

Meeting Minutes

EU Just Transition Fund 2021-2027

4th Programme Monitoring Committee Meeting

Date: Wednesday 19th June 2024

Location: Bloomfield House Hotel, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath

Present

Clare Bannon, Paul Beattie, Mick Broughan, Ruth Buggie, Monica Byrne, Laura Cahill, Sarah Campbell, Orla Carroll, Shirley Clerkin, Peter Clifford, Terence Connolly, Robert McDermott, Stephanie Gantzer, Barry Guckian, Marie Harnett, Cassandra Hinchy, Sonya Kavanagh, Frank Maughan, Robert McDermott, Michael McGrath, Janet McKiernan, Avni Mishra, Sarah Morgan, Helen Mulhall, Suzanne Nally, Amy O'Connor, Rory O'Sullivan, Aoife O'Grady, Pat O'Neill, Bernie Roe, Michelle Rooney, Anna Shakespeare, Noel Sheahan, Johnny Sheehan, Ruairí Smyth, Peter Stevenson, Helena Stromberg, Tsvyatko Velikov, Simon Walton

Apologies

Anne Cusack, Helena Deane, Maurice Eakin, Eddie Fitzpatrick, Dae Hanley, Paddy Kavanagh, Jerry Mac Evilly, Edel Meenan, Ian Murphy, Celene Sheehy

Agenda

Time	Item	For
10:00	1. Arrivals and Registration (Tea/Coffee and Refreshments)	
10:30	2. Welcome and Opening Remarks <i>Clare Bannon – A/Director EMRA, Chair of the PMC</i>	
10:35	3. Welcome from the European Commission <i>Stéphanie Gantzer-Houzel –DG REGIO, EU Commission</i>	
10:40	4. Tour de table	
10:50	5. Adoption of the Agenda	Adoption
10:55	6. Adoption of the Minutes of PMC 3, November 2023	Adoption
11:00	7. Programme Overview: Status of actions progressed across the three priorities. <i>Bernie Roe & Terry Connolly, EMRA</i>	Presentation



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12:00	8. Update on Enabling Conditions	Information
12:05	9. Update on Action 3.3 Community EV Chargers: Changes to Delivery Mechanism <i>ZEVI</i>	Presentation/Discussion
12:35	10. Site visit and input from the Westmeath Tourism Activator	Visit
13:35	Lunch	
14:35	11. Communications Update, including Operations of Strategic Importance selection process, and update on Evaluation Plan <i>Helena Stromberg, EMRA</i>	Presentation
15:00	12. Update on Action 1.2 Support to Local and Regional Economic Strategies: Unallocated Funds <i>Pobal</i>	Presentation/Discussion
15:30	13. Any Other Business	Discussion
15:40	14. Date of Next Meeting	Information
15:45	15. Meeting Ends	

Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Programme Monitoring Committee meeting was chaired by Clare Bannon, Acting Director, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. The Chair extended thanks to all who attended the fourth PMC meeting and welcomed all attendees to the meeting, in particular the European Commission representatives Stephanie Gantzer-Houzel and Tsvyatko Velikov. The Chair thanked the departing members and extended a special thanks to Susan Glennon, formerly of DECC, for her contributions to the fund over the past year. The Chair reminded those present of the conflict-of-interest section in the code of conduct for committee members and that a list of the committee members is published online.

Members who have left the PMC and their new replacements

Organisation	Outgoing PMC Rep	Incoming PMC Rep
DPENDR	Ruth McGrath	Cassandra Hinchy
NWRA	Brendan Mooney	Barry Guckian
DOT	Akriti Brady	Clare O'Connell
CCMA	John Mulholland	TBC
EMRA Cathaoirleach	Kate Feeney	TBC
EMFAF	David Paisley	Laura Woods



Welcome from the EU Commission

Stephanie Gantzer-Houzel, EU commission welcomed all attendees noting the group is the beating heart of the fund and that the fund is in a very exciting time as the first project selections are being finalised.

There then followed a round table of introductions by each attendee.

Adoption of the Agenda

- Proposed by Orla Carroll, Fáilte Ireland
- Seconded by Johnny Sheehan, the Wheel

The agenda was **ADOPTED**

Adoption of PMC 3 Minutes

- Proposed by Mick Broughan, Enterprise Ireland
- Seconded by Peter Clifford, Science Foundation Ireland

The minutes were **ADOPTED**.

Programme Overview: Status of actions

See attached presentation.

Bernie Roe provided a thematic and qualitative overview of the journey on the EU Just Transition Fund (EUJTF) so far. She noted that the real substance of the programme comes to light during the project selection phase prior to handing over to Terry Connolly for a more detailed update on the EU JTF.

Regarding Action 3.2, The NTA have proposed some minor clarification points to their implementation plan as it may be too restrictive in its current form. EMRA is discussing whether or not a written procedure is required.

