

Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting held on 10th December 2021 at 11am
online Via Zoom.

Present:

Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. Frank McBrearty	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn
Cllr. Donal Lyons	Cllr. Donal Gilroy	Cllr. Jack Murray
Cllr. Orla Leyden	Cllr. Enda Stenson	Cllr. Joe Sheridan
Cllr. John Naughten	Cllr. Patrick McGowan	Cllr. Enda McGloin
Cllr. David Maxwell	Cllr. Declan McDonnell	Cllr. David Collins
Cllr. Brian McKenna	Cllr. Niall McNelis	Cllr. Tim Broderick
Cllr. Michael Crowe		

Cllr. Christy Hyland **PRESIDED**

Apologies: Cllr. Craig Lovett, Cllr. Sean Smith, Cllr. John Caulfield, Cllr. Jarlath Munnely, Cllr. Justin Warnock Mr Brendan McGrath (Chief Executive Galway City Council)

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr David Minton (Director)
Mr Denis Kelly (Assistant Director & Senior Planner)
Mr Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)
Mr Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr Frank Flanagan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr John Daly (Economic and Sustainable Development Officer)
Ms Catriona Meehan (Clerical Officer)

1) Adoption of the Draft Supplementary Standing Orders regulating the proceedings of the Assembly when holding remote meetings

Proposed: Cllr. Donal Lyons

Seconded: Cllr. Patrick McGowan

Resolved:

“That the Draft Supplementary Standing Orders regulating the proceedings of the Assembly when holding remote meetings be adopted for the holding of this meeting.”

2) Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on the 19th November 2021 (circulated):

Proposed by: Cllr. Donal Lyons

Seconded by: Cllr. Patrick McGowan

Resolved:

“That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 19th November 2021 be adopted”.

3) Matters Arising

Cllr. Frank McBrearty enquired regarding the circulation of his report and related documentation, regarding the Mica crisis, which had been sent to the Assembly with the recommendation that it would be circulated to members. Cllr. McBrearty asked about the progress of the motion passed at the previous meeting which recommended a delegation be sent to the EU with the hope of bringing attention to the issue and highlighting the problems with building regulations in Ireland. He asked what the best way was to go forward on this matter.

A discussion was held which included the following comments:

Cllr. David Maxwell highlighted the fact that the Mica Action group had been in Brussels recently, he questioned whether there might be overlap if the Assembly sent a delegation to highlight the same issue. He urged caution with progressing further in this matter.

Cllr. Jack Murray stated that he thought the Mica Action group should be consulted even if they do not represent all those involved.

Cllr. Patrick McGowan agreed that it would be unwise to operate without consulting with the Mica Action Group. He stated there is a dedicated section in the Local Authority dealing with the issue and also the Mica Action Group so it would be unwise to act independently on this matter.

Cllr. Brian McKenna stated that Donegal County Council should be consulted prior to any action.

Clr. Tim Broderick enquired whether it would be possible that the Mica Action Group could give the Assembly a presentation.

Cllr. Frank McBrearty stated that this motion would be separate to the Mica Action Group he highlighted the importance of making sure the legislation is addressed not just highlighting the current crisis stating it was important that this never happened again. He added that the issue is not just with Mica but with other minerals and materials. Cllr. McBrearty stated that the Assembly is a political committee and that we have a role to make representation regarding issues within our region.

Cathaoirleach Christy Hyland stated the importance of making sure this issue never occurred again.

Members requested that all the documentation mentioned by Cllr. McBrearty be circulated to them for their consideration.

Mr David Minton agreed to formulate a response and engage with stakeholders on this matter. He emphasized the importance of maintaining a level of engagement with the stakeholders in the areas concerned. Mr Minton stated that the Assembly didn't want to undermine any ongoing work. He added that Cllr. McBrearty had shared his report and that colleagues in the Irish Regions Office had been consulted with a view to advising Members how to best advance the motion. He highlighted some of the avenues that this issue could be raised, including through MEPs. He advised that the executive will explore further and discuss further at the next meeting Mr Minton confirmed that the requested documentation would be sent to members.

4) Director's Update

Mr David Minton stated that the full report had been circulated to members but that there were a couple of items that he wanted to highlight to members. Mr Minton noted the good work by Mr Denis Kelly and his team regarding the submission to the offshore energy scheme. He stated this will bring significant benefit for the entire region. He asked that members bring this to the attention of the Chief Executives' of their relevant Local Authority. He added the submission was available on the website. Mr Minton also drew members attention to the fact that the team supported 11 partners in the region access €1.2 million from the recent round of Northern Periphery and Arctic programme. Mr Minton also noted that the Assembly has been assisting the New Technological University with its TU status. He stated this will be a great benefit to the region into the future. He added that there would be an update on the new ERDF programme in January. Mr Minton highlighted the consultation process that is underway regarding the Connecting Ireland Initiative, he encouraged all Local Authorities to make submissions as this was a very important issue for the region. He stated the Assembly's report was being finalised and would be on the website shortly. Mr Minton stated that the report in association with OECD on 'Barriers to Innovation Diffusion' would be published shortly. He added that this was a vital report due to the categorisation of the region as a 'Lagging Region' and a 'Region in Transition'. He asked members to circulate the report and promote it on social media. Mr Minton drew members attention to an important issue especially for the counties of Roscommon and Galway. He stated the Just Transition Fund has been negotiated by the Irish Member State and there has been much discussion around this topic. Mr Minton specified €80m has

been allocated to this fund will be managed primarily by the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly with input from the other Assemblies. He stated that parts of Roscommon and Galway are being included in the fund and that due to the Region being a 'Region in Transition' the allocation of funding would be higher at approximately a 70% allocation.

Cathaoirleach Christy Hyland requested a full presentation be given to Members.

