

# Southern & Eastern Regional Operational Programme 2007-13

## Minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of Monitoring Committee Assembly House, Waterford 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2007

### **1. Introduction**

The Chair opened by welcomed Members to the inaugural meeting of the 2007 – 2013 programming period. He advised that meeting will largely focus on setting out the procedures rather than monitoring the operations. He apologised that some of the papers for today's meeting were issued late and advised that normal practice will be to have papers available on the website three weeks in advance of the Monitoring Committee Meeting.

### **2. Adoption of the Agenda**

The agenda was agreed.

### **3. Introduction and overview of the S & E Regional OP 2007-13**

The Chair invited Mr Ivan Grimes to give a brief overview of the new OP. Mr Grimes explained the background on how the Programme was drafted over the previous two years. He advised that the OP budget stands at approximately €680 million and is closely linked with the Lisbon and Gothenberg Agendas as well as the ERDF Regulations and National policies. He also informed the Committee that submissions had been received during several public consultation phases from various regional and local authorities and other bodies.

The Chair added that the Programme was written at Priority level so it is essentially a strategic document. He added that on an annual basis the Managing Authority will be obliged to identify those areas that are directly addressing the Lisbon Agenda, a practice described as earmarking. He concluded by saying that following six months of negotiations with the European Commission the Operational Programme was formally adopted by the European Commission on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October last, with expenditure eligible from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007.

**Cllr. Bronwyn Maher** asked if the Gothenberg Agenda would be given equal prominence to the Lisbon Agenda during the implementation of the programme. She also asked if the Monitoring Committee would be able to identify actual expenditure.

**Cllr. Mary Freehill** asked what role the Monitoring Committee would have in relation to the reallocation of funding over the course of the Programme.

**John McAleer, (South West Regional Authority)** asked if the Gateway Challenge Fund in the Programme is separate to the Gateway Innovation Fund under the NDP. He added that there has been much criticism from rural local authorities that the Gateways and Hubs are being prioritised.

In response the Chair advised that the regulations oblige Member States to report additionally on the Lisbon Agenda initiatives. He added that the Gothenberg Agenda is an integral part of Lisbon and the two cannot be separated. He advised that the Committee will be informed on an annual basis how much has been spent under each of the interventions contained in the Operational Programme and he added that it is a

requirement in the new Programme for the Managing Authority to publish the list of beneficiaries and the amount of funding which has been allocated to each of them.

He advised the Committee that in relation to the role of the Monitoring Committee regarding the reallocation of funding, the legal position is that the Committee can formally approve the reallocation of funding between Priorities before a formal request can be sent to the EU Commission for their approval. However he added that in relation to transfers between Themes in the same Priority and for Exchequer funding, the Committee can only make recommendations regarding reallocations and that decisions would be taken by the Department of Finance and the Government.

The Chair informed the Committee that the Gateway Challenge Fund is additional to the NDP Gateways Innovation Fund. He explained that the details of the Sustainable Urban Development Priority are still being worked out between the relevant Departments and the Managing Authority. Finally he noted that while this Priority concentrates on the gateways and hubs, in developing the Programme the Managing Authority was also conscious of the need for geographical balance and in this context he drew the Committee's attention to the second Priority, where most of the activity in terms of alternative energy, broadband, water and sanitary waste water schemes will occur in the rural parts of the region. He also reminded the Committee that parallel to the Regional Programme there was very significant investment planned under the Rural Development Programme being managed by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and where investment in all urban areas outside the Gateways and Hubs was eligible.

#### **4. Overview of Powers and Functions of the Monitoring Committee and proposed monitoring arrangements.**

Introducing this item the Chair advised that all of the powers and functions of the Monitoring Committee stem from Article 65 of the General Regulation. He advised that that the Monitoring Committee is obliged to monitoring the effectiveness and quality of implementation of the programme and it is required to approve annual reports on implementation, financial performance, and financial control of expenditure and to determine whether any independent evaluations need to be commissioned and to agree the overall selection criteria to be applied to co-financed operations.

#### **5. Consideration of Rules of Procedure of the Monitoring Committee**

The Chair informed the Monitoring Committee that it has the right to establish its own rules of procedure, and that a draft had been circulated for consideration by the Committee. He explained that the Monitoring Committee will always strive to make decisions by consensus.

**Mr Cathal Kelly (Equality Authority)** noted that the Equality Authority is listed as an advisor to the Monitoring Committee but that in the BMW Regional Operational Programme the Authority is listed as a member under the Horizontal Interests.

The Chair indicated that following consultation with the Department of Finance, together with the relevant Departments responsible, the decision was taken that the relevant Department for each of the horizontal principles would be the Member to the Committee with the statutory agency as an Advisor. He said that in practice advisors have full right of participation.

**Cllr. Lettie McCarthy** asked if the Committee had the power to change the Rules of Procedure itself or would it have to seek clearance from the Department of Finance or from the EU.

The Chair said that the Department of Finance had issued general guidance in terms of the categories of bodies to be represented, but that the Monitoring Committee determines the Rules itself and thus could choose to subsequently amend them.

The Committee unanimously approved the Rules of Procedure.

## **6. Consideration of draft Implementation Plans for each Theme/sub-theme including Selection Criteria.**

The Chair informed the Committee that Implementation Plans will be drawn up for each Theme between the Department/Agency, the Department of Finance and the Managing Authority. He explained that the Committee will have an opportunity to consider each of these implementation plans and he added that the Committee must agree the selection criteria, which will be part of the Plans, within six months of the adoption of the programme. The Plans will also contain agreed performance indicators which the Department/Agency on an annual basis will use to show that the interventions are meeting their targets in terms of outputs and results. The Plans will also deal with all the technical tasks and the responsibilities of the respective bodies in the cascade in terms of financial management, in terms of reporting requirements, in terms of publicity and information requirements, document retention, etc.

