

**MINUTES of the 3rd MEETING OF THE
BORDER, MIDLAND AND WESTERN
REGIONAL OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME 2014-2020
MONITORING COMMITTEE**

**Held In The
Council Chamber, Roscommon County Council, Áras on Chontae, Roscommon
June 7th 2017**

ATTENDANCE: (See attached)

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

The Chairperson of the BMW Regional OP Monitoring Committee, Mr. David Minton, Managing Authority, presided.

Mr. Minton opened the meeting and formally welcomed the committee members to the third meeting of the Border, Midland and Western Regional Operational Programme Monitoring Committee for the programme period 2014-2020.

Mr. Minton especially welcomed the EU Commission representative Ms. Merja Toikka. He thanked the Chief Executive and staff of Roscommon Co. Co. for making the building and technology available for the meeting and stated that the new civic offices were a world class example of a public service building. He informed the members that he had replaced Gerry Finn as Director of the Regional Assembly and said that it was a great honour to be chairing the PMC Meeting.

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Proposed by Mr. Hugh O'Rourke
Seconded by Mr. Michael Hughes

"That the Agenda be adopted"

The Agenda was **ADOPTED** and **AGREED** by all

**2. ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES OF THE BMW REGIONAL OP
MONITORING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12th May 2016**

Proposed by Mr. Michael Hughes
Seconded by Cllr. Seamus Kilgannon

"That the Minutes of the BMW Regional OP Monitoring Committee Meeting of the 12th May 2016 be adopted"

The Minutes of the BMW Regional OP Monitoring Committee Meeting of the 12th May 2016 were **ADOPTED** and **AGREED** by all

3. NWRA UPDATE

Mr. David Minton, Managing Authority, gave a brief update on the staffing and strategy changes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) over the last 9 months. He formally acknowledged the role of his predecessor Gerry Finn and also Kieran Moylan and Michael Mc Cauley and their work and dedication on the delivery of the Operational Programme over the last 16 years. He informed the members that in the last year the Managing Authority has been reviewing the strategy and role of the Assembly to be as effective as possible. Mr. Minton reported on the NWRA 'One Region One Vision' Conference which was held in December 2016. He informed the meeting that the conference focussed on the untapped potential of the region where experts were gathered together to help frame a strategy and clear direction for the Assembly over the next number of years.

Mr. Minton stated that the Assembly's consultation process over the last few months included meeting as many national and regional bodies as possible and reviewing the role of the Assembly. One clear role that emerged from this process was building the capacity of the institutions, local authorities, agencies and relevant bodies to be able to access European funding and have a better knowledge of EU structures and the funding mechanisms available.

Mr. Minton reported that in late November 2016 the Assembly piloted a diploma in European Studies in partnership with the European Institute and the Leuven Institute in Brussels. This diploma concentrated solely on European funding and how the region can optimise and maximise European funding. He informed the members that this was a very successful pilot project with the three Assembly's now working together on a diploma in European affairs at a national level. As a result, by the end of year 1 there will be 43 people from local authorities, institutions and agencies, participating on a 5 day diploma course which includes 3 days spent in Brussels. Mr. Minton stated that a new round of this diploma will be running again in September/October 2017 and anyone interested should contact the Assembly.

He also pointed out that the Regional Assembly is the regional contact point for the Northern Periphery & Arctic Programme and the national contact point for the Interreg Atlantic Area Programme, which provides substantial European funding. He stated that the Government has committed €6m to the Atlantic Area Programme and informed the members that last week in the first call of the programme €12m was delivered to projects nationally.

Mr. Minton reported on the future of the region and the focus of IOT in the public sector, private sector, commercial sector and agencies and the application of technology in traditional industry and also in new industries. He informed the members of the smart places initiative which was launched recently by the members of the regional assembly which includes a two part process. The first phase is a feasibility study looking at smart initiatives across the region and includes the public, private and community based sector, to help create a very vibrant and dynamic region. The second phase in conjunction with local authorities in the region, WDC and NUIG is a strategy for placing this region in a strong position to deliver the Irish targets going forward and in particular post 2020.

He also reported on the European Entrepreneurial Region (EER) application and informed the members the NWRA has been awarded the EER for 2018. The application was lead by An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny T.D. with over 120 letters of support which will be formally announced in Brussels in July.

Mr. Minton stated that the Regional Assembly is not just delivering the Operational Programme but has another core function by participation in the National Planning Framework (NPF). The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) is being replaced by the NPF and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). He informed the meeting that this process is underway since February 1st 2017 with the NFP Issues and Choices paper now published. He reported that the Assembly consulted with the 9 local authorities and all the relevant agencies in the region to put together a very comprehensive vision of what we think the BMW Region is going to look like in 2040 and where the Government needs to invest it money as priority. The Assembly's submission to the Government is now available on the NWRA website.

Mr. Minton outlined the key achievements under the Operational Programme and also pointed out the Assembly's governance role together with its internal finances and financial management & control functions.

In conclusion Mr. Minton highlighted that the Northern and Western Regional Assembly *can create better places together with a more competitive region* and he outlined the following:

- Create Better Places by ensuring our region adopts effective planning and economic development policies centred on sustainable and resilient growth
- Enhance our Competitiveness by optimizing all exchequer and EU funding (with local & regional partners) to ensure appropriate levels of investment and infrastructure are secured for our region.
- Act a as a platform for collaboration, knowledge transfer and ultimately regional economic development

4. PROGRESS REPORTS FOR EACH PRIORITY

Priority 1: Strengthening RTDI in the BMW Region

SFI Research Centres Programme

SFI Investigators Programme

SFI Spokes Programme

Ms Joan Hynes, Science Foundation Ireland, outlined briefly the physical and financial progress of the SFI Programmes.

