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Mr. Anthony Tohill
Chief Executive
Mid Ulster District Council
Burn Road
COOKSTOWN
County Tyrone
BT80 8DT
24th October 2019

Dear Anthony,

ICBAN Member Councils' Annual Contribution (2020/21)

Each year at this time, ICBAN contacts member Councils regarding the Annual Contribution to the cross-border partnership. Member Council contributions are a very important contributor towards our core administration resources and for which we are always most appreciative. The amount to be levied has been agreed by the Management Board to be £15,000 for the 2020 financial year for County Councils and 2020/2021 financial year for NI Councils. This is the first increased contribution which the organisation has sought since 2001.

Our delivery focus continues to be on areas which will benefit our member Councils. The attached 2-page Update provides more information on the current work programme and this will centre on promoting the need for broadband infrastructure improvements, delivering EU projects to promote creative industries, and representing the potential impact of Brexit on border region communities in line with our recently issued 'The Border into Brexit' preliminary report: <http://icban.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Border-into-Brexit-Interim-Findings-final-Oct-19.pdf>

A key project will be the development of a new 'Strategic Action Plan for the Central Border Region'. This is currently being prepared and will be finalised through meetings of the Council Senior Officers / Directors Forum, and with the Management Board of ICBAN. The purpose of the initiative is to advocate for recognition of the potential and significance of the Central Border area to both governments, and to promote regional priorities into the forthcoming Peace Plus Consultation.

On behalf of the ICBAN Management Board I would like to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Council for the continued support and assistance. Should you have any queries or would like more information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Shane Campbell
Chief Executive Officer
ICBAN

ICBAN UPDATE - OCTOBER 2019



FOR ATTENTION OF SENIOR OFFICIALS AND ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES OF MEMBER COUNCILS

ICBAN is the Cross-Border partnership for the Central Border Region, comprising eight-member Councils from the area. Through these twice-yearly Updates we aim to keep stakeholders informed of the partnership's initiatives and developments.

The organisation has been working to develop a number of projects and initiatives for the Region under the Priority Thematic areas below.

1. High-Speed Broadband Infrastructures

The need for High Speed Internet Provision continues to be a key priority. The Governments in both Ireland and Northern Ireland have promoted plans to address inadequate broadband provision in rural areas. This is recognised in the focus by ICBAN in complementary initiatives which detail technical and policy solutions, towards the ultimate goal of improving the quality of connectivity for citizens on both sides of the border. Most recently, ICBAN has been engaging on plans for the procurement of the £165 million earmarked for broadband improvements in NI, through drawing on other regional examples. In Ireland the organisation continues to make representations of the need to embrace both fixed broadband and mobile broadband opportunities in strategic plans and of the acute need to advance delivery of the delayed National Broadband Plan. There is also the continuing need to promote that inadvertent roaming charges must not be reintroduced as a result of the UK leaving the Digital Single Market through Brexit.

2. Brexit

Since the UK decision to exit the EU, ICBAN has been researching and publishing the expressions by citizens of the area on the impacts, both real and potential, of Brexit for communities. The latest initiative was published on 14 October with Queen's University Belfast. These are the initial preliminary findings of 'The Border into Brexit' study <http://icban.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Border-into-Brexit-Interim-Findings-final-Oct-19.pdf>

Subtitled as 'Perspectives from Local Communities in the Central Border Region of Ireland / Northern Ireland', the online survey ran during Sept/Oct and drew 475 responses. The latest survey findings reveal the complexities and sensitivities involved in managing the UK's withdrawal from the EU for border region residents. It examines the experiences of the Brexit process for those living and working in the area, their anticipation of a hard border and their views on a No Deal Brexit.

This report follows on from the two previously published studies: 'Bordering on Brexit' in November 2017 and 'Brexit at the Border' in June 2018. The final report will be issued in December following the final Focus Groups. This work contributes to ICBAN's 'Border Navigator' project funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Reconciliation Fund.

The final two Focus Groups are being organised as follows:

- Monday 11th November in Pettigo, in evening
- Tuesday 12th November in Cavan, during the day.

To attend a Focus Group meeting please email info@icban.com

The Border into Brexit:
Perspectives from Local Communities in the Central Border Region of Ireland/Northern Ireland

SUMMARY OF INTERIM FINDINGS

The project

- These are results from the first part of The Border into Brexit project run by Queen's University Belfast in conjunction with the Irish Central Border Area Network of 8 local authorities in the Central Border Region of Ireland/N. Ireland.
- It offers preliminary analysis of a large online survey of residents across the region, from both sides of the border.
- The survey asked people living and working in the region about their experiences of Brexit already, their anticipation of a hard border and their views on a No Deal Brexit, as well as the unique nature of the border region.

Impact of Brexit

- Respondents to the survey report wide and significant experience of Brexit having an impact already on their experience and on their plans. This ranges from the economic (e.g. redundancy, business downsizing) to the social (e.g. relocation, community tensions), and is worsened by the lack of political voice and speculation about the future for the border.
- Specific experiences and expectations of impact notwithstanding, many respondents share an overwhelming feeling of uncertainty, which has only negative connotations: 'Like being hunkered down waiting for a storm' (Respondent 4E3).
- Just as various cross-border aspects of life in the region are interrelated and, thus, so are concerns about the impact of Brexit. For example, a concern with potential border checks is connected to fears of delays, inconvenience and loss of business, as well as to concerns about a rise of community tensions, friction and regression in the peace process.