5) Planning and Economic Development

a) Presentation on the Regional Development Monitor – AIRO, Maynooth

Mr Conall McGettigan advised that as part of the RSES the Assembly committed to reviewing the objectives and targets set out in the strategy. Mr McGettigan stated that the NWRA has been working with the other Assemblies to formulate a Regional Development Monitor and that AIRO have been working with the three Regional Assemblies over the last few months on it. He added that AIRO are leaders in spatial analysis and have a lot of experience in this area. He stated that the presentation today would help members understand how the monitor can be used to benefit the region.

Mr Eoghan McCarthy stated that the aim of the Regional Development Monitor is to collate and visualise a range of relevant socio-economic indicators to aid in monitoring the performance of each of the three regions in terms of achieving the pillars set out in the RSES of each region. He provided a detailed presentation (See Appendix 1) and gave a demonstration of the site that was in production mode. He provided a demonstration of a selection of indicators with an emphasis on NWRA data, via a mixture of dashboards and mapping tools that fed off live public sector data (EPA Environmental Quality etc). In concluding he advised that that the monitor would need a lot of collaboration between Assemblies and Local Authorities in order to maximise the benefit. He stated that it was hoped that the monitor will go live in second quarter of 2022.

Cllr. Orla Leyden queried whether affordability could be built into the model, as there seems to be a lack of data in this area.

Cllr. Donal Lyons asked for the presentation to be circulated to Members.

Cllr. David Collins asked whether the 2022 Census data will be added to the monitor to take into account increase in population etc.

Cathaoirleach Hyland agreed with Cllr. Leyden regarding affordability of housing and asked for Mr McCarthy to respond to the queries.

Mr McCarthy responded saying that there is a section relating to the affordability of housing with a detailed profile on rent price change and historical house prices. He added that there will also be data on incomes over time which can be used to judge affordability of housing. He confirmed that the Census data would be built into the model as soon as they are available. Mr McCarthy confirmed that he would be happy for the presentation to be circulated to members.

Mr David Minton emphasised the importance of the tool as dynamic benchmark for the region's performance, with the ability to monitor Government investment across many areas on a continuous basis. He added that monitoring data such as the EV charging spots would be vital in our green transition.

b) Town Centre First Analysis – John Daly

Mr John Daly gave a presentation on presented on the research and analysis undertaken in respect of dereliction and vacancy across the region (See Appendix 2).

Mr Daly explained the reasons the analysis was being carried out was to:

- Support RPO 3.6 in the RSES -support the existing reporting and monitoring of vacancy hotspots, informing government action, targets and forth coming plans and programmes.
- Support 'Housing for All'- The Assembly is one of the lead bodies tasked with using ERDF to tackle vacancy and dereliction in our towns.
- Inform the 'Town Centre First Initiative'- the report will be used to inform the Government that such a scheme be directed at this region and advocate positive discrimination towards this region, due to the above average levels of vacancy in this region.
- Assist Stakeholders to develop policies around vacancy and dereliction.

The Cathaoirleach invited questions/comments from Members and queries raised included:

- The suitability of the source of the data for the study was queried - as previous studies and the Census had identified different figures for some areas identified in the presentation.
- A query was raised regarding the source of the figures for total commercial stock and total residential dwellings and what criteria was used when identifying vacant dwellings.
- The concern was raised that certain smaller towns and villages are being left behind in initiatives such as the 'Town Centre First Analysis'.
- Members asked if there was any analysis on whether the imposing commercial tax rates on vacant commercial properties were actually having an impact on the issue of residential and commercial vacancy.
- It was suggested there should be a three-tier system of commercial rates to make it fairer on SME's.
- It was noted that tax incentives, grants and subsidies had been very successful in addressing vacancy issue in some key areas and perhaps there was need for a pilot scheme to see would tax incentives address the vacancy issues in other areas in the region.
- The exclusion of Galway City on the tables in the presentation was queried.
- It was noted that the figures relating to Ballysadare seemed very high.
- It was highlighted that Ballybofey had the highest vacancy rate in Ireland in previous reports, and it was important to acknowledge this, and it should be added to and pilot scheme if there would be any.
- It was stated that it was important that the areas highlighted in these reports as having high vacancy rates should be the focus of government planning and incentives to address the issue.

Mr John Daly acknowledged the difference between the figures used in the report and those from the Census. He stated that the Geo Directory liaise with postal staff to determine vacancy rate, he said that the Census data is a point in time and can often take holiday homes as vacant properties and that the methodology they used was perhaps not best method to determine a vacant unit. He stated that Galway City was not included in the table as the focus was on towns and villages and Galway was classified as a city, but he added that it will be included in the actual publications. Mr Daly stated that it was possible that Ballybofey has the highest vacancy rate in the country depending on what data is being used and when the data was gathered. Mr Daly confirmed that this analysis includes recommendations and acknowledged the need for a balanced approach when it came to incentives and penalties to address the issue of vacancy

6) Correspondence

Mr David Minton explained to members that there will be correspondence related to the Just Transition Fund circulated after the meeting.

7) Any other Business

Cllr. Frank Mc Brearty wanted to confirm whether the report compiled by Mr McCluskey would be circulated to members along with his own report.

Mr David Minton informed members that the reports mentioned by Cllr. McBrearty would be circulated to members.

Cllr. Enda McGloin referred to a previous item on the agenda reinforcing the position that tax incentives could be very beneficial to addressing the issue of vacancy in our towns and villages. It was questioned whether it was possible to conduct a study around the benefits of tax incentives on vacancy rates, which then could be used when lobbying Government for action. Mr David Minton stated this would be considered in the context of upcoming research being published by the Assembly

Members and staff exchanged well wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____ (Cathaoirleach)

Date: _____