

**Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting  
held on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at 11am online via Ms Teams.**

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**Present:**

Cllr. David Maxwell	Cllr. John Naughten	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn
Cllr. Tim Broderick	Cllr. Declan McDonnell	Cllr. Patrick McGowan
Cllr. Orla Leyden	Cllr. Brian McKenna	Cllr. Jarlath Munnely
Cllr. Joe Sheridan	Cllr. Justin Warnock	Cllr. Niall McNelis
Cllr. Enda McGloin	Cllr. Clifford Kelly	Cllr. Donal Gilroy
Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. Jack Murray	Cllr. Donal Lyons

**Presided:** Cllr. David Collins (Cathaoirleach)

Mr Brendan McGrath (Chief Executive Galway City Council)

**Apologies:** Cllr. Christy Hyland, Cllr. Enda Stenson, Cllr. John Caulfield, Cllr. Michael Crowe, Cllr. Frank McBrearty.

**Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:**

Mr. David Minton (Director)  
Mr. Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)  
Mr. Frank Flanagan (Senior Executive Planner)  
Mr. Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)  
Ms. Catriona Meehan (Clerical Officer)

- 1) On behalf of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly Cathaoirleach Cllr David Collins proposed a Motion of sympathy to the family of our colleague the late Councillor Sean Smith who passed away earlier in the week. He stated that Cllr. Smith was a great person to work with and that he worked tirelessly for his constituents over many years.

Numerous Members expressed their sympathy to the family of Cllr. Smith. They stated that he was great advocate for his region and was very fair in his dealings with everybody. It was stated that the late Cllr. Smith was a gentleman at all times.

**Proposed:** Cathaoirleach David Collins

**Seconded:** Cllr. Donal Lyons

**Unanimously agreed that**

*‘That the Assembly should pass a vote of Sympathy to the family of the late Cllr Sean Smith and that the meeting be adjourned for five minutes as a mark of respect to the late Cllr. Smith.’.*

- 2) **Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2022 (Circulated):**

Cllr. Declan McDonnell stated the importance of including the word ‘Unanimously agreed’ for all motions passed without a vote highlighting that this was not stated for the various Motions passed in December’s meeting.

Mr David Minton confirmed that this phrase would be added to the minutes from Decembers Assembly meeting regarding Motions where a vote was not taken and would be included for all such motions going forward.

**Proposed by:** Cllr. Donal Lyons

**Seconded by:** Cllr. David Maxwell

**And Unanimously Agreed:**

*"That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2022 be adopted including amendment proposed".*

**3) Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

**4) Planning and Economic Development**

**a) Presentation by DECC on 'Securing the Renewable Energy Transformation'**

Mr Conall McGettigan introduced those who had joined the meeting from the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC). These were Mr Philip Newsom (Principal Officer in the Renewable Electricity Division, Mr Paul O'Neil (Principal Officer in the Planning and Advisory Division), Ms Alana Johnson (Assistant Principal in the Renewable Electricity Division) and Mr Adam Fowler (AO in Renewable Electricity Division). Mr McGettigan thanked them all for attending the meeting. He explained that the presentations would centre around the Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework (RESPPF)

Mr Newsom thanked members for the opportunity to speak, he extended his condolences to the family of Cllr. Sean Smith. Mr Newsom and Mr Paul O'Neill gave presentations centred around the New Climate Action Plan and Governments efforts to decarbonise all sectors of Society. The presentation also explained that a Regional Renewable Electricity Strategy is to be developed by the assemblies for the Region, which is currently in the early stages of development, and the ambition to grow on and offshore energy in all areas of the Country.

Members noted the items below:

- The allocation of resources to Regional Assemblies was queried, it was emphasised that the Assemblies are already doing great work with little resources the hope was expressed that adequate additional resources would be allocated for the extra work.
- An Bord Pleanála turning down planning applications for a housing development due not being linked to public transport, the concern was raised whether policy was being looked at correctly by them, in the middle of a housing crisis.
- Opposition to wind farms was noted as a barrier to progress in this area.
- The issue of Data Centres was highlighted.
- It was queried whether fines would be issued for non-compliance.
- Members queried the focus on the East as a priority in the strategy as the wind strength in the West is better and offshore developments are less controversial within communities.
- It was noted that more awareness was needed around the benefits of Solar Generation
- Microgeneration grants are too small, and cost could be inhibitive for someone considering installing panels.
- Importance of Wave and Tidal was highlighted.
- Queried where the study into public perceptions was carried out as rural communities might have different opinions than those in the Cities.
- It was stated that we are not capitalising on the fact that we are an island nation.
- The issue of wind farms destroying landscapes was referenced, especially in areas of outstanding natural beauty, resulting in some areas being made difficult to live in.
- Noted that there appeared to be huge push back from ESB Networks regarding micro-generation.
- Issues with Smart Meters were highlighted including their limitations regarding 3 phase supply.
- Members noted that there needed to be a policy, setting out the obligations on facilitation of micro-generation. It was added that a definitive date was required for the delivery of this policy.

