



Northern & Western Regional Assembly

Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting held on the 15th March 2024 at 11.00am in Roscommon Chamber

Present:

Cllr. Jack Murray	Cllr. Donal Gilroy	Cllr. Declan McDonnell
Cllr. Christy Hyland	Cllr. Orla Leyden	Cllr. Donal Lyons
Cllr. Tim Broderick	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn	Cllr. Patrick McGowan
Cllr. Brian McKenna	Cllr Niall McNelis	Cllr Aine Smith
	Cllr Enda Stenson	Cllr. Clifford Kelly

Presided: Cllr. John Naughten (Cathaoirleach)

Apologies:

Cllr. David Collins, Cllr Michael Crowe, Cllr Frank McBrearty, Cllr Enda McGloin, Cllr. David Maxwell, Mr. Liam Conneally (Chief Executive Designate). Cllr. Declan Bree, Cllr. John Caulfield, Cllr. Justin Warnock, Cllr. Jarlath Munnely, Cllr. Joe Sheridan.

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr. Denis Kelly (Director)
Mr. Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director HR/Corporate/External Engagement)
Mr. Paddy Austin (Assistant Director ERDF)
Mr. Conall McGettigan (A/ Senior Planner/Assistant Director)
Mr. Brendan Mooney (Programme Executive)
Ms. Tanya Whyte (Acting Senior Executive Planner)
Mr. Declan Meehan (Acting Senior Executive Planner)
Ms. Eimear Dowd (Regional Development Officer)
Ms. Carmel Carrick (Auditor)
Ms. Alison Ruane (Assistant Staff Officer)
Ms. Claire Callaghan (Clerical Officer)

Cathaoirleach John Naughten welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on February 16th (Circulated)

Proposed by: Cllr Jimmy McClearn

Seconded by: Cllr Niall McNeils

And unanimously resolved that:

“The minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Assembly held on February 16th, 2024, be adopted”.

2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

3. Planning and Economic Development

- (i) **Submission to Draft Ministerial Direction to Athenry LAP 2024 –2030 (for noting)**
This presentation had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting.

Proposed by: Cllr Donal Gilroy
Seconded by: Cllr Enda Stenson

and unanimously resolved that:

“The Assembly endorse the report and that a submission be made as set out in the report submission as recommended.”

- (ii) **Draft Donegal Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) 2023 – 2029’**

Mr. Conall McGettigan spoke on the proposed submission which had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting.

Cllr Patrick McGowan thanked the NWR planning team and welcomed the report.

Proposed by: Cllr Donal Gilroy
Seconded by: Cllr Enda Stenson

and unanimously resolved that:

“That a Statement on the Draft Donegal Local Economic & Community Plan 2023-2029 be made in accordance with the report furnished.”

4. Presentation on Data2sustain – Mr Gerry Doyle Assistant Director NWRA and Mr Mike Conroy Director Data2sustain. (Appendix 1)

Mike Conroy ATU, Director Data2sustain and Gerry Doyle Assistant Director NWRA gave a joint presentation (included at Appendix 1 & 2) on Data2sustain. Gerry Doyle advised that Data2sustain, a newly established European Digital Innovation Hub for the region will assist SME’s and public bodies in delivering digital transformation which will boost our competitiveness and will assist in delivering a smarter, more connected region.

Mr. Mike Conroy, Director of Data2sustain, advised that the Data2Sustain program provides an excellent mechanism to access dedicated digital leadership, backed by a coordinated ecosystem of relevant sectoral expertise, to carry out projects to the benefits of the region’s enterprises.

Cathaoirleach John Naughten thanked Mr. Conroy and Mr. Doyle for a very interesting joint presentation and said considering the extreme cost of developing products with the most up to

date technologies this was a great opportunity for SMEs to get free assistance and support

Members Questions and Comments

- Cllr Patrick McGowan said many counties in the region are playing catch up on developments in technology, including Donegal. He said there should be more presentations on projects like this so that they as Councilors can bring the information back to their constituents.
- Cllr Orla Leyden praised Mr. Conroy for this presentation and acknowledged his experience in this field. She asked if there is a roadmap for digitalisation for companies and does the service being offered cover costs?
- Cllr Niall McNeils thanked Mr. Conroy for the excellent presentation. He asked if cyber security is a problem as this is the biggest risk for SMEs presently. He also queried the benefits and threats coming from the development of AI.

Responses

Mr. Conroy acknowledged the different challenges for various parts of the region. He stated that Industry cannot be strong without a strong technology sector, and that this is an opportunity to strengthen the links between the counties and the overall region. Regarding cyber security, Mr. Conroy stated that Cyber Ireland is a very good option for advice and support. He stated that there is a lot that needs to be addressed regarding AI legislation and some aspects are very concerning and hopefully some of the new legislation being introduced will find the right balance.

