

Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting held on 19th of February 2021 on Zoom at  
2pm

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**Present:**

Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. Sean Smith	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. Michael Crowe	Cllr. John Naughten	Cllr. Enda Stenson

Cllr. David Maxwell **PRESIDED**

**Apologies:** Cllr. John Caulfield, Cllr. Craig Lovett, Cllr. Jarlath Munnelly

**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 Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)  
Ms Catriona Meehan (Clerical Officer)

1. **Review of Supplementary Standing Orders (circulated) Regulating the proceedings of the Assembly when holding remote meetings adopted on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 for an initial period of three months:**

**Proposed by:** Cllr. David Maxwell

**Seconded by:** Cllr. Jimmy McClearn

*‘Resolved that supplementary standing orders be adopted for a further three months starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 2021.’*

2. **Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 2021 (circulated):**

Cllr. Declan McDonnell advised there was an error in the attendance record as Cllr. Michael Crowe had attended the meeting. Cllr. Mc Donnell also added that there was an error in wording regarding his proposal for a meeting with Ernest & Young and the representatives for the Department. He pointed out that in the minutes it suggested he requested a ‘Private’ meeting however he had said ‘Special’ meeting. The Cathaoirleach David Maxwell advised that these changes would be made.

**Proposed by:** Cllr. Declan McDonnell

**Seconded by:** Cllr. Niall McNelis

**Resolved:**

*“That the minutes of the meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 2021 be adopted”.*

**3. Matters Arising:**

Cllr. Niall McNelis enquired whether the motion he put forward in the last meeting regarding the Post Offices had been forwarded to the relevant bodies. Mr Gerry Doyle confirmed the motion had been forwarded but no response has been received.

**4. Planning and Economic Development:**

a) *Presentation by Irish Water (John Casey, Elaine Henegan and Daragh Murphy)*

*John Casey- Asset Strategy and Sustainability Manager for Irish Water* made a presentation regarding 'Irish Water Supporting Growth'. Sections focused on were as follows:

- Capacity for Growth
- National Regional and Local Planning
- Wastewater Capacity Register
- National Water Resources Plan – Leak Reduction Programme
- Investment Planning
- Investment Needs – Water Services Policy Statement
- RC3 support for growth
- Capital Investment

Following the presentation a number of issues were raised by Members, including the following:

**Issues raised by Cllr. Patrick McGowan:** Cllr McGowan questioned what is the reason Irish Water seem to refuse to take charge of estates where there are stand alone, mechanical treatment plants. He asked was this decided by the local authority or by Irish Water? Cllr. McGowan also added that when estates have been taken charge and are under the control of the Council Irish Water seem to refuse to maintain these facilities. Cllr. McGowan referred to the plans mentioned in the presentation regarding the upgrading treatment sewage plants within towns and villages. He stated that unless there is a programme within 5 years, people will be refused planning in these areas, which militates against people living in our towns and villages. Cllr McGowan also referred to the pipe replacement scheme in the presentation and stated that the figures in Donegal were at odds with what was in the presentation. Cllr. McGowan also stated that the cost that Irish Water is charging rural once off houses for water connections is very high and that the charges for connection have gone up significantly since Irish Water took over.

**Response by John Casey:**

- With reference to the developer provided infrastructure and the standalone DPI's – he advised that there is a Department programme to address those.
- The standalone treatment plants are not Irish Water treatment plants but there is a Department programme addressing those and Irish Water is working with the Department to address the issues around these plants.
- With reference taking in charge, there is a MOU with the local authorities on this issue. Irish Water is very active in taking in charge the water services. If there are specific problem areas, they should be sent in through the local reps support desk.
- With reference to the leakage reduction programme he advised that there has been huge drive there and that the results can be seen in that the leakage level is coming down. He acknowledged that there was a huge need for pipe replacement but added that with all the investment needs across the asset base there is a limit to what can be done. Prioritisation for pipe replacement is to get the best value out of the pipes that are replaced.
- He advised he was not in a position to answer for the specific quantities for Donegal, but he said it could be answered in a written response.
- The issue of the cost of connection of once off rural houses, is a matter for the regulator as they determine the connection charging policy.

Darragh Murphy IW emphasised the number of pipes that need replacement in Ireland and the limits on the money available to do these replacements. Mr. Murphy stated that there was always a focus on return on investment of leak reduction when choosing which pipes would be replaced.

**Issues raised by Cllr Declan McDonnell** He asked whether Irish Water was being funded properly by the government to carry out the necessary work in the region? He highlighted the issues in the East side of Galway city regarding capacity for growth. Cllr. McDonnell stated that they have been informed that funding exists over the longer period but where is the funding now? Cllr. McDonnell questioned how projects are prioritized? Cllr McDonnell gave an example of one project being completed very close to another that needed works and all equipment etc is in the area - so why would one project be left for several years, why are both projects not completed together?

