



Stormont Castle
BELFAST
BT4 3TT

**Marie Austin
Committee for TEO
Room 412
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3SR**

3 September 2020

Dear Marie

COMMON FRAMEWORKS AND PEACE PLUS

Thank you for your letter of 30 July, following the briefing provided by Departmental officials on EU Exit issues.

In your letter, you indicated that the Committee had requested

- a departmental oral evidence session specifically on common frameworks;
- a departmental written briefing on the PEACE PLUS programme; and
- a response to a question that Committee Member George Robinson MLA was unable to ask during the evidence session due to technical issues.

We have agreed that an oral evidence session on common frameworks will be provided to the Committee on 7 October.

A written update on the development of the 2021-2027 PEACE PLUS Programme is attached at Annex A. This update has been provided by the Department of Finance as the department with lead responsibility for EU Programmes.

A response to the question from Committee Member George Robinson MLA has been provided below.

Q: How would a second wave of COVID-19 and a resulting lockdown affect the Brexit deadline of 31 December 2020?

A: The UK Government has confirmed that it will not seek to extend the transition period beyond 31 December 2020, and remain hopeful that a deal will be agreed. Negotiations on the future partnership have continued during the COVID-19 crisis, both via videoconference and in person.

Yours sincerely


Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

Update on development of the 2021-2027 PEACE PLUS Programme

Background

1. The EU Commission's proposal for a future European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Regulation was published in May 2018, and it provides for continued support for PEACE and INTERREG type activities during the 2021–2027 EU programming period under a combined PEACE PLUS Programme. Commitment to this Programme and its funding is set out within the Withdrawal Agreement¹ and Political Declaration². The New Deal, New Approach document also references PEACE PLUS amongst the Irish Government's commitments.

Programme Development

2. DoF and its co-sponsor department in the South, the Department for Public Expenditure & Reform (DPER), tasked the SEUPB, as per its legislative role, to begin preparatory work on developing the PEACE PLUS Programme in the summer of 2019.
3. SEUPB has met with departmental Permanent Secretaries, held a joint North / South departmental workshop in November 2019, and have more recently facilitated a series of bi-lateral meetings with departmental officials in March and April of this year. As part of this process Executive and Irish government departments were tasked with identifying cross-border interventions for potential inclusion in the programme. This initially included proposals for high level policy areas and was then followed with identification of specific measures.

¹ Political Declaration

"The Parties recall their shared commitment to delivering a future PEACE PLUS programme to sustain work on reconciliation and a shared future in Northern Ireland, maintaining the current funding proportions for the future programme."

² Withdrawal Agreement - Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland

"RECALLING the Union and the United Kingdom's commitments to the North South PEACE and INTERREG funding programmes under the current multi-annual financial framework and to the maintaining of the current funding proportions for the future programme."

4. As well as departmental engagement, SEUPB also undertook a comprehensive engagement process that was open to all external stakeholders. This included 21 events throughout the eligible area from December 2019 through to February 2020 to raise awareness of the PEACE PLUS Programme. An online stakeholder survey was then made available on the SEUPB website, which closed at the end of February, receiving 320 responses.
5. SEUPB have since produced initial draft proposals for the PEACE PLUS Programme which includes a high level overview with potential thematic areas for funding, reflecting the returns from departments and the information garnered from the stakeholder engagement events and survey responses. The proposed interventions include Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities; Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation; Empowering and Investing in Our Young People; Healthy and Inclusive Communities; Supporting a Sustainable Future and Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration.
6. The DoF Minister met with the SEUPB Chief Executive upon receipt of the initial draft proposals and raised points of clarity for action in the ongoing development process, whilst highlighting the importance of a lasting legacy; the need for community involvement at ground level; and the need to reduce bureaucracy and simplify delivery. The SEUPB proposals were circulated to Executive colleagues on the 20th July for comment. Further Ministerial engagement will be undertaken to reach an agreed programme.
7. Work will continue with departments to identify specific targeted areas for funding, supported by a firm evidence base. Additional detail on the thematic areas and indicative budget allocations will be included as this process continues. Further consultation will take place through the Programme Development Steering Group (membership consists of representatives from local government, central government, trade unions, business, rural and community and voluntary sector representatives from across the eligible area).
8. A public consultation is also to be scheduled for later this year, after which approval will be sought from the Executive, the Irish Government, the North-South Ministerial Council and the European Commission. The initial draft proposals have been shared with the Programme Development Steering Group, the European

Commission and Government Departments on the basis that it brings together the inputs made during the engagement process, but that further work is needed to rationalise the Programme; to ensure that it will be delivered by and benefits local communities; and to ensure that it is not used to replace Departmental expenditure Programmes.

