

# Southern Regional Assembly

## Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 08<sup>th</sup> June 2018

**Presiding:** Cllr. Larry O'Brien, Cathaoirleach

**Present:** Cllr. R. Beasley, Cllr. P. Breen, Cllr. J Carroll, Cllr K. Conway, Cllr. H. Cremin, Cllr. S.C. Fitzgerald, Cllr. D. Forde, Cllr. D. Geoghegan, Cllr. J. Leddin, Cllr. T. McEllistrim, Cllr. P. McMahon, Cllr. Gearóid Murphy, Cllr. Gerard Murphy, Cllr. M. Murphy, Cllr. D. O'Brien, Cllr. M. Ryan, Cllr. M. Shields, Cllr. B Slattery, Cllr. O. Walsh.

**Apologies:** Cllr. J. Brennan, Cllr D. Foley, Cllr. K. McCarthy, Cllr P. Millea.

**Officials Present:** Mr. T. Lucey, Designated Manager; Mr. Stephen Blair, Director; Mr David Kelly, Asst. Director; Mr. Kevin Lynch, Assistant Director; Ms. Sharon Murray, PE; Ms Derville Brennan, PE; Mr. Dominic Walsh, A/Snr. Planner; Ms Karen Coughlan, ASO.

### 1. Adoption of Minutes of Meeting held on 11th May 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 2018 were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. Kevin Conway and seconded by Cllr. Mattie Ryan.

### 2. Matters Arising

There was a general inquiry about revising the draft RSES deadlines and whether it was appropriate to discuss this under matters arising or AOB.

**Mr Stephen Blair** said if the members wanted to discuss this now it could be done so under matters arising confirming the timelines for the draft RSES are for the Councillors to determine. In terms of reviewing the timelines for the RSES Mr Blair reminded all that he was mindful of the elections in May 2019. The elections were in part dictating the timeframe as he didn't want the members to be under undue pressure to satisfy RSES statutory requirements around election time. Mr Blair said the ambition was to get all work on the draft RSES completed and ready for adoption at the September meeting. He informed that the Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly had met that morning and agreed to issuing their draft RSES for public consultation at the Assembly meeting scheduled in September.

Mr Blair advised the intention was to present the members with bite-sized portions of the draft to facilitate understanding and subsequent adoption suggesting they see how much material could be digested before the workshop scheduled for the 22<sup>nd</sup> June. He reminded Members of the reliance on outside organisations to feed in critical information and whilst the Assembly are actively engaged not all the key players are providing the required information on time. There are key ingredients outstanding from the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government. Mr Blair proposed going as far as possible by July and reassess at the scheduled meeting.

**Cllr Kevin Conway** informed that the annual meeting of Cork County Council was scheduled for the 22<sup>nd</sup> June and is aware of at least one other Authority in the same position, he proposed changing the date of the workshop and pushing the draft RSES out to September.

**Cllr Bill Slattery** seconded this proposal informing Clare County Council also had their AGM on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Cllr Gerard Murphy** queried the definition of 'rural' being classified as towns of less than 10,000 population saying the figures in the NPF are not feasible and will never satisfy the rural Cllr's. He asked what can be done in relation to this and if the figures have to be stuck by rigidly. He wanted to know how this can be progressed.

**Mr Stephen Blair** responded explaining there are certain key ingredients still required with the expectation that the population projections would have been issued in time for this meeting. Subsequently there is currently nothing concrete to base anything on however he is confident that projected figures when issued will be more generous than expected.

**Cllr Bill Slattery** wanted clarification on postponing the upcoming SPA workshop.

**Mr Stephen Blair** inquired if the 21<sup>st</sup> would work for the majority to which everyone agreed. **The revised date of the workshop was confirmed as the 21<sup>st</sup> June with a start time of 11.30.**

**All agreed that the adoption of the draft RSES for public consultation would be deferred to the September meeting.**

**Cllr Joe Carroll** agreed with Cllr Murphy's previous comments that the populations figures for Cork County fell way below expectation. He expressed his dissatisfaction at the aspirational tone of the NPF saying there was no growth predicted for Cork county. The CASP area will grow but any housing planned will be absorbed by the areas such as Carrigaline. He reiterated that Cork County were unhappy with what had been produced.

