

Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting held on 22nd of January 2021 on Zoom At
11.00 am

Present:

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

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 Frank Flanagan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)
Mr Barry Guckian (Programme Executive)
Mr John Daly (Economist)
Ms Catriona Meehan (Clerical Officer)

1. **Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 18th of December 2020 (circulated):**

Proposed by: Cllr. Brian McKenna

Seconded by: Cllr. Enda Stenson

Resolved:

“That the minutes of the meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 18th of December, 2020 be adopted”

2. **Matters Arising:**

There were no matters arising.

3. **Planning and Economic Development:**

a) *Presentation by Mr Denis Kelly on the National Development Plan – Review to Renew Consultation (submission by NWRA)*

Denis Kelly provided a detailed presentation on the format of the consultation and proposed submission to it (See Appendix). He advised that the presentation reflects the draft document that had been furnished to Members in advance of the meeting the previous day.

Following the detailed presentation, Members raised a number of queries and comments including:

- Accept suggestion of URDF funds being ringfenced but not RRDF
- Concerned regarding the fact that there is no downward limit on settlement size regarding RRDF
- Broadband should be priority
- one of the pillars of our submission is connectivity and accessibility.
- Potential of Galway Port and Sligo Port should be captured to facilitate off-shore
- Quality of living for rural as well as urban is crucial
- Nuance language in the draft to include community-led projects and micro generation energy prosumers in section 4.4
- Presentation showed quality infographics that should be included in submission

- The submission should highlight that we are a region in transition whose future prospects has been damaged severely by the effects of the Covid pandemic.
- Submission and presentation would be sent on to the various institutes of technology, in relation to their technical university application and to NUIG.
- A number of specific infrastructure projects were referenced, including but not limited to Galway Outer Bypass, N15, Ulster Canal and WRC
- Interconnectivity within the region not outside the region
- Adult education and reskilling of individuals due to unemployment as a result of Covid 19

Denis Kelly and John Daly responded in detail to the queries as they arose. Denis Kelly advised that the submission had been kept at a high level and confirmed that the consultation documentation had advised that submissions in respect of individual projects were not being sought. Notwithstanding, he said that the draft submission recognised the importance given in the RSES to regional connectivity and accessibility projects. Accordingly, the appendix within the draft submission included those priority roads projects referenced within the RSES. Denis Kelly confirmed that the comments of Members would be incorporated and that:

- Reference to ringfencing of RRDF funds would be omitted - so that the ask is for a proportion of the URDF to be exclusively ring-fenced for large regeneration schemes.
- Broadband is included as a priority in the draft.
- Acknowledged the ongoing role of Galway and Killybegs Ports in facilitating onshore wind energy and potential for offshore renewable energy was accepted – the document would reflect importance of both ports in this regard.
- The language in the section 4.4 would be reviewed to include reference to community-led projects and micro generation energy prosumers.
- Infographics would be incorporated where feasible within the submission.
- Copy of submission would be circulated to Institutes of Technology and NUIG

Mr David Minton stated that a briefing document had been sent out to all Local Authorities, providing them with some of the background socio-economic data so that individual local authorities can decide if they wish to send a consistent message but this is a matter for each local authority. Mr Minton added that the background socio-economic data was also shared with the technological University partners. Mr Minton added his thanks to Denis Kelly and his team for putting together a brilliant framework of what can be done and thanked the members for a good discussion.

It was **UNANIMOUSLY AGREED** that the submission be made on that basis.

Cllr Declan McDonnell during the discussion had asked for clarification if the assembly would be making a submission on the Galway City Development Plan. Mr Kelly confirmed that a report will be brought to members at the February meeting.

b) RSES Implementation Update

i. Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft Westmeath Development Plan 2021-2027

Presentation outlining the plan presented by Mr Frank Flanagan

Frank Flanagan advised Members that the Assembly had made a submission to the Draft Westmeath Plan and that following consideration of submissions the Planning Authority now proposed making a number of Material amendments. He gave a detailed account of the submission asking Members to note same (See Appendix for presentation slides).

