Southern Regional Assembly
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 04th October 2018

Presiding: Cllr. Séamus Cosaí Fitzgerald, Cathaoirleach

Present: Cllr. R. Beasley, Cllr. P. Breen, Cllr. J. Brennan, Cllr. J. Carroll, Cllr. H. Cremin, Cllr. D. Foley, Cllr. T. Kinsella, Cllr. T McEllistrim, Cllr. P. McMahon, Cllr. P. Millea, Cllr Gearóid Murphy, Cllr. G Murphy, Cllr. J. Murphy, Cllr. D. O'Brien, Cllr. Larry O'Brien, Cllr. M. Ryan, Cllr. M Shields, Cllr. B. Slattery, Cllr. O. Walsh.

Apologies: Mr. T Lucey,

Officials Present: Mr. David Kelly, A/Director; Mr. Kevin Lynch, Senior Planner/Asst Director; Ms. Derville Brennan, A/Assistant Director; Mr. Robert Fennelly, Regional Planning Officer; Mr. Juan Martinez Covarrubias, Economist; Mr. Bryan Riney, Regional Planning Officer; Ms. Karen Coughlan, ASO.

1. Adoption of Minutes of Meeting held on 08th July 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on the 08th July 2018 were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. Larry O'Brien and seconded by Cllr. Oliver Walsh.

2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3. **Planning Matters for noting:**

- Observations on Proposed Variation No.6 to the Kilkenny City & Environs Development Plan 2014 – 2020.

The observation on the proposed variation no.6 to the Kilkenny City & Environs Development Plan 2014 – 2020 was noted.

4. Feedback on submission received on the Draft Preliminary RSES (attached) and MASPs/SPAs sections.

Mr. David Kelly reflected on the robust discussion on the RSES at the previous meeting saying that many salient issues had been raised which have all been taken into consideration. Mr Kelly informed the meeting that for the last twelve to eighteen months the planning team in the Assembly have been working closely with planning staff in the Local Authorities and will continue to so. There has also been strong engagement with the Chief Executives updating them of the process, timelines, key issues etc. He noted that meetings with Cork City Council, Cork County Council and Wexford County Council had yet to happen but these are in the pipeline. Mr Kelly advised the Members that a summary of issues raised by members and submitted by the Local Authorities since the last meeting had been circulated setting out the assessment and the action to address the issue. Submissions received late the evening before had been acknowledged but had been not addressed in detail yet.

Cllr Robert Beasley inquired as to who had not made a submission.

Mr David Kelly confirmed no submissions had been received from Kerry, Limerick or Clare.

Mr Kelly stressed that the purpose of today's meeting was not to vote on the adoption on the RSES but to review the issues raised and how best to address them. He reminded all that the role of the RSES is to implement and support the NPF and Governments economic objectives and policies. It is a regional strategy and therefore cannot identify every issue at local level. He informed that after today's meeting the next stage will be to finalise the draft which will be considered in line with the SEA and AA process. A decision is needed on when the next meeting will be held to adopt the RSES. Mr Kelly said he would present timelines based on proposed meeting dates for adoption.

Cllr Larry O'Brien raised a concern for the smaller towns and villages and in particular the emphasis being placed on the cities and large towns as drivers of growth. While he welcomed the proposed investment in Waterford City he had concerns about what this would mean for New Ross.

Cllr Robert Beasley informed the meeting that he has spoken to engineers in Kerry County Council who were very disappointed with the limited amount of time allowed to make submissions. He is concerned about the timelines and stressed the importance of getting this right.

Mr David Kelly replied that many of these issues will be picked as we work through the submissions.