**Mr Cathal Kelly** asked what level of engagement the Managing Authority had with the various Horizontal Principle specialist bodies. He advised that the wider equality grounds were introduced late in the day and it presented a challenge for measure managers to integrate them adequately in the last programme.

The Chair advised that the Managing Authority met each of the bodies responsible for the horizontal principles to identify which of the principles were most relevant to which themes and sub-themes. He said that the advice and assistance from the specialist units provided a meaningful appraisal of the horizontal principles and their application to the design of the schemes and that the advice supplied by the specialist units was also supplied to the relevant Departments and Agencies to assist them in their preparation of their Implementation Plans.

**Mr Alain Roggeri (DG Regio, European Commission)** advised the Monitoring Committee that it should focus on the results, the long term impact and the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the programme to try to promote and enhance innovative ways to promote and achieve regional and local development and thereby ensure a global strategic vision for integration. He suggested that the Monitoring Committee should monitor the use of the selection criteria, because they will drive effective and efficient implementation.

## **7. Updates**

**Mr. Pat Casey (Department of Finance)** then gave the Monitoring Committee updates on a number of issues. In relation to the Communications Action Plan, he advised that this has to be in place by February 2008, work has already started on it, and a draft has been prepared by the NDP/CSF Information Unit and circulated internally to the Committee that is dealing with Communications, and the final plan is expected to be in place before Christmas to meet the requirements set out in the Regulations. The Managing Authority will have a role in managing the communications strategy for the region.

Regarding the National Eligibility Rules, Mr Casey advised that these are being developed at present. It is expected that they will be completed before the end of this year.

Mr Casey informed the Committee that the regulations require that the Financial Systems Description be completed not later than a year after the Operational Programme has been approved. He said that work has commenced, but it is still at a very early stage. He said that all the Managing Authorities and the Financial Control Units are contributing to the process.

Finally Mr Casey advised that in relation to the IT System for the new Programme, work had also commenced on this and it is hoped that work on this project will be completed without delay.

#### **8. Consideration of draft Reporting Template**

The Chair advised that the reporting template which has been circulated for consideration sets out the basic minimum information that will be required from Departments and Agencies when submitting progress reports to the Managing Authority. These reports will be used to compile the reports for the Monitoring Committee.

**Mr John McAleer** asked if it is proposed to have ongoing evaluations and will the NDP Evaluation Unit still be involved in this.

**Mr Pat Casey** said that evaluations will be conducted by the Managing Authority which may engage consultants or external expertise in order to conduct evaluations.

The Chair added that the Monitoring Committee will decide at what stage evaluations will be conducted and whether they will be conducted at programme level or addressing particular parts of the programme. He added that evaluation will remain an integral part of the monitoring of the programme and advised that making amendments to the programme are now predicated on conducting evaluations to justify such adjustments.

#### **9. Arrangements for OP launch and publication**

The Chair advised that the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance will be launching both the National Strategic Reference Framework and the three Operational Programmes in Ireland on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2007, in Tullamore, Co. Offaly and the official text of the Operational Programme should be printed by then

#### **10. Any Other Business**

The Chair informed the Committee that Mr Alain Roggeri is attending his last Monitoring Committee meeting here as he is moving to a new position within DG Regio and that the Managing Authority would like to mark the occasion with a small gesture of appreciation for his work and assistance over the last three and a half years and to wish him luck in his new role. The Department of Finance and the other members of the Committee asked to be associated with the remarks of the Chair and wished Mr Roggeri well in his new assignment. In response, Mr Roggeri thanked the Committee for their kind remarks and said that he had enjoyed his assignment with Ireland.

#### **11. Next meeting**

To be advised.

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|--|-------------------------|
| Regional Assembly  | Cllr. Mary Freehill     |
| Regional Assembly  | Cllr. Lettie McCarthy   |
| Regional Assembly  | Cllr. John Ryan         |
| Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food              | Linda O'Donovan         |
| Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food              | Orla O'Brien            |
| Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment             | Thomas Sheehan          |
| Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment             | Vincent Landers         |
| Department of Education & Science                        | Paul Doyle              |
| Department of Education & Science                        | Peter Kelly             |
| Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources | Joanne McCormack        |
| Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources | Richard Browne          |
| Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources | Kieran Duffy            |
| Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources | Philomena Harte         |
| Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government   | Declan Bourke           |
| Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government   | Stephen Roy             |
| Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government   | Frank Gallagher         |
| Department of Transport & the Marine                     | Eunice Nicholls         |
| SERA Cathaoirleach                                       | Cllr. Paddy O'Callaghan |
| MWRA Cathaoirleach                                       | Cllr. Lilly Wallace     |
| DRA Cathaoirleach  | Cllr. Bronwen Maher     |
| Farming Pillar   | TJ Maher                |
| EU Commission  | Noel Farrell            |
| EU Commission  | Alain Roggeri           |
| SERA Director  | Thomas Byrne            |
| MWRA Director  | Seamus Tracey           |
| Equality Authority                                       | Cathal Kelly            |
| Combat Poverty Agency                                    | Julie Smyth             |
| Enterprise Ireland                                       | Margaret Ryan           |
| Enterprise Ireland                                       | Eilis Duffy             |