

Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting held on the 15th of December 2023 at 11.00am in Roscommon Chamber.

Present:

Cllr. Jack Murray	Cllr. Joe Sheridan	Cllr. Justin Warnock
Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. John Caulfield	Cllr. Donal Gilroy
Cllr. Christy Hyland	Cllr. Orla Leyden	Cllr. Donal Lyons
Cllr. David Maxwell	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn	

Presided: Cllr. John Naughten (Cathaoirleach)

Apologies: Mr Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director), Cllr Brian McKenna, Cllr. Niall McNelis, Cllr. Patrick Mc Gowan, Cllr. Declan McDonnell, Cllr. Jarlath Munnely, Cllr Tim Broderick, Cllr. David Collins Cllr Michael Crowe, Cllr. Clifford Kelly, Cllr. Frank Mc Brearty, Cllr. Enda McGloin, Cllr. Áine Smith, Cllr. Enda Stenson.

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr Denis Kelly (Director)
Mr Conal McGettigan (Acting Assistant Director/Senior Executive Planner)
Mr Brendan Mooney (Acting Assistant Director ERDF)
Ms Tanya Whyte (Acting Senior Executive Planner)
Ms. Carmel Carrick Auditor.
Ms Catriona Meehan (Staff Officer)
Ms Claire Callaghan (Clerical Officer)

1. Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on the 17th of November 2023 (Circulated)

Proposed by: Cllr Donal Lyons

Seconded by: Cllr Donal Gilroy

And unanimously resolved that:

“That the minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Assembly held on the 17th of November be adopted”.

2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

At the request of the Elected Members from Sligo the Cathaoirleach agreed to start the meeting at point 6(b) of the agenda

3. Directors Update

Mr Denis Kelly (Director) welcomed Ms Tanya Whyte who has been appointed as Executive Planner and who will be Acting Senior Executive Planner until such time as the vacant position at Senior Executive Planner is filled.

Mr. Kelly gave an update on the recent meeting with the Taoiseach on the 8th of December in Monaghan. He stated that the meeting with the Taoiseach was very positive, and it gave NWRA an opportunity to highlight the ambitions of the RSES, showcase the EU Funding expertise within the NWRA and our role as National Contact point for a variety of programmes and as Managing Authority for the Regional Programme. The regional economic development trends and opportunities were explored, highlighting the disparities in infrastructure provision compared to the two other regions in the country. Mr Kelly stated that the Taoiseach welcomed the presentation and supported the concept of balanced regional development and acknowledged the argument for spatial equity across the country. He acknowledged a range of investments made within the region and that efforts to progress others were ongoing. Mr Kelly advised that a press release had been agreed with the Office of the Taoiseach following the meeting and that this would be circulated to Members.

Mr Kelly advised Members that, on 13th December 2023, the Assembly had received confirmation from the Chief Executive of Galway County Council, Mr Liam Conneally, that he is the Chief Executive Designate for a two-year period.

Members questions and comments

- Cathaoirleach John Naughten commented on how the meeting with the Taoiseach was very positive and he thanked the staff at the NWRA for their very professional presentations on the day. He also thanked all the members who attended on the day and engaged very well. He commented that it was onward and upward for the Region and more Government support was required and this meeting was a very worthwhile exercise.
- Cllr Jimmy McClearn stated the meeting was a good opportunity to tell our story. He commented on the fact that work has started on the clearing of the rail line from Athenry to Galway and this is very welcomed. We had to fight hard for this and the NWRA has been very positive regarding the development of rail. He felt the Taoiseach would have gone away from the meeting with a very positive picture of the NWRA.
- Cllr Donal Gilroy also commented on the good work been done by the NWRA. Cllr Gilroy also made the comment that Members should have received the press release before it was put up on social media.
- Cllr Joe Sheridan welcomed the clearing of the rail line and enquired whether there was much discussion on this matter with the Taoiseach and the issue regarding the Galway ring road.
- Cllr Donal Lyons thanked the staff of the NWRA for the meeting with the Taoiseach. He commented on the fact that West Galway is not booming like the rest of the country, he also enquired about getting an up-to-date report on the Galway bypass/ ring road and where this project is at.
- Cllr Christy Hyland agreed with the previous councillors that the meeting with the Taoiseach was a great day for the NWRA. He also raised concerns regarding the drop in tourist footfall at popular tourist attractions in Mayo, Downpatrick Head, Croke Patrick. Cllr Hyland also brought up his concerns around the number of fatal accidents on our roads noting the large financial burden on the state.

- Cllr Orla Leyden asked if the question regarding match funding was brought up at the meeting with the Taoiseach. She enquired had any update been received.

