



Northern & Western Regional Assembly

**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN & WESTERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY MEETING
HELD ON 15TH FEBRUARY 2019 IN THE
ASSEMBLY CHAMBER AT 11.00 A M**

Present:

Cllr Keith Henry	Cllr Seamus Coyle	Cllr Jackie Crowe
Cllr Nigel Dineen	Cllr Pearce Flannery	Cllr Jack Murray
Cllr Mary Hoade	Cllr Declan McDonnell	Cllr Jimmy McClearn
Cllr Paddy Smith	Cllr Gerry Murray	Cllr Frank Dolan
Cllr Joe Murphy	Cllr Justin Warnock	Cllr Enda Stenson
Cllr Richard Finn	Cllr Sean Smith	Cllr Niall McNelis

Cllr Seamus Coyle **PRESIDED**

Apologies:

Cllr. John Caulfield	Cllr Seamus O'Domhnaill	Cllr Dermot Connolly
Cllr Jerry Lundy	Cllr Seamus Kilgannon	
Cllr. Patsy O'Brien	Cllr Frank McBrearty	

Mr. Seamus Neely, Designated Chief Executive

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr David Minton (Director)
Mr Denis Kelly (Assistant Director)
Ms Caitlin Conneely (Assistant Director)
Mr Frank Flanagan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr Gerry Lavelle (Programme Executive)
Mr Brendan Mooney (EU Programmes Executive)
Ms Brenda Finn (Clerical Officer)

**1. Adoption of Minutes of Meeting of Northern & Western Regional Assembly held
18th January 2019**

Proposed by: Cllr Mary Hoade

Seconded by: Cllr Enda Stenson

Resolved:

“That the minutes of the meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 18th January 2019 be adopted.”

2. Matters Arising

There are no matters arising.

3. Planning and Economic Development

3.1 RSES Update

Mr. Denis Kelly, Assistant Director & Senior Planner, gave an update on the RSES. Mr Kelly informed members that over 1000 submissions have been received and the team is working through them as quickly as possible in order to categorise them based upon the theme of the issues raised. This will inform how best to review all the issues and provide a recommendation on the issues raised, as part of the Director's Report. He advised that the Director's Report shall recommend whether the Draft be adopted with or without changes and should those changes be material changes and/or require strategic environmental assessment or Appropriate Assessment then further public consultation will be necessary for a period of not less than 4 weeks Mr Kelly proposed outlining a proposed methodology at our March Assembly meeting.

Cllr Keith Henry raised the question as to when we hope to have the document finalised and adopted.

Cllr Coyle stated that the Assembly hopes to adopt the RSES in its lifetime.

Cllrs McDonnell, McNellis, Hoade, Flannery and McClearn articulated the concerns raised by their Members in respect of the RSES, including:

- ❖ There is only one Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (Galway) and it should be within a specific chapter
- ❖ Regional Centres are Sligo, Letterkenny and Athlone and ideally these should be consistent with each other and align with our settlement strategy.
- ❖ The length of section devoted to settlements should be proportionate to their position in the hierarchy.
- ❖ Reference to the Letterkenny/Derry network should reflect its position as a cross-border network and not be confused with its position in the hierarchy as a Regional Centre.
- ❖ Issues relating to Galway City and County, including boundary of MASP, critically important infrastructure not prioritized nor highlighted enough.
- ❖ Is the timeline of having the RSES adopted within the life of this Assembly achievable?

Cllr Murray asked if it would be feasible to request copies of all submissions by key public bodies/statutory bodies.

Mr Kelly advised that although some submissions are similar, we need to systematically assess them and in order to do so the best approach is to initially screen them in order to categorise them on the basis of issues raised. It was clear that multiple submissions related to Greenway/Rail infrastructure, but others related to a variety of issues. Once they are categorized then it will be necessary to identify the key significant issues being raised and consider how to respond to them. Mr Kelly agreed with Members that it is important that we

get the strategy right and that we consider what is best for the region. Mr Kelly advised Members that he heard what was being said in relation to the Hierarchy of the MASP, Regional Centres and then Towns and that this was reflective from his initial screening of some submissions. He said that to be fair to all submissions it would be appropriate to ensure we consider all of them.

Mr Kelly advised that the team would work towards providing an update at the meeting scheduled for 7th March that would give a breakdown of the number of submissions and thereafter discuss in further detail at the SPA meetings scheduled for 12th (West – HQ) & 13th March (Border – Cavan tbc) and he suggested a joint SPA meeting be held at the end of March.