Terry then handed over to Laura Cahill and Avni Mishra from Pobal to discuss the structure of Call 1 and Call 2 under Action 1.2 the Action to ***Support the implementation of bottom-up local and regional economic strategies.***

Orla Carroll, Fáilte Ireland provided an update on the Action 1.1 Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme and the network of trails. It was also highlighted that the first group of



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selected projects through the Fáilte Ireland Schemes, representing 32 million euro of investment, were announced the day of the PMC meeting.

Closing the presentation, Terry then gave an update on the Enterprise Project Portfolio Management System (EPPM), noting all IBs are now trained on the system and the system is live. He reminded the PMC members of the challenging timelines on the fund.

The Chair then opened to the floor for questions.

Tsvyatko Velikov said that the EU Commission have been in touch with the MA regarding the spending profile and they are happy the MA is focusing on the N+3 target and the decommitment deadlines. Looking forward to seeing the projects materialise and the funding be drawn down.

Stéphanie Gantzer-Houzel:

- Very impressive to see all that has come to life in such a short time period – acknowledged time pressures

A discussion followed which included contributions from Orla Carroll, Avni Misra, Terry Connolly, Shirley Clerkin, Mick Broughan, Clare Bannon, Noel Sheahan, Johnny Sheehan
Items discussed included:

- An update on the status of Grant Agreements.
- On Scheme G – what is the status on this in Action 1.1
 - Orla Carroll – scheme G will no longer proceed. Had discussion with the universities but proposals weren't right. Resources were a limitation and can spend on other schemes
- An update on the selection of sites for Peatland Restoration
- Mentioned transmission of data coming soon and signed grant agreements formally completed at that stage.
- Issues clarifying timelines and state aid issues.

Noel Sheahan, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media noted great day for the projects launched today and the excellent work they have done for such a relatively small team.

Update on Enabling Conditions Information

Terry Connolly gave an update on the enabling conditions confirming that Ireland currently meets all required enabling conditions for funding.

Update on Action 3.3 Community EV Chargers:

Aoife O'Grady, Zero Emissions Vehicles Ireland (ZEVI), introduced the EV Scheme and plans for Ireland and their targets, noting a change of legal advice and why that leads into a request for a change to the JTF implementation to take it in line with the new legal advice.

Michael McGrath, ZEVI, then went further into detail on the proposed changes to the implementation model, see attached presentation.



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The Chair noted that there was a lot to consider there, particularly for Local Authorities and opened to the floor for questions.

Simon Walton – The principle of what is being said there is a clear rational. When you get into the detail there is further discussion with the LAS and the reallocation of the risk to the LAS. The form of contract, the challenging timelines. The ESB as a key stakeholder. No objection but there are additional discussions required with local authorities

- Aoife O’Grady – we are in constant contact with them and are aware with those issues. From today we will follow up within a week but wanted to get a steer on direction today.
- Aoife O’Grady – with shared island scheme we apply for the cabling in advance so that the 9 month timeline can be running down while the procurement and works take place

Stéphanie Gantzer-Houzel – The Commission are not in a position to say anything on the legal arrangements, that is up to Ireland to figure out. Our concern is the implementation mode that is chosen is implemented within the timeline. An accurate assessment of what is achievable within the timeline is required. If option 1 is chosen and if LAs are in charge of delivery then there must be enough support in place for them and everyone to deliver within the timeline. The Commission is ready to discuss options such as reviewing the programme or reducing the scope to ensure that the action is achievable.

Orla Carroll – Need to note that Failte, Pobal and now ZEVI are allocating projects to the Local Authorities. There are resource considerations with this.

- Michael McGrath That’s why there is an option 2 (without LAs as beneficiaries) so that we can ensure that we can deliver.

Following the outcome of the discussion with the LAs and a decision being made as to which option is being advanced, the implementation plan will be updated and circulated for approval via written procedure.

Site visit and input from the Westmeath Tourism Activator

Amy O’Connor – Spoke on the role of the Just transition activators and noted Helen Mulhall (Tourism Activator, Kildare Co. Council) was present as well.

- Full complement of tourism activators are in place as of April this year. One in each county council within the territory.
- Direct connection with people in the localities to ensure they get what is needed from the scheme.
- We sell the region, see it as a role that will go beyond 2026
- Mentioned strength of network between the 8 activators.
- Work with funding supports outside the JTF too.

There followed a visit to Scragh Bog where Triona Finnen, NPWS, lead a tour of the boardwalk and introduced some of the important aspects of the site. Shirley Clerkin, NPWS, further detailed why the site was of significance for the EU JTF and how it relates to the fund.



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The meeting then broke for lunch

Communications Update, including Operations of Strategic Importance selection process, and update on Evaluation Plan

Helena Stromberg, EMRA

Presentation/Discussion

Helena Stromberg presented on the communications aspects of the fund including championing local business in the catering for the fund, the high read rate of the EU JTF newsletter, the communications events around the fund and the training and guidance documents on communications requirements which has been delivered to IBs /public beneficiaries. The designation criteria for operations of strategic importance were also discussed.

