

**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN & WESTERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY MEETING HELD ON 20th November
2020 via Zoom AT 11.00 A.M.**

Present:

Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. Jack Murray	Cllr. Craig Lovett
Cllr. Brian McKenna	Cllr. Tim Broderick	Cllr. Donal Lyons
Cllr. Niall McNelis	Cllr. David Collins	Cllr. Frank McBrearty
Cllr. Donal Gilroy	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn	Cllr. Joe Sheridan
Cllr. Christy Hyland	Cllr. Declan McDonnell	Cllr. Justin Warnock
Cllr. Orla Leyden	Cllr. Enda McGloin	Cllr. Jarlath Munnelly
Cllr. John Naughten	Cllr. Sean Smith	Cllr. Enda Stenson
	Cllr. Patrick McGowan	

Cllr. David Maxwell **PRESIDED**

Apologies: Cllr. John Caulfield

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr David Minton (Director)
Mr Denis Kelly (Assistant Director & Senior Planner)
Mr Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)
Mr Patrick Devine (EU Projects Officer)
Mr Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr Frank Flanagan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr Barry Guckian (Programme Executive)
Ms Sharon Conway (First Level Controller)
Mr John Daly (Economist)
Ms Amy Caulfield (Clerical Officer)

CE Designate: Mr Brendan McGrath, Galway City Council

1. Consideration of proposed supplement to the Assembly's Standing Orders (circulated)

Cathaoirleach David Maxwell proposed that supplementary standing orders as circulated be adopted for a period of three months, until February 2021 whereupon they could be

reviewed. He added that it was his intention that if level 5 restrictions are relaxed sufficiently on December 1st, that a physical meeting was to take place on Friday 11th December in Roscommon County Council's Chamber with Members having the option to attend virtually or physically.

Cllr. Declan Bree stated that, despite the public health restrictions currently being applied, Councillors are permitted to travel to any location in the course of their work as Elected Members. Cllr Declan Bree also stated that he wanted to ensure that the Cathaoirleach had the discretion to call a physical meeting sooner than February if restrictions were eased. Cllr David Maxwell stated that his preference would be to hold physical meetings prior to February if the prevailing public health restrictions allowed for same.

Cllr. Frank McBrearty stated that all members should be issued with a letter from the Northern and Western Regional Assembly if they were to travel to a meeting outside of the 5km zone. He added that this was the procedure put in place by Donegal County Council. Cllr. Donal Lyons added that Galway City Council issued a letter to all Councillors stating that they were essential workers and therefore free to travel if required and David Minton Director NEWRA stated that this could be done

Proposed by: Cathaoirleach David Maxwell

Seconded by: Cllr. Enda McGloin

And Resolved:

"That the Northern and Western Regional Assembly Supplementary Standing Orders be adopted as circulated for a period of three months, until February 2021 at which point, they can be proposed for adoption for a further period if required."

2. Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 18th September 2020:

Proposed by: Cllr. Brian McKenna

Seconded by: Cllr. Declan Bree

Resolved:

"That the minutes of the meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 18th September, 2020 be adopted"

3. Matters Arising:

(A) Cllr. Declan Bree stated that Minister Eamon Ryan had recently reiterated his support for the reopening of the Western Rail Corridor and he asked that an urgent meeting be sought with him to discuss same. Director David Minton stated that this opportunity could also be used to contribute views on the National Development Plan Review which is currently ongoing.

Proposed by: Cllr Declan Bree

Seconded by: Cllr. Jimmy McClearn

And Resolved

“That the Director David Minton and the Cathaoirleach David Maxell write to Minister Ryan to request a meeting with him in relation to the reopening of the Western Rail Corridor and the National Development Plan Review currently ongoing”.

(B) Members asked for an update on invitations that were to be sent to Irish Water to attend a future Assembly Meeting. Director David Minton confirmed that the invitations were issued and suggested that a presentation from Irish Water be put on the agenda of the next Assembly meeting whether they attend in person or virtually.