- **Mr Kevin Lynch,** responding to Cllr O'Brien confirmed that the RSES contains policy objectives for the smaller towns and villages. He then proceeded to deal with the issues as submitted by the Local Authorities as per the paper circulated: Carlow County Council –9 key points, all accepted including:
  - Identifying Carlow as a Strategic Growth Location;
  - Reflect the inter-regional role of Carlow;
  - Support for the rural areas which has already been recognised and supported;
  - Connectivity which has been included from a strategic stance;
  - TUSE which the strategy is happy to support;
  - Importance of the rural economy and the Ancient East.
- Cllr Pip Breen raised the following:
  - Support for the Ports of Waterford & Rosslare and the importance of connectivity as a whole. Kevin Lynch (KL) confirmed the RSES supports these points;
  - Tier-1 status for ports in the region. KL outlined the classification for ports but confirmed the RSES is happy to support the ambition of getting Tier-1 status for what are currently tier-2 status;
  - Support for rail link;
  - Emphasise that higher density planning is not appropriate for rural areas which KL confirmed will be supported and reflected.
- Cork City Council –Key points included, all of which are broadly accepted and supported in the RSES:
  - Status of Cork city should be reflected as per the NPF;
  - There is no clear strategy statement which KL confirmed is being prepared will be included in the next draft;
  - Rural tourism needs to be reflected - KL confirmed all relevant aspects of tourism will be acknowledged;
  - Connectivity didn't delineate between physical, digital and international;
  - Not enough emphasis placed on retail;

- Clear separation needed between City and County Cork population figures - KL informed there was a technical difficulty in this as it was not in line with the road map issued however we would work to seek a resolution if possible;
- Overall improvement in economic strategy required;
- Light rail and Northern Ring Road need to be identified.

- Overall general points raised at the last meeting included:
  - Need for more evident support for Kilrush, Bantry and similar towns – KL confirmed the RSES will reference these types of towns and the role they play. He advised the identification of Strategic Growth Locations listed in the RSES totalling 12-13 per region is based on an agreed criteria with the Local Authorities and Bantry and Kilrush don't fit the however they will be referenced in the RSES as areas which the Local Authority can prioritise as part of the development of their core strategies.
  - Need for flexibility of zoning e.g. in the case of Mallow. KL confirmed that for these types of issues the RSES takes an overarching approach and sets the framework to allow the Local Authorities to get on with their work. Regarding zoning and population figures there is an obligation to work under the national guidance therefore the Regional Assembly cannot make changes in this area. He confirmed there is a review underway but reiterated it is outside the remit of the Assembly's work. He further confirmed support for small towns would be given through the objectives outlined in the RSES.

Cllr Larry O'Brien inquired as to whether the RSES or County Developments Plans should be referred to when considering future developments?

Mr Kevin Lynch confirmed this was not for the RSES to consider due to the strategic nature of the document.

Cllr Bill Slattery raised the issue of county population figures and stated that as a Member of the Regional Assembly he should be able to voice his dissatisfaction with the projections set out in the roadmap. He stressed that getting the highest population growth was a priority for each Local Authority and he cannot accept of the figures presented.

Mr Kevin Lynch remined all that the Roadmap issued by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in early July set out the population figures as determined by the Department. He confirmed that the members/LA's dissatisfaction with the figures have been raised with the Dept however it is not within the gift of the Assembly to alter these. Mr Lynch pointed out that this is the first RSES and as such is in a transitional state, there will be a review of figures post the 2021 Census.

Cllr Bill Slattery informed the meeting that Limerick who has had growth of 0.8% have been allocated 1.85% population growth whereas Clare has seen a growth of 1.2% but only been allocated 0.9% population growth. He deemed this reversal of population growth unfair and as such he cannot give his support to the lower population growth. He called for the support of his colleagues on this.

Cllr Pat McMahon seconded Cllr Slatterys stance

Cllr Oliver Walsh commented that the RSES may have no say over zoning but has a say over density and lower density affects zoning.

Cllr Joe Carroll raised concerns over West Cork saying that while Clonakilty is a hub town for Cork it does not play the same role for West Cork or Kerry pointing out that there is a technological park in

Clonakilty employing more than 1,400 people but would question how many are employed there from West Cork. Cllr Carroll said he was not happy with just alluding to Bantry for growth stressing the need to emphasise it now.

Cllr Pip Breen raised the point that TUSE does not mention Wexford. He stated that Rosslare Harbour is currently a roll-on/roll-off port which needs to be addressed. Cllr Breen highlighted housing density as a real issue saying lower density should apply to small towns and villages however he highlighted that there is no building happening in villages due to lack of infrastructure. Cllr Breen also raised the issue of the proposed rail downgrade planned for the South East despite it being a hub.