Funding

9. In terms of funding, the original commitments made by the European Commission and the British and Irish Governments would see a total programme worth approximately €650m. The European Council agreement on the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) of the 21st July confirmed the initial EU allocation of €120m for PEACE PLUS. We may also see an additional allocation from the Irish Government's European Territorial Cooperation allocation. This may result in the British Government contribution also substantially increasing along with the Executive's match funding element. The total value of the PEACE PLUS Programme will only become apparent with final agreement on the EU's MFF, consideration of any additional contribution from the Irish Government and confirmation of the British Government's corresponding commitment. Colleagues are asked to note the potential Programme allocation.

10. At this stage in the development of the Programme there are no indicative budget allocations to any of the thematic areas. This will require further engagement with Ministers, Departments, the Irish Government and the SEUPB on the specific areas of intervention to be included in the Programme and the outputs to be achieved. SEUPB will be engaging with departments during August on these requirements. It will also be dependent on the final agreed Programme budget. Any Programme expenditure liabilities will be subject to Programme rules and our budgeting and expenditure requirements.

Timing

11. There are no set regulatory deadlines associated with the development of PEACE PLUS. The current timetable is to have it operational in January 2021. It is important that the development process moves at pace so funding can be

delivered to communities that need it most. This is particularly relevant as we deal with the impacts of COVID-19.

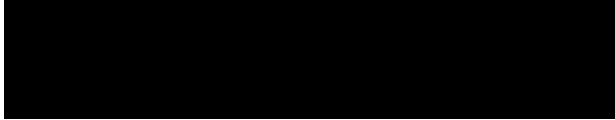
12. Some key milestones that were agreed between SEUPB and EU Commission officials are:

Draft Programme priorities / themes submitted to the EU Commission (with clear intervention logic)	Discussion between SEUPB and DoF & DPER before sharing with EU Commission officials in July 2020
First Draft of Cooperation Programme document sent to the EU Commission	Late Summer 2020
Statutory Consultation on Draft Cooperation Programme	Autumn 2020
Submission of Final Cooperation Programme to Governments, NSMC and EU Commission for approval	November / December 2020



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Executive Office



Stormont Castle
Ballymiscaw
Belfast
BT4 3TT

30 July 2020

Dear 

BREXIT – ORAL EVIDENCE SESSION WITH OFFICIALS ON 29 JULY 2020

At its meeting on 29 July 2020, the Committee for the Executive Office received oral evidence from officials on Brexit issues.

During the evidence session, common frameworks and the new PEACE PLUS programme were discussed. Following the session, the Committee agreed to:

- Schedule a departmental oral evidence session specifically on common frameworks; and
- Request a departmental written briefing on the PEACE PLUS programme.

Due to technical issues, Committee Member George Robinson, MLA, was unable to question officials. Mr Robinson was therefore invited to submit his question in writing:

- How would a second wave of COVID-19 and a resulting lockdown affect the Brexit deadline of 31 December 2020?

The written briefing paper and a response to Mr Robinson's question is requested by 28 August 2020.

I should be grateful if you would contact me as soon as possible to make the necessary arrangements for the oral briefing on common frameworks.

Yours sincerely

Marie Austin
Clerk to the Committee for the Executive Office

Marie Austin, Clerk
Committee for the Executive Office
Room 346, Parliament Buildings, Ballymiscaw, Stormont, Belfast, BT4 3XX
Telephone: (028) 9052 0302
E-mail: marie.austin@niassembly.gov.uk