

**COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION  
ON THE  
BLANCHARDSTOWN AREA PARTNERSHIP  
PLAN IMPLEMENTATION BOARDS**

*FORUM 15  
HUNTSTOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE  
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# INTRODUCTION

The Plan Implementation Boards (PIBs) are charged with developing and monitoring the implementation of the Blanchardstown Area Partnership (BAP) Strategic Plan. They are also the mechanism that allows the Partnership to receive feedback from the community and to report on progress through the community representatives who sit on each PIB. In order to review this communication process and identify opportunities to improve community participation in the work of the PIBs and of BAP, the Dublin 15 Community Forum (Forum 15) was asked to gather feedback from the community representatives and provide a report and recommendations to the Board of the Partnership. During April 2004, Forum 15 interviewed a sample of the current community representatives. Two facilitated sessions were held on May 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> to allow for feedback and endorsement from the community representatives.

## BACKGROUND TO THE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION BOARDS

The Plan Implementation Boards evolved from the existing seven Working Groups. In 2002 the Working groups were streamlined into three Plan Implementation Boards. The PIBs meet monthly and are chaired by a member elected by the group. The Deputy Manager participates in each PIB meeting and acts as the main contact between staff and PIBs although other staff members will participate in PIBs as the need arises. Each PIB is represented at the Board level through representatives elected by the PIB.

The role of the PIBs is to:

- Implement specific areas of the Strategic Plan
- Report to the BAP board on progress
- Coordinate responses to promote social inclusion
- Influencing, lobbying and mainstreaming actions with other agencies
- Work with BAP staff to implement actions<sup>1</sup>.

There are currently three PIBs in operation. The terms of reference of each PIB are provided in Appendix 2. Further details are provided below:

### ***Community Development PIB***

Community Development incorporated the following working groups: Community Development, Family Support, Childcare and Health. There are currently twelve members of the Community Development PIB including eight community representatives, three statutory representatives and one elected representative. The Family Support and Child Care Working Groups continue to meet and report to the Community Development PIB on a regular basis.

### ***Youth PIB***

Youth incorporated the Youth Working Group and the Education Working Group. Both working groups continue to meet but now report to the PIB on a regular basis. There are currently fourteen members of the Youth PIB: Seven community representatives, two statutory representatives, two elected representatives and two representatives of educational institutions.

### ***Economic Development PIB***

Economic Development covers the areas of Employment; Enterprise; Adult Education and the Built Environment. There are nine members of the Economic Development PIB: four community representatives, two education representatives, one statutory representative and one elected representative.

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<sup>1</sup> Farrell, Grant Sparks Consulting, Blanchardstown Area Partnership, Mid Term Strategic Review, Oct. 2002

# FINDINGS

## ***Value of the PIBS***

The work and importance of the PIBs were fully endorsed by all of the community representatives interviewed during this process. The PIBs fill a unique role in the life of the Blanchardstown community and the majority of respondents said that participation in the PIBs is essential and they would ensure that their group was represented at all times. The strengths of the PIBs were identified as follows:

- **Information and networking.**

Representatives identified the PIBs as the one place in the community to meet with their colleagues from all parts of the community to address their issues. Learning about other programmes, events and projects was seen as the primary reason why people participate in the PIBs.

- **Coordination and joint planning**

Meeting with colleagues from other programmes allows project workers to coordinate their work and ensure that individual projects enhance the work that occurs in other parts of the community or in other organisations. The PIBs also provide an opportunity for organisations to work together on joint projects when appropriate.

- **Advocacy**

The PIBs function as a venue to advocate for particular issues and interests. Participants regard their role as advocates as a very important function of what they do and the PIBs are one of the important venues where it is essential to participate if they are to be effective advocates.

- **Access to Resources**

Participating in the PIBs was seen as an opportunity to access resources for their organisation. These resources included Partnership funds as well as funding and other resources from statutory agencies. An example of this is the addition of extra training places through the work of the Economic Development PIB.

## ***Cost of Participating***

Members of the PIBs recognised that participation in the PIBs represented a significant cost to the organisation in terms of staff time, particularly if the representative was also on the Board and / or the Executive Committee. The cost of travel, parking, paperwork, printing, phone calls etc was seen as significant for small organisations who operate on a very tight budget. For volunteers, the cost of travel, printing etc was seen as a barrier although participants can submit expenses to the Partnership. Participants were unclear as to the policies surrounding this process and were in general, uncomfortable applying for these expenses. More importantly however, participants spoke of the need to demonstrate an appreciation of the contribution of the participants in the PIBs.