(C) Cllr. Tim Broderick queried if any correspondence had been received in regard to Cllr. Declan Bree’s Transboundary Environmental public consultation objection. Mr Gerry Doyle confirmed that no correspondence has been received to date.

4. Draft Budget 2021 (circulated)

Gerry Doyle Assistant Director presented the Draft 2021 budget and the stated that there was a need for the Assembly to continue to support constituent Local Authorities while maintaining and expanding service levels in a changed world. He reiterated the importance of the Assembly maintaining its current good financial position and gave an overview of the Assembly's increased COVID-19 related Costs which have been more than offset by decreases in costs in other areas such as staff travel, Software & IT Equipment. He added that the proposed Draft Budget as circulated provides for no increase in Statutory Demands in 2021 from that which applied in 2020.

Cllr. Tim Broderick queried Rates & Water and the possibility of the Assembly availing of a restart grant. Mr Gerry Doyle confirmed that a query was lodged with Roscommon County Council to investigate if this was an option, but we did not qualify for the restart grant. However Sharon Conway Auditor confirmed we are due a credit back relating to rates already paid in 2020.

Cllr. Declan McDonnell raised a query about members training and Gerry Doyle Assistant Director stated that provision had been made in the budget for 2021 for increased provision for staff and Elected Members training to make up for training not held in 2020 due to the pandemic.

Cllr. Joe Sheridan queried if there was any plan in place for a new version of the Diploma in European Studies. Director David Minton explained that consideration has being given made for a training Programme, possibly a Diploma 2.0 which could integrate some other new elements such as smart cities and the Green Deal.

Proposed by: Cllr. Donal Gilroy

Seconded by: Cllr. Enda Stenson

And adopted

“That the Draft Budget 2021 as circulated be adopted”.

5. Planning and Economic Development

(A) RSES Implementation Update

Mr Denis Kelly confirmed that a submission was made to Minister Ryan in relation to the Sizewell C Nuclear Power Plant – Suffolk, UK: Transboundary Environmental Public Consultation in late September. He also confirmed the roll out of two events with our local authority colleagues in relation

to climate adaptation and mitigation. He also spoke about upcoming work that Regional Assemblies were undertaking with the EPA in providing a webinar in respect of Environmental matters to LAs across the country. He informed that the RSES Implementation Advisory Group are meeting on 26th November which will be chaired by Cathaoirleach David Maxell and the chairs of the two SPA's will also be in attendance.

(B) Development Plan Consultations

Mr Denis Kelly confirmed that members are being notified of consultations received regarding development plans.

(i) Note submission made to “Proposed variation No. 2 of the Monaghan County Development Plan 2019 -2025 (circulated)

Mr Denis Kelly asked members to note that submission.

Proposed by: Cllr. Frank McBrearty

Seconded by: Cllr. Declan McDonnell

(ii) Consideration of Proposed Variation No. 5 to Longford County Development Plan 2015 – 2021 (circulated)

Mr Denis Kelly explained the variation to members

Proposed by: Cllr. Enda Stenson

Seconded by: Cllr. Frank McBrearty

~~To note,~~ Cllr. Orla Leyden made comment regarding the Lough Ree power station and it's proximity to Lanesborough and Ballyleague in County Roscommon. Mr Denis Kelly confirmed that the proposed variation is solely focused on the vacant sites levy only and not wider policy matters.

Resolved:

‘That a submission be made to the Proposed Variation No. 5 to Longford County Development Plan 2015 – 2021 in accordance with the report furnished’

(iii) Consideration of Draft Louth County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 (circulated)

Mr Conall McGettigan gave an overview to members of the Louth County Development Plan 2021 – 2027. From a Monaghan / Cavan point of view, the assembly have asked for five different features where they feel that there could be a better acknowledgement of what we are doing in our RSES in relation to Cavan and Monaghan. He noted that otherwise, the team are not proposing to make any additional comments. Mr Denis Kelly asked if members had any questions, none arose.