She reported on the very successful research centres programme and informed the members of the 12 research centres nationally with two of these centres based in the BMW Region. Ms Hynes reported that cumulative eligible ERDF expenditure at the end of December 2016 was in excess of €23m. Also at the end of December 2016 the number of new researchers employed in the BMW Region was 171. Ms. Hynes pointed out that one of the objectives of the Research Centres Programme is that there

is engagement with industry which is very successful and to date there has been 187 partners engaged with the research centres, from a baseline of 103. She reported on the research centres based in the BMW Region, i.e. the INSIGHT research centre based in NUIG and CURAM also based in NUIG which is a medical devices research centre that was launched in 2013.

SFI Investigators Programme

Ms. Hynes outlined briefly the progress under the SFI Investigators Programme and stated that from 2014 to date there have been ten investigators awards made under this programme which are based in the BMW Region. She reported that cumulative expenditure at the end of 2016 under this programme was €2.5m and stated that SFI launches this programme on an annual basis.

Marine Research Programme

Mr. Barry Guckian, Managing Authority, informed the members that a revised Implementation Plan will be presented to the members in the near future on the Marine Research Programme.

Enterprise Ireland Commercialisation Fund Innovation Partnerships Programme

Mr. Michael Hughes, Enterprise Ireland, outlined the objectives of the Commercialisation Fund and Innovation Partnerships Programme.

He reported that the Commercialisation Fund enables research in both science and technology in the third level colleges and research centres to be brought to a stage where it is commercially viable. Mr Hughes informed the members that the two aspects of the programme included the commercial case feasibility support and the full commercialisation fund programme. He pointed out that in 2016 there were 24 applications for commercial case feasibility support and 7 applications for commercialisation fund project support approved for the BMW Region

Mr. Hughes also reported on the success of the Innovation Partnerships Programme which is a programme to promote and encourage collaboration between both companies and 3rd level colleges in the region which supports research and development. He stated that in 2016 there were 20 innovation partnerships approved for the BMW Region.

Ms. Merja Toikka, EU Commission, pointed out the importance of Research and Innovation for all member states. She referred to the European semester exercise which the cohesion policy and other programmes are supporting and informed the members of the member state reports with specific recommendations which were published on the 22nd May. Mr. Toikka informed the members that for Ireland the specific recommendation was for public investment in research and innovation and in particular support for SMEs as these SMEs are the backbone for all countries. She acknowledged the good progress reported in research and innovation but pointed out the importance of optimising all the funds available in this area to encourage companies to engage in research and innovation. Ms. Toikka also highlighted the

good progress being made on the performance indicator targets where some targets had already reached the mid-term stage of the programme.

Enterprise Ireland Industry R&D Fund

Mr. Eugene Daly, Enterprise Ireland, informed the members that the R&D Fund is a fund for industry with 54 enterprises receiving R&D support in the BMW Region to date. He stated that Enterprise Ireland's overall budget for this programme is €22m with €10m approved to date.

Mr. Daly stated that a critical performance indicator for Enterprise Ireland is the number of firms investing greater than €100,000 per annum in R&D projects. From a baseline of 185 the number of firms investing greater than €100,000 per annum in the BMW region has reached 203 with a final target value set at 220.

Priority 2: Information & Communication Technologies

National Broadband Plan

Ms. Susan Fleming, Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, reported that the National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland has access to high speed broadband. This is being achieved through commercial investment and state intervention which is part funded by the ERDF. She stated that since 2012 the commercial industry has invested €2.5 billion in broadband infrastructure which means that 1.4 million homes and businesses can now access high speed broadband. Ms. Fleming said that a recent announcement by EIR to include an additional 300,000 premises by the end of 2018 brings the total to 1.7 million homes with high speed broadband from commercial investment. The remaining provisions will be through the state intervention which amounts to approximately 542,000 homes, primarily in rural areas. She also stated that in 2016 the high speed broadband map was reviewed to look at the impact of the commercial sector and new investments proposed by companies. As a result of this the additional 300,000 premises will be provided on a commercial basis with 84,500 premises brought into the intervention area due to a failure on the commercial sector to provide high speed broadband for those houses.

Ms. Fleming reported that the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, has continued to engage with DG Regio in relation to this analysis and also in relation to the state aid approval process. A state aid pre notification notice was submitted to the Commission in July 2015 and the Department continues to engage with the Commission to finalise this process. She informed the members that in Q 3 of 2016 the Department initiated engagement with JASPER, a European Investment bank, who is providing support to the broadband team in relation to the feasibility study and major project notification prior to submission to the EU Commission. In line with EU and national environmental legislation the Department in December 2015 assessed the need to carry out a strategic environmental assessment and an appropriate assessment. This work is ongoing with an initial consultation process to develop an environmental report and public consultation is expected in Q3 of 2017 and the report is due to be published in Q4. Ms. Fleming reported that the Department is still at the procurement stage for the state aid intervention which is a

complex process with 8 phases and are currently at phase 3 which is competitive dialogue but is now approaching the end point. The draft contract includes over 1,200 pages with 400 hours of competitive dialogue to date and there are three qualified bidders in the process. She informed the members that the pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ) stage went from 5 bidders down to 3 which now remain in the process and the next stage of the process is to submit detailed solutions. Ms. Fleming reported that the process will end in a 25 year contract which aims to deal with Ireland's connectivity challenges into the future with a minimum of 30 mbps requirement. There is also a requirement within the contract for future proofing over the next 25 years which will provide for all citizens requirements in Ireland.