**Response:** John Casey advised that he would like to see an improvement in funding and that discussions are ongoing. Darragh Murphy acknowledged that there was a gap between the level of investment that was planned and the level of investment that was needed to get to the point where Irish Water and the Irish public are completely happy with water services. In the meantime, their focus is on the works that return the most benefit to the most amount of people. John Casey stated that they are very aware of the needs around East Galway and that planning is being pushed forward. Elaine Heneghan advised that this year they are starting the greater Galway area drainage strategy, which will look at the medium to long term growth strategy and there is also a Network Reinforcement programme for Galway East.

**Issues raised by Cllr David Collins:** he stated that in most development plans there is a push to get people into the smaller towns and villages, but he questioned whether there is enough focus on the water and wastewater infrastructure required to allow for this. Cllr Collins referred to the small towns and villages growth programme, which was mentioned in the presentation and questioned whether that will include small villages where the population is 1000-1500?

**Response:** John Casey responded and advised that the programme is for areas that already have some existing infrastructure in a settlement with populations of less than 2000.

**Issues raised by Cllr. Jimmy McClearn:** He referenced the storms of last August where electricity failed many treatment facilities, he questioned whether Irish Water had any plans to fit generators at the more substantial plants?

**Response:** John Casey advised in response that there are plans for standby generators or even mobile standby generators that can be moved to the location of a power failure. Darragh Murphy also advised that there is a contingency working group that has been set up to respond to any crisis that happens around the country. Irish Water will be able to respond to these crises with the support of local authorities. He also added that ESB now prioritise the return of water services in the event of a storm etc.

**Queries raised by Cllr Tim Broderick:** He questioned whether the €100million for small towns and villages referenced in the presentation is for upgrade or new provision? Cllr. Broderick referenced Darragh Murphy's statement regarding the budget spend and prioritising the projects that benefit the most amount of people. He asked does that mean there will be a focus on the urban centres. He asked where does the €100 million for the small towns and villages appear in this plan? What are your projections for 2022 onwards? Cllr Broderick asked whether Irish Water is looking at real investment in provision for wastewater treatment services in small villages? Cllr Broderick stated that Irish Water's submission to Galway's county development plan lacked ambition. He questioned whether their submission meant that there would be a focus on where there is already infrastructure and the areas without infrastructure would be neglected. Cllr Broderick also referenced elongated boil water notices and he questioned what policy is in place for commercial customers in relation to the extra costs involved. He questioned whether Irish Water is going to put a policy in place to offset these costs.

**Response:** John Casey advised that there is no provision for areas with no existing infrastructure in the investment plan. John highlighted other funds that may help those areas including the Rural Regeneration Fund. John added that if a funding request is successful by this method Irish Water will happily take over these facilities. Darragh Murphy stated that he believed there is a 40% discount on water use for non-residential premises affected by lengthy boil water or do not consume notices. Darragh Murphy added that Irish Water are constrained by the regulator regarding billing, tariffs or discounts. Cllr Broderick stated that it is disappointing to realise that Irish Water does not have enough money to fully invest in small villages in rural Ireland.

**Queries raised by Cllr. Enda Stenson:** He referred to the difficulty in getting on a group wastewater scheme. He stated once off housing is prohibited on most of the land in his area, yet they can't move into the towns and villages because the capacity is at its peak. Cllr. Stenson acknowledged that it is probably not the fault of Irish Water but the fault of lack of investment. He stated that something needed to be done and there were many groups of houses of 100 or less that need a private group scheme that connect to the community.

**Response:** John Casey responded that the funding for the group sewage schemes is under the Departments rural water programme.

**Issues raised by Cllr. Enda McGloin:** He referred to the increased demands in terms of infrastructural requirements by Irish Water. He also referred to the fact that Irish Water have nominated plant hire specialist and extra conditions are now being required by IW which also adds to the cost. Cllr. McGloin added that all these costs will impact the ambition to repopulate the region.

**Response:** John Casey responded by advising that the connection charging policy that is approved by the regulator has increased the cost in some counties but decreased the cost in others. John Casey advised that systems had to be put in place by IW to ensure the quality of work carried out.

**Issues raised by Cllr. Christy Hyland:** He stated that it has been said that there is an agreement to take water out to Murrisk near Croagh Patrick and onto Lecanvey. He emphasised the beauty of the area and the impact contaminated water would have on the tourist industry. Cllr. Hyland wanted to know if this suggestion was true or not?

**Response:** John Casey stated he did not know the answer to the question, but he added he will get a response and send it on.

**Issues raised by Cllr. Donal Lyons:** He had sent a question through the Zoom Chat function. 'Could the question be raised with John the replacement of the rising main to the Clifton Hill and Tonebruckey reservoirs in Galway City.'

**Response:** John Casey advised that he will get a response and send it on.

Director David Minton thanked John Casey and his team for their attendance and their answers to the questions.

## **(b) RSES Implementation Update**

### **i. Draft Mayo Development Plan 2021-2027**

*Presentation by Mr Frank Flanagan outlining the proposed material amendments to the plan.*

Mr Flank Flanagan advised that a report had been circulated to Members in advance of the meeting and he would present on it. He highlighted the high level of consistency between Mayo County Development Plan and the RSES. However, there are some areas that need to be looked at regarding the consistency of language around Tier 1 and Tier 2 towns. He added that some of the descriptions used in the plan are not consistent with regional and national planning policy.