**Mr Stephen Blair** reminded Cllr Carroll there were no figures yet to corroborate this, the staff of Cork County Council may have produced figures but there is nothing official to base them on yet. Mr Blair said what he has seen sight-off to date indicates that the figures are very generous and feels that most will be pleasantly surprised.

**Cllr Deirdre Forde** inquired if the Assembly will have a specific investment package.

**Mr Stephen Blair** clarified that there are 2 principal funds, Urban and Rural, both being administered by the Department of Housing Planning & Local Government. For projects to be eligible they must demonstrate consistency to both the NPF and relevant RSES. The Assembly members will set the framework for the project criteria within the RSES.

**Cllr Gerard Murphy** inquired about the proposal of moving 20% of the metropolitan area of Cork to the CASP area asking who is tasked with making these decisions.

**Cllr Kevin Conway** inquired if the allocations for Cork City & County are based on present or proposed boundaries.

**Cllr Robert Beasley** cautioned that while the growth of towns and cities will happen the villages are still in decline.

**Cllr Gearóid Murphy** reflected that while he welcomed the aforementioned final projected figures being more generous than expected actions speak louder than words. It is very discouraging that the Department are not coming back to confirm projections. Based on the NPF Cork County allocation is

going be half of what it was in 2016. Cllr Murphy has seen nothing to refute these observations and stressed the urgency of getting clarification. He requested that someone who was in a position to answer these questions be invited to address the Assembly.

**Cllr Mattie Ryan** said it gets more depressing every time he looks at this, many villages have lost schools and there are 38 villages with no sewerage in his county alone. The pilot scheme to tackle this only facilitated 5 village sewerage schemes. In his opinion the rural fund is insufficient, it could go solely towards facilitating Tipperary putting proper sewerage in place alone.

**Cllr Larry O'Brien** recalled a clinic he attended last week where the issues of planning restrictions as a result of insufficient sewerage were raised. He inquired what options do the members have if there is dissatisfaction when the figures are finally issued.

**Mr Stephen Blair** clarified that regional strategy has to be consistent with the NPF and as such the overarching figures in the NPF must be used. However how the region is developed is within remit of the Assembly. He outlined the three prescribed layers:

1. National
2. 3 Regions
3. 5 Cities

Beyond these layers there is nothing prescribed, following this will be metropolitan areas and constituent counties. Mr Blair explained the Assembly will then take the figures and apply them to meet policy objectives in the Regional Strategies, the Local Authorities are responsible for sub-county figures and will decide themselves which towns to target. The Assembly are tasked with creating the framework conditions to satisfy requirements. Mr Blair suggested bringing Irish Water on site to develop policy that will dictate Irish Water Investment strategy.

Mr Blair reclarified what is within the remit of the RSES which includes setting Regional Targets which in turn will filter down to county level and principal towns after which the average growth rate is applied. The Local Authority must then decide how to distribute this across the county. To facilitate this the Assembly must identify policy drivers and apply figures and methodology.

**Cllr Joe Carroll** inquired if Irish Water and Transport Infrastructure Ireland would follow the RSES.

**Mr Stephen Blair** explained the rationale behind consulting with all key players was to ensure their commitment to policy and funding. He confirmed that Irish Water will commit policy and money.

**Cllr Larry O'Brien** referred to a village of approximately 800 inhabitants with sewerage facilities for only 300 which is not sufficient. He inquired if Irish Water plan to upgrade for these kinds of villages.

**Cllr Gerard Murphy** inquired who makes the decision on the fact that the guidelines between the Metropolitan Area of Cork & CASP vary by 20%.