Ms. Merja Toikka, EU Commission, stated that the commission considers the provision of high speed broadband as very important for economic operators. She said that she is aware of the challenges for Ireland but expressed concerns that the foreseen timetable for the broadband plan is delayed. Mr. Toikka pointed out that technology is changing very fast and by the time the broadband rollout of 30 mbps happens it will not be sufficient for the end users where 5G broadband will be required. She asked what date did the Department expect the invitation to submit the detail solutions to happen and pointed out that the plan is now 1 year behind schedule.

Ms. Susan Fleming, Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, outlined that by the end of 2018 there will 77% of households and premises with access to high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 mbps and by 2020 it is anticipated that this will rise to over 90%. She outlined that all three bidders in the broadband plan process have indicated that they are proposing a fiber to the home solution which will allow for much more higher speeds than 30 mbps. In relation to 5G she stated that this is an issue for the Communications Regulator and informed the members that this is progressing in terms of spectrum availability for the 5G operators. In addition she informed the members that the competitive dialogue for ISDS is currently be finalised and a date for this stage of the process is imminent.

Priority 3: SME Support, Promotion & Capability Development

Entrepreneurship in Micro-Enterprise (Local Enterprise Offices)

Mr. Martin Corry, Enterprise Ireland, reported that in 2016 the Entrepreneurship in the Micro-enterprise scheme was delivered through the 13 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) located in the Border, Midlands and Western Region. The LEOs are the first stop shop for enterprise development. He reported that the specific objective of this priority is to foster and grow a cohort of entrepreneurs in the BMW Region with the skills and resources to accelerate the start-up and expansion of their enterprises.

Mr. Corry reported that a dedicated Micro Enterprise and Small Business Unit has been established within Enterprise Ireland. Within this unit a national Centre of Excellence has been created to ensure that all micro and small businesses benefit from an expanded and benchmarked service across all regions.

Mr. Corry outlined the good progress of the performance indicator targets and stated that in 2016 under the LEO expenditure an estimated total public amount of €5.2m

and total eligible amount of €6.4m will be available to claim when the new IT system becomes operational.

He informed the members that the LEOs in the BMW region participate in cross-Border projects such as: Trade links, Interreg IVA, CREST, TARGET, Harnessing Natural Resources, and in informal networks of cooperation at district and local area level. Joint LEO-LEA (Northern network of Local Enterprise Agencies) activities are undertaken to introduce micro-businesses in either jurisdiction to Island-wide market possibilities for products and services. He stated that going forward there is likely to be joint co-operation and initiatives pertaining to Brexit.

Mr. Corry reported that the LEOs continue to publicise their programmes and activities through various media and channels. In each case the EU logo and accreditation is printed and displayed prominently. Beneficiaries are also required to acknowledge the EU contribution.

In relation to the horizontal issues he outlined the following:

Gender Equality

The LEOs generally seek to proactively gender-mainstream their operational activities and structures, particularly in regard to gender balance requirements, with a view to achieving optimum levels of gender equality.

Highlights for 2016

- National Women's Enterprise Day 2016 took place on the 19th October. Seven events took place in Cavan, Dublin, Westmeath, Meath, Kilkenny, Kerry and Galway.
- National Enterprise Awards 2016
 - Overall winner: Applied Concepts, supported by the LEO Offaly
 - Peer Award - introduced first time at NEA 2016 won by DARE Technology.

Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

The LEOs help promote equal diverse and socially inclusive societies including disability and help combat poverty and inequality through co-operation with local and rural development structures and facilitation of job creation.

Highlights for 2016

- The Student Enterprise Awards –
 - 22,559 students nationally from 620 schools took part in the Student Enterprise Awards Programme
 - 201 student entrepreneurs from 69 schools nationwide, representing 76 student businesses took part in the National Final in Croke Park in Dublin on 20th April 2016.
- IBYE – Record applications up 32%.
- New products launched to enhance LEO delivery.

He also reported that some major developments in 2016 included:

- Finalisation and/or review of protocols with 10 other support providers.

- Continuation of New Youth Entrepreneurship Competition - IBYE programme focusing on Young Entrepreneurship 18 - 35.
- The LEO Competitive Fund, co-ordinated by DJEI and funded by EI was open to groups of LEOs to come together to bid for funding for projects to support job-creation initiatives in their areas. 16 projects were awarded 1.9m funding.
- New product launch to enhance LEO delivery i.e. Lean for Micro, Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters' (TAM)
- LEOs continue to promote Gender Equality, Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination.

Enterprise Ireland New Frontiers Programme

Mr. Michael Hughes, Enterprise Ireland, reported that the New Frontiers programme is Ireland's national entrepreneur training programme that is delivered at a local level by the Institutes of Technology and funded and managed by Enterprise Ireland. He pointed out that the programme is an important pipeline for Enterprise Ireland's start-up businesses and for the Local Enterprise Office pipeline together with HPSUs.

Mr. Hughes informed the members that the programme is run in two phases. This includes a part time phase 1 course which is an evening course where participants work on the initial stages of their business plan. At a competitive level there is a phase 2 course which is a full time 6 month commitment where participants receive €15,000 in financial support. He stated that these courses are run in the IoTs where the participants are provided with incubation space in the campus incubation centre where they receive the full supports of the incubations centres during the course. He informed the members that in 2016 there were 50 phase 2 participants in the BMW Region.

Enterprise Ireland Supporting the Capacity of SMEs

Mr. Eugene Daly, Enterprise Ireland, informed the members that support in the capacity of SME's covers three areas and includes capital grants, key manager grants and graduate grants. The target for this programme was €13m over the life of the programme and to date €9.5m has been approved. Mr. Daly stated that the target of 110 enterprises receiving support has been exceeded with 114 enterprises receiving support at the end of 2016.