Cllr. Christy Hyland referred to a new road being created between Westport to Castlebar reducing travel time between the two towns to 9 minutes. Cllr. Hyland stated that there would be an economic hub created by the joining of the two towns. Cllr. Hyland stated that there was no point in having one town in each tier that both towns should be in Tier 1. Mr Denis Kelly advised that they were not questioning what Tier a town should go into, they were making a point about the consistency of language regarding Castlebar, which is a 'Key Town' in the RSES and Westport, which is not. Cllr Hyland emphasized the fact that the new road would make these two towns together a Tier 1 town. Mr David Minton confirmed that within the RSES there has been significant engagement with Mayo County Council and the Assembly fully supports the corridor between Castlebar and

Westport. He added that the Assembly has been asked to assess the consistency between the county development plan and the RSES. At this stage there is a focus on consistency of language on a local, regional and national level and the use of terms that could cause confusion. Mr Minton highlighted the strong support in the RSES of this economic corridor.

**Proposed: Cllr. David Maxwell**

**Seconded: Cllr. Donal Gilroy**

**Resolved:**

*“That the Northern and Western Regional Assembly agree the submission to the proposed material Amendments to the Draft Mayo County Development Plan as set out in the report circulated.”*

**ii. Preparation of Galway City Development Plan 2023-2029**

*Report by Mr Frank Flanagan on the Issues Paper Galway City Development Plan 23-29*

Mr Flanagan advised that a report had been circulated in advance of the meeting and he stated that the purpose of the submission is to aid consistency between the draft plan, which will be done later in the year, and the RSES.

**Proposed: Cllr. Donal Gilroy**

**Seconded: Cllr. Jimmy McClearn**

**Resolved:**

*“That the Northern and Western Regional Assembly agree the submission to the proposed material Amendments to the Draft Galway City Development Plan as set out in the report circulated.”*

**(c) Housing Demand and Supply Targets (Guidance)**

*Mr Conall McGettigan presented a General Overview of the Housing Demand and Supply Targets Guidance for Local Authorities.*

Mr McGettigan discussed the new modelling plan for housing supply set out by the Government. He discussed the NPF 50:50 City model, which is the model the Government is in favour of. Mr McGettigan highlighted that the Regional Assemblies will have a role in the development of the Housing Demand & Delivery Tool.

**5. To consider the following Notice of Motion from Cllr Joe Sheridan**

*“That this Assembly recognises the importance of community participation in the energy transition and supports the installation of rooftop solar power for community buildings, particularly school buildings. The Assembly notes that while residential commercial, industrial and business buildings benefit from an exemption to planning permission for the installation of solar panels covering less than 50% of the roof area (S183/2007, S1235/208), community buildings and schools are not subject to the same exemptions, and this creates an unfair burden and significant additional cost on schools and community buildings seeking to install solar panels. Noting this the Assembly will formally request of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to include as a matter of urgency schools and community buildings in the exemptions from planning permission for the installation of solar panels.”*

Cllr Joe Sheridan explained that he is requesting that state amenity buildings be exempt from planning permission for solar panels when the panels cover less than 50% of the roof. This exemption is already afforded to private and residential buildings, but Cllr Sheridan wants it extended to state / community owned amenity buildings, especially schools. Cllr Sheridan stated that he thinks it is important that the Assembly shows a way forward for community owned facilities and community renewables to promote ownership, dissemination a sense of pride within the community.

**Proposed:** Cllr Joe Sheridan

**Seconded:** Cllr Donal Gilroy

**Resolved:**

*'that the Assembly will formally request the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to include as a matter of urgency schools and community buildings in the exemptions from planning permission for the installation of Solar Panels'.*

**6. Correspondence**

**Western Rail Corridor Report**

Mr David Minton stated there had been a motion at a previous meeting to write to the Department of Transport requesting a meeting regarding the EY report. Mr Minton said a response had come back stating Irish Rail was responsible for the report. Mr Minton stated that Irish Rail had then been contacted stating the CEO of Irish Rail Jim Meade would be willing to meet assembly members, but he is not available for the March Assembly. Cllr David Maxwell asked members what they wanted a delegation to meet him before the March meeting. Cllr Tim Broderick stated that the meeting was requested with Ernest and Young, he questioned why a meeting was not being sought with Irish Rail. Mr Minton explained that the motion was issued to Irish Rail and the Department of Transport. EY were the contractors appointed but Irish Rail commissioned the report, so they are responsible for its results. Cllr Broderick questioned whether Irish Rail would stand over the report. Mr Minton said he is not able to determine whether Irish Rail will stand over the results but EY are a private company and are under no obligation to attend an Assembly Meeting. He stated that the next best alternative is to get a representative of Irish Rail to brief members on the anomalies found in the report. It was agreed to organise a Special meeting with Irish Rail.

**7. AOB**

No matters were raised under AOB

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cathaoirleach

Date: \_\_\_\_\_