

## Public Participation Network Structural Review

### Feedback Template

Further to the publication of Mazars [\*Structural Review of the Public Participation Network – Report\*](#), the Department of Rural and Community Development is eager to hear the views of all Public Participation Networks, the CCMA, Local Authorities, host organisations and other relevant stakeholders on the report.

We want to work with you to prioritise recommendations, to address any gaps and to develop an implementation roadmap to guide any changes that may be made to how PPNs are structured. The process will not be limited to the recommendations made by Mazars in the structural review report, but will also be open to further ideas and recommendations prompted by the report and by your own experiences.

In advance of a webinar on the Report which is due to be held in September, we would be most grateful if you would share your feedback on the report. This will be used to structure the webinar, so that the discussion can be directed to issues which PPNs and other stakeholders feel are most significant.

We are therefore requesting written feedback from PPNs, the CCMA, Local Authorities, host organisations and relevant stakeholders on the recommendations made in Mazars report, any gaps which the report does not address, and any other issues of concern which you would like to raise.

We would also be grateful for your initial thoughts on implementation, for the roadmap which will be developed to guide action on strengthening the national Public Participation Network structure in the coming years.

We have set out some questions below to gather your input. We would be grateful if you would take time to consider the content of the report over the summer and return your feedback by email to the Department at [PPN@DRCD.gov.ie](mailto:PPN@DRCD.gov.ie), by **Wednesday, 31 August 2022**.

## Section 1. Your views on Mazars Report and Recommendations

### Report on feedback from Monaghan PPN Secretariat

#### A. General feedback

##### **1.1 What is your broad feedback on Mazars Structural Review of the Public Participation Network – Report?**

Our view on the report is that we would like to clarify that a lot of the issues highlighted in the report do not reflect MPPN's relationship with MCC. MPPN have a good working relationship with MCC and have done since its inception in 2014. However, we note the findings raised across the PPN's nationwide and do agree with the proposed recommendations to help remedy these findings. With regards to the current PPN structure in place, MPPN do not have any issue with it and would prefer a much greater clarity on what the 3 options for organisational restructure would involve if one of those options have to be chosen.

##### **1.2 Are there areas that you think are important but which were not addressed by the report? If so, please give detail**

There seems to be a current detachment from Central Government and DRCD with an element of distrust between some of the PPN's and DRCD. Has the DRCD already decided what the outcome of the review is to be?

##### **1.3 Is there existing good practice in particular areas that could serve as a model for addressing any of the findings in the report?**

Prior to the PPN being set up in 2014, Monaghan Community Forum had been well established within Monaghan County Council's Community Development Department, with a complete structure and outline in place, and had received both investment and support from Monaghan County Council at every step of the way. As a result of this, the crossover to Monaghan PPN created little or no difficulties and it runs and operates as laid out in the PPN Handbook, independently, but with the full co-operation of Monaghan County Council. Both the RW and SW are employees of MCC and receive the full legal and statutory entitlements in regard to their employment, which we note is not across the board with other PPN's, and certainly should be.

It is interesting that Governance seems to play a part in a lot of the issues that have to be addressed. Monaghan PPN have good governance policies and procedures in place and adhere to all audit and procurement rules and regulations.

***1.4 Do you have any other ideas or want to raise any other issues in relation to Mazars Report?***

**Item 3.4.2:** The One and Done approach should be looked at in more detail. If one PPN have run a successful training programme or project, it should be shared with the other PPN's so they can duplicate the success within their own PPN. Likewise with any guidance, tools, documents or strategies and supports that can enhance best practice. As resources are limited, this will reduce costs and increase efficiency across all the PPN's.

## B. Feedback on Recommendations

### ***1.4 Which three recommendations in the report do you think should be prioritised as the most urgent to address?***

#### **Item 3.2.2: Confusion around roles and dilution of responsibilities**

Greater clarity around the role of the Reps, both for the Reps and the other parties that sit on the committees with them is vital. Reps nominated should have an actual interest in their role and not be nominated because no-one else was put forward. Reps should have access to a good induction course provided by DRCD which will clearly lay out their roles, responsibilities and time required and provide them with support and advice.