Cllr Jason Murphy agreed with Cllr Larry O'Brien's earlier comments saying that many towns may be affected by the investment in Waterford however it has to happen. Cllr Murphy said it is the job of the planners to demonstrate Waterford as the regional driver for towns such as New Ross. As the executive it is the responsibility of the Assembly to convince the rural Cllr's of the merits of Cities as the drivers. He pointed out that Waterford can drive the region forward and it is key that this is promoted effectively.

Cllr Gerard Murphy said the draft, when circulated, will test the acceptance of the response to the submissions received. Cllr Murphy is of the opinion that Bantry should be selected as a key town over Clonakilty instead of adding it to the current list. He expressed his support for the points Cllr Joe Carroll raised. He felt most points had been dealt with at this stage however there were a few outstanding ones:

- Access to Monard is still an outstanding issue;
- Bantry, he reiterated his acceptance that additional key towns cannot be added but he suggested that Bantry replace Clonakilty on the list;
- He accepts that the national guidelines on rural housing must be adhered to but suggested an insert/wording that allows for development of brownfields sites in rural Ireland noting that this concept had been successful in Northern Ireland and there is nothing in the NPF excluding this;
- Population targets are insufficient and is pleased to hear there is ongoing consultation noting the Department have conceded before therefore we must continue to canvas for the likes of Clare.

Cllr Robert Beasley highlighted tourism as a key point for the RSES saying there has been a decline in tourism due to poor infrastructure. He noted the Wild Atlantic Way as being one of the best things to happen, but it needs help.

Mr Kevin Lynch in response to the issues raised said the RSES is happy to support tourism and it was already included in the document. On the inclusion of towns like Bantry/Kilrush he informed there were a number of strategic locations picked as they fulfilled certain criteria such as status of location. He assured the meeting that the selection of strategic growth locations does not necessarily mean growth or even decline of population in other towns, it will be up to the Local Authorities themselves to make these decisions. Mr Lynch reminded all that the job of the RSES is to put the best case forward for the region however it is a reserved function of the Assembly to adopt it and therefore the democratic process allows for issues to be raised. He confirmed Bantry would be given the appropriate recognition however there were 33 towns in the region bigger and it does not make sense to classify it as a key town. He asked those requesting Bantry to be listed as a key town to hold their opinions until they see how it is given recognition in the final draft RSES and if still dissatisfied it can be addressed than.

Mr David Kelly reminded everyone that the key role of the RSES is to reflect and implement the objectives of the NPF and redress imbalance in the country and as such strong cities and towns are key drivers of regional growth. He assured that whilst we support these drivers we can also support networks of towns strategically. Mr Kelly said he accepted that the Members were there to represent their locality, but he cautioned that by virtue of being a Member of the Regional Assembly they must also be mindful of their regional remit. He confirmed that the RSES was being written to allow the Local Authorities the flexibility to identify areas to prioritise at the local level.

Cllr Joe Carroll expressed the concern that towns 'earmarked' will attract government agencies and investment saying the IDA already disregard West Cork.

Cllr Henry Cremin said he took on board all that Mr Lynch has said in response to the submissions however if something is not written in black and white it may lead to problems for example if the light rail system needed in Cork City is not specifically mentioned it may affect the development.

Cllr Mattie Ryan said Tipperary would not be happy unless their proposals were accepted. He accepts that towns are drivers however questions the status given to towns. Cllr Ryan said they must also consider rural areas.

Cllr Larry O'Brien noted his agreement with Cllr Mattie Ryan

Mr Kevin Lynch said the submission received from Tipperary would be dealt with at the end.

Cllr Gearoid Murphy noted that Cork city had been given a specific population increase of 102,000 but no specific figures given for Cork County. He acknowledged that a verbal commitment has been given in respect of this but stressed the need for the figures to be included in the RSES

Cllr Deirdre O'Brien stressed the need for investment in Cork. The Local Authorities should be given the relevant infrastructure with a clear statement of support from the RSES.

Cllr Mary Shields stressed the need for the Light Rail in Cork to be enshrined in the RSES. These types of projects take time and her fear is it will facilitate further delays if not very clearly stated. Cllr Shields said anything that is good for Cork City will also