



## JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

18 January 2023

### **OPENING STATEMENT Gina McIntyre CEO – Special EU Programmes Body**

PEACEPLUS is a cross border funding programme designed to promote peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.

This year represents a significant milestone for the SEUPB as we celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, with the largest funding Programme in our history.

Over the last 25 years, the SEUPB has managed a number of European Union investment programmes, including the PEACE and INTERREG programmes. Through these initiatives, the European Union alongside the Governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have helped to support the Peace Process in Northern Ireland and the six border counties.

A total of €3.39 billion has been invested through previous programmes, funding over 23,000 projects, and touching the lives of more than two million citizens.

We are working on the closure of the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes, all activity for projects ceased on 31 December 2023. There are 8 projects which have yet to fully conclude, capital builds, which due to covid, were delayed significantly. These projects have a programme of activity to complete in 2024, which they are doing so at their own expense, as the funding has ceased. We are working on the administrative closure of all other projects with a view to maximising the reimbursement of EU receipts from the Programmes.

The PEACEPLUS Programme will continue to provide this vital support to Northern Ireland and the border counties with an investment of €1.14 billion focusing on embedding peace and promoting prosperity across the region.

This investment is vital because building a peaceful society must go hand-in-hand with building a prosperous society. One which is addressing the challenges of today and which is looking toward the future. A society which gives all its citizens a stake in that future.

### **Focus of PEACEPLUS**

The focus of PEACEPLUS is both broad and ambitious. The PEACEPLUS Programme will not only support established peace building initiatives such as reconciliation and relationship building. It will deliver outcomes across the whole of society through:

- Investment in our young people to improve their life opportunities.
- Encouraging the social economy and entrepreneurship.
- Developing community leadership.
- Investment in the economy through support for research, skills, lifelong learning.
- Investment in rural and border communities through regeneration and reimagining, access to services.
- Creating iconic spaces in new and vibrant town centres and villages
- Supporting smart towns and villages



- Health and well-being of citizens - equality of access to services
- Environmental protection activities
- Transport links
- Covid recovery actions and mitigate against some of the impact of Brexit

Everyone in the Programme area has the potential to contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous society. Therefore, individual Investment Areas have been designed to optimise engagement and participation across all ages, communities and sectors and thus, ensure the maximum contribution to peace and reconciliation in the Programme area. A small grants programme has been built into this thematic area which will see funding reach smaller organisations and groups to deliver good relations impacts in and between communities and across borders. Each Local Authority has been given an allocation of funds, based on deprivation and population statistics, they must submit a plan to outline how they will spend the funding, and this plan must have demonstrable evidence of co creation with the community.

The really hard to reach groups, need to be given a voice and an opportunity. This has to be home for everyone. It is well understood that over the past 25 years the most badly affected communities during the conflict and violence, whom were also the most deprived, have seen the least improvement. PEACEPLUS will put a focus on ensuring that all communities, traditional and new are respected.

A more innovative culture is being fostered across the Programme area. There is an opportunity to build upon this positive cultural shift and invest in high level research and innovation initiatives to facilitate commercially driven partnerships involving the Programme area's best researchers and companies of all scales. SEUPB are encouraging applicants to look at new emerging technology and digital solutions.

The Programme will invest in our children and young people, in confidence building, skilling supporting through peer groups and will build on the current models of mental health support which provide accessible, age appropriate, early prevention and recovery activities and are delivered on a cross community and cross border basis. This will result in an increased number of resilient young people with the level of capacity required to be in control of their own lives and make a positive contribution within their communities. PEACEPLUS will impact individuals lives, and has been designed to address specific areas of need such as the outcomes focused on mental health and well-being.

Addressing persistent issues of Cultural Trauma – the cycle of past hurt. Supporting activities to counter this trauma through art / music / story telling/ sport/ addressing hurt/ discussion groups. Intergenerational trauma in this region is very prevalent and this has to be addressed at all sections of society, citizens demonstrate high levels of Trauma – you only have to look at the horrifically high rates of addiction/ suicide/ violence recorded.

The PEACEPLUS Programme presents an opportunity to develop a strengths-based model, which will enable and empower rural communities to reach their full potential. Investment will contribute to the creation of thriving rural communities, delivering significant social, economic and environmental benefits.

Protection of our natural environment will be supported. Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth and is crucial to human life. The marine area comprises all marine waters including seabed, sub soil, sea loughs and tidal rivers. In addition to economic benefits, the marine and coastal



environment provide important societal benefits through ecosystem services. These include waste assimilation, coastal defence, carbon absorption, recreational, heritage, fisheries and aquaculture.

There is an opportunity to address the legal and administrative obstacles associated with a border, and there is a high level of interest from administrations, statutory agencies, and organisations in how they can address some of their specific challenges and build networks with a purpose for the future.

Applicants can be from outside the programme area, they can come from all across the island of Ireland, between the two islands, across Europe or globally. This is a wonderful opportunity for organisations who have natural links in sectors to be involved in the Programme projects, with the understanding that the majority of the benefit, must be for the citizens of the programme area.

## **Programme Implementation**

The first round of PEACEPLUS funding calls opened in June 2023, and since then a total of nine thematic calls have opened for applications.

All the information and resources for making an application is available on the specially designed PEACEPLUS Support Portal. Additional information and guidance has been provided through a series of PEACEPLUS Roadshows and Workshop events.

The first round of PEACEPLUS funding was announced on 12 December 2023. The funding was awarded under Theme 3.2 Empowering and Investing in Our Young People. A total of €45 million was awarded to six projects, made up of partners from across the youth sector. Together the projects will cover the whole of Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.

The funding will be used to support capacity building programmes for young people aged 14 to 24 who are disadvantaged, excluded or marginalised, have deep social and emotional needs and are at risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour, violence or paramilitary activity.

More funding announcements are expected at the end of February, in the region of €50m. We have a schedule of funding calls throughout 2024, and this timetable is available to view on the SEUPB website. New calls are advertised extensively, through both the local and national press and online.

The SEUPB is also exploring the potential for complementary working with other large-scale funders including the Shared Island Fund, International Fund for Ireland, City and Growth Deal funding, some government departments, among others. An initial workshop was held in 2023 to consider various options for cooperation.

PEACEPLUS is an enormous challenge but also a tremendous opportunity, which we are very grateful for, and we will do our best to roll it out successfully, taking on lessons learnt from the past programmes and ensuring that we are here to support the applicants to do the work that is so badly needed.

We recognise that there is a great deal of work ahead, but we are excited by the prospect of seeing the enormous impact the Programme will make.