



NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES MEETING

**NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES,
ARMAGH, AND BY VIDEOCONFERENCE**

30 OCTOBER 2020

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty first North South Ministerial Council Special EU Programmes meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh, and by videoconference on 30 October 2020. The meeting was attended by Conor Murphy MLA, Minister for Finance, Peter Weir MLA, Minister for Education and Michael McGrath TD, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. Minister Murphy chaired the meeting.

IMPLICATIONS OF UK WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EU

2. The Council noted that the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration provide for the continuation of the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes and for a successor programme, PEACE PLUS. The implementation of the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes is continuing and planning for the PEACE PLUS programme is underway.

RESPONSE TO COVID-19

3. Ministers noted the impact of Covid-19 on the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes and the actions implemented by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to assist project delivery and ensure programme implementation. It is intended that the PEACE PLUS programme will incorporate Covid-19 recovery actions and the programme development process is ongoing.

CURRENT PROGRAMMES

4. The Council noted the SEUPB CEO's progress report for the 2014-2020 PEACE and INTERREG programmes. 96 projects worth €277.9m have been approved for PEACE IV, representing 103.1% of total programme value, and 34 projects worth €291.1m have been approved for INTERREG VA, representing 103.2% of total programme value.
5. The SEUPB continues to facilitate North/South participation in the INTERREG VB and VC Regional and Transnational and Inter-regional Programmes.

PEACE PLUS

6. Ministers noted the progress to date on the development of the PEACE PLUS Programme, that work will continue to deliver an agreed Programme and that a public consultation will be undertaken to provide for further stakeholder engagement.
7. The Council noted that further discussion with departments and Ministers, North and South, will be required to reach an agreed programme and that the final PEACE PLUS programme cooperation document will be submitted to both Administrations, to the NSMC and to the European Commission for approval.

BUSINESS AND CORPORATE PLANS

8. Ministers noted that the Special EU Programmes Body has produced draft Corporate Plans for 2017-19 and 2020-22 and draft Business Plans for 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021, based on guidance issued by the Finance Departments.
9. The Council noted that the key objectives for SEUPB in 2017-19 were:
 - to achieve the outputs and contribute to the results of the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes, by supporting projects to maximise their contribution to society;
 - to work in partnership with applicants and beneficiaries to ensure that projects are implemented in line with their letter of offer;
 - to ensure excellence in the business performance of the SEUPB through the implementation of effective and efficient administrative processes within a corporate governance framework designed to meet accountability requirements; and
 - to invest in the development of its human resources to ensure staff are well informed, highly motivated, adaptable and supportive members of staff; and foster the development of strong teams and networks.
10. Ministers agreed that the key objectives for SEUPB in 2020-22 are:
 - to deliver to meet Stakeholder expectations by ensuring SEUPB operates with the highest standards of governance, providing accurate and timely information which meets regulatory requirements;

- to work in partnership with its customers to ensure that projects achieve the outputs and contribute to the results of the Programmes, by supporting projects to maximise their contribution to society;
- to operate business processes which are effective, efficient and promote the organisation's ethos of innovative practice; and
- to invest in its resources to ensure the organisation is adaptable, supportive and creates strong teams and networks.

11. The Council approved SEUPB's Business Plans for 2017-2021, approved SEUPB's Corporate Plans for 2017-19 and 2020-22, and noted the budget provision for each.

ANNUAL REPORTS AND ACCOUNTS

12. Ministers noted the Special EU Programmes Body Annual Reports and Accounts for 2016, 2017 and 2018, which have been certified by the Comptrollers and Auditors General in both jurisdictions and laid before the Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas.
13. They noted that the 2019 SEUPB Annual Report and Accounts will be submitted to the Council and laid before the Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas in due course.

STAFFING AND ORGANISATION MATTERS

14. Ministers noted that the SEUPB's governance structures continue to operate effectively.
15. The Council agreed that options for an independent organisation review of SEUPB will be considered by sponsor departments and that draft terms of reference will be submitted to NSMC for consideration prior to the commencement of any review.

NEXT MEETING

16. The Council agreed to hold its next NSMC Special EU Programmes meeting early in 2021.

Joint Secretariat
30 October 2020

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