



Northern & Western Regional Assembly

**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN & WESTERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY MEETING
HELD ON 12TH APRIL 2019 IN THE
ASSEMBLY CHAMBER AT 11.00 A M**

Present:

Cllr Keith Henry	Cllr Seamus Coyle	Cllr Dermot Connolly
Cllr Seamus O'Domhnaill	Cllr Seamus Kilgannon	Cllr. Patsy O'Brien
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 Frank McBrearty	Cllr Jerry Lundy	

Cllr Seamus Coyle **PRESIDED**

Apologies:

Cllr. John Caulfield	Cllr Niall McNelis	Cllr Nigel Dineen
Cllr Pearce Flannery	Cllr Richard Finn	Cllr Jack Murray
Cllr Jackie Crowe	Cllr Sean Smith	

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)
Ms Sharon Conway (Auditor)
Ms Brenda Finn (Clerical Officer)

1. Adoption of Minutes of Meeting of Northern & Western Regional Assembly held 7th March 2019

Proposed by: Cllr Jimmy McClearn

Seconded by: Cllr Declan McDonnell

Resolved:

“That the minutes of the meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 7th March 2019 be adopted.”

2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3. Planning and Economic Development

RSES Update

Mr. Denis Kelly gave an update to members on the progress of the RSES. Mr. Kelly said that the team were working towards having the Directors’ Report on submissions issued to Members by the end of next week. He advised Members that the team would bring Members through the issues emerging from the consultation and asked that the Members remain mindful that the Draft RSES is lengthy and that it needs to be shortened. There was scope to do this across the document by reduction in text and reviewing the text size and layout. He advised that a working Draft of the Director’s report had been circulated but it was work in progress and was by no means a finished version. He suggested that it would be useful to use as a discussion document.

Mr. Kelly advised Members in respect of submissions received to Sections 3.1-3.5 and non-material changes that would be recommended.

Mr. Frank Flanagan gave a brief overview on the Galway MASP, referencing inclusion of Moycullen and advised that there is merit in calling out some of the infrastructure projects. Cllr Declan McDonnell asked if there was any proposal to zone lands at the airport site and referenced a factory area opposite it.

Cllr McClearn stated that he was of the opinion that Galway would have a chapter to itself. Cllr McClearn stated that the area between Galway city and Moycullen has one or two different designations and is not for development, asking that this be considered.

Mr. Frank Flanagan replied by saying that there was no proposal to include Athenry in the MASP; it is not in the Directors recommendation. Members were advised that the RSES would not zone lands and confirmed that some consideration was being given to the Airport site and lands across the road from it. They were also advised that the issue raised by Cllr McClearn would be further considered and that policy to protect rural areas within MASP would be recommended to the Assembly.

Mr. Flanagan gave an update on the proposed Material Alterations to the Eastern and Midlands RSES. He provided an update in respect of Athlone and advised Members that the RSES for EMRA suggests the population in Athlone to be 30,000 by 2031 but the NWRA has suggested it to be 30,000 by 2040.

Cllr Joe Murphy queried what overall impact the projected population figures will have on Athlone. Mr. Flanagan responded by saying that it will have a big impact on Athlone but also a consequential impact on county development plans for Westmeath and Roscommon.

Proposed by: Cllr Joe Murphy

Seconded by: Cllr Seamus Kilgannon

Resolved:

“that the Northern and Western Regional Assembly issue a submission to EMRA in relation to the proposed projected population figures for Athlone within the context of the proposed Material Alterations and advise that they need to be achievable and reflect those of the NWRA Draft RSES and NPF”

Mr Conall McGettigan gave members a brief overview on the section on Letterkenny RGCSF which had taken into consideration a number of submissions, including DHPLG requiring that it be made consistent with Sligo approach. He also acknowledged opinions expressed by Members at previous meetings. Thus, the Letterkenny Regional Growth Centre shall be represented in a section with Sligo, Athlone and Key Towns. The NW City region context will be within the All cohesion section.

Conall McGettigan briefed Members in respect of Sligo and reminded Members that the proposal to include Collooney was examined in detail, however, when the population of Collooney was factored into the overall population of the RGCP Area, against the PUA population, it resulted in the overall Population within the Principal Urban Area falling below the recommended threshold as set down by the DHPLG in their guidance, as per the NPF Roadmap (2018).

Cllr Seamus Kilgannon expressed his disappointment. Mr Kelly advised that they had reviewed this again following his previous concerns and the evidence does not support its inclusion. However, they will examine how best to reference Collooney within the context of Sligo.

Cllr Connolly questioned if members will know who the submissions were received from. Mr Kelly responded by saying that what was intended is that all submissions other than those that relate solely to RPO's 115 (i.e. WRC) will be made available to them via a link on the website, when necessary redactions have been made to ensure they are GDPR compliant. He advised that the other 800 submissions can be made available upon request and shall not be on the website as to do so would involve a lot of work to make them GDPR compliant collectively.

Mr Flanagan gave an overview on section 3.7, including Ballina, Castlebar and Cavan.

Cllr Murray questioned if Ballina and Castlebar are classified as a key town and Mr Flanagan confirmed that they are.

Conall McGettigan briefed Members in respect of Growth Ambition 2 (Ch 5).

Cllr Connolly voiced his concerns in relation to the impact forestry has on part of the economy and the detrimental effect it has on local communities. Cllr Warnock acknowledged that both sides of the argument have to be heard but he feels like the Assembly could have done more about the effect plantation has had on the local community and environment in Leitrim.

Cllr Murray spoke with regards to forestry. He said there are no grants or incentives to replant the land and there is too much competition for land against young farmers. Mr Kelly responded by saying that it was considered that the Assembly had been proactive in including this as a policy area, recognising that the Assembly is not empowered to change the planning legislation to require planning permission for forestry, as suggested in some submissions.

