

**Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting
held on 17th February 2023 at 11am in Roscommon Chamber.**

Present:

Cllr. David Maxwell	Cllr. John Naughten	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn
Cllr. Tim Broderick	Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. Donal Lyons
Cllr. Orla Leyden	Cllr. Clifford Kelly	Cllr. Jack Murray
Cllr. Donal Gilroy	Cllr. Justin Warnock	Cllr. Niall McNelis
Cllr. Enda McGloin		

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, Cllr. Declan McDonnell, Cllr. Patrick McGowan, Cllr. Brian McKenna, Cllr. Jarlath Munnely, Cllr. Joe Sheridan, Mr. David Minton (Director)

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr. Denis Kelly Senior Planner / Assistant Director
Mr. Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)
Mr. Frank Flanagan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr. Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr. John Daly (Policy Research & Sustainable Development Officer)
Mr. Travis ODoherty (EU Programme Liaison Officer)
Ms. Catriona Meehan (Clerical Officer)

1) Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on the 20th January 2023 (Circulated):

Proposed by: Cllr. Donal Lyons

Seconded by: Cllr. David Maxwell

Resolved that:

“That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 20th January 2023 be adopted”.

2) Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3) Planning and Economic Development

a) Submission to Galway City Draft Direction (Circulated) – for noting

Mr Denis Kelly outlined that notification of the consultation on the Draft Direction was received on 18th January 2023. He advised that an Assembly Meeting was not available in advance of the final date for submissions and therefore, in accordance with agreed procedure, the approval of the Cathaoirleach was obtained for the submission before making it. He outlined the content of the submission to Galway City Council in respect of the Draft Direction. He summarized that the submission outlined two points.

- It recommended the reinstatement of 14 parcels of land that were proposed to be Zoned as R or R2 in the Proposed Material Alterations, back to Agriculture or Agriculture and High Amenity as provided within the Draft Development Plan.
- The report highlighted the issue of white lands where there is no proposed zoning of the area. The implication is that there are no objectives/policies for these areas. This is not consistent with RPO 3.6.14 as it creates uncertainty and moves away from plan lead development.

Mr Kelly requested that Members note the report.

Members Questions

Cllr. John Naughten enquired what was the status of 'white areas'.

Cllr. Donal Lyons stated that the OPR would benefit from a visit to the sites they are commenting on. He highlighted the recent issue regarding An Bord Pleanála rejecting planning permission for a housing development due to it being too car dependent. He stated it was a severe disappointment in the current housing crisis. Cllr. Lyons suggested that this decision would have impacts out to 2040.

Cllr. Niall McNelis noted that he respected An Bord Pleanála but that this application was for family housing adding the outcome was very disappointing.

Chief Executive Designate Brendan McGrath (Galway City Council) stated that he agreed with the Councillors that this was a very unfortunate outcome. He added that if this ruling was a sign of things to come there would be many more refusals in the coming years. Mr McGrath remarked that these decisions were 'Planning by Numbers'. Mr McGrath also noted other refusals including developments with Traveller specific accommodation. He highlighted again that some of these developments were close to the city. Mr McGrath questioned how housing targets were to be achieved with these obstacles.

Proposed: Cllr. Donal Lyons

Seconded: Cllr. John Naughten and

Unanimously Resolved that:

'Members note and agree the submission to Galway City Draft Direction - as circulated'

b) Draft Letterkenny Local Area Plan (LAP) and Local Transport Plan 2023-2029 (Slides at Appendix 1)

Mr Denis Kelly advised that this LAP was unique in that it is being made without the alignment of the County Donegal Development Plan with the NPF and RSES. He suggested that the better option would be for this process to stop until a review of the County Development Plan is completed. Mr Kelly stated it was not possible to do both at the same time as it would lead to significant issues with consistency, as outlined in the report that had been circulated. He asked that Conall McGettigan provide a briefing presentation to Members.

Mr Conall McGettigan synthesised the submission to the Draft LAP and LTP (Appendix 1) which outlined recommendations and observations. Mr McGettigan highlighted the lack of evidence-based data or methodology used to support/justify the provisions within the LAP. He highlighted the difficulty with the different boundary being proposed for the LAP compared to the RSES and the lack of context given to the North-West City Region. He emphasized issues with the target for housing unit completions, based on the performance to date. Mr McGettigan also noted that the Climate Action Plan may not be fully taken into account and that there was no mention of the MICA issue which would impact these plans greatly. Furthermore, he advised that the Public realm element of the Draft Plan is to be largely complemented, with the content within the Plan seeking to align with the Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy and the RSES RPO 3.7.26. However, he advised that it does not fully integrate two of the significant projects in the Regeneration Strategy and no rationale has been provided for their exclusion. One of the areas is Project C1 (LK Green Connect & Urban Wetlands) and the second is the complementary C2 Project (River Corridor & Greenway) He advised that the zoning of these areas, which were within flood zones was also problematic.