Responses

- The point regarding the dissemination the press release about the meeting with the Taoiseach was acknowledged however it was noted that there was time pressure to factor.
- Cathaoirleach John Naughten said the Taoiseach was very positive about the Galway ring road.
- Mr Denis Kelly will have the press release issued to Members.
- Mr Conall McGettigan will examine the figures and the wider impact they are having on the area and will come back to the assembly with an update at a future meeting.
- Mr Kelly added that the Taoiseach was very understanding of the issues of the Local Authorities in the Region regarding Match Funding however he did not commit fully to zero funding from Local Authorities.

4. Adoption of 2022 Audited Annual Financial Statement (AFS)

Following the completion of the Audit of the NWRA's Annual Financial Statement for 2022 by the Local Government Audit Service a copy of the Audited Annual Financial Statement was issued to the Members along with the agenda for the meeting. Ms Carmel Carrick Auditor went through the changes from the Draft Annual Financial Statement previously circulated which she stated were primarily down to the accounting treatment of recoups for expenditure made in 2022 which were not received until 2023.

Proposed by: Cllr Jimmy McClearn

Seconded by: Cllr Joe Sheridan

Unanimously agreed:

'To adopt the Final 2022 Annual Financial Statement as presented'

5. Adoption of 2022 Annual Report

Mr Denis Kelly summarized the report that had been circulated to Members. He stated that a lot of work had gone into the report thanking those who had contributed.

Proposed by: Cllr Donal Lyons

Seconded by : Cllr Jack Murray

Unanimously agreed:

'That Members adopt the Annual Report for 2022'

6. Planning and Economic Development

a) Submission to Carrick on Shannon – Joint Local Area Plan (2024 – 2030) Pre-Draft Consultation

Mr Conall McGettigan updated Members on the Joint Local Area Plan he stated that a full report will be presented at the next meeting as the report is at an early stage.

b) Consideration of the Review of the Draft Sligo County Development Plan 2024- 2030 (Slides at Appendix 1)

Ms Tanya Whyte gave a presentation on the draft Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2023, highlighting the volume of documents accompanying the draft plan, stating that the draft Plan was generally compliant with the RSES and outlining the emerging issues of concern for the Regional Assembly which included:

- Population targets for Sligo town are less than minimum targets in RSES.
- Housing – no serviced sites identified & need clarity on whether student accommodation included in calculations.
- No Building Heights Study carried out.
- No Renewable Energy Strategy although renewable energy addressed in the draft plan. A map depicting suitable areas for renewables would be useful.
- Not clear if there were calculations used for zoning for business, enterprise and industry.
- Not clear if there is a major tourist attraction proposed for Sligo town- reference to Sligo Goal but unclear if this is the project.
- No objectives for a National Park.
- Landscape Character Assessment not included. Map accompanying the draft plan is based on appraisal carried out in the 1990s.
- May be issues around flood risk and zoning.
- No timeframes associated with some objectives.

She advised that the submission for this was due on Friday the 22nd of December 2023 and that the finalised report would be agreed with the Cathaoirleach in advance of it being issued in accordance with established procedure.

Questions and comments

- Cllr Donal Gilroy make a number of points/comments including daytime increase in population and services not in place; engaging with private sector for provision of land for serviced sites; Renewable Energy Strategy should be included; acknowledged the point regarding a major tourist attraction stating that he didn't know it had to be in the town, he emphasised the importance of heritage as a tourist attraction e.g. Yeats and the Spanish Armada; Landscape Map should be updated; timeframes should be included on objectives to get things done.
- Cllr Bree stated all the points were worthy of consideration adding that he was looking forward to getting the documents.
- Cllr Donal Lyons raised the topic of local access to lake Arrow, stating that over the years a lot of the public access has been sold privately and this is now leaving only a few options of access to the lake for the locals.
- Cllr Justin Warnock raised the plantation of forestry in the county as a concern, especially around tourist sites.
- Members noted that the plan lacked an energy strategy stating that this needed to be highlighted.
- The issue of new Council Members passing plans that they had not contributed to was highlighted. It was noted that the timing of the draft plan was not ideal.

Responses

- Ms Tanya Whyte outlined that while not a regional assembly matter, there can be issues in relation to land ownership and access to lakes, including historic rights of ways and

these may be on deeds/folios. Land Registry map may provide information on the matter.

She also outlined that there are objectives for forestry in the draft Plan.