Ms. Merja Toikka, EU Commission, asked if it was foreseen if there would be more demand for SME support where targets could reach 200 and over and pointed out that the SMEs are the future economic players for all countries and the creators of jobs. Mr. Hugh O'Rourke, Enterprise Ireland, informed the members that there was latent demand for this type of support in the region in the early stages of the programme but pointed out that this growth in demand may not be as good in the later years of the programme.

Priority 4: Low Carbon Economy

Social Housing Retrofit Voids Programme

Ms. Claire Gavin, Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government, reported that the voids programme is a targeted programme which focuses exclusively at returning vacant and boarded up social houses to productive use in an energy efficient manner. She stated that the work carried out on this programme will positively impact on Ireland's commitment in relation to carbon emissions reduction and energy reduction target for 2020.

She reported that the programme commenced in 2014 and delivers housing units which have been left vacant for long periods to productive use in a timely manner and in a cost effective way. This targeted measure focuses exclusively on vacant units and boarded up properties on retrofitting of the fabric of the dwelling which involves insulation of walls and attics, windows and doors replacement and upgrade work to heating systems.

Ms Gavin informed the members that since the commencement of the programme overall there have been 7,200 units nationally remediated and in the BMW Region she pointed out the number of units retrofitted with energy works undertaken for the period from 2014 to 2016. She stated that the 2017 programme has just been rolled out with 328 units in the BMW Region retrofitted in the initial phase. The average energy efficient work cost per unit in 2014 was €3,352, €2,919 in 2015 and €4,220 in 2016. She stated that the voids programme has significantly improved the Government's overall programme to improve the performance of the local authority residential housing stock. The Department of Housing has just recently appointed a co-ordinator for the work in both the BMW and S&E regions to give a more focussed approach to this programme.

Social Housing Retrofit Energy - Efficiency Programme

Mr. Kevin Byrne, Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government, outlined that this programme provides retrofitting of the least energy efficient social housing homes. He stated that Local Authorities have been undertaking this programme since 2013 with the support of the Department of Housing and the programme is made up of two components. Phase 1 of the scheme began in June 2013 with the aim of ensuring the entire social housing stock will have as a minimum, wall insulation and attic insulation. Phase 2 concentrates on the fabric upgrade works of those remaining dwellings with hollow block wall construction, single glaze windows and defective doors.

He stated that in relation to output and expenditure at the end of 2016 the Department of Housing has provided a total of €107m for improving the energy performance of the older local authority housing stock which has enhanced higher energy efficiency ratings in over 58,000 local authority homes. He stated that this has benefited those in danger of fuel poverty and is making a significant contribution to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction targets and energy reduction targets for 2020. He informed the members that in 2016 works were completed in over 10,400 units under phase 1 and 900 units under phase 2 with a total programme funding for 2016 of €22.5m. In

addition Mr. Byrne reported on the specific upgrading of units in the BMW Region together with the current progress under the programme for 2017 and he also outlined the planned works for the future of this programme. He informed the members of the circular which was issued by the Department of Housing to each local authority requesting them to submit a clear assessment of proposed activity and related expenditure in 2017 on the remaining phase 1 and phase 2 works.

Priority 5: Sustainable Urban Development

Designated Urban Centres Grant Scheme

Ms. Caitlín Conneely, Managing Authority, reported on the projects approved for the BMW Region in early 2016 under this priority. She informed the members that the total awarded for the BMW Region was €14m and outlined the projects as follows:

1. Sligo €2million for two projects: The enhancements to O'Connell Street and the provision of a new community centre in Cranmore.

2. Letterkenny €2 million is being awarded to split over 3 projects: Upgrading the Joe Bonner Link Road, the construction of a new Social Enterprise building and the upgrading of town linkages under the sustainable transport grants

3. Galway €3.5million for City Library and Cultural Centre: The €3.5 million granted to build a library & cultural centre on the Headford Road.

4. Athlone: €1.5million for Church Street Enhancement: The project involves enhanced pedestrian facilities and public spaces.

5. Dundalk: €2 million for Clanbrasil Street & St Nicholas Quarter Rejuvenation

6. Mullingar Town Centre €1.5 million for enhancement of town civic areas and linkages between them

7. Tullamore: €1.5 million for Street Enhancement Project:

Ms. Conneely informed the members that reported that work is currently ongoing under these projects and was at the design stage in 2016.

Mr. Stewart Logan, Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, asked if the local authorities had experienced any difficulty in acquiring contractors to carry out the works under these projects, taking into account the upturn in the economy. Ms. Conneely reported that the Managing Authority are currently engaging with the local authorities and to date is not aware of any issues in this area but stated that she will keep the Department informed of any difficulties encountered going forward.

Priority 6: Technical Assistance

Technical Assistance

Mr. Barry Guckian, Managing Authority, reported that the Technical Assistance Priority is used to manage the Operational Programme. He stated that activities in 2016 centred on the closure of the 2007-13 programme. It also included information and publicity activities, the work on the designation process and the E-Cohesion IT System.

Anne Marie Caulfield, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) thanked the staff of DPER, the Managing Authority, Certifying Authority and Audit Authority for the very valuable work carried out in relation to the designation of the 2014-2020 OP. She acknowledged the issues around the delays in the provision of an e-cohesion system and highlighted that the BMW region at the end of 2016 has a reported spend of €93m across 4 priorities and the S&E has reported spend of €126m. She stated that the overall position at the end of 2016 is that there should be accumulated expenditure claims to the value of €220m which could result in a drawdown of €110m.

Ms. Caulfield informed the members that the fiscal space available to the country for next year is in the region of €200m. She stated as Ireland's budgetary position remains challenging it is important that we now start the process of claiming back the co-financed element of the programmes in a timely manner. She acknowledged the importance of structural funds and that the EU budget is properly managed and also to demonstrate that EU Cohesion funding is well spent for future funding. She stated that now that designation is completed the Department hopes to move forward to claim back the full ERDF entitlement without delay.

Mr. David Minton, Managing Authority, acknowledged that the clear focus over the next few months will be on the drawdown of structural funds and full declaration. The Managing Authority will be working with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to achieve the milestones and to optimise and maximise all EU funding. He stated that it is of particular relevance moving forward and post 2020 that Ireland's argument for EU Funds is strong and he thanked the staff of the NWRA and the Intermediate Bodies for their work in the designation process.

5. HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES

Ms. Anne Marie Quarry, Department of Justice (Gender Equality Division) reported on the Gender Equality Horizontal Principle and thanked the projects for their progress reports on the Gender Equality Horizontal principle.

Ms. Quarry reported as follows under each Priority:

Strengthening RTDI in the BMW Region

Ms. Quarry stated that the efforts of the Science Foundation of Ireland are acknowledged and appreciated in relation to the collection and analysis of data, the identification of barriers for female participation including childbearing and care

giving roles and the setting of targets to increase the number of female participants on projects.

She said that the actions set out in the report show a clear understanding of the gender principle not only in attracting female participation but also within the organisation itself, in sitting and remote panels and among postal reviewers. She informed the members that it is refreshing to see that in integrating gender in research and innovation, it is considered critical that any exclusion of gender aspects in experimental design must be justified. Generally, if a project is considered gender neutral, a clear narrative should be provided setting out the rationale in order to demonstrate that the gender principle has been applied and understood.

Ms. Quarry outlined that some projects will have specific gender targets because of statistics already gathered and analysed. However, only by providing the background information accompanied by disaggregated data can gender equality know if projects are complying with what is required under Article 7 of ESF Regulation 1304/2013 and their public sector duty under Section 42 of the Irish Human rights and Equality Act 2014 and also in line with the commitment in the Programme for Government. She said that Gender Equality would like to thank the SFI Research Centres for doing exactly that.

ICT Infrastructure

Ms. Quarry stated that it is accepted that access to high-speed broadband will provide enhanced access to education services, labour market access and the future delivery of eGovernance services such as eHealth for all citizens. She apologised for requesting disaggregated data last year and stated that GE Division will just have to trust that the impacts for gender groups will be balanced and fair in the various stages and timeframes for the roll out of the programmes.

SME Support, Promotion & Capability Development

Ms. Quarry noted that all LEO's generally seek to proactively gender-mainstream their operational activities and structures, particularly regarding gender balance requirements, with a view to achieving optimum levels of gender equality. She said that it is welcome that each of the 31 LEO's support women in business through dedicated business and networking events. Ms. Quarry stated that these initiatives which address the particular issues and obstacles facing women entrepreneurs is clearly showing a willingness to implement the gender principle. It is also noted that all 31 LEO's support the National Women's Enterprise Day. She said that it is appreciated that specific programmes aimed at female entrepreneurs are run to balance the greater uptake by males for example in the Local Enterprise Laois.

However, she reported that an issue that requires addressing in the report relates to the provision of statistics e.g. all LEO's are asked to provide the number of applications in addition to the number of successful applicants by gender in respect of all awards and grants. She said that it has to be stressed that disaggregated data provided in tabular form from year to year in respect of all projects and grants is required in order to establish participation by all diverse group types including gender and provide the information that can identify gaps and inform future policy in order to ensure

compliance with Article 7 of ESF Regulation 1304/2013 and the Public Sector duty under Section 42 of the Irish Human rights and Equality Act 2014.

The collection of data is the first step. Analysing it and identifying the questions it raises is the second step and using the data to inform policy is the third step. However, she pointed out that overall, the work of the LEO's is to be commended and Gender Equality acknowledges all efforts made to date in promoting the gender principle in their programmes.

Low Carbon Economy

Ms. Quarry noted that from the report the issue of gender imbalance between men and women is not relevant in relation to the implementation of the Social Housing Retrofit Scheme and the Warmer Homes Schemes. The reasons provided are that the units returned to productive use under the programme are on the basis that priority be given to accommodating homeless families to the fullest extent and the Warmer Homes Schemes target vulnerable people living in fuel poverty. She said that it is understood why these programmes do not target a specific gender. However, as part of the planning and assessment stages of all programmes and strategies, equality and human rights issues need to be considered and measured in order to comply with the public service duty under the IHREC Act 2014.

Ms. Quarry pointed out that consistent poverty levels are higher for women than men. She said that it is quite possible that the schemes complement other strategies aimed at reducing the poverty gap. Disaggregated data is required in order to establish who benefits and who does not benefit from the programme.

She said that Gender Equality is not asking that a specific family group type be targeted. However, disaggregated data showing whether the family groups benefitting are male or female-headed is required. She reported that this would be in line with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment's commitment under the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020. Action 6.7 provides that new energy policy measures developed by the Department are evidenced-based and that the distributional impacts of these policies are considered in the implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty. Also, Action 1.32 of the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 aims to *Reduce the gap in poverty rates between female and male-headed households*. She pointed out that it is acknowledged that the strategy was recently published but stated that going forward it would be appreciated if data could be provided showing family group types benefitting from the various programmes.

Sustainable Urban Development

Ms. Quarry reported that Gender Equality notes that this scheme will promote accessibility for all and does not have a gender focus. She said that it is good to see that Local Authorities will be required to provide evidence of community consultation including all relevant groups and interests.

Gender Equality Issues relevant to all programmes

Ms. Quarry reported that it would be good if all areas could think about their own organisations and aim to bring a gender perspective into all aspects. This would include staff organisation and selection, decision making / steering and appraisal committees etc which feed into the promotion of the gender equality principle. She reported that as we expand a gender consciousness across all aspects of an organisation, decision making will be fairer and more productive. She said that an imbalance of either all male or all female can result in the loss of valuable skills and creative thinking and does not provide the ingredients for effective policies and strategies. She pointed out that many organisations are perhaps doing this already and stated that would be really good if any developments in that direction could be incorporated into the Horizontal Principle reports. She informed the members that the whole purpose of Gender Mainstreaming is to have a more fair, balanced and inclusive society where men and women are equally valued and receive equal opportunities.

Ms. Quarry pointed out that The New National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 which was recently published proposes that all reviews of existing policies should include a gender perspective as should all policies developed over the lifetime of the Strategy. She said that action to promote women's equality will benefit society more broadly. The United Nations and the European Commission advocate the integration of a gender perspective in policy-making through the gender mainstreaming process as an effective means of promoting gender equality. She reported that gender mainstreaming is also a crucial element in the implementation of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the European Commission's Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019. She said that it is recognised that enabling women to exercise rights and opportunities will generate wider prosperity for the country. The OECD has estimated that achieving gender parity would add 0.6 percentage points to the world's annual GDP growth rate. It has calculated the economic gain for the world at US \$ 12 trillion.

Ms. Quarry informed the members that it is in everyone's interest that we play our part in making that happen and in order to ensure compliance with Article 7 of ESF Regulation 1304/2013 and the Public Sector duty under Section 42 of the Irish Human rights and Equality Act 2014. She said that the Gender Equality Division would like to thank all present for the steps they have taken in that direction.

Mr. David Minton, Managing Authority, thanked Anne Marie Quarry for her detailed update in relation to gender equality and in particular he highlighted the good work of the SME's and the Local Enterprise Offices in supporting gender equality and female entrepreneurship.

Mr. Terry Dunne, Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment, stated that the Department was happy with the progress being made on the Environmental Horizontal Principle under the Low Carbon Economy Priority. In relation to the Social Housing Retrofit and Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme he pointed out the progress being made in meeting Ireland's climate change targets. He also stated that the broadband plan when it's rolled out has the scope to reduce the need for people to travel and stated that we need to try to integrate climate action into

all public bodies' decision making processes as it is one of the greatest challenges that we are facing.

6. DRAFT ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORT (AIR) 2016

Mr. Barry Guckian, Managing Authority, explained that the annual implementation report includes the progress reports submitted by the relevant Implementing Bodies. He informed the members that this report, subject to minor amendments and the approval of the Monitoring Committee Members, is now due to be submitted to the EU Commission.

Ms. Merja Toikka, EU Commission, outlined that this is the first substantial annual implementation report under the 2014-20 OP and highlighted the importance of reaching the financial and output performance framework targets. She asked that any gaps in the output and result data and values for 2016 should be reviewed and filled in as the report could be rejected by the Commission otherwise. Ms Toikka informed the members that the EU Commission has been strongly advising Ireland to take on board financial instruments and asked that any progress in the evaluation and assessment to introduce financial instrument in the ERDF should be included in the AIR. She stated that the leverage effect is very positive in other countries that have opted for financial instruments.

Ms. Toikka also asked that the regulatory requirement for a list of beneficiaries to be made available should be referred to in the AIR with details of where the list is published. She also pointed out the mandatory information requirement regarding the Atlantic Strategy which she has informed the Managing Authority about.

Mr. Barry Guckian, Managing Authority, informed the members that the Beneficiary List is available on the NWRA Website.

Mr. David Minton, Managing Authority, stated that one of the biggest challenges that the Assembly has is telling the story of the benefit and impact of European funding and stated that a part of the NWRA's communications review the Assembly will be improving on this.

Proposed by Mr. Jim Conway

Seconded by Mr. Michael Hughes

“That the Annual Implementation Report 2016 be approved subject to any minor corrections and adjustments”.

The Annual Implementation Report 2016 was **APPROVED** and **AGREED** by all, subject to any minor corrections and adjustments.

7. IMPLEMENTATION PLANS AND OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME AMENDMENTS

Implementation Plans: Micro-enterprise and Better Energy Warmer Homes

Operational Programme: Micro-enterprise and Better Energy Warmer Homes

Mr. Barry Guckian, Managing Authority, outlined the amendments to the Implementation Plan and Operational Programme which were circulated at the meeting.

He pointed out that the technical adjustments to the OP included an additional financial allocation for Ireland and stated that it was agreed with Enterprise Ireland that the extra allocation would be spent on, LEO M1 Competitive Scheme, Brexit Support and LEAN tools and techniques for Micro Enterprises. Mr. Guckian highlighted the text change in the OP to the Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme (BEWHs) also. He informed the meeting of the amendments to the BEWHs Implementation Plan together with amendments to the Micro-enterprise Implementation Plan.

Ms. Margot Dunne, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, asked when she could expect a revised implementation plan for the Marine Research scheme. Mr. Guckian informed the meeting that this scheme is currently be reviewed and stated that the Managing Authority is due to meet with the Department of Marine within the next week to progress this matter further.

Ms. Merja Toikka, EU Commission, stated that the Commission has agreed with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform that the technical adjustments for both the ERDF and ESF will be incorporated into the Commission system simultaneously with the partnership agreement update to follow.

Proposed by Ms. Joan Hynes

Seconded by Mr. Eugene Daly

“That the amendments to the Implementation Plans and Operational Programme be approved”.

The amendments to the Implementation Plans and Operational Programme were **APPROVED** and **AGREED** by all.

8. UPDATE ON:

8.1 Communications

8.2 Evaluation

8.3 e-Cohesion IT System

8.4 Designation Procedure

8.5 Closure 2007-2013

8.1 Communications

Mr. Barry Guckian, Managing Authority, gave a brief presentation on the BMW Regional OP Communications Strategy. He pointed out the importance of raising the profile of the Operational Programme and the ERDF in the region. He outlined to the members some of the highlights of 2016 including the NWRA Conference which was held in the Model Arts Centre in Sligo. He stated that the Model was one of the projects from the 2007-13 OP which was good exposure for the programme. He stated that the national funds website was an important project also for 2016 and informed the members that the Assembly sat on the national communications committee which developed the site. This website was launched earlier in 2017 and is a one stop shop for all the structural funds. Mr. Guckian reported also on the NWRA website which is in a testing environment at present and stated that as well as providing information on the OP the website will also give concrete examples of what is happening on the ground. He thanked the Intermediate Bodies for their co-operation in the development of this site and asked for good imagery to complement the progress reports received to date. He reported on the Assembly's social media followers on twitter and facebook and outlined the high increase in the twitter followers. Mr. Guckian also informed the members that as a large of source of information in the BMW Region is from local papers and local radio the Assembly concentrated on a targeted advertisement campaign in 2016 with a half page advertisement placed in the local papers to inform the public of the work of the Assembly.

Ms. Merja Toikka, EU Commission, thanked Mr. Guckian for his very informative presentation and pointed out that communication is still a challenge for member states and she referred to the survey which was carried out in December 2016. Ms. Toikka stated that she was pleased to hear that the NWRA was developing a new website. She complemented the citizen's summary which was produced for the meeting and asked if a link to the various projects from the BMW counties listed in the report could be made interactive. In conclusion Ms. Toikka thanked everyone for the excellent work in the implementation of the ERDF Programme and reported that Ireland is currently doing well and making good progress in this area.

8.2 Evaluation

Ms. Caitlin Conneely, Managing Authority, reported on the draft joint evaluation plan which was circulated at the meeting and informed the members that this evaluation plan was developed jointly by the NWRA and the Southern Assembly for

the two Operational Programmes 2014 – 2020. She stated that the Evaluation Plan was agreed by the Monitoring Committee meeting in 2015 and she outlined the proposed amendments currently being made to the plan. Ms. Conneely reported that the purpose of the plan is to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes, as well as to assess their effectiveness, efficiency and impact. The impact of programmes is to be evaluated in the light of each ESI fund, in relation to the targets under the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

8.3 e-Cohesion IT System

Ms. Anne Marie Caulfield, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, informed the members that the initial tender for the e-Cohesion IT System was published in March 2016. However she stated that this process was cancelled as the only valid tender received was for multiples of the budget allocated for the project. Therefore, it was agreed with the EU Commission that the Department would use the existing 2007-13 IT System with some minor modifications for the initial expenditure claims this year. She stated that these modifications have now been made and the IT system is available to make claims to ensure that Ireland doesn't lose any funding under the N+3 rule. Following research with other EU member states regarding their e-Cohesion systems and the technical solutions available the e-cohesion tender was re advertised in September 2016 using a framework operated by the office of government procurement. The tender has now been awarded to SugarCRM based in California with a Dublin based company implementing the solution for the e-cohesion system. Ms. Caulfield informed the members that this project is progressing well and will be rolled out in 3 phases. Phase 1 will be used by the beneficiary bodies and intermediate bodies and will go live at the end of July 2017 with testing carried out in the last week of June and the first two weeks of July. Phase 2 will be live in early September and this aspect of the system will include the Managing Authorities and Certifying Authorities. Phase 3 will be live in late October or early November and will involve the auditing and reporting functionality. She stated that after a difficult procurement phase the project is progressing well and said that the Department is optimistic that all 3 phases will be finalised in a timely manner with the co-operation of the relevant bodies in terms of testing.

8.4 Designation Procedure

Ms. Margot Dunne, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, informed the meeting that the member state was in the position to designate the Managing Authorities for both Regional Operational Programmes last week. This was based on the receipt of an unqualified opinion from the independent audit body on the management and control systems in place for both OPs. She stated that the Department has now notified the Managing Authorities and the EU Commission of the designation. Ms. Dunne stated that under the EU regulations this designation must be monitored and stated that this function will be conducted by the member state. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform proposes to do this by the monitoring of audit results, including system audits and quarterly oversight meetings with the Regional Assemblies and also by the administrative agreements which are now in place with the relevant bodies. She stated that both the Audit Authority and member state will be monitoring closely the implementation of the current action plan and she urged all of the Intermediate Bodies to implement the relevant actions as soon as

possible in order to move on and fully focus on payment claims. Ms. Dunne thanked the staff of the Regional Assembly and the Implementing Bodies for the work on designation over the last year.

Ms. Merja Toikka, EU Commission, welcomed the designation of the Operational Programmes and thanked everyone involved in the process. She pointed out that designation was a very important step and highlighted the importance of getting the first payment claim processed before the end of June to avoid any risks going forward. Ms. Toikka also referred to the N+3 deadline and the importance of aligning forecast with the payment claim also.

8.5 Closure 2007-2013

Mr. Brendan Mooney, Managing Authority, gave a brief overview of the closure of the 2007 – 2013 Operational Programme. He informed the members that the 31st March this year saw the closure of the 2007-13 OP and thanked everyone involved in this process. Following final declarations and subsequent audits there was an overbooking of €14.5m. He stated that the target declaration was for €457m with €471m declared and pointed out that the overbooking was to ensure that Ireland drew down its full allocation following audits and corrections. Mr. Mooney outlined the total amounts declared under each Priority of the 2007-13 OP and informed the members that the error rate was just over 1% which is well within the 2% tolerable error rate. The over declaration ensured no de-commitment of funds for the Irish Exchequer as Ireland drew down its full ERDF Allocation for the BMW Region.

9. Any Other Business

Ms. Merja Toikka, EU Commission, informed the members that the EU Commission is planning on sending out observation letters in August 2017 and stated that thereafter there will be a timeframe of 2 months to react with any comments or observations. Ms. Toikka pointed out that the Atlantic Strategy will now be included in a section of the annual implementation report and stated that this is a very interesting opportunity for the BMW Region in particular. She stated that the strategy includes 5 member states and pointed out that there are very interesting things happening in the Atlantic strategy this year. Ms. Toikka reported that this includes an Atlantic stakeholder conference taking place in Glasgow on the 8th November and she encouraged the Managing Authority to attend the conference and also visit the website atlanticstrategy.eu for details. She stated that Spain, which is one of the strategy members, has proposed a meeting for all Atlantic Strategy members at the Glasgow conference as this would be a good opportunity to present progress and exchange experiences and good practices. She also pointed out that this strategy is getting more visibility with certain opportunities available and stated that the Commission would strongly recommend member states to make use of these opportunities.

Ms. Toikka referred to the Smart Specialisation Communication Report and the Cohesion Report which is due. She informed the members of the Cohesion Forum which will be held on the 26th and 27th June in Brussels with approximately 700 participants which will include President Juncker and other EU Commissioners. This time the Cohesion Forum will focus mainly on the preparations for the post 2020

framework and in particular the ESIFs. In relation to post 2020, Ms. Toikka pointed out that DG Regio is still at an early stage in discussing internally the future of the cohesion policy and stated that the Commission recognises that there will be a lot of uncertainties on the shape and volume of the next MFF. She pointed out that cohesion policy should remain the key investment and innovative policy to deliver what we want it to deliver for smart and sustainable growth for jobs for our citizens.

Mr. Toikka reported that the white paper and follow up papers includes a need to reform and stated that all our reflections should be driven by strong evidence and in-depth consultation of stakeholders. She pointed out that this should also be an inclusive process, open to new ideas and stated that the Commission would welcome Irish ideas and stated that DG Regio would be happy to voice Irish views in the context of reaching internal discussions.

Ms. Toikka pointed out that each member state should submit their Partnership Agreement Progress Report to the EU Commission by the end of August where it will then be analysed by the first week in September with feedback provided if needed. She informed the members that the 2017 Annual Review Meeting for all structural funds will take place in the autumn which will provide a good opportunity to exchange information and monitor progress and deliveries.

Ms. Toikka referred again to the European semester exercise which the cohesion policy and other programmes are supporting and Ireland's specific recommendation for public investment in research and innovation. She stated that this exercise is currently being monitored very closely together with how member states have carried out their structural reforms. By the end of June the Commission is due to endorse the proposals for these recommendations. In conclusion, Ms. Toikka reported that DG Regio is now in a position to provide support to the member states in the newly set up structural reform support service for the best use of ESIF.

Mr. David Minton, Managing Authority, noted Ms. Toikka's comments and stated that the Assembly would be represented at both events in Brussels and Glasgow.

10. Next Meeting

Mr. Minton informed the members of the proposal to hold a Monitoring Committee meeting in November 2017 which will focus on a thematic approach. He stated that this will include looking at one of the priorities of the OP in more detail to promote the priority in the region. He welcomed any comments or suggestions in this regard.

Anne Marie Caulfield, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, stated that the member state would support this proposal and pointed out that this would be very useful to review and monitor progress in terms of drawdown of structural funds.

Mr. Minton informed the meeting that further details of this meeting would be circulated to the members later in the year.

The foregoing minutes are confirmed

Chairperson

Secretary

Date: _____

ANNEX 1

ATTENDANCE LIST

MANAGING AUTHORITY – Northern & Western Regional Assembly

Mr. David Minton (Director, NWRA)

Ms. Caitlín Conneely (Assistant Director NWRA and Secretary to the Monitoring Committee)

NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

Ms. Margaret Dunne Department of Public Expenditure & Reform

Ms. Anne Marie Caulfield Department of Public Expenditure & Reform

Ms. Patricia Hennessy Department of Public Expenditure & Reform

INTERMEDIATE BODIES AND POLICY DEPARTMENTS

Mr. Damien Clarke Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Mr. Martin Corry Enterprise Ireland

Mr. Michael Hughes Enterprise Ireland

Mr. Hugh O'Rourke Enterprise Ireland

Mr. Eugene Daly Enterprise Ireland

Mr. Stewart Logan Dept of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government

Mr. Kevin Byrne Dept of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government

Ms. Claire Gavin Dept of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government

Ms. Joan Hynes Science Foundation Ireland

Mr. Andrew Sullivan Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment

Mr. Susan Fleming Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment

Ms. Siobhan Murphy Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment

REGIONAL and LOCAL INTERESTS

Mr. Jim Conway Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly

Cllr. Paddy Bracken Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly

Cllr. Seamus Kilgannon Northern & Western Regional Assembly

Mr. Eugene Cummins City & County Managers Association

Mr. Vinnie Dunphy Southern Regional Assembly

HORIZONTAL INTERESTS

Mr. Terry Dunne Environment Policy Unit (DCCAE)

Ms. Anne-Marie Quarry Gender Equality Division (Department of Justice & Equality)

OTHER ESIF MANAGING AUTHORITIES

Ms. Nicola Finnegan Department of Education and Skills

NON-MEMBERS: ADVISORS

Mr. Merja Toikka EU Commission

NORTHERN & WESTERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY STAFF

Mr. Brendan Mooney	Northern & Western Regional Assembly
Mr. Denis Kelly	Northern & Western Regional Assembly
Mr. Conall Mc Gettigan	Northern & Western Regional Assembly
Mr. Michael O'Brien	Northern & Western Regional Assembly
Ms. Gerardine Lafferty	Northern & Western Regional Assembly
Ms. Pauline Grennan	Northern & Western Regional Assembly