Cllr. Jack Murray welcomed the detailed report and broadly supported the issues raised. He acknowledged the support from NWRA adding that it was important to address the issues. Cllr. Murray noted that water resources also needed to be addresses. He emphasized the importance of the TenT to encourage potential business with Derry. Cllr. Murray stressed the impact that Mica will have on housing supply as there will need to be steps backwards before going forward to repair the buildings impacted. He stated this will be a huge challenge as it impacts private, social and public buildings.

Proposed: Cllr. Jack Murray

Seconded: Cllr. Justin Warnock

Unanimously Resolved that:

'Members note and agree the submission to Draft Letterkenny Local Area Plan and Local Transport Plan 2023-2029'

c) CSO Regional and County Disposable Income release (Slides at Appendix 2)

Mr John Daly presented a detailed summary of the figures outlined in the CSO report. These figures showed the large income inequality when comparing the Northern and Western Region with the State Average and the other two regions. Mr Daly examined many graphs which all indicated that the issue of the income inequality is getting worse not better. He also examined disposable income in the region in comparison with other regions in Europe, this further emphasized the concerning issue developing in our region. Mr Daly outlined what he believed were the reasons for this inequality, explaining that there was a lack of investment in infrastructure in the region. He stated that this led to weak urban structure and in turn less high value jobs.

Mr Daly stated that the answer to the issues highlighted in the report were:

- Positively discriminate in favour of the Northern and Western Region by providing a higher rate of capital investment – per head of population – in our region's infrastructure assets.
- Provide a sizeable stimulus package for the Northern and Western Region's economy to counter the economic impact of Brexit and COVID-19 and to provide a platform for the region to improve its performance as a "Transition Region", "Lagging Region" and a "Moderate Innovator"
- Support the strategic priorities of the RSES of the Northern and Western Region – namely for the region to be more "Urban", "Connected", "Smart", "Specialised", "Green" and focused on "People and Places"
- Adopt a fully integrated approach to funding that delivers effective regional development targets set out in the NPF and RSES of the Northern and Western Region

Comments from Councillors

- Members thanked Mr Daly for the presentation stating that the presentation had been clear, concise and portrayed an important message.
- Members enquired what could be done to address these issues, it was noted that many Local Authorities do not have the expertise or time to dedicate to accessing EU funds.
- It was noted that the Assembly stated it would help guide LA's through the application process, it was questioned whether these links had been set up.
- Members warned against portraying too negative of a picture of the region as this could scare of potential investors.
- It was highlighted by members that the figures for Galway City had probably distorted the Regions figures, meaning that the true figures excluding Galway City was even more worrying.
- The issue of Match Funding was highlighted as a major barrier.
- The importance of highlighting the issues in the report was stated. It was requested that the report be circulated to all members so they could draw further attention to it.
- It was mentioned that these figures were from 2021 therefore the issues were likely even worse now.

Mr Denis Kelly advised that there was a new EU funding guide developed by the Assembly to aid the Local Authorities in applying for funding and he introduced Mr Travis O' Doherty (EU Programmes Liaison Officer). Mr Travis O' Doherty circulated a copy of the EU Funding Guide that the NWRA has just published. He advised that the main objective of the guide is to provide an overview of how EU funding, and EU programmes operate. He outlined how it describes the main European Territorial Cooperation Programmes and other Programmes of interest for the NWRA region and outlines how to develop a project proposal and the application process. He advised that the guide provides an understanding of the scope and role that EU Programmes play to help support local authorities identify funding opportunities that match its work programmes and objectives -enabling local

authorities to plan ahead and budget for projects of interest. He advised that the next stage was to close out on providing assistance to those local authorities that had expressed an interest in preparing their own bespoke strategy.

Mr Travis O' Doherty also highlighted that the Assembly had established an EU Funding Network, which provides regular networking and information events, including regular newsletters. He advised that he was always available to help and advice. He agreed with members that match funding remained an issue.