When discussing the Evaluation working group Helena Stromberg mentioned that it would be structured with representatives from the Managing Authority, the Member State, Each Intermediate Body and 2 Programme Monitoring Committee Members. At the previous PMC Peter Clifford, Science Foundation Ireland, volunteered to participate on the evaluation working group. A further PMC member volunteer was invited to come forward via email.

Stéphanie Gantzer-Houzel – Congratulated the team on the great work on Communications in the programme. Reminded communication is a joint effort. A lot of actors are involved, and everybody should get to communicate on the funds so that there is a shared ownership on the fund.

The Chair mentioned Ireland being selected to speak at Inform EU as the first representative of the Just Transition Fund was a credit to the work of the Programme Monitoring Committee, the EU JTF EMRA Team and of Helena Stromberg.

Update on Action 1.2 Support to Local and Regional Economic Strategies: Unallocated Funds Pabal

Presentation/Discussion

Michelle Rooney gave a presentation on the work done on Action 1.2 and it's two calls so far, covering the selection criteria, the design of selection and how the calls ran in practice. She also introduced the reasoning behind the consideration for a third call and how it is proposed that it would be structured.

The chair commented that there is a lot in that for the Programme Monitoring Committee members to address.

Mick Broughan - what counties would Call 3 be open to?

- Michelle Rooney – Offaly, Galway, Kildare, Laois, and Longford as it currently stands.

Peter Clifford – I would support this motion but would suggest early Q3 to launch

Mick Broughan seconded this.



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Orla Carroll – Do you believe there are new concepts or do you think it would be better to work with failed applicants?

- Laura Cahill – Can't say that for sure until they see who applies but may be a new pool but likely prior applicants, it is to create a fair and open process
- The Chair then invited the commission to comment
- St  phanie Gantzer-Houzel – Emphasised they are in an observer capacity. We would commend the idea of a third call. For us what is key is transparency and equal treatment so from that side we would welcome an open call. We discussed with the Managing Authority whether the Resource Allocation Model as a way to select rather than exclude so if there is an under subscription from the counties most in need of support that the others would be there to absorb the funds.

The Chair suggested an amendment to the wording proposed for insertion into the implementation plan. It was suggested by the Chair that the phrase additional call should be amended to an 'additional third call' to highlight that the process will not continue indefinitely.

There was a discussion on whether the call should be open to all counties however the PMC agreed that given the administrative burden of filling in the applications it would be unfair to invite applicants who were unlikely to be successful due to their geographic location following application of the Resource Application Model.

Sarah Morgan – On the basis of what was allocated for the C&E there is a balance, will it be included?

- The Chair – the Resource Allocation Model was only used on the LECP surplus funds to decide the counties for inclusion in the call but the final balance will be rolled into the money for distribution through call 3

The Chair – following a suggestion from the Commission, a decision was taken to vote on the amendment for inclusion at the meeting rather than proceeding to written procedure.

- Mick Broughan proposed and Sarah Morgan seconded
- Peter Clifford requested that the third call proceed as quickly as possible and preferably in July. It was indicated by the Chair that the process would proceed as quickly as possible.

The proposal to include a provision for a third call in the Implementation Plan for action 1.2 was agreed.

Any Other Business

- Clare Bannon provided a Cohesion Policy Update. It was outlined that in addition to the various reports published at European level to prepare the next round of cohesion policy (such as the 9th report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion), Ireland



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has also started to discuss the future of the policy through a national dialogue on the future of cohesion policy coordinated by DPENDR. A public consultation was launched at the beginning of the year and an event will take place in Dublin Castle on September 26th. This event will gather various stakeholders and propose a mix of workshops and panel discussions. An exhibition space will also enable funds to showcase projects and the EU JTF will be represented.

- Frank Maughan provided an update on the Just Transition Commission. Following the approval of the Government in April to establish a Just Transition Commission, the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications is now seeking applications for a chair and members of the Commission.

The role of the Just Transition Commission will be to advise and support Government in long-term just transition planning, developing a shared understanding, and identifying the challenges, solutions and opportunities for Ireland's transition to a climate neutral future.

Candidates must demonstrate evidence of significant and relevant experience and expertise at an appropriately senior level in one or more of the following areas: skills development; human rights and equality; rural and community development; social inclusion; green economic development; and/or youth development, youth perspective.

Details on the applications process and background information on the Commission, including its approved terms of reference, is available at www.gov.ie/JTC or on Stateboards.ie Applications can be submitted to JTC@decc.gov.ie by COB Tuesday, 25 June 2024.

Date of Next Meeting

The chair announced the next meeting will potentially take place in November 2024 with the date to be finalised closer to the time.

Meeting Ends



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