## ***Membership: volunteers / employees / statutory agencies.***

## **Appointing / Electing Community Representatives**

Those interviewed have participated in the PIBs for varying lengths of time. Long-term members were elected during a formal election process facilitated by the Partnership and the Community Forum. As members have stepped off, newer members have been invited to join. The appointment process in recent times has been flexible and allowed the Partnership to identify particular issues or groups which were under-represented and to encourage these groups to nominate representatives. While this flexibility allows vacancies to be filled quickly, some representatives suggested that a more formal process with clear description of the roles and expectations would help the Partnership recruit volunteers and would

also improve how the PIBs operate since members would be aware of the commitment involved and could be held accountable.

Community representatives on the PIBs must be affiliated to a local community or voluntary organisation. In contrast to other local structures such as RAPID or the Local Drugs Task Force, representatives are not elected to the PIB or the Board by local residents directly. Representatives indicated that having representatives affiliated to organisations allowed for greater legitimacy and accountability and prevented individuals pursuing personal issues.

## **Volunteers and Employees**

Currently, the majority of community representatives are employed by community organisations. Only two members of the PIBs are not employed in the community sector in Blanchardstown. However many of the employed representatives also live in the community and bring their experience of community involvement as volunteers to their role as community representative.

The issue of having volunteer community representatives participating in the PIBs was seen as a major challenge for the PIBs. Members identified the need to have more volunteers and community residents participating in the PIBs but recognised the difficulties that make it difficult to recruit volunteer members. In particular, these included the following:

- Participation in the PIBs means attending meetings, developing and reviewing plans and advocating for communities. Therefore it is a long-term activity where outcomes are fairly unclear. In contrast volunteering as a youth leader or sports coach has a very clear, identifiable role and outcome. It is more difficult to explain the role of community representative and harder to find volunteers with the skills and interest to fill that role.
- Participants said that in order to participate in a meaningful way, representatives need to be comfortable with addressing issues of community development and have an understanding of the local development process. Given that the majority of participants in the PIB are working in local development and are familiar with the language and the politics involved, a volunteer representative may feel isolated and out of their depth unless they receive appropriate support.

Despite these challenges, every participant felt that it is possible to identify volunteer community representatives who would be willing to participate in the PIBs given the appropriate supports and encouragements. Two basic requirements for encouraging participation by volunteers as recommended by the participants were:

### **1. Change PIB meetings to evenings.**

Most representatives felt that evening meetings were essential. One community representative said that having meetings during the day automatically prevents volunteers from participating. This representative raised the question of whether the Partnership really wants volunteers to participate if it continues to hold meetings during the day. This was not a unanimous opinion however and some members said that the PIB had tried evening meetings and participation by community representatives actually declined.

### **2. Introduce a formal induction process.**

One participant identified the lack of a formal induction process as a major reason for feeling uncomfortable and out of their depth at meetings. One community representative felt that the group welcomed her to participate but in her words, “did nothing to rope me in”. The elements of a successful induction process as defined by the community representatives includes:

- Explanation of the history and background to the Partnership, the Strategic Plan and the PIB
- List of members and description of their organisation.
- Clear articulation of the role of the community representative and the commitment required.
- Explanation of technical details and a glossary of acronyms and technical terms.
- Opportunities to meet with the members of the three PIBs in a social atmosphere to build personal relationships to encourage collaboration.

- The induction should go beyond the initial introductions and should allow opportunities for the new member to check in after a couple of meetings to ask questions etc.

### **3. Maintain affiliation to local organisations**

Participants are supportive of having community representatives affiliated to local organisations rather than introducing a model of geographic representation similar to RAPID or the Local Drugs Task Force. Participants were concerned that individual interests would overwhelm a larger community view if representatives were elected to the PIBs and Board on a geographic basis.

## **Representation by Statutory Agencies**

Statutory agencies are well represented at board level of the Partnership and a number of representatives participate in the PIBs. Members of the PIBs were interested in having stronger representation from all of the statutory agencies and particularly representation from staff at a policy and management level. Members felt that the PIBs are the location where many of the key policy issues are being discussed and action steps are developed. The ability to forge links with staff from statutory agencies was seen as a particular strength of the PIBs and both the community and the statutory agencies stand to gain from active participation in the PIBs.

## **Review and monitoring of the plan**

Respondents felt positive about the recent process to develop the strategic plan. The PIBs were actively involved in the process and the members are confident that the plan reflects the wishes and interests of the PIBs. The level of awareness of the plan varied greatly, with some members being very familiar with the details of each action while others had no sense of what was contained in the plan.