Mr Daly agreed with members regarding the outdated 2021 figures regarding income inequality, stating that more up to date figures would provide a clearer picture. He also confirmed that if Galway City was removed the figures for the remainder of the region would alter considerably. Mr Daly emphasized again the need for positive discrimination for the region. He acknowledged that the map could look very negative for the region, but he added that these issues would not be addressed if they were not highlighted.

d) Research project on Marine Spatial Planning – Update

Mr Denis Kelly provided a brief update to Members, highlighting that there would be a workshop on March 7th adding that members would be kept up to date with the progress.

e) Publication of Draft Planning and Development Bill – for noting

Mr Denis Kelly asked members to note the publication of the pre-Draft Planning and Development Bill, and that the Directors of the three Assemblies had been invited to the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage pre-legislative scrutiny stage of the Draft Planning and Development Bill 2022. He stated that this gave the Director an opportunity to make observations to the draft. He suggested that an update could be given to the March Assembly Meeting.

4) Work Programme 2023 (Circulated)

Mr Gerry Doyle spoke to the Assembly's Work Programme for 2023 which he stated was an ambitious programme of work and went on to outline some of the main points contained therein. Mr Doyle thanked Members for attending the European Regional Development Programme Launch, in the Porter House Galway City, in January which he stated had been very successful. He noted that the Programme Launch booklet and the EU funding Guide, had been circulated to members. He added that over the coming months there would be individual schemes launched under the ERDF Programme which the Elected Representatives would be invited to.

Cllr. Niall McNelis acknowledged the high volume of work that went into the ERDF booklet and the Launch event. Cllr. McNelis noted that the Porter House was a great venue and that it was important to showcase venues like this and he enquired was there any feedback from the Commission regarding the launch. Mr. Gerry Doyle stated that the Commission had expressed immense satisfaction as to the organisation of the event and with their visit to the Salmon Weir Pedestrian and Cycle bridge currently nearing completion which is funded under the 2014-20 ERDF Programme.

Cllr. Declan Bree expressed disappointment in the fact that there was no introduction from the Cathaoirleach of the Assembly in the Programme launch booklet. He stated that we should acknowledge the role of the Cathaoirleach in any event organised by the Assembly. Cllr. Bree also asked if the Mayor of Galway City had been invited to speak. He stated that it was basic protocol to invite the Mayor to speak at an event of this magnitude hosted in their city.

Cllr. Lyons stated that the event had been very successful however he questioned why there were not more photos of the event circulated to promote the great work. He added that there was a great article published in a local paper however it was not accompanied with a picture. Cllr. Lyons stated that we

should be spreading the word about all the great work done by the Assembly. He stated he agreed with Cllr. Bree around the importance of the protocol of the Mayor of Galway.

Mr Gerry Doyle acknowledged the importance of recognising the Assembly's Cathaoirleach and the Cathaoirleach / Mayor of the locations where major events were held. He stated that the Mayor of Galway had attended the event in Galway but had not been invited to speak due to an oversight on the Assembly's behalf. He added that the Cathaoirleach of the Assembly was the first person to be invited to speak at the launch but that the absence of the introduction from the Cathaoirleach in the Programme launch booklet was an oversight which will be rectified in an online version to be uploaded to our website shortly. In addition he stated that brochures to be printed over the course of the Programme will be updated to include an introduction from the Cathaoirleach He confirmed that the Assembly would ensure that the Mayor / Cathaoirleach of any location where events were being held would be invited to speak at these events.

Proposed: Cllr. David Maxwell

Seconded: Cllr. Declan Bree

Unanimously agreed that:

'The Mayor / Cathaoirleach of any local authority in whose area a major event was being hosted would be invited to address the event as a standard protocol for all such events'

5) Conference and Training

The Cathaoirleach thanked Cllr. David Maxwell for a great two days in Monaghan, at the AIR event. He stated it was a credit to the organisers. He stated it was great to see councillors from around the region in attendance.

Cllr. Gilroy congratulated the organisers of the event stating that everything went very well. He added that there was a lot of information to take in and perhaps spreading it over more days would be beneficial.

Cllr. David Maxwell thanked all who attended noting that it was the first event with the three Assemblies working together and it had been a huge success.

6) Correspondence

Mr Gerry Doyle outlined the circulated responses and acknowledgements from the HSE.

Cllr. Donal Lyons stated that the response from the HSE was very disappointing as it did not address the issue outlined.

Mr Gerry Doyle agreed that a follow up request would be sent to urge a response to the matter urgently.

7) Any other Business

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____ (Cathaoirleach) Date: _____