

**Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Special Meeting
held on 27th of October 2023 at 11am in Roscommon County Council Chamber.**

Present:

Cllr. John Caulfield
Cllr. Orla Leyden
Cllr. Donal Gilroy
Cllr. Brian McKenna
Cllr. Christy Hyland

Cllr. Declan Bree
Cllr. Tim Broderick
Cllr. Donal Lyons
Cllr. John Naughten
Cllr. Áine Smith

Cllr. Niall McNelis
Cllr. Declan McDonnell
Cllr. David Maxwell

Special Guests Present:

Colm Markey MEP
Chris McManus MEP

Presided: Cllr. John Naughten (Cathaoirleach)

Apologies: Cllr. David Collins, Cllr. Michael Crowe, Cllr. Clifford Kelly, Cllr. Frank McBrearty, Cllr. Jimmy McClearn, Cllr. Enda McGloin, Cllr. Patrick McGowan, Cllr. Jarlath Munnelly, Cllr. Jack Murray, Cllr. Joe Sheridan, Cllr. Enda Stenson, Cllr. Justin Warnock, Luke Ming Flanagan MEP

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr. Denis Kelly (Director)
Mr. Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)
Mr. Frank Flanagan (A/Assistant Director / Senior Planner)
Mr. Brendan Mooney (A/Assistant Director)
Mr. Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr. John Daly (Policy Research Officer)
Ms. Eimeár Dowd (Regional Development Officer)
Ms. Marie Moriarty (Assistant Staff Officer)
Mr. Travis O'Doherty (EU Programmes Liaison Officer)
Mr. Noel Ballantyne (GIS Officer)
Ms. Catriona Meehan (Staff Officer)
Ms. Eileen McSweeney (Clerical Officer)

1) Introductions / Welcome

On behalf of all members Cathaoirleach Cllr. Naughten welcomed Chris MacManus MEP and Colm Markey MEP to the Assembly. Cllr. Naughten stated that the need to tackle regional inequality was greater than ever. He added that if the region is to overcome the many challenges associated with being categorised as a 'lagging region', support is required at both National and European level.

Chris McManus MEP stated all levels of government need to work with a common goal to ensure the region does not remain a 'lagging region'.

Response from Cathaoirleach

Cllr. Naughten thanked Chris McManus MEP and Colm Markey MEP for his understanding of the issues facing the Region. Cllr. Naughten stated that all levels of government need to work together to achieve common goals for the region.

4) Feedback and queries from the Elected Members of the Assembly

- Members thanked both MEP's for outlining their thoughts. All members were in agreement that connectivity, infrastructure and balanced regional development are crucial in order to attract investment into the region. Specific questions arose relating to the development of the Galway Ring Road, the N15, and the extension of the N17. Furthermore, investment for the new port in Galway and the extension of the Western Rail Corridor to Sligo was stated as being essential for our Region.
- Members agreed that better communication is needed between local government and the EU. Members queried if the introduction of an EU Funding Officer in each local authority would be introduced before a change of MEPs next year. Furthermore, what immediate steps can be taken to simplify audit process of EU funding.
- Members agreed it was disappointing to learn there is no Irish MEP on the Regional Development Committee. Members asked both MEPs if they were re-elected would they join said committee.
- Members stated the importance of investing in cybersecurity. It was widely agreed that it is a crucial matter to invest in.
- Members advised decision making in Ireland is heavily centralized. Regions should have more autonomy when making decisions on the allocation of EU funding.
- Members queried the provision of the common health area and whether this will be implemented in the near future.
- The rising issue of cocaine in Ireland was noted by members.
- Members raised the question of whether Ireland in comparison to other EU countries is overperforming, underperforming or meeting targets in respect to our response to the provision of services to the refugees coming from Ukraine.



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- Colm Markey MEP outlined that the Irish language has been recognised as an official working language in the EU which in turn creates opportunities for translators. He advised he will commit to making a speech in Irish before the end of term. In addition, Chris McManus MEP outlined he will make a speech in Irish to ensure the Irish language is used at EU level.
- Overall, both MEP's advised members that cohesion, a balanced economic development and a bottom-up approach to decision making are essential to investment in the region.

Response from Cathaoirleach

Cllr. Naughten thanked both MEPs for taking the time to speak with the assembly.

It was noted that the Assembly will pass the proposal to maintain communication with MEPs at the next assembly meeting.

5) Any other Business

Mr. Denis Kelly (Director) advised members that Mr Frank Flanagan (A/Assistant Director / Senior Planner) is retiring from the NWRA. He began by highlighting the significant contributions that Mr. Flanagan had made to the region and congratulated him on his retirement. Mr. Kelly stated that Mr. Flanagan has been a pillar of support and very knowledgeable in all areas relating to planning and economic development.

Cllr. Naughten echoed the words of Mr. Kelly and sincerely congratulated Mr. Flanagan on his retirement. Cllr. Naughten paid tribute to Mr. Flanagan's pragmatic approach to planning. Mr. Flanagan ensured to look beyond the planning laws and saw the people it would affect. Within the NWRA, Mr. Flanagan took on a regional strategic role where his knowledge, wise head and quick wit will be missed. Cllr. Naughten expressed his sincere wishes to Mr. Flanagan and wished him a long, happy, and healthy retirement.

Members expressed their sincere thanks and gratitude to Mr. Flanagan for his service to the public.

Mr. Flanagan thanked Cllr. Naughten, Mr. Kelly and members for their kind words.

Cllr. Naughten also thanked Mr. Flanagan for his long service to Roscommon County Council and for the difference he has made to this region.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed:  (Cathaoirleach)

Date: 17-11-2023