**Mr Stephen Blair** stated the intention is the MASP will form the overall part of the plans. The reality is Local Authorities will be working from existing situations ascertaining where the housing needs are to meet the population targets, all growth won't happen in Cork City. Mr Blair agreed there is collaboration needed between Cork City, Cork County and the Assembly assuring that analysis will be brought before the chamber for decisions. Mr Blair informed the intention is that investment will be plan-led. The RSES will identify places where growth is needed, and Irish Water will follow to put the infrastructure in place to support this.

**Cllr Deirdre O'Brien** inquired who brings the information back to the Local Authorities elected members and how does information flow.

**Mr Stephen Blair** informed the Assembly will be working with the technical staff in the Local Authorities completing assessments which will be brought before the Assembly and Local Authority members.

**Mr Tim Lucey** commented on the tight deadlines for the RSES in light of crucial information still missing; population figures, details on the MASP and lack of guidance on issues raised to date. Mr Lucey clarified the methodology being used by Cork for population projections is the current population figure of 1 million for the Southern Region. He remarked on the fact that some critical papers are not available to Chief Executives who in turn can't brief their members. Mr Lucey agreed it is critical that the RSES be adopted prior to the elections therefore it can't be deferred beyond September.

### **3. Planning Matters**

Before commencing on the planning matters Mr Kevin Lynch, who was recently appointed to the role of Assistant Director/Senior Planner, said he was pleased to be here addressing the members giving them a brief overview of his career to date. He informed there were two submissions for noting at today's meeting:

- SRA submission to the Draft Tralee Municipal District Local Area Plan;
- SRA submission to Proposed Variation No 5 of the Tralee Town Development Plan 2009-2015.

Both related to Tralee and as such would be noted together. Mr Kevin Lynch said on assessment both submissions were consistent with the Kerry Local Development Plan, the South-West Regional Planning Guidelines and the National Planning Framework and were recorded as noted.

### **4. Presentation on the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES).**

**Mr Stephen Blair** wanted to put the presentation in context explaining the intention is to bring the Cllr's along on the RSES journey through bite-sized pieces. The first stage being delivered through the SPA meetings which focused on the Rural Development Policy and today being the equivalent for the Urban areas however these were not mutually exclusive. Mr Blair reminded the Members of the RSES mission which is to promote and develop all parts of the region to improve quality of life, the urban aspect forms part of the overall strategy.

**Cllr Bill Slattery** raised an issue around the circulars issued relating to the three metropolitan areas referring to a boundary map produced by AIRO which includes settlements in Clare. He referred to page 45 of the NPF referencing further growth objecting that they had taken out 'Shannon' from the Limerick Metropolitan Area. Cllr Slattery proposed an amendment to put Shannon back in stating the title should be the Limerick-Shannon metropolitan area confirming Limerick were in agreement with this proposal.

**Cllr Joe Leddin** seconded this proposal.

**Mr Stephen Blair** said the Metropolitan areas had not yet been defined and this would be the responsibility of both the Assembly and the Local Authorities and that the circular on population will also deal with metropolitan areas. Mr Blair confirmed there is no desire to exclude Shannon saying Shannon town and airport will form part of the metropolitan area.

**Cllr Bill Slattery** asked for confirmation that Shannon would be replaced back in the title.

**Mr Stephen Blair** reminded that the draft text will be coming to the Members who will advise on the terminology to use.

**Cllr Bill Slattery** stressed he wanted this revision immediately which Mr Blair noted.

**Mr Kevin Lynch** gave a presentation on the RSES covering the following areas:

- Emerging structure of the RSES;
- Regional Strategic Outcome: Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities;
- National Strategic Outcome: Compact Growth;
- NPF Policy Support for our Urban Areas;
- EU Good Practice: ESPON 2nd Tier Cities;
- The Urban Agenda for the EU;
- EU Committee of the Regions (CoR): Regional Innovation Ecosystems-Learning from EU's Cities and Regions;
- Sustainable Place Framework for the RSES;
- Metropolitan Areas and MASP's;
- Key Future Growth Enablers for cities of the Southern Region;
- Regional Growth Centres;
- New Regional and Development Funds;
- Emerging Policies and Objectives.

