



Northern & Western Regional Assembly

MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN & WESTERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY MEETING HELD ON 7TH MARCH 2019 IN THE GUILDHALL CHAMBER, DERRY AT 12 NOON

Present:

Cllr Jerry Lundy
Cllr Nigel Dineen
Cllr Mary Hoade
Cllr Niall McNelis
Cllr Joe Murphy

Cllr Seamus Coyle
Cllr Jimmy McClearn
Cllr Declan McDonnell
Cllr Seamus O'Domhnaill
Cllr Justin Warnock

Cllr Dermot Connolly
Cllr Frank McBrearty
Cllr Sean Smith
Cllr Seamus Kilgannon

Cllr Seamus Coyle **PRESIDED**

Mr. Seamus Neely, Designated Chief Executive

Mr John Kelpie, Chief Executive, Derry City and Strabane District Council

Councillor John Boyle, Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council

Apologies:

Cllr. John Caulfield
Cllr Gerry Murray
Cllr. Patsy O'Brien
Cllr Frank Dolan

Cllr Jack Murray
Cllr Jackie Crowe
Cllr Richard Finn
Cllr Enda Stenson

Cllr Pearce Flannery
Cllr Keith Henry
Cllr Paddy Smith

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr David Minton (Director)

Mr Denis Kelly (Assistant Director & Senior Planner)

Mr Frank Flanagan (Senior Executive Planner)

Mr Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)

Mr Gerry Lavelle (Programme Executive)

Ms Brenda Finn (Clerical Officer)

Official Welcome

Mayor Cllr Boyle extended a Céad Míle Fáilte in welcoming the members to the city said he was delighted they had chosen to travel to Derry for their meeting and to get an update on the positive work done by both Councils at a regional, national and international level to promote the North West City Region. Cllr John Boyle said it was fitting that on a day that the Northern & Western Regional Assembly were holding such an historic meeting in Derry that

he welcomed the announcement by global manufacturer Terex to invest £12m in Campsie and create up to 100 new jobs in the region. The Mayor said this was a major good news story for the city and district and a substantial financial commitment and vote of confidence for the City and wider North West region. He added that it is fantastic news for the city region and further evidence of our city's offering in terms of skills base and investment proposition. Cllr Boyle stated how pleased he was to have the NWRA members hold their meeting in Derry and acknowledged how important it is for border counties to work together and for the benefit that it brings.

Cllr Seamus O'Donnell, Cathaoirleach of Donegal County Council, and also a Member and former Cathaoirleach of the Assembly, said huge progress had been made in selling the City region to governments and national and international markets and praised the positive working relationship between Derry/Strabane and Donegal Councils and their commitment to securing investment and prosperity to the City Region.

Cllr Seamus O'Domhnaill emphasised how important Derry is to Donegal and vice versa. He stressed how important it is that both sides of the border benefit from each other and that Derry City has strived to become a major player on the island of Ireland.

Cllr O'Domhnaill also stated that it is important that the RSES is recognised and realised so that we can fight for this part of the island. He continued by commending the management and members of the Assembly for the fantastic work they have done, and the Assembly should be proud, and its work is very important in the Region.

Cllr O'Domhnaill thanked Cllr Coyle for agreeing to come to Derry for the meeting; he thanked Cllr Boyle for making himself available to attend. He also thanked Chief Executives Seamus Neely and John Kelpie, stating his appreciation of their continued expertise.

Cllr Seamus Coyle Cathaoirleach, Northern & Western Regional Assembly, acknowledged the collaborative work being done in the North West area and commended the positive work to date by the two Council Chief Executive's to ensure collaboration and synergy in promoting the region. Cllr Seamus Coyle expressed his gratitude for the invitation that was extended to the members of the Assembly. Cllr Coyle made the following points in his speech:

- This is a historic meeting as it is the first of any Regional Assembly outside of the State
- The purpose of the meeting is to recognise and express support for the North West City Region
- The NWRA recognise the innovation and collaboration across Donegal, Derry & Strabane.
- This region is an untapped source of great potential economically, socially and environmentally.

- It is widely accepted that the challenges can only be met, and the opportunities pursued, with a consistent and long-term approach to coordinating the development of the region.
- In developing our Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies the members have always insisted on a shared understanding. Today for us is about gaining more of an insight on the initiative so that we can properly integrate the initiative into the spatial and economic objectives.

Cllr Coyle wished the Mayor the best of luck for the upcoming election and for all his future endeavours. He hopes the relations built today will be of benefit to us all in the future. He said that the meeting was held in the Guildhall in Derry to recognise the cross-border partnership developing in the North West City Region and as a way of celebrating our shared communities. He said that the Members of the Regional Assembly were meeting with the Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council Cllr John Boyle along with the Chief Executives from both Derry City & Strabane and Donegal County Councils to hear about the new and integrated approach to create a prosperous, thriving and sustainable City Region. The Chief Executives were then invited to present to the meeting.

