



Northern & Western Regional Assembly

MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN & WESTERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY MEETING HELD ON 20TH SEPT 2019 IN THE GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL CHAMBER AT 11.00 A M

Present:

Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. Christy Hyland	Cllr. Declan McDonnell
Cllr. Tim Broderick	Cllr. Niall McNelis	Cllr. Patrick McGowan
Cllr. Joe Sheridan	Cllr. Enda McGloin	Cllr. Brian McKenna
Cllr. Justin Warnock	Cllr. Frank McBrearty	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn
Cllr. Donal Gilroy	Cllr. John Naughten	Cllr. Gerry Murray
Cllr. Jack Murray	Cllr. David Maxwell	Cllr Orla Leyden

Apologies: Mr Seamus Neely Designated Chief Executive, Cllr. Jarlath Munnely, Cllr. Sean Smith, Cllr. David Collins Cllr. Craig Lovett Cllr. Donal Lyons Cllr. Enda Stenson, Cllr. John Caulfield

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly –

Mr David Minton (Director)
Mr Denis Kelly (Assistant Director)
Mr Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)
Mr Frank Flanagan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)
Ms Brenda Finn (Clerical Officer)

Cathaoirleach McDonnell thanked Galway County Council for hosting our Assembly meeting. He also expressed his deepest sympathy to Mr Denis Kelly on the recent passing of his Mother and Cllr David Collins on the passing of his sister and he asked the members to observe a minute's silence.

1. Adoption of Minutes of Meeting of Northern & Western Regional Assembly held 26th July 2019

Proposed by: Cllr Justin Warnock

Seconded by: Cllr Niall McNelis

Resolved:

“That the minutes of the meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 26th July 2019 be adopted.”

2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3. Presentation by John Daly – Regional Assemblies Economist

Mr Daly gave a detailed PowerPoint presentation, explaining that the European Commission classifies regions within the EU as either being a “Less Developed Region”, a “Transition Region” or a “More Developed Region”, based on their GDP per head of population relative to the EU27 Average. He advised that the European Commission downgraded the Northern & Western region from a “More Developed Region” to a “Transition Region” and provided evidence in his presentation of the region’s continued economic decline (See Appendix I).

He provided an examination of trends including

- Commercial Vacancy Rates - significantly worsen over the past number of years.
- Disposable Income Per Capita - remains well below the State average and its fellow Irish regions.
- Proportion of High Valued Jobs – has failed to attract as many high valued jobs compared to the Irish and European norm
- Productivity levels - worsened in the past several years.

It was suggested that such trends may explain why the region has not prospered economically in recent times, strengthening the argument for greater government intervention for “Positive Discrimination”.

To gauge the capacity for “Positive Discrimination” towards the region, he examined trends in government investment in key growth enablers. He set out that the analysis found that in recent years, the region received the lowest level of regional and local road funding per km of such roads out of all the regions in Ireland, and below the State average. Higher Education Institutes within the region received less in capital funding per undergraduate enrolled over the past number of years relative to its fellow regions and the State average. Likewise, government R&D funding provided to the region – per head of population – was lower relative to the national norm, while investment in its public health infrastructure – per head of population – also lagged behind the State average over the past decade.

In the context of the region’s recent reclassification, he recommended greater government investment in the region’s key growth enablers, with the view of increasing the region’s productive capacity and its standard of living. This should be viewed from the perspective that the region offers strong value for money, both in terms of its cost competitiveness, and the relatively favorable EU co-financing rates that are available for infrastructure projects in “Transition regions”. In terms of cost competitiveness, he evidenced that housing affordability for both first time buyers and renters is significantly cheap within the region, while childcare and wage costs are considerably lower compared to the rest of the State.

He considered that “Positive Discrimination” towards the region would be insufficient unless such additional resources are directed towards policies that have been proven to revitalise regional economies. He recommended policy interventions, including developing the region’s designated “Regional Growth Centres” and “Key Towns”, improving the region’s human capital levels, enhancing regional infrastructure that enables growth, supporting SMEs in rural communities, maintaining cost competitiveness along with other policies.

Mr David Minton, Director, advised that at European level, the funding for 2027 is being discussed now but this report was important in informing exchequer funding.

The Cathaoirleach asked Members if they had any queries in respect of the presentation.