- Mr Conall McGettigan stated that the timeframe was tight, but he would be in contact with Cllr Bree and Cllr Gilroy on Monday in relation to the final report.

c) Consideration of Draft Cavan Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 – 2029

A summary of the Draft Cavan Local Economic and Community Plan was presented to Members. Mr Conall McGettigan spoke on the planning and economic issues impacting Cavan, he mentioned that 20% of Cavan's employment leaves the county every day.

Proposed by: Cllr David Maxwell

Seconded by: Cllr Donal Gilroy

Unanimously agreed:

'That Members note the Draft Cavan Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 – 2029'

d) Consideration of Draft Monaghan Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 – 2029

A summary of the Draft Monaghan Local Economic and Community Plan was presented to Members.

Proposed by: Cllr Donal Gilroy

Seconded by: Cllr Donal Lyons

Unanimously agreed:

'That Members note the Draft Cavan Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 – 2029'

e) Consideration of Variation to Donegal CDP 2018 – 2024, to delete Letterkenny Specific Content in CDP

Mr McGettigan advised Members that the Assembly received notification on 1st December that this Variation is to be made to remove the local policies relating to Letterkenny Town Plan area from the County Development Plan, now that the Local Area Plan is adopted. He advised that the report for is to be submitted by the 8th of January. He advised that there was insufficient time to have a report prepared for this meeting and that in accordance with agreed practice the report will be agreed with the Cathaoirleach before a submission is made and the report shall be brought to the January Assembly Meeting for noting.

7. Report on Study visit to Denmark

Mr Mooney gave an overview of the itinerary of the study visit on behalf of Members that attended, stating it was a great opportunity for staff and members to get an understanding of Regional Government in a less centralised structure than Ireland. Members received a presentation on how a decentralized system operates and the benefits that come from this system. The study visit included a meeting with the officials of the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme, where they received a presentation from the officials in relation to new funding opportunities for our region. A presentation was also made on behalf of the NWRA to the staff of the NPA in memory of Rachel Burn R.I.P.

Members also got an opportunity to see the benefit of investment in walking and cycling infrastructure with a walking tour of Copenhagen. On day three the party got to visit a Powerplant on Copenhill, this power plant has a ski slope built on top of the incineration plant that provided district heating to a large part of the city. The study visit also included meeting the Irish Ambassador to Denmark, Ambassador Elizabeth McCullough, who expressed great interest in the work the NWRA.

- Cathaoirleach John Naughton thanked Brendan Mooney for his presentation on behalf of the attendees and he thanked all the staff for the research and planning that went into the trip and acknowledged that we can learn so much from these study visits. Cathaoirleach also thanked Cllr Jimmy McClearn who stepped in to represent the Cathaoirleach for the duration of the study visit.
- Cllr Jimmy McClearn commented on the great relationship Ireland has with the Nordic countries and feels we can learn a lot from these and how they operate the regional systems.
- Cllr Joe Sheridan found the trip very beneficial on a personal, Business and economic and environmental level, with a lot of learnings to take from the visit. He was very impressed with how the citizens engage with the Government. Cllr Sheridan thanked the staff of the NWRA for organising the trip.
- Cllr Justin Warnock thanked the NWRA for the trip and commented on the centralization of the regional government and how each region should be responsible for themselves.
- It was suggested by some of the members to have an Assembly meeting on Clare Island in the spring of 2024.
- Mr Denis Kelly thanked the members on their positive feedback from the visit to Denmark.

8. Any other Business

- Mr Denis Kelly advised the members that he has been asked to sit on the board with the Galway Culture Company, this was a previous agreement in place with previous director Mr David Minton.
- Cllr Orla Leydon brought to the members attention that the Roscommon Town draft LAP has gone on display from the 15th of December 2023 to the 5th of February 2024 and acknowledged this was a tight time frame.
- Cllr Donal Lyons also mentioned the issues with Broadband across the region.
- The issue with connection to Eirgrid was raised.
- Mr Denis Kelly confirmed that they could follow up with Eirgrid on availability to brief Members.

Cathaoirleach John Naughten proposed that Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan should be invited to attend one of the Assembly meetings in 2024 adding that a letter be sent to initiate the invitation.

Proposed: Cathaoirleach John Naughten

Seconded: Cllr Donal Lyons

Unanimously agreed

'that a letter will be sent to Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan inviting him to attend an Assembly Meeting in 2024.'



Northern & Western Regional Assembly

Proposed : Cllr Joe Sheridan

Seconded : Cllr Donal Lyons

Unanimously agreed:

'that a presentation be given to Members regarding Eirgrid and any potential connection issues'

Cathaoirleach John Naughten thanked all the staff of the NWRA, the members and wished them all a very Happy Christmas.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____

Date _____

16/02/24