- Working with communities and small-scale generation, including farms and community centres, was highlighted as an important source of generation.

Mr. Newsom responded to the queries and advised that he was encouraged by the great support of renewable energy generation by Members. He stated that Offshore wind generation required a lot of work to build up resources. He agreed with Members that the West had great resources ready to be capitalised on. Mr. Newsom stated that although the wind strength is highest in the West it was more complicated to establish offshore Wind Farms there compared to those in the Irish Sea. He explained that the sea is shallower in the east which makes the generation and capture of electricity less complicated. Mr. Newsom stated that the best opportunities for the West would be in floating wind farms and the technology was not as advanced in this area. He stated that the question around adequate resources is a question for the Department of Housing, but he acknowledged the great work that the Assemblies are already carrying out. Mr. Newsom acknowledged that data centres added huge demand to the grid and that there was a benefit in having electricity generation proximate to the large-scale demands, emphasising the importance of energy parks. Mr. Newsom stated that fines are not the best way to address noncompliance and that it is better to encourage a collective push as a nation to address these issues. He stated that there was an increased awareness of microgeneration and its benefits. He added that smart meters were important for this to be progressed. Mr. Newsom stated that there were schemes aimed at small-scale generation including farms and community centres he added they are looking at providing financial support or tariffs for these groups. He informed Members that there were initiatives planned to increase the awareness of microgeneration and smart meters.

Mr Paul O'Neil responded to the query regarding An Bord Pleanála's decision, advising that it is their role to ensure the policy framework is in place to frame decisions in a better way and thereafter it is the role of An Bord Pleanála to consider the proposal having regard to all material considerations, including policy. He stated that there will be a new division in An Bord Pleanála that will deal with offshore and climate-related applications. He added that a big part of prioritising the East is based on the fact that the West Coast seabed drops off suddenly and the technology is not currently sufficiently advanced in this area for deployment but that it is anticipated that it will be in the coming period. He reassured Members that the West Coast is very much on the agenda of the Department.

Mr Minton thanked Mr Newsom and Mr O'Neill for their presentation and stated their objectives aligned with the Assembly's RSES. He added that he looked forward to working together in the future.

**b) Submission to National Parks and Wildlife Service – Strategy Statement (Circulated) (Slides at Appendix 1)**

Mr Conall McGettigan outlined the background to the new strategy and explained the new organisational structure. He stated the Assemblies views and comments on regarding the Strategy as set out in the report that had been circulated.

Cllr. Justin Warnock asked about progressing RPO 5.3 as the Leitrim CDP adoption was to be considered shortly. Mr McGettigan stated that he would bring an update regarding RPO 5.3 to the next meeting.

Cllr. Justin Warnock stated he would welcome the report at the next meeting and was glad that RPO 5.3 had been highlighted. Cllr. Warnock stated that he hoped that if one party was not in agreement then it would still go ahead and it is very important for Leitrim. Cllr. Donal Gilroy stated that he supported Cllr. Warnock's request.

Mr McGettigan agreed that the item would be made a priority and would be added to the Agenda for the February/March Meeting.

**Proposed:** Cllr. Declan McDonnell

**Seconded:** Cllr. David Collins

**Resolved that:**

*'Members note and agree the submission to National Parks and Wildlife Service – Strategy Statement'*

c) **Submission to SEA Scoping Consultation: EirGrid Implementation Plan 2023- 2028 (Circulated) (Presentation at Appendix 2)**

Mr Flanagan outlined that Members had been circulated with a submission made in respect of the Grid Implementation Plan. He highlighted that there is a difference in emphasis between what the Department and EirGrid are saying. Mr Flanagan summarised the concerns of the NWRA regarding the implementation plan. He highlighted the possibility of the midlands for energy generation. Mr Flanagan stated that EirGrid owned all the onshore and offshore transmission grid. He stated that there will be collaboration between the Assembly and Eirgrid and that it would be a two-way street.

Cllr. Donal Lyons thanked Mr Flanagan for his presentation he agreed that there seemed to be discrepancy between EirGrid and DECC in relation to offshore.

Cllr. Joe Sheridan emphasised the importance of dispersion of infrastructure, he added that there was great opportunity for community benefit but it was important that the benefits are dispersed across the region.

Mr Flanagan stated that Eirgrid was its own organisation with its own objectives but added that consistency was important. He stated that the plan was not at the stage of discussion of dispersion of infrastructure yet. Mr Flanagan stated that will keep members informed on any developments.