Gerry Doyle responded that the NWRA will continue to work with other Assemblies and the local authorities to get support relating to cybersecurity.

Denis Kelly thanked Gerry Doyle and Mike Conroy for their work to date and said future presentations will be provided on progress over the coming 12-18 months.

Cathaoirleach John Naughten thanked Mr. Conroy and Mr. Doyle for an interesting joint presentation and said considering the extreme cost of developing products with the most up to date technologies that this was a terrific opportunity for SMEs to get free assistance and support

5. Presentation by Dr. Karl Murphy European Union Affairs Officer, the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly, on URBACT and the European Urban Initiative. (Appendix 3)

Dr. Karl Murphy gave a detailed presentation on URBACT and the European Urban Initiative (EUI) , see Appendix 3.

Cathaoirleach John Naughten thanked Dr. Karl Murphy for his presentation and commented on how this opens opportunities for cities and larger towns, and the further development of the region going forward.

Following queries from the Elected Members, Dr Murphy acknowledged that it can be difficult to make up the 50k population requirement which is set out by the EU for URBACT. Dr Murphy confirmed that he would be happy to assist the Members if they had further queries.

6. ERDF Update

Paddy Austin Assistant Director gave an update on the ERDF Programmes, under Priorities 1, 2 and 3. He advised that the Warmer Homes Scheme had a lower uptake than what had been expected, and that it should be at 25% and was only currently at 8%. The uptake is lower than in other regions and needs to be addressed.

He advised that the Thrive Programme has now been launched and the ERDF team have met all the local authorities in the region who are preparing applications. Paddy Austin advised that the Elected Members should encourage, as appropriate, their local authorities to submit strong applications.

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Members Questions and comments

Cllr Patrick McGowan requested more information/reports on the warmer homes Scheme as he is getting a lot of queries on it. Cllr Donal Gilroy requested a representative from SEAI to attend the Assembly to speak to the Members regarding the scheme and its low uptake. Cllr Niall McNeils also referred to SEAI and said that this should be on the next agenda.

Cllr Orla Leyden enquired as to whether the Local Authority have to be in ownership of the building at the start for strand 1 to be able to apply for strand 2.

Following queries from the Elected Members Mr. Paddy Austin responded to questions raised and stated that in relation to the Warmer Home scheme, the low uptake and issues causing this, he will have a call with the SEAI in the next few weeks and will then report back to the Members.

He stated that in relation to THRIVE Strand 2 a call will close in May, buildings must be under the control of the local authorities and local authorities must be ready to start work straight away. Strand 2 is very competitive with a lot of Local Authorities showing interest.

Mr. Paddy Austin advised Members that this was Mr. Brendan Mooney's final day with the NWRA as he had secured promotion to Enterprise Ireland.

Cathaoirleach John Naughten along with all the members commended Brendan Mooney in performance of his duties since taking up employment with the Assembly in 2015. Members wished him the best of luck for the future.

Mr. Denis Kelly, Mr. Paddy Austin & Mr. Gerry Doyle made individual contributions acknowledging the high quality, informed and professional standard that Brendan had brought to each of the teams he had worked with over the years and wished Brendan the best of luck in his new role with Enterprise Ireland.

7. Feedback from Members on the AIR Training Seminar held in Limerick from 7th – 9th February.

Mr. Gerry Doyle gave a detailed update on behalf of all Members that attended the training Seminar. Following the update, the Cathaoirleach invited individual Members to contribute.

- Cllr Declan McDonnell highlighted this was one of the best Seminars for a long time, the quality of the panel was very well received, and it got some significant publicity.
- Cllr John Naughten referred to the regional focus of the Conference and thanked



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Cllr Leyden, Cllr Maxwell, Denis Kelly and Brendan Mooney, who participated on panels. He said this is something unique we need to continue and mentioned the quality of the excellent speakers.

- Cllr Donal Gilroy was part of the organizing committee and agreed with previous feedback. He said that while attendance by Assembly Members was good, there was an opportunity to increase attendance at any future Training Seminar, as the Seminar was of high quality and hugely relevant.

8. Correspondence

Mr. Gerry Doyle provided an update on responses received to the letters to Party leaders following last month's Assembly. He asked members if they wanted him to pursue the answers they received and send another response to the leader of Fianna Fáil and the leader of Sinn Féin.

Members expressed disappointment at the response received from the Tanaiste's office and asked for a further letter to go to him asking for a meeting in his role as Leader of the Fianna Fail Party. This was unanimously agreed.

9. Any other Business

Cathaoirleach advised that Cllr Justin Warnock's sister, Mary Curneen, has passed away and condolences were expressed unanimously by members present.

This concluded the business of the meeting at 1.50 pm.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

John Doyle
19 / 4 / 24