There was a concern that the plan was “not written in stone.” Members recognised that changing circumstances and funding cuts will have an impact on the proposed list, but members wanted to ensure there was accountability and that the plan functioned as a guideline for action throughout the year. Some members felt that when certain actions were not achieved, that there was no follow up to investigate why not or to develop a plan to allow those actions to be completed

## **Lobbying and Advocacy**

Almost every member of the PIBs raised the issue of lobbying and advocacy. Some successful lobbying was identified such as securing additional training places Blanchardstown and the attention raised regarding the changes in the delivery of services by Community Welfare Officers but all members felt that more could be done. A number of members suggested that the PIBs should develop clearly articulated and well-researched position papers on key issues and that the PIBs should nominate spokespersons to be available when these issues arise. The members felt that the PIBs were ideally placed to take on this lobbying role in the community. The reasons for this included the following:

- The PIBs are representative of the broader Blanchardstown Community and are not limited to particular interests.
- The technical expertise and resources of BAP provide an opportunity to research and compile data for Blanchardstown as a whole.
- The connections with other Partnerships also place the PIBs and BAP in a position to create alliances with people in other communities.
- BAP is respected by the statutory agencies. The endorsement of BAP carries weight and provides access to decision makers.

Some of the challenges identified by the members which have prevented the PIBs becoming strong advocates were identified as:

- Members need training on how to lobby effectively. Many have never participated in campaigns and are unfamiliar with all of the aspects of developing and implementing an effective campaign.
- The PIBs in practice function as networking and information sharing bodies. Members do not necessarily agree on key policy issues and will need support to develop common positions.

- The PIBs meet once a month. Members are often forced to respond to immediate problems and crises. This prevents members from being able to develop common positions, to write position papers and to prepare members to act as spokespersons. Members felt that significant progress was being made on this area while the skills and resources of the Partnership's Communications Officer were available.
- The addition of more community residents on the PIBs would provide additional legitimacy to the advocating for the community. Many of the members who work in the community are also community residents but some members identified a conflict in deciding which interest they are representing: their community, their own organisation, the PIB or the Partnership.

### ***Training needs***

The following training needs were identified by the members of the PIBs:

- Lobbying and associated skills such as preparing position papers, media relations, public speaking, etc.
- Financial Management and analysis. Some members identified a concern with reviewing applications and financial reports without any background in financial analysis. As a result they felt unable to participate in the discussion in a meaningful way. Ensuring that Board members understand their financial responsibilities was also identified as a critical training requirement.
- Information on other partnerships and how they operate. A number of members wished to learn about programmes and strategies employed by other partnerships.

### ***Relationships among the PIBS***

There is a perception that the three PIBs tend to operate in isolation from each other. Apart from the representatives and the chairs that sit on the board, the members of the PIBs never meet with each other as a group. Members felt that if the three PIBs could benefit from meeting on a regular (perhaps quarterly) basis. This would ensure that the activities of the three PIBs are coordinated and the three PIBs could provide community support for particular actions of individual PIBs

### ***PIBs and the Board***

Members reported a good relationship between the Board and the PIBs. The Board responds quickly to any issues raised by PIBs and the members of the PIBs felt supported and endorsed by the Board. A number of concerns were raised however:

- In general, PIB members reported that they received regular updates from their PIB chair or Board representatives on action taken by the Board of the Partnership. This was not a universal experience however and some members said that they do not receive regular reports.
- It was recommended that Community Representatives should meet as a group prior to Board meetings and work together to represent the community sector on the Board. Long-term members identified this as a particularly strong aspect of the Board in previous years and were interested in creating a strong community voice on the Board.
- The change in holding Board meetings every two months rather than every month was identified as creating a problem for communication between the Board and the PIBs. The length of time between meetings can mean that it may be difficult to address topical issues that may require an immediate response. If a member missed a board meeting there can be a significant gap between meetings and members spoke of feeling disconnected from the process.
- PIB members recognised that the primary responsibility of the Board of the Partnership is to ensure the security and viability of the organisation. As a result, members felt that securing time for PIB issues can be problematic when the board is addressing significant issues related to the future of the Partnership. Members requested that time be set aside at Board meetings to hear reports from the PIBs.