Mr Flanagan gave a brief overview on the Growth Ambition 4 – Quality of Life (CH7) and referenced the need to consider the youth within the Age Friendly context.

Conall McGettigan gave a briefing on chapter 10 – Implementation and suggested that an RSES oversight committee be formed to meet and review to ensure that the RSES be implemented and reported upon.

Cllr O'Donnell welcomed the suggestion of an implementing committee, stressing how important it is that the strategies be implemented. Cllr O'Donnell also raised the following points:

- What level of engagement has been had with Irish Water?
- With regards to the Atlantic Economic Corridor, is there anything further that can be implemented from this?

Mr Kelly advised that Irish Water have been very willing to engage with us at all times.

Mr Minton advised that with the AEC, it is important that it be as broad as possible and that we look at various settlements of scale along the corridor, working collaboratively with the Southern Assembly.

Cllr Seamus Coyle thanked Mr Kelly and his team for all the work that has been put into the RSES document. Mr Kelly advised that the document will be issued by email on Thursday 18th April, for consideration of Members at our next Assembly meeting which is scheduled for Friday 26th April at 10:30am. At that meeting Members will be asked to consider making the RSES, with or without amendments. Where amendments are material amendments then it will be necessary to engage in a further 4 week consultation.

4. Consideration of Annual Financial Statement y/e 31st December 2018

Ms. Caitlin Conneely, Assistant Director gave a detailed overview of the Annual Financial Statement for y/e 31st December 2018 and thanked Sharon Conway and Maeve Doyle for the work they put into preparing the Annual Financial Statement.

Proposed by: Cllr Declan McDonnell

Seconded by: Cllr Jimmy McClearn

Resolved:

“that the Annual Financial Statement for the Northern & Western Regional Assembly y/e 31st December 2018 be adopted”

Ms Conneely also informed the Assembly members that the Regional Assembly deems it prudent to endeavour to maintain a reasonable credit reserve in its' annual operating budget at all times. The credit reserve figure at the 31st December 2018 represents 28% of the annual operation budget of €2.005m in 2019 (2017: 24.3% of budget €2.21m). The current reserve is

set at 50%. Some of the expenditure included in the budget will be recoverable directly through projects and technical assistance. However, because of the lack of predictability in the timing of the receipt of operating funds and to avoid significant fluctuations in statutory demand levels arising from one off events including retirements, the Regional Assembly deems it prudent to endeavour to reduce the credit reserve from 50% to 30%.

Proposed by: Cllr Jimmy McClearn

Seconded by: Cllr Mary Hoade

Resolved:

“that the accounting policy be changed in order to facilitate that the credit reserve figure be reduced from 50% to 30%”

Cllr Kilgannon suggested that it may be advantageous for the Assembly to consider a mortgage to purchase this building rather than paying rent, particularly when it is so cheap to borrow now. Cllr Coyle assured Cllr Kilgannon that his suggestion would be consider bearing in mind the conditions of the lease agreement.

Consideration of Draft Annual Report for y/e 31st December 2018.

Mr Gerry Lavelle gave the members a detailed update on the Draft Annual Report for 2018.

Proposed by: Cllr Jerry Lundy

Seconded by: Cllr Keith Henry

Resolved:

“that the Draft Annual Report for the Northern & Western Regional Assembly y/e 31st December 2018 be adopted”

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.

6. Correspondence

An acknowledgement was received from Mr. Shane Ross T.D. Minister for Transport Tourism and Sport regarding his support for the development of the Connaught Rugby Sportsground. The correspondence was read to the members. It was also agreed that this correspondence would be circulated to member following the meeting.

Mr. Lavelle also informed members that Ms Hildegarde Naughton T.D. responded to the Assembly by email regarding the closure of the post offices. Ms. Naughton stated that she had forwarded our concerns to the Committee secretariat for circulation to other members and they would consider it at their next meeting, and they would be in touch with us thereafter. No further correspondence was received.

Cllr Connolly informed the Assembly that in relation to the reply from the State Examination Commission regarding exam students who experience extenuating circumstances during their State examination that there was to date no definite commitment and it is still a concern. Cllr Connolly stated that the Commission avoided clarity in their response to the Assembly.

Proposed by: Cllr Dermot Connolly

Seconded by: Cllr Seamus Coyle

Resolved:

“that the Northern and Western Regional Assembly contact the Department of Education and Skills again and request that special consideration be given to students sitting exams who experience extenuating circumstances and allow deferral of examinations”

Mr. David Minton in response to Cllr Mc Clearn’s query regarding the administration of regional ERDF funds post 2020 informed the Assembly that there is currently a review of the ERDF funding underway

Proposed by: Cllr Jimmy Mc Clearn

Seconded by: Cllr Frank Dolan

Resolved:

“that the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, Mr. Paschal Donohoe TD be requested to ensure that regional ERDF funds are administered by the Regional Assembly post 2020.

7. Any Other Business

Mr. David Minton informed members Ms. Caitlin Conneely, Assistant Director is leaving the Assembly to take up a new appointment with Roscommon Co Co. The Cathaoirleach Cllr Seamus Coyle and Mr. Minton paid tribute to Caitlín on the positive impact she made on the Assembly since her appointment two years ago and on behalf of the Assembly members and Staff wished Caitlín all the best in her new role.

Caitlín thanked all the members for their kind comments.

Next Assembly Meeting

It was unanimously agreed that the next Assembly meeting would be held on Friday 26th April at 10.30 a.m.

Cllr Justin Warnock stated that Leitrim should have more prominence in the Atlantic Economic Corridor unlike the situation that developed with the Wild Atlantic Way.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

The foregoing minutes are confirmed.

Signed: _____

Cathaoirleach

Date: _____