#### **Item 3.4.3: Limited Capacity for current and new activities**

Budgets should be increased in general and rolled out on a multi annual basis instead of an annual basis. Resources need to be in place to cover all elements of the PPN activities and extra staff should also be provided where necessary, with additional supports for the Community Development areas required. Resources seem to be of issue particularly to those PPN's who are not hosted, as MPPN are hosted by MCC, the issue of rent, heat and lighting are not taken from the MPPN budget which leaves us with more of a budget than those PPN's who do have to pay for rent, heat and light.

#### **Items 3.5.1/ 3.5.2/ 3.5.3 Staffing Issues**

All Resource Workers and Support Workers should be the same grade across the board and their working terms and conditions should be the same also, with an entitlement to statutory and legal employment requirements, i.e. contributing to pensions, increments, leave etc. No staff member should be unable to avail of an increment due to a shortfall in the budget allocated – equality for all staff working in the PPN's is vital.

Recruitment for these posts should be done externally to ensure staff have both an interest, experience and skills in community, and not just employed by the Local Authority to fill a role. The key competencies for both Resource and Support Workers should be identified and the skills, qualification and competencies clarified to help address the high incidences of staff turnover within the PPN's.

### ***1.5 Do you think that a central coordination structure, set out in section 4 of the report, would be beneficial to PPNs?***

***If so, which of the three recommended options do you believe would be most suitable?  
If not, please provide your views as to why not***

As stated, the current PPN structure works for MPPN, however clarification is required on what exactly the option entails; What would the National Co-ordination Structure involve and what would its role be? What would be the consequences of picking this option over the others, and how does it differ? Also, there is no mention of the Secretariat role in any of the 3 options, and very little mention of the Secretariat throughout the report. MPPN don't wish to pick an option until it received clarification on the what the 3 options entail.

**1.6. Did you identify any areas which you feel were not addressed in the recommendations made in the Report? If so, please share your recommendations in this regard**

It was felt that there is a need to target groups who are unsure about the role of the PPN, and who are not engaging at any level, despite repeated attempts to entice them to avail of the PPN activities. The communications campaign should help with this. The requirement for groups to become members of the PPN to avail of grants should also be looked at again. Groups are registering with the PPN in order to avail of funding, but then are taking no part in PPN activities or events. Lack of uptake for training provided is also an issue, which again stems from lack of engagement from groups. Groups highlight the training courses required through the annual Training Survey and although they register for the training courses, the actual uptake on them on the day of the course is quite poor. This leads to frustration for both the RW/ SW's, the company providing the training, and the Secretariat as to what other course of actions that could be taken.

**1.7 Do you have any other feedback on the recommendations made by Mazars in the report?**

**3.3.1: Difficulties in recruitment & retention of members and reps**

More engagement from current members is required, despite repeated attempts by the PPN, it is becoming more of an issue. Lack of engagement and feedback is frustrating for both the Secretariat and RW/SW and it needs to be looked at nationwide. A Needs Analysis should be carried out to find out why the engagement has reduced in the last three years, and how this can then be increased over a period of three years. Maybe the the roll out of the PPN communication structure may improve the PPN's visibility and raise awareness. The duplication rule should also be done away with, if a Rep wishes to sit on more than one committee rather than having a seat vacant, this should be allowed.

## Section 2. Your input on the Implementation Roadmap

A working group, representative of key stakeholder groups, will be established to develop a roadmap to guide implementation of the recommendations in the Mazars report and any additional recommendations that stakeholders agree on during consultation. We will seek members for the working group in due course.

The Implementation Roadmap will be used to guide action on strengthening the national Public Participation Network structure in the coming years.

### ***2.1 What is your broad feedback on the areas that should be included in the Implementation Roadmap?***

Clarification is required on whether the PPN's are actually working or not, are Reps nationwide actually having any impact or influence on policy making and participative democracy as a whole?