A joint presentation was given by Mr. Seamus Neely Chief Executive, Donegal County Council and Mr. John Kelpie, Chief Executive Derry & Strabane District Council, (See Appendix I).

The Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council, the Cathaoirleach of Donegal County Council and the Cathaoirleach of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly agreed that there was a need to sustain and enhance the growth potential of the North West region of the Island of Ireland. It was acknowledged that there was great benefit in working together in partnership and acting in a collaborative way on strategic objectives that create better places and more inclusive communities.

Cllr Coyle then invited Cllr Boyle and Cllr O'Domhnaill to join him in the commemorative signing. The wording of the Commemorative signing was read into the record.

Commemorative Signing

We, Councillor Seamus Coyle, Cathaoirleach of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly, Councillor Seamus O'Domhnaill, Cathaoirleach of Donegal County Council and Councillor John Boyle, Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council, elected representatives of our community,

DO AGREE ON THIS DAY

To sustain and enhance the growth potential of the North West region of the island of Ireland.

To commit to working together in partnership - with the core objective of achieving a very strong economy.

To act in collaboration on strategic objectives that create better places and more inclusive communities.

To maintain permanent ties between the Regions in order to foster mutual improvement in all domains that fall within our competences.

To recognise the strength in each other's values.

Cllr. Seamus O'Domhnaill

Cllr. Seamus Coyle

Cllr. John Boyle

The Commemorative Signing concluded with a brief interval before the remainder of Assembly business was commenced.

Cllr Coyle commenced the Remainder of business, stating that it was a great honour to partake in the commemorative signing with Cllr Seamus O'Domhnaill and Cllr John Boyle. He hoped that the shared vision would be realised as it was critical to give our people a better future.

Vote of Sympathy

Proposed by: Cllr S Coyle

Seconded by: Cllr J Mc Clearn

Resolved:

“that a vote of sympathy be extended to Cllr Jackie Crowe on the passing of his sister Ann McMahon”.

The Cathaoirleach Cllr Seamus Coyle held a minute’s silence.

Ar dhéis Dé go raibh a h-anam dílis.

1. Adoption of Minutes of Meeting of Northern & Western Regional Assembly held 15th February 2019

Proposed by: Cllr Sean Smith

Seconded by: Cllr Mary Hoade

Resolved:

“That the minutes of the meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 15th February 2019 be adopted.”

2. Matters Arising

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

Cllr McClearn voiced his concern regarding our request that the Minister make a commitment to ensure that regional ERDF funds are administered by the Regional Assembly post 2020. Mr. David Minton responded that the Assembly has commissioned a piece of work on this. Mr Minton also agreed to keep this item on the agenda for the next few months following the elections. Cllr Mc Nelis acknowledged the collaborative approach between the 3 Assemblies and voiced his opinion, including the need for the Assembly to ensure the control of funding was retained by the NWRA.

Mr Minton responded by referencing discussions with Chief Executives at a recent meeting and stating that our strategy over the next 6-8 months will need to be taken at a number of levels, including ensuring that necessary engagements are undertaken.

In discussions it was agreed that politicians should also be engaged in the dissemination of information; that this Region must be discriminated positively regarding funding; that the Assembly engage fully with MEP's and that multi-level governance is key.

3. Presentation by Mr Brian McGrath, Derry Chamber of Commerce and CEO of Foyle Port

Mr McGrath began by welcoming all the Assembly members to Derry and stated that he was pleased that both himself and his colleague Mr George Curtbert had the opportunity to speak to the members today.

Mr. McGrath gave a very comprehensive presentation, (See Appendix II).

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Seamus Coyle, commended Mr. McGrath and Mr Curtbert on the very comprehensive and informed presentation. He opened the discussion to Members who acknowledged the quality of the presentation and raised a number of points including:

- Acknowledged that the port is vital to Donegal and in fact to the whole Region and is an national asset.
- The partnership between Derry and Donegal has been excellent and benefited this region. Mr. Neely and Mr. Kelpie were commended for the immense leadership they have put into this.
- Asked what as an elected Assembly can be done for Foyle Port?
- There are great ambitions for Galway port and questioned if Foyle port has a working relationship with Galway port.

Mr McGrath responded with the following points:

- Donegal County Council and Strabane District Council are working closely together.
- Mr McGrath feels they have all they need in place today, but they need to get linkages and Government policy to better align. Fiscal stimulus is key. He asked that they be allowed to do what they do best and let investment go ahead.
- Foyle port is a UK Trust Board that operates in two jurisdictions simultaneously.
- Foyle port works closely and has good relations with Galway port.
- Peripheral infrastructure issues need to be worked on as facilities are needed.

Mr. McGrath was asked what growth was expected in the next 10 years with regards to cruise ships and he responded that he would hope to increase the current number of 15 to approx. 30-50 or possibly even 70 per year.