## ***PIBs and the Staff***

The members of the PIBs described the staff of the Partnership as very supportive and essential to the work of the PIBs. Deputy Manager Susan Bookle in particular was identified as playing a key role in coordinating the work of the PIBs. The Deputy Manager was seen as the link between the three PIBs and is therefore very important in ensuring that PIBs are working to a common agenda. Other staff members participate in PIB discussion as the need arises and were seen as helpful and always available to respond to the questions and requests for information from the members of the PIBs

The PIB members saw the role of the staff as primarily one of implementation. On occasion, staff members would identify issues of concern and bring them to the PIB for consideration. PIB members were in general very comfortable with this process and respected the input of the staff on key issues. PIB members felt however that it was important to clarify the relationship between the staff to remove the possibility of conflicts arising.

## ***PIBs and the Community***

A significant problem was identified in communicating the work of the PIB and the Partnership in general with the wider Blanchardstown community. The majority of community representatives on the PIBs are employed by local community organisations and report back on the activities of the PIB to their own organisation. In general, however, information does not pass beyond the organisation to the local residents.

Members felt that it is essential that the PIBs and BAP provide regular updates to the community through a variety of media. In particular the use of the local media such as “Community Voice”, “Insight and Phoenix FM were identified as particularly important in communicating what was happening at the Partnership.

Other more innovative ideas were mentioned including community meetings in local neighbourhoods to meet directly with local residents to hear their concerns and to report on progress on local initiatives.

The addition of more volunteer community representatives rather than employees of local organisations was seen as another opportunity to ensure information reached the grass roots community.

# **RECOMMENDATIONS**

## ***MEMBERSHIP***

### **Formal membership policies**

- Formal policies should be produced which clearly articulate the role of the community representative and of the PIBs. These should cover the election process, level of commitment required, term of office and a procedure to replace representatives when they do not participate.
- The requirement that members be affiliated to local organisations rather than elected on a geographic basis should be maintained.
- The PIBs should continue to draw on community resources by inviting individuals with specific skills and information to meet to the members.

### **Community Volunteers**

All community representatives identified the difficulties associated with recruiting more community volunteers onto the PIBs. However a number of representatives felt that there are potential recruits who would be willing to participate. The following steps are necessary however:

- The Partnership needs to develop a higher public profile so community volunteers who are not associated with local social inclusion organisations become familiar with the activities of the Partnership and the PIBs and will therefore be in a position to respond to an invitation to join.
- A willingness to take on a strong advocacy role may encourage community volunteers to participate in the PIBs as a tangible goal can be identified.
- Community volunteers need to be asked to participate. This can happen in a variety of ways including public elections, notices in various media etc. However, personal approaches to potential recruits by existing members of the PIBs are likely to be more successful.
- Once the new member is recruited, appropriate supports and an induction process are essential to keeping the new members.

### **Induction**

- A formal induction process should be developed which reaches out to new community representatives and ensures they settle in over time. This should include both provision of information, helping the new member acquire the skills necessary to participate in the review of the plan as well as informal events to build connections among the members of the PIBs.

### **Meeting times**

- PIB meetings should be held in the evenings to facilitate community volunteers.

### **Representation by Statutory Agencies**

- Community representatives recognised the benefits of having statutory agencies participate in the PIBs. Participation by policy and management staff of statutory agencies should be encouraged and facilitated as much as possible.

## ***PLANNING / REVIEW***

- All PIB members should be fully briefed on the contents of the Strategic Plan
- The strategic plan should form the basis for the work of the PIB during the year.
- Progress on achieving specific actions should be reported on a regular basis and members consulted on any amendments to the plan.

## **LOBBYING & ADVOCACY**

Community representatives should be supported in developing targeted, strategic lobbying campaigns to advance the interests of the Partnership, the PIBs and the participant organisations. This would include the following:

- Clearly articulated positions and goals
- Easy to read position papers
- List of speakers who are well briefed and available to speak to media, community organisations and statutory agencies on the positions and interests of the PIB

## **TRAINING**

Community representatives should have access to formal, ongoing training on the following areas.

- Effective lobbying and advocacy
- Financial Management and analysis
- Information on other partnerships, their programmes and strategies.

## **COMMUNICATION**

### **PIBs**

- The members of the three PIBS should meet on a regular (perhaps quarterly) to share information and support the implementation of the action plan. This should include time for informal networking to encourage better relations among the PIB members and build a sense of ownership and solidarity.

### **Board**

- The Board and the PIBS should ensure clear communication through regular reporting of the activities of the PIB at the Board and regular reports from the Board at the PIB meetings.

### **Staff**

- The existing good relationship between staff and PIBs should continue. Policies should be developed however to clarify the role of staff and PIBs in implementing the action plan.