Proposed by: Cllr Declan McDonnell

Seconded by: Cllr Seamus Coyle

Resolved:

“that the SPA meetings scheduled for 12th & 13th March be kept separate and that a joint SPA be scheduled for Wednesday 27th March to deal with the RSES meeting to be at 2pm in the Chamber.”

3.2 Draft RSES for Southern Region

Denis Kelly advised Members that the Southern Regional Assembly had consulted it in respect of the Draft RSES for the Southern Region. He outlined the content and layout of the Draft advising that it is complementary to the contents and layout of the Draft RSES for the Northern and Western Region. He advised that the settlement strategy places emphasis upon the consolidation of urban centres of scale, including Waterford, Cork and Limerick which together with Galway City shall complement the role of Dublin. He suggested that this Assembly should acknowledge the need for both the RSES for the NWRA and SRA to emphasise the need for intra-regional connectivity as a key issue for each region.

Mr Kelly confirmed that the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) is acknowledged as an economic growth enabler which is a shared opportunity to be harnessed for the benefit of both regions. He advised that the Assembly confirm that the economic reach of the AEC needs to be strengthened through enhanced connectivity (digital and transport) to enable the corridor and that an objective to strengthened collaboration and partnerships between the metropolitan areas of Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford with Galway and the Regional Centres of Sligo and Letterkenny to achieve regional parity with Dublin.

He noted that Limerick-Shannon MASP Policy Objective 8 seeks to deliver effective planning and investment into the Galway-Ennis-Shannon-Limerick (GESL) Economic Network. It was noted that the RSES referred to excellent public transport connections along the GESL and strengthened interaction with the Shannon Estuary, North Kerry and Kerry Knowledge Triangle and suggested that the NWRA should be supportive of this collaborative approach and mindful of it being reflected within the RSES for the N&W region.

Mr Kelly asked Members to also note commonality of RPO's and regional enablers across both RSESs that would benefit from close collaboration at implementation stage He said that some of these included but is not limited to:

- regional freight strategy.

- shared Marine and Blue Economy potential as key enablers, with both regions possessing extensive coastlines, ports, and fisheries.
- cross regional greenways and blueways.
- cross regional renewable energy and green technology initiatives
- shared tourism corridors, the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, identified as key enablers.
- Both strategies place an emphasis on optimisation of digital infrastructure and pursue Smart Regions.

Mr Kelly advised that if Members were satisfied then he would confirm this opinion to the SRA in the form of a submission to their consultation that is ongoing and runs to 8th March 2019.

Members unanimously agreed that a response issue to the Southern Regional Assembly outlining the views as set out by Mr Kelly.

4. Presentation by Michael McGrath – Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER)

Mr. McGrath gave a detailed presentation on the EU Cohesion Policy post 2020, (Appendix I)

Cllr Seamus Coyle and Mr David Minton thanked Mr McGrath for his presentation. Mr Minton stated that European funding is hugely important to the Region and the Assembly members need to be aware of discussions that are going on at a European level.

The following points were raised by members of the Assembly:

- ❖ Who are the principal negotiators on behalf of the Member State?
- ❖ Can this presentation be given at a Committee of the Regions meeting?
- ❖ Are the Oireachtas Members aware that this Region is in transition?
- ❖ If Post 2020 funding is going to be similar as the last allocation this makes no provision for the increasing gap between the regions. The BMW region is going into transition and should be positively discriminated in relation to EU funding and national funding to address the increasing regional imbalance
- ❖ If there is a no deal Brexit, are the Government working on plans? The BMW region will be significantly affected by Brexit, especially in a no deal scenario – DPER should be looking at ways to maximise funding to the region.
- ❖ There is a huge disconnect between Dublin and west of the Shannon – Members expressed their disappointment that there is no national conversation happening about the widening gap between the regions, and especially between Dublin and the Northern and Western Region.
- ❖ How many Regions across the EU are slipping back into transition status and are there measures being taken by other Member States to address this issue?
- ❖ There is a significant infrastructural deficit in this region – both economic and social infrastructure – why is central Government and the Department not addressing this? The region can provide a counter-balance to the problems being experienced in Dublin due to their economic growth rate however the region cannot do this without investment in the required infrastructure.
- ❖ The Department does not appear to be enthusiastic about balanced regional development and this is of grave concern to members.