**Proposed:** Cllr. Donal Lyons

**Seconded:** Cllr. Joe Sheridan

**Resolved that:**

*'Members note and agree the submission to SEA Scoping Consultation: EirGrid Implementation Plan 2023- 2028'*

Mr Frank Flanagan advised that although not on the agenda, he wanted to take the opportunity to advise that a Draft Ministerial Direction had been issued in respect of the adopted Galway City Development Plan and that a consultation process was to be initiated by the City Council. He advised that a report would be brought to the Members or the Cathaoirleach in due course for consideration in making a submission.

5) **Conference/Training event update**

a) **Association of Irish Regions Conference – Bookings Open – 2023-2028**

Mr David Minton outlined the importance of the Event. He gave details regarding the Conference and the possible speakers. He emphasised the importance of the event and encouraged all Members to attend.

Cllr. Declan McDonnell also encouraged all Members to attend and enquired whether a meeting with Minister Micheal McGrath had been secured, as discussed at Decembers Assembly meeting.

Mr Minton informed members that he was in contact with the Ministers Private Secretary regarding a dedicated meeting with the Minister in Dublin after the AIR Conference. He stated no date had been confirmed but schedules were being compared and that he would keep members informed.

It was decided to wait for the details of the meeting to be confirmed before deciding attendees.

b) **Launch of ERDF Programme 21- 27 - Galway – January 25<sup>th</sup> 2023**

Mr Minton summarised the schedule for the launch, and he highlighted its importance for the Region and encouraged everyone to attend the event which was being held in the Portershed in Galway.

## 6) Correspondence

There was no correspondence received to report on since the last meeting.

## 7) Any other Business

### **Rahoon Development:**

Cllr. Niall Mc Nelis expressed his disappointment at An Bord Pleanála's rejection of an application for development with 71 housing units at Rahoon. He said that the reason for the refusal was the over reliance on car transport. He stated that these units were vitally important to tackle the continuing housing crisis. He added that if the region was serious about holding onto jobs we need to ensure there was adequate housing. Cllr. McNelis enquired whether this was an issue other Councillors were experiencing.

Cllr. Donal Lyons agreed with Cllr. McNelis regarding An Bord Pleanála's decision he said these decisions will have an impact on planning going forward. He asked that the NWRA could investigate further into this item.

Cllr. Declan McDonnell also voiced his annoyance at the refusal of planning. He stated it is difficult to know where to go to voice frustration.

Mr Minton acknowledged the Councillors frustration he stated that there were challenges relating to RPO's around compact urban growth, but he acknowledged there was also challenges relating to the delivery of housing. He stated that An Bord Pleanála has an independent role within planning adding that all that can be done is to trust in the process. Mr Minton stated that there would be an opportunity for scrutiny under the new Planning Bill, which he stated could be an avenue for Councillors to voice their opinions and concerns.

CE designate Mr Brendan McGrath agreed with Mr Minton adding that Galway City had added complexity as some of the City is a Protected European Habitat therefore almost all applications have to go to An Bord Pleanála, he stated the applications discussed were not appeal situations they were simply applications that were referred to An Bord Pleanála. He added that if the same methodology is used current applications in the pipeline will also be refused. Mr McGrath stated that the upcoming review of planning legislation should obligate An Bord Pleanála to actively implement 'Housing for All' not just have regard for the policy. He stated that if this obligation is not implemented then Galway City Council will struggle to build any houses at all.

### **Standing Orders and Remote / Hybrid Meetings:**

Cathaoirleach David Collins informed Members that there was a subcommittee to be set up to examine the Standing Orders in relation to remote / hybrid meetings going forward especially in situations of adverse weather conditions. He reminded Members that it was still not possible to have blended meetings, so they had to be either virtual or physical meetings.

Cllr. Declan Bree queried why this was needed, he stated that online meetings were introduced in response to Covid and that had largely subsided therefore meetings should be physical going forward.

Cllr. Donal Lyons stated that the standing orders do not cover the move online in the case of weather events therefore a Sub Committee was needed to amend the Standing Orders.

Cllr. Joe Sheridan highlighted the fact that the CE designate was able to answer Members questions at the meeting and he stated that this would be very difficult if the meeting was physical as they would have competing demands on their time.

Mr Minton stated that the Department is very keen to encourage flexibility. He added that he believes a Sub Committee should be established as it is not fair on anyone to be making decisions on a Thursday evening based on weather events. He added that currently the Standing Orders do not cover the change



of meetings to online based on weather events etc. Mr Minton suggested that the existing AIR Members could be brought together to discuss the Standing Orders. He stated that the other Regional Assemblies had been experiencing similar issues and he was eager that all three of the Assemblies would have the same policy therefore the AIR Members would be well placed to discuss this in conjunction with Members of the other Assemblies.

**Proposed:** Cllr. Declan McDonnell

**Seconded:** Cllr. Declan Bree

**Resolved that:**

*'A sub-committee of current AIR Members should be established to examine and update the Standing Orders. This examination would be in conjunction with Members of the other Regional Assemblies.'*

This concluded the business of the meeting.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **(Cathaoirleach)**      **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_