### **Community**

- Regular updates on the work of the Partnership and the PIBs should be published in local media such as Community Voice, Phoenix FM and Insight.
- Occasional information events should be held in local neighbourhoods to gather information from residents and to report on progress on individual projects and action steps.

## **APPENDIX 1: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

### **Interviews**

The following PIB members were interviewed:

#### ***Youth***

Gavin Byrne, Blanchardstown Youth Service  
David Creed, Neighbourhood Youth Programme (Chair)  
Brendan Doorly, Ladyswell United F.C.

#### ***Community***

Celia Durnin, Dublin 15 Community Council  
Susan Fox, Blakestown Community Development Programme  
Trisha Newham, Neighbourhood Youth Programme  
Marijka Walsh, Barnardos (Chair)  
Siobhan Walshe, Citizen's Information Centre

#### ***Economic Development***

Carmel Fitzpatrick, Blanchardstown Centre for the Unemployed (Chair)  
Ken Germaine, BASE  
CJ McGuigan, Blanchardstown Travellers Support Group  
Patricia Sheridan, Tolka River Project

### **Consultation Sessions**

The following PIB members participated in the follow-up consultation sessions:

#### ***May 20th, 2004***

Celia Durnin, Community Development PIB  
Carmel Fitzpatrick, Economic Development PIB  
Kevin Quinn, Community PIB

#### ***May 21st, 2004***

Susan Fox, Community Development PIB  
Patricia Sheridan, Economic Development PIB  
Marijka Walsh, Community Development PIB

## **APPENDIX 2: PIBS TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

#### ***Process***

- Real support for Community Development in Dublin 15
- Synergy of what everybody is doing
- Lobbying regionally / locally / nationally
- Bringing a community voice to the table wherever we are
- Advocacy role
- Mapping of activity, sharing information
- Consultation that leads to action
- Evaluate process
- Information out of BAP to community

#### ***Actions***

- Monitoring actions
- Agree and oversee communication strategy
- Mapping

#### ***Staff***

- Public relations as part of the agenda
- Open relations between staff and PIB – through the chair and deputy manager

#### ***Board***

- Two way process
- Space on Board and PIB agenda for feedback
- Tracking progress of decisions

#### ***Influencing***

- Playgrounds
- Health facilities
- Family support
- Childcare
- Funding for community groups
- Women's refuge
- Child protection

# YOUTH

## ***Strategic Role of the PIB***

- Overview youth development in the BAP area
- Influence, support and add value to the work of the PIB representatives in relation to Youth development.
- Lobby and advocate on behalf of youth issues in the area
- Inform the community of youth issues and developments
- Ensure that youth work has an educational focus
- Ensure that educational needs of youth people are significantly represented

## ***Actions***

- Ensure that the Youth actions approved in the yearly programme of activities are linked to the BAP strategic plan and other local development consultative plans
- Monitor the progress of actions approved in the yearly programme of activities.
- Take a proactive role in accessing match funding to progress youth actions
- Ensure that youth activity is reflective of both school and out-of-school activity.

## ***Staff***

- The PIB will link with BAP staff to help progress its work and vice-versa
- As per the national agreement the role of the Education Coordinator is central to informing, implementing and development youth and education strategies.

## ***Board***

- Two-way communication between the Board and PIB youth related issues.
- Space on each Board and PIB meeting to feed progress.
- The PIB will act on issues of relevance on behalf of the Partnership.

## ***Strategic Direction***

- The PIB has a strategic focus in relation to youth issues identified by BAP and other local development organisations.

# **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

## ***Actions***

- To monitor the development, implementation and critically assess the impact of actions as per the programme of activities – in depth once a quarter.
- To agree any changes to the approved programme of activities and adjust as necessary.
- To review learning from actions and use to inform policy.

## ***Policy***

- To prioritise issues from the BAP plan that the PIB will strategically develop.
- To influence local, regional and national policy that impacts on economic development in Blanchardstown.
- To act as a forum for members to bring issues of strategic importance for the PIB to the table.

## ***Staff***

- Staff work with the PIB in an open and trusted manner through the Chair and the Deputy Manager.
- Staff act as a resource to the PIB and attend meetings as requested where their knowledge can be used to progress strategic developments.

## ***Board***

- The relationship between the Board and PIB is an open, two-way process.
- All PIB meetings and BAP board meetings must have give time to feedback from both parties.
- The BAP board have the final say in relation to all matters raised by the PIB

## ***Influencing***

- PIB members will influence each other's practice and other identified organisations.