A hard border

- More than 4 in 5 respondents think the likelihood of a hard border has increased since last year. The overwhelming reason given for this view is political leadership in Westminster, specifically the stance of PM Boris Johnson and the rhetoric of the British government on No Deal. Another reason given is the lack of political leadership from Stormont.
- Regardless of views of its likelihood, a harder border is unanimously seen as a retrograde step. This is associated with conflict in the minds of people of all generations. As a consequence, the prospect induces fear and anxiety for many: 'I am frightened. I don't think I could go back to living with the old order. Before I don't know any better, thought it was normal, now I know (it isn't normal) and I don't want to go back.' (R544)
- The impossibility of separating the practical from the peace implications of a hard border is seen in many responses, e.g. 'Possible loss of my job; Increased cost of living; curtailment of my way of living; reintroduction of fear when having to approach potential border checks due to the associated dangers.' (R165)

A No Deal Brexit

- The cross-border normality of life in the region led many respondents to view a No Deal Brexit as having a profound and wide effect, from business closure to conflict. 'A no deal Brexit means all bets are off, anything can happen' (R2)
- The fear of a return to violence is ever-present in this survey, particularly so in relation to a No Deal.

Why is the border region most affected and most vulnerable?

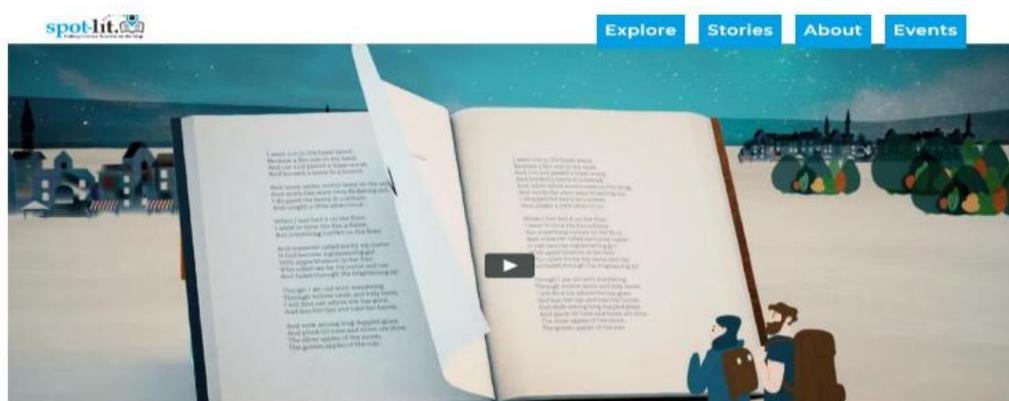
- Whatever happens to the border in symbolic and in practical ways has consequences that go to the heart of politics and society in the Central Border Region. 'Because the border cuts through our parishes, neighbourhoods, farms and homes, it will affect us in every single thing we do.' (R70)
- There is a feeling of political lack of representation and voicelessness which exacerbates the sense of anxiety: 'I feel very angry that there is no one to represent my voice in the UK Parliament - and also in our local Assembly. This is the area and the people that are likely to be most affected and where are the leaders representing us?' (R279)

ICBAN continues to seek and deliver on funding opportunities from the EU and other sources.

INTERREG Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) Programme



- **BLITZ (Business of Literature Zones) Project:** ICBAN is lead partner, with partners from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Finland. This 3-year project aims to grow SME reach beyond local markets by developing and marketing literary tourism. An animated project video can be viewed on <https://www.spot-lit.eu/> ICBAN will be engaging with Council Officials on mutual opportunities in promoting workshops and a development programme to SMEs from across the cross-border area.



- **'Digi-2-Market' Project:** This INTERREG project's focus is on digitally enabled 'green solutions' which overcome the problems of physical connectivity, whilst at the same time enabling enterprise development using local resources. A key output, 'Digital City' containing key resources to help local SMEs embrace immersive technology marketing opportunities is being prepared.

4. Advocacy

The organisation has been promoting the case to both governments for high-level supports and regional status for the Central Border Region. In order to advance this, ICBAN has convened a Forum for Council Senior Officers / Directors to meet on regional development issues. The most recent meeting on 9th September was attended by all Council Directorates and it was agreed that a Strategic Action Plan should now be developed for the area. ICBAN will engage the services of the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) in completing this. The final document will be promoted to the highest levels of both governments. In parallel ICBAN will also be advocating the regional strategic priorities to SEUPB as part of the forthcoming consultation into the new Peace Plus programme.

5. Events & Activity

- Facilitating a meeting of Community Planning Officers of the Central Border Region on. The previous meeting on 13th September examined the various community planning initiatives to help tackle poverty and social deprivation across the Region.
- On 7th November ICBAN will be meeting with SEUPB ahead of the formal opening of consultations into the Peace Plus programme, anticipated to begin in early December.

Communications

We want to actively engage with member Councils on progressing regional projects and initiatives of benefit to your area. You can contact us through:

- Engaging with your Council's elected representatives nominated to the Management Board
- Emailing ICBAN to info@icban.com or Phoning +44 (0)28 6634 0710



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