Cllr. Brian Mc Kenna asked for clarity on what types of buildings was being discussed, in terms of 5% of buildings allocated for occupants with disabilities, was it residential? Mr Frank Flanagan clarified that it was specifically set out for residential buildings. Cllr McKenna stated that Part M regulation was not being enforced appropriately. Cllr. McKenna stated he would be interested in the outcome of that proposal from Westmeath county council. Mr Flanagan stated that in his understanding Part M refers to all buildings regardless of their use and there is an obligation on developers and builders to ensure that Part M is complied with.

Cllr. Orla Leydon thanked Mr Flanagan for the clarifications in his presentation. She added that with reference to the point made earlier in the meeting regarding the interconnectivity of the region the significance of the upgrading of the N61 between Sligo and Athlone is very important. Mr Frank Flanagan responded that the submission does contain a request for Westmeath to acknowledge the importance of the N61 linking Sligo to Athlone.

Cllr. Justin Warnock questioned whether the mention of support of broadleaf forestry was in relation to commercial broadleaf forestry or woodlands that would exist for the next one hundred or two hundred years. Mr Flanagan stated that the submission was simply showcasing our proposal to set up a forum. He explained that the amendment is written in the form that they will encourage broadleaf forestry, he added that it is a very loose alteration.

Cllr. John Naughten asked Mr Flanagan did he have any concern around the Zoning element of the draft, with relation to the joint urban area plan for Athlone. Cllr. Naughten asked whether there were any restrictions within the plan that would restrict what we can do when that joint urban area plan takes place. Mr Flanagan stated that the concern would be that Athlone might fall behind the other regional centres like Sligo and Letterkenny. Mr Flanagan said he does not think there is any restrictions on the joint urban area plan but may need new legislation to determine who will make a joint urban area plan because it is something new that doesn't exist at the moment. He added that the fear is the delay that this is adding might mean that Athlone falls behind.

Proposed: Cllr. Donal Gilroy

Seconded: Cllr. Orla Leydon

Resolved:

"that the Northern and Western Regional Assembly note the submission to the proposed material Amendments to the Draft Westmeath County Development Plan."

c) Housing Demand and Supply Targets (Guidance)

Mr Denis Kelly suggested that this item is put on the agenda for the February meeting when there would be more time to consider and this was agreed.

4. Cohesion Policy

a) Presentation on the next round on funds (2021-2027)

Mr Barry Guckian presented a brief summary on the next round of funds centring around smarter, greener and a Europe closer to its citizens. Three main priorities have been identified-Smart Cities and Smart Regions, Low Carbon and Climate Resilience and Urban Dimension.

Cllr. Tim Broderick requested a hard copy of the document mentioned. Mr Minton agreed that this could be done.

b) BREXIT Reserve Fund

Mr David Minton highlighted to members that the regulation was published over the Christmas period. He stated there was an announcement that there was a €5.37 billion going into Brexit adjustment reserve which is going to be targeted at sectors most impacted by BREXIT. He highlighted that there was a large territorial focus in the article 175. There is a suggestion that a region could avail of the fund. One billion has be reserved for Ireland for the 2021 period, we are going to be in correspondence with the department to see if there is a regional envelope of funds that can support communities and businesses in our region but particularly along the border.

Cllr. Brian McKenna requested a handout relating to this section. Mr Minton agreed a short briefing document with regulations could be sent out that one could be sent out to all members. Mr Minton also suggested that members bring the matter up with members own constituent local authorities.

5. **Schedule of Assembly Meetings 2021**

Cllr Orla Leydon highlighted that there is a Councillor Climate Action Meeting on the 19th of February, which overlaps with the Assembly meeting. Cllr. Maxwell suggested, that because it was being organised by the department and Climate change is becoming an important issue, that we could move the meeting to 2pm. Cllr. Maxwell emphasized that this was a once off because it was organised by the department and it is critical. Cllr. Maxwell asked was everyone in agreement that the February meeting is moved to 2pm. This was agreed by all.

