

Board Composition on Existing & New Local Development Companies Post 2006

PLANET – The Partnerships Network is making this submission to the Minister and the Change Management Group of the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs in respect of the future composition and selection of Board members of existing as well as of companies established as a result of the Cohesion Process.

Area-Based Partnership Boards exist to promote social inclusion through multi-sectoral collaborative action by responding to identify needs in local communities.

With this fact in mind, and since their establishment in 1991, Area Based Partnerships have operated on the basis of representation from the following four-pillars

- Community & Voluntary Sector
- Statutory Agencies (e.g. HSE, FAS, DSFA, VEC, Teagasc)
- Elected Representatives
- The Social Partners (e.g. IBEC/Chamber of Commerce/Trade Unions/IFA)

PLANET is aware that the Department will be issuing guidelines regarding the future selection and composition of the existing and new companies. We would ask that the following points be taken into consideration prior to the guidelines being issued. We would stress that local needs should always be catered for when selecting nominees for the company boards.

We are proposing the following:

1. **Company Name:** All new companies must reflect the social inclusion ethos in their company title. For Example, the Meath Partnership is the name of the new company for County Meath.
2. **Board Composition:** New Boards must reflect the local priorities and needs. The Board membership and sectoral representation is crucial in this regard.
 - *Community & Voluntary Sector:* The community/voluntary nominees should come from appropriate local structures, which are representative of the sector and have a focus on social inclusion (i.e. County Forum, Social Thematic Networks focusing on social inclusion).
 - *Statutory Sector:* We propose that there are at least 6 nominees from this sector. The nominations should be sought from a senior management level, i.e. at Director of Services. All nominees must have a decision-making capacity for local and/or regional budgets. The particular agencies to be on the Board are: FAS, DSFA, VEC, HSE, Local Authorities, the Probation Service, and TEAGASC. The

nominating agencies will vary depending on whether or not the company operates in an urban or rural setting.

- *Social Partners:*

2 Representatives from the Farming Sector (e.g. IFA, ICOS) in the case of rural companies. Local nominees are to be nominated via their national organisations.

2 Representatives from the Business Sector, i.e. either IBEC or the Chambers of Commerce. The local nominees should be nominated via their national organisations.

2 Representatives from ICTU. Again, the nominees would be selected from the local trades union network, via ICTU.

- *Elected Representatives:*

2 County/City Councillors. It will be the responsibility of the relevant town/county councils to select their nominees.

2 Members of the Oireachtas (either from the Seanad or the Dail). Again it would be the responsibility of all parties to ensure clear selection procedures are agreed.

3. Concluding Comments:

PLANET is aware that the number of Board members will vary from area to area and that there is no point in prescribing an exact figure. We would request that gender balance is factored into Board composition. We would also request that the guidelines would recommend Board meetings are scheduled to accommodate all Board members, particularly voluntary members. Those voluntary members should also receive relevant support as required to allow them to participate on an equal level with other members of the Board. Balance between all sectors on the Board should be maintained and all sectors should be treated equally.

It would also be recommended that written guidelines are issued to Board members regarding the company's expectations of them and their responsibilities to the organisation and thus to the community at large. We would expect that the social inclusion ethos and representation would be a core feature of the new company structure and not diluted in any way.