The following questions / observations were raised:

- Why did the funding change so much when we have a state-of-the-art university in Galway?
- Can we arrange for all the Oireachtas members from the Region to get together to discuss what is to be done about this regional gap that is emerging?
- This is a shocking report, our Region is under invested in every area. What can this organisation do to try to increase the funding in this area?
- The Nation State has refused to invest in infrastructure in the West and the Government is not prepared to meet us halfway.
- The Government is not prepared to invest in rural Europe and we as an organisation need to bring this report to the attention of the TD’s.
- We need to make the most of this report and put it before Oireachtas and Local Authorities to draw funding over the next 7/8 years, particularly at a National level.
- We need to work on all areas in the Region, but the border area is the least well off in the State and Brexit will exacerbate this gap.
- Funding appears to be going to populated areas at our expense.
- Figures for the northern and western region are much worse than depicted if we were to exclude Galway City and its hinterland.
- Can GVA figures be provided for border and west in addition to the region?
- EU funding must not be centralised.
- What supports can the Regional Assembly give to Local Authorities to grow their expertise in applying for funds post 2020.
- Two-tiered economy is becoming more pronounced.

Mr Minton advised that the NWRA piloted a Diploma in European funding and there is a new programme to be rolled out for November this year. He advised that the Assembly has an EU engagement unit that works with Local Authorities daily. Mr John Daly also responded advising that he agreed with many of the comments made and clarified a number of points:

- Science Foundation Ireland funding has dropped, funding is drawn down on merit and unfortunately there is only one University in the Region. We need to invest in our higher education institutes more.
- As we are a Transition Region now, we need to highlight that there is greater value for money for those who invest in this Region.
- GVA can be given at scale below Region.
- Unfortunately, funding Project 2040 is pushing funding away from rural counties and we need to echo that sentiment.

Mr Minton concluded by advising that he would be encouraging Local Authorities to participate in the EU Studies Programme.

Proposed by: Cllr Jimmy McClearn
Seconded by: Cllr Patrick McGowan
Resolved:

“that each Cathaoirleach of our constituent Local Authorities and their Chief Executives be invited to a meeting to discuss the findings of this report.”

Proposed by: Cllr Jimmy McClearn
Seconded by: Cllr Patrick McGowan
Resolved:

“that following the meeting with each Cathaoirleach and Chief Executive that we meet with Oireachtas Members to discuss the findings of this report.”

Proposed by: Cllr Niall McNeils
Seconded by: Cllr Orla Leyden
Resolved:

“that each local authority write to Paschal Donohoe T.D ,Minister for Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform stating that “Eurostat has confirmed that the Northern and Western Region, which includes our local authority, has moved back from a 'Developed Region' to 'Region in Transition' and considering that this points to a two speed national economy, how is the Minister proposing to address it; is there opportunity for positive discrimination? Can the Minister also confirm that European Regional Development Funding will continue to be delivered in the regions post 2020? “

Mr Minton thanked John Daly for the huge amount of work he put into this report and stated that it is great to have him as part of our team.

4. Galway 2020

Patricia Philbin, CEO and Marilyn Gaughan Reddan, Head of Programme, gave a very detailed PowerPoint presentation on the launch of Galway 2020.

Following the presentation Cllr Leyden asked if there is any feedback she could get as to how Roscommon County Council can benefit from Galway 2020 in regard to tourism etc.

Patricia Philbin responded by saying that they have engaged with CEO Eugene Cummins and have met over the past months to discuss any projects Roscommon County Council wish to get involved in. Any events taking place in the Roscommon region will be advertised in the Galway 2020 brochures and online on their website.

5. Planning and Economic Development

RSES Update

Mr Kelly stated that the RSES document is out for public consultation from 4th August until 11th October as agreed at your last meeting. The Assembly has been in contact with each Local Authority and has advised of their availability to meet with each planning office.

Mr Minton informed members that the Assembly is waiting to see the number of submissions that are received and then a variety of dates for consideration of the next steps can be scheduled. There will become clearer following the consultation and shall be discussed at the next Assembly meeting scheduled for 25th October.

6. Corporate Plan

Mr Minton gave the members an update on the Corporate Plan. He advised Members that the Assembly has written to Chief executives, stake holders and third level institutes etc inviting them to provide their views. He said that he would also be writing to all Members seeking their input over this next week. The Corporate Plan 2019-2024 will be brought to Members for adoption in November.

7. Correspondence

There was no correspondence to note.

8. Any Other Business

The date that was decided for the next Assembly meeting is Friday 25th of October at 11am in the NWRA headquarters.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____

Cathaoirleach

Date: _____