



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Good Practice Principles Handbook for Community Benefit Funds Under the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme

Summary of responses to public
consultation

2021

Prepared by the Department of
the Environment, Climate & Communications
gov.ie

1 Summary of responses

The Department of the Environment, Climate & Communications (DECC) has released the final Good Practice Principles Handbook for Community Benefit Funds (CBFs) in the first auction of the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). The Department published the draft Handbook on 30th March 2021 and invited comments from interested parties. 142 parties submitted comments by the closing date of 24th May 2021. The Department has carefully considered all comments and suggestions and in response the final Handbook, published on the 6th of July 2021, incorporate appropriate modifications and clarifications.

Given the volume and the variety of comments, the Department does not intend to respond to individual submissions. We would, however, like to provide the following overview of key amendments and considerations.

Through the consultation questions numerous comments were received that showed a broad consensus on a number of topics including the importance of community decision-making, the ability of funds to provide multi annual awards and agreement with those categories defined as ineligible for support.

However, there were a number of topics where opinions were equally divided on the questions posed.

One example relates to whether the community should be more formally defined. Given the balance in opinions on this issue the Department after careful reflection has decided not to define the community more formally in order to not cause unintended consequences in so defining.

There was also a split in opinion on whether a specialised framework should be set up for the role of the Administrator, to ensure good quality administration.. Whilst the Department would like to ensure that there is excellent governance in the administration of funds, there are significant challenges in requiring administrators to register in a specialised framework, not least that requiring such a framework could significantly increase the administration costs of the funds, thus reducing the amount of funding available to the community themselves. This is particularly the case for smaller funds which for RESS-1 make up a significant majority of the projects. So, on balance the Department has decided to focus on good practice principles to underpin the funds' governance rather than forcing a specialist framework.

There was also significant division in responses concerning near neighbour payments. Some respondents felt that near neighbours should be compensated by developers outside of the

funds. Others suggested maximum and minimum payments. Some suggested these payments might cause friction in the community. Given the size of funds as per the RESS mandate it was considered unlikely that developers would compensate near neighbours from separate “benefit” funds and we have attempted to elaborate and clarify our thinking in the final Handbook.

Primarily the consultation and associated town hall workshops emphasised the need for further clarification on the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the administration of CBFs. Therefore, a number of clarification paragraphs have been incorporated into the final document to explain in further detail the concepts and relationships envisaged.

Additional explanation has been provided as to the primary role of the RESS terms and conditions and the relationship of the Handbook to those terms and conditions. This is to ensure that all stakeholders are aware that in the case of any conflict or inconsistency between the RESS terms and conditions and the Handbook, the RESS terms and conditions will prevail.

A number of other minor changes and corrections were incorporated into the final document which can be viewed at the following web address:

<https://assets.gov.ie/140382/b5198da9-c6c7-4af2-bbb5-2b8e3c0d2468.pdf>

DECC recognises that considerable thought and effort was put into all the submissions, as evidenced by the comments received. We thank respondents for their time and inputs and look forward to a successful delivery of Community Benefit Funds across the country over the coming years. |