6. **Correspondence**

Mr David Minton highlighted that there was a meeting scheduled with Minister Eamon Ryan in relation to the National Development Plan. The meeting which was originally scheduled for the afternoon has now been moved to next week on their request. Mr Minton stated that with regards to the SPA meeting schedule, the full schedule is usually agreed in the January meeting but due to current circumstances the meetings will be added in once things become clearer.

Cllr. Orla Leydon asked that in the meeting with the Minister there could be question raised in relation to the Just Transition Fund. She stated that there was concern due to a proposed increase of contribution by community from 15% to 50% which would make the projects not viable. Mr Minton stated that this matter had arisen critically over the last ten days and he is very aware of it and he said it would be no harm in raising the concern of the region with the Minister.

Cllr. Donal Gilroy asked whether there was any correspondence with regards to the motion about Sligo Airport from the last Assembly meeting. Mr Gerry Doyle confirmed nothing had been received yet and added that a could follow up could be sent.

7. **AOB**

Motion received from Cllr. Niall McNelis

The recently published Grant Thornton Report and review of the economic contribution and financial sustainability of the Irish Post Office Network has identified the Public Service Obligation (PSO) and provision of Public Service Compensation (PSC) as an essential provision to secure the viability of the network.

Furthermore-Countries with approval from the European Commission to operate a Post Office PSO are the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Finland, and Spain.

Industries currently or previously receiving a PSO in Ireland include-Agriculture, Aviation, Rail, Finance, Bus, Radio, Housing and Energy e.g., PSO subsidy payments have been provided for socially necessary but commercially unviable bus and rail services in the order of €255 million annum since 2010.

Cllr. McNelis asked for implementation of a Motion that was passed in the Daíl in 2016 which set out the action plan enabling the sustainability of the Network and that the government implement a sustainability plan, a tight timeframe for the implementation of it and that there must be a focus on either new products, capital investments and the government servicing. Cllr. McNelis stated that the motion is really about saving the Post Offices in communities right across the region. He added that we have seen how important Post Offices have been in the pandemic.

Cllr. Donal Lyons has abstained from the vote as he is a member of the An Post Network.

Proposed: Niall McNelis

Seconded: Brian McKenna

The motion was **agreed unanimously**.

Cllr. McClearn proposed that we would invite representatives from the Department and Ernest and Young to our February meeting. He added that it was the perfect opportunity to facilitate the meeting by Zoom which alleviated the cost of them travelling to the region. Cllr McClearn stated that the report had many details that needed explanation. that it should be an item on the Agenda in the February meeting. Mr David Minton agreed to send out a link to the WRC report to all members. He added that Irish water is also scheduled to present at the February meeting so there then would be two presentations at that meeting. Cllr Tim Broderick added that with regards to the Irish Water presentation, it has been postponed before he added that Cllr. McClearns proposal deserved singular attention he suggested that we could look to move the Irish Water presentation to

the March meeting. Cllr. Declan McDonnell suggested that perhaps a special meeting was needed as the Western Rail Corridor was very important. He added that it needs a proper debate, and it should not be rushed. Mr David Minton stated he was happy to suggest to the Dept of Transport regarding either attending the assembly or to host a special meeting at a time that suits them. He added that perhaps we could wait to see if there was a confirmation from them before scheduling Irish Water. Cllr. David Maxwell stated that he had no problem having a special meeting, but he added that he does not believe that presentations over Zoom are as engaging as being there in person. Cllr Maxwell stated that for the WRC and Irish water meetings he would prefer to be in the room with them. Cllr Christy Hyland agreed with Cllr. Maxwell with regards to Zoom meetings not being as engaging. Cllr. Hyland stated that Ernest and young received half a million euros and that surely, they would afford us the time to answer our questions.

Proposed Cllr. Jimmy McClearn

Seconded Cllr. Declan McDonnell

And Resolved

“That the Director David Minton writes to the Department and Ernest and Young to request either attendance at the February Assembly meeting or a separate special meeting to discuss the findings of the Western Rail Corridor Report.”

Cllr Joe Sheridan added that he sent a motion about community participation in renewables. Cllr. Maxwell confirmed that the item will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____
Cathaoirleach

Date: _____