**Cllr Larry O'Brien** remarked on the fact there was no mention of Tipperary or Wexford yet.

**Cllr Mattie Ryan** expressed his disappointment that Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford etc. had not been mentioned however he appreciated there was nothing Mr Lynch could do about this.

**Cllr Gearóid Murphy** inquired as to the process of selecting towns with populations between 10,000 and 20,000 under the Urban Regeneration Fund.

**Mr Stephen Blair** recognised that Cllr Mattie Ryan had given examples of strong towns which were also good examples of Regional Centres. Mr Blair commented on the fact that there are a small number of strong towns with a robust workforce and catchment areas outside of the influence of cities stressing the importance of supporting the growth of these centres. Mr Blair confirmed these towns and growth centres will be identified in the RSES and will supplement the NPF by doing so. Mr Blair confirmed that the Government has no pre-determined urban fund. He referred to the annex at the back of the NPF identifying towns such as Nenagh, all other towns are eligible for the Rural Development Fund with towns of population just above 10,000 being eligible for both. Mr Blair clarified that regional strategy will set out population growth, but the towns are the agents to determine what needs to be done to enable the growth under the remit of the Local Authority.

**Cllr Mattie Ryan** commented that it was a small fund and would be stretched to meet all needs.

**Mr Stephen Blair** stressed the important role the members had to play in ensuring that small towns don't get left behind confirming members will be furnished with the pertinent material to enable them to assist a town in making a bid. There should be enough growth to enable all of the region to prosper. Mr Blair clarified the funding stream is there to enable the strategy, the challenge lies in positioning ourselves to ensure we get as much as possible of both funding streams.

**Cllr Pip Breen** commented on the fact that some key infrastructure had not been referenced such as Rosslare which provides the gateway to Europe and despite this 2 Ministers had to be approached to get Rosslare mentioned in light of BREXIT. Other regional assets that need to be acknowledged are the fact that 10% of the entire country's agricultural produce comes out of Wexford and the South-East produces a third of the country's food. Cllr Breen stressed that there needs to be a way to export this produce.

**Cllr Joe Carroll** commented on the fact that the foundation of the NPF, and in turn the RSES, was to turn the population of counties around however in his opinion this is not being addressed. The South-West are still not getting what they need, it is not tackling the issue of how to encourage people back to the area. He emphasised the need for a major town in the South-West, but the lack of sufficient roads is not facilitating this.

**Cllr Larry O'Brien** noted his agreement with what Cllr Breen and Cllr Carroll had said. Cllr O'Brien highlighted the problems that Wexford are experiencing, New Ross is being hit with the overflow of traffic from Waterford and it is up to the Assembly to tackle this issue.

**Mr Stephen Blair** assured that the RSES is providing building blocks for these issues, while the likes of New Ross may not be specifically mentioned yet it doesn't mean it won't be.

**Cllr Larry O'Brien** requested clarification on the query raised by Cllr Mattie Ryan.

## **5. Draft Annual Report 2017**

Mr Stephen Blair commented on the Annual Report for 2017 saying it illustrates the variety and breadth of activities while showcasing the good work being done. Mr Blair thanked Ms Sharon Murray, PE, and staff for the comprehensive job done in pulling this report together.

The annual report for 2017 was adopted on the proposal of Cllr Bill Slattery and seconded by Cllr Gearóid Murphy.

## **6. Any other business**

There was no other business

## **7. Confirm date for next meeting**

The date of the next Assembly meeting was confirmed for Friday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

It was also confirmed that everyone is invited to lunch directly after the meeting to honour Mr Blair's retirement and last day in the Assembly.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Cllr. Larry O'Brien**  
**Cathaoirleach**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_