### ***2.2 What issues do you feel should be prioritised in the Implementation Roadmap process?***

- How to increase feedback and engagement from current groups
- Increase in resources, both monetary and staff
- The issue of finding reps to sit on committees
- Roll out the new Communications strategy
- Equality for staff in line with agreed terms and conditions
- The allowance of reps to sit on more than one committee – two reps on more than one committee is better than having a vacant seat

### ***2.3 Did you identify any issues that should be considered as part of the Implementation Roadmap that were not included in Mazars Report? If so, please provide further detail***

No.

**2.4 Is there any other feedback you wish to share on implementation or any issues which you wish to raise?**

More clarity on what the 3 options actually mean for the current structure.

With regard to the submission from the PPN National Workers (copy attached), MPPN wish to make their own submission/ comments as below.

**Section A, 1.1**

Agree that Mazars could have done a more detailed review to ascertain if PPNs are working or not, and as stated in the report, the review examines the PPNs outside of their function, but doesn't examine the changes needed to the PPN structures. Also, the PPN annual reports did identify areas that could be improved and agree that DRCD may require additional supports and resources to deal effectively with the PPNs.

**1.2**

With the request for extra resources, it does make sense to apply for an increase as there hasn't been one since 2014. MPPN Secretariat would be agreeable to this and would have to put a plan in place to discern what projects they could use the extra resources for. See item 1.4, Section B also for our views on this. As discussed at our Secretariat feedback meeting, PPN's that are hosted externally spend the majority of their budget on rent, heat/light, and salaries, whereas in MPPN's case, it is mostly salaries, as we are hosted by MCC. I think the increase is mostly needed for those PPN's who have very little budget to spend once they have paid rent etc.

**1.3**

MPPN agree that there are many examples of good practice in the majority of PPNs.

**1.4**

Secretariats should be left in place as they provide a vital bottom up approach, and if as stated in the submission, specific supports and review of responsibilities should be developed as part of the new proposed structure, this would be beneficial.

Regarding the college structure, MPPN have no difficulty in removing the existing structure, however the removal of this would not be in line with the community seats on the SPC which provide for social inclusion, community and environmental reps.

**Section B, 1.4**

The upgrade to a Grade 6 for RW is justified, as the remit of the PPN has changed and broadened since 2014 (including the inclusion of staff management). There seems to be a lot of discrepancy throughout the PPN's with the actual grade of RW's, some are 5, 6 and in some case 7's. All PPN staff grades should be standardised across the board, and each staff member should have the same terms and conditions and be entitled to receive their statutory and legal entitlements.

With regard to the upgrade of the SW, both the RW and SW are of the opinion that the SW should be upgraded to a Grade 4, but don't think it's necessary to upgrade to a grade 5. MPPN do not require another Support Worker as a third staff member wouldn't be viable.

A Three year multi annual may be beneficial, however after consulting with the RW who has to complete the annual returns and also monitor the budget, MPPN do not have a problem with this being on annual basis, and from a governance point of view, it is easier to adhere to an annual budget as opposed to a multi annual one. However, we agree that there should be some flexibility with rolling money from one year to the next in the case that work planned for that year didn't take place, and I think this is the issue that is being raised by other PPN's.

With regard to the co-ordination and DRCD, it would be beneficial if the Dept could review and develop processes that could enable real deliberative democracy, citizen engagement and strategic planning as per 3.3.1 as it is currently very hard to recruit reps to our committees.

While we agree that having individual cultures within the PPN structure is a good thing, we do believe that a sharing of resources would be beneficial and help with standardised operation methods for particular mandates.

MPPN believe an increase of 7% would be in order as there has recently been an increase in the T&S rates (from 1<sup>st</sup> September) and there will also be a salary increase coming down the line for both the RW and SW (in line with statutory increases across the board, due to the rate of inflation).

#### **1.5**

MPPN agree that the options laid out are unclear and are happy with the current PPN structure in place, as stated in the submission, adding any more layers to the structure could prove unwieldy and complex.

#### **1.7**

PPNs are not community development organisations, this role is currently under the remit of the LA's and our remit for community development is to ensure the community voices are heard and brought into policy making.