Proposed by: Cllr. Brian McKenna

Seconded by: Cllr. Sean Smith

Resolved:

‘That a submission be made to the Draft Louth County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 in accordance with the report furnished’

(C) Remote Working Survey – Presentation by John Daly Economist.

John Daly presented to the Assembly members giving an overview of the recent findings of the Regional Coworking Analysis publication from the three Regional Assemblies, copy available via this link

<https://www.nwra.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/regional-co-working-analysis-22102020.pdf>

Cllr. Joe Sheridan queried the use of the word 'head office' and it may constrain dilution into more rural areas. Mr John Daly explained that this was more of a wording issues rather than a policy intention and that the assembly's focus is on offering the worker more flexibility. Cllr. Sheridan also queried if the tax accreditation was BIK friendly for the tax credit recipient. Mr John Daly explained that this analysis is a consideration more than a recommendation and it is a means to begin the discussion of whether it is feasibility to allow a tax credit / BIK. It wouldn't be the intention that the assemblies carry this out but more so bodies such as the Revenue Commissioners.

Cllr. Joe Sheridan raised a question in terms of querying if there was any inclination of any increment in dispersion levels across the region since September. Mr John Daly explained that data was only available up September 2020.

Cllr. Niall McNelis documented issues around mental health issues when working from home due to employers not providing appropriate levels of support for employees who are working from home. He suggested that we should be speaking to employer groups and the unions to see what they think about working from home. He also noted issues with broadband and suggested 5G needs to be looked at along with training around work life balance.

Cllr. Justin Warnock queried if poor broadband was the reason why there were lower levels of uptake of remote working in this region. He suggested fibre optic needs to be rolled out and connectivity needs to be focused on rapidly.

Cllr. David Collins queried the reduction in company carbon footprint and asked if this would be looked at? He suggested that maybe companies could be given an incentive to reduce carbon footprint by setting up their employees in hubs with proper infrastructure. He pointed out that this is an opportunity to talk to employers.

Mr John Daly explained that there would be a clear environmental benefit if remote working is managed correctly. One exploration is speaking to employees asking them what they want to see brought in to make it worthwhile for employers to allow employees to work remotely. He noted that hubs could be a potential way to achieve this but of equal importance is that it works for both the employer and the employee.

In response to Cllr. Niall McNelis questions, Mr John Daly agreed that work life balance can be a challenge but that hubs can be used as a mechanism to overcome these issues. Hubs also offer an element of social interaction which has been noted in the analysis as an issue of remote working.

In response to Cllr. Justin Warnock's question in relation to the low level of uptake in remote working in this region, Mr John Daly noted that in his opinion, it wasn't solely in relation to poor broadband but more towards economic performance of the region's economy. In the Regions in Transitions Report, it was reported that there was a below average proportion of the labour market in the North West involved in the technology and knowledge intensive economy. The composition of the lack of growth in the region's economy in recent years and lack of numbers in those types of jobs are more of a reflection into the low numbers recorded.

Cllr. Christy Hyland queried if figures were available to track the volume of traffic into and out of towns on a daily basis? Mr John Daly explained that data from the 2016 Census was dated. He suggested looking at the CSO Labour Force data Q2 2019 publication which looked at commuting time and the composition of peoples commute times.

Cllr Donal Gilroy noted that no county in our region comes in under the top 10 in this report, Galway comes in at number 11 but 5 of the bottom 6 are in our region. He noted that broadband is a big issue and the national broadband roll out isn't focusing on our region.

Motion received from Cllr. Niall McNelis

“Digital innovation hubs can help ensure that every high tech, or not, can take advantage of digital opportunities. Digital innovation hubs are one stop shops that help companies become more competitive with regards to their businesses production process, products or services using digital technologies. The department for business is considering the allocation of funds. Can we write to the minister requesting a regional spread in funding allocations ensuring at least one hub is located here”

Cathaoirleach David Maxell asked Cllr. Niall McNelis to confirm what “here” referred to, was it the region or a particular place. Cllr Niall McNelis confirmed it was one within the region but perhaps, given the size of the region, we should be considering more. We want to ensure the region gets it's fair share. Director David Minton explained that Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) can help ensure that every company, small or large, high-tech or not, can take advantage of digital opportunities. It will important for us to note that there will be a geographical spread so Mr Minton noted that he would expect at least one digital innovation hub for the region but it would be very important that at least one of those hubs would be located in the Northern or Western Region.