4. Presentation by Mr Derek McCallan – Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Local Government Association

Mr McCallan gave a comprehensive presentation to the Assembly members on the topic of Local Government in Northern Ireland; Mr McCallan congratulated the Assembly on being a functional Regional Assembly (See Appendix III).

Mr McCallan responded to a number of queries and observations by Members.

In conclusion, Cllr Coyle thanked Mr McCallan for his very interesting presentation and for the offer to the Central Policy Forum in Q4 2019. It was agreed that the Assembly would accept the invitation to the Forum.

5. RSES Update

Mr Denis Kelly gave the members an update on the RSES with specific reference to submissions received during the draft consultation phase (See Appendix IV).

Mr Frank Flanagan gave a presentation on the Joint Draft Retail Strategy for Athlone that has been published by Westmeath County Council and separately by Roscommon County Council. He referenced that a previous submission on the Joint Retail Strategy dated 17th July, 2017 in which it commented on the extent of the retail catchment and the recommendation in the Retail Planning Guidelines for a joint approach from Westmeath, Offaly and Roscommon in formulating a retail strategy for the Midlands. He advised that it is considered that this remains relevant to the proposed Variation and the Assembly should support a subsequent joint approach from the three Councils. In relation to the current proposal he advised that there is uncertainty in relation to the population projection being used, with a wide variation between the lower and upper limits. The Assembly recommended that an addendum be attached to the Variation Report which uses the population target emerging from the RSES process currently at an advanced stage. This target should then be used as the basis for the determination of any additional retail floor space. He recommended that the Assembly support the use of existing floor space to fulfil the requirements for additional retail space in the interests of pursuing compact and brownfield development.

Mr. Flanagan also referenced that the NWRA had collaborated with EMRA, Westmeath County Council and Roscommon County Council Directors of Planning and Senior Planners in respect of the Athlone Regional Centre and had circulated a copy of a working draft for consideration. Members were advised that the weak urban structure in the NWRA was recognized in the NPF as a significant issue to be addressed and accordingly the NWRA approach to these centres and its proposed prominence within the Draft differed somewhat from EMRA's approach. This would not be so apparent but for Athlone being a shared settlement. Members were circulated a copy of the NWRA working draft that had been issued to EMRA and the constituent Councils.

Members thanked Mr Flanagan for his presentation and Cllr Murphy stated that he and other Roscommon councilors fear that Athlone may not be given the same status as Sligo & Letterkenny and acknowledged the approach taken in discussions as outlined.

Proposed by: Cllr Seamus O'Domhnaill

Seconded by: Cllr Joe Murphy

Resolved:

“that the Northern and Western Regional Assembly make a submission to Westmeath County Council and separately to Roscommon County Council on the basis of the presentation Frank Flanagan provided today on the Joint Retail Strategy”

The Cathaoirleach asked Mr. Kelly to clarify target dates for the RSES process and in response the following were suggested.

1. 12th March 2019 - SPA West Meeting at 11am in HQ, Ballaghaderreen.
2. 13th March 2019 – SPA Border Meeting at 11am in Cavan County Council Chamber, Cavan.
3. 27th March 2019 – Joint SPA Meeting at 11am in HQ Ballaghaderreen (NB Change of time).
4. 12th April 2019 – Monthly Regional Assembly Meeting
5. 26th April 2019 – Special Regional Assembly Meeting (TBC on 12th April)

Cllr Coyle stated that he felt it would be beneficial if the publication of any Material amendments to the draft RSES document be on or after 1st June, after the elections.

6. Conferences/Training

Gerry Lavelle advised that there were no notifications of forthcoming Conferences/Training.

7. Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

8. Any Other Business

Debate by MEP Candidates

Proposed by: Cllr Niall McNelis

Seconded by: Cllr Declan McDonnell

Resolved:

“that the Northern and Western Regional Assembly host a debate of perspective MEP candidates in Galway prior to the election”

Connaught Rugby

Cllr Niall McNelis raised the issue of Connacht Rugby and stated that it is a leading example of the resilience and potential of the North West region. The plans to redevelop the Sportsground are a beacon for regional development in the West and North West of Ireland and will enhance the competitiveness of the region from both a business and sporting perspective.

The strategic benefits of the project to the entire region are also fully aligned with the Government's National Planning Framework, Project Ireland 2040, the Border Mid-West Operational Programme 2014-2020 as well as the National Sports Policy, all of which highlight the need for a regional spread of capital investment throughout the country.

Further, this project ensures the long term sustainability of Connacht Rugby and will deliver a fit for purpose facility everyone will be extremely proud of.

Proposed by: Cllr Niall McNelis

Seconded by: Cllr Declan McDonnell

Resolved:

“that the Northern & Western Regional Assembly gives it full and unequivocal support for this project and urges the Government, both local and national, to fully back this important regional development and that a copy of this motion be sent to Mr. Shane Ross T.D. Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport”

This concluded the business of the meeting.

The foregoing minutes are confirmed.

Signed: _____

Cathaoirleach

Date: _____