- ❖ Will the Regional Operational Programme post 2020 be managed by the NWRA as the Assembly has been a Managing Authority for three programming periods and the members see this as a vital role to leverage funds into the region?
- ❖ Will the NWRA be given the opportunity to administer any funds that may be made available regarding Brexit? There is considerable expertise and experience in the Regional Assembly and the Local Authorities, and it is vital that they be central to the management of any funding, especially if infrastructural funding becomes available. The region is now going to be In Transition and, as a border region, will be affected disproportionately by Brexit, therefore it is important that there is a role for the Assembly in managing any funds that may be available.
- ❖ It is important that investment by EU is communicated to the general public. It is also important that the COR members are briefed on issues as they can reflect EU issues and concerns back to Local Authority level. The EU is struggling in the context of Brexit however the regions are recognized as the basis of rebuilding support for the EU.
- ❖ Members have been involved in a significant number of cross-border initiatives over the years including the Local Authority led Cross Border Network which has achieved great work and investment through partnerships of Local Authorities on both sides of the border. Members feel that this work, and other regional cross border initiatives must be maintained and supported post Brexit.

Michael acknowledged the concerns raised and the confirmed the following:

- ❖ The EU Budget was compiled on the assumption that the UK leaves the EU.
- ❖ There is an understanding in the Government that help is required post Brexit.
- ❖ When a Region is classed as 'In transition' the types of investments can be more flexible, however there are limits to what ERDF funding can do in relation to infrastructure.
- ❖ A significant number of Regions have moved backwards into transition status. Some have moved primarily due to a realignment of the calculation however the BMW region, and one/two others, have moved back into Transition status even by the calculations used previously. This is a cause for concern by the EU and the Department.
- ❖ The EU, Ireland and the UK have committed to continuing the PEACE Plus Programme
- ❖ National allocations of ERDF are based on population - the smaller the population, the smaller the allocation so it is difficult to increase allocations to specific regions
- ❖ Ireland does not qualify for cohesion funding any longer
- ❖ The current focus of TenT is on completion of core TenT network i.e. already completed in Ireland. There may be an opportunity to look at links to the core network in a second phase of Ten T.
- ❖ Confirmed that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is carrying out a Review of ERDF Structures at present. He cannot preempt the outcome of the process but envisages a change in the ways the Regional funds are delivered due to the decreasing amounts of funding involved.

Michael agreed to speak to the Committee of the Regions on a future date.

Proposed by: Cllr Jimmy McClearn
Seconded by: Cllr Declan McDonnell
Resolved:

“that the Northern & Western Regional Assembly request that the Minister make a commitment to ensure that regional ERDF funds are administered by the Regional Assembly post 2020”

5. Conferences/Training

Gerry Lavelle advised that there were no notifications of forthcoming Conferences/Training. However, he asked that if members had an interest in attending any such event, then they were advised to contact the offices of the Assembly to discuss same. In reply to queries raised regarding allowance available to members for training/conference, Gerry Lavelle informed members that the allowance is €350 per member.

6. Membership of Regional Assembly post Local Elections

Proposed by: Cllr Mary Hoade
Seconded by: Cllr Pearce Flannery

Resolved:

“that where nominating bodies are nominating two or more members to the Regional Assembly, consideration should be given to ensuring an appropriate gender balance”

7. Schedule for March 7th/8th Assembly meeting in Derry

The March assembly meeting is due to take place in Derry on 7th March. The meeting is scheduled to start at lunchtime. There will be a presentation by Mr Brian McGrath, President of Derry Chamber of Commerce and CEO of Foyle Port. The meeting will conclude at 4pm with a tour of the Guild hall. An itinerary is being prepared and will be circulated to members as soon as it is completed. Members were reminded that accommodation is on hold in the Derry City Hotel until Monday 18th February at noon if they wish to book rooms.

8. Correspondence

An acknowledgement was received from both the Department of Education & Skills and from the Minister for Education in relation to examination candidates who experience extenuating circumstances during their State examination.

It was agreed that all correspondence would be circulated to member.

9. Any Other Business

Proposed by: Cllr Justin Warnock

Seconded by: Cllr Frank Dolan

Resolved:

“that the Northern and Western Regional Assembly support a call for a moratorium on forestry in Leitrim”

This concluded the business of the meeting.

The foregoing minutes are confirmed.

Signed: _____

Cathaoirleach

Date: _____