Cllr. Brian McKenna also noted that the Broadband issue is critical.

Proposed by: Niall McNelis

Seconded by: Declan McDonnell

The motion was agreed unanimously.

(D) Atlantic Area Update

Mr Brendan Mooney gave an update on The Atlantic Area Programme, which is an INTERREG Funding programme with a current budget of €185m. It runs in seven-year blocks and the next programme is 2021 -2027. Each programme is managed by a Managing Authority and a joint secretariat and it is currently ran out of Porto in Portugal. The programme covers Ireland, Northern Ireland, the West Coast of the UK (although they will be leaving in the next programme period due to Brexit), parts of France, Spain and the whole of Portugal. The team at the Northern and Western Assembly applied during Q3 for the role of Managing Authority for the programme. An update will be given once a decision has been made.

Director David Minton gave further insight into the Atlantic Area Programme and explained that they are transnationally managed programmes, and this particular programme has been managed out of Portugal for the last ten years. Brendan and his team were approached directly to consider submitting an application to become Managing Authority. The decision making has now been elevated to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

6. Post 2020 Update

Director David Minton explained that back in late 2018, the Department of Public Expenditure Reform published their Crowe review which concluded with a recommendation that the ERDF Funds should be centralised at a National Level. The members collectively tried to reverse that recommendation and with the assistance of Mr John Daly we were in a position to collate the evidence in the 'Region in Transition' Report which underpinned some of the economic challenges we have and the benefit we get to having access to European Regional Development funds. On the back of publishing the Regions in Transition report, the members attended a number of events and Senior Political engagements in Brussels in late 2019. This led to the role of the Regional Assembly being included in the Programme for Government. On the back of the evidence we provided in the Regions in Transition Report, the European Commission wrote to the Irish Member State in its country specific report highlighting that Ireland had the highest level of Regional inequality as flagged by the report commissioned by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly. That has had a staggering impact on the direction that this was going because with the commitment from the Programme for Government along with the country specific report, the member state and DPER in its needs analysis for Structural Funds (2021 – 2027), dedicated a specific chapter to the Northern and Western region.

We have also been written to by the Department asking us to make a submission into the review of the National Development Plan which will be prepared over the coming months to ensure our region is recognised. Members will be briefed on further developments once they are known.

Acknowledgement was shown to Cllr Declan McDonnell and also to the campaign lunched by Cathaoirleach David Maxell with the "Let's Be More" initiative and it being instrumental in raising the issues of regional inequality.

7. Correspondence

Director David Minton informed members of two pieces of correspondence that was received. The first was communication from Minister McGrath (circulated) confirming Managing Authority, the second was from the Department of Public Expenditure to engage with the National Development Plan Review which has a deadline of the end of January 2021. Mr Minton confirmed that works would be ongoing with members through the SPA and stakeholders in making the submission. He explained that this review poses a number of opportunities to leverage more support financially and at a policy level.

8. Any other business

Cllr. Declan McDonnell suggested the arrangement of an SPA ~~by Denis for both sections~~ in December if travel restrictions are lifted. Cathaoirleach David Maxell stated that he intends on organising an Assembly meeting on Friday 11th December, both physically and via zoom. All members unanimously agreed to the Plenary Assembly Meeting. Cllr. Donal Gilroy asked for confirmation that members would still have the option to join this meeting via zoom. This was confirmed by Cathaoirleach David Maxell and covers all meetings up to February 2021.

Mr Denis Kelly confirmed he would speak to the chairs of the two SPA's (Frank McBrearty & Jimmy McClearn) suggested Tuesday 8th December as a tentative date – (morning for the West, afternoon for the border) for a proposed meeting.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____

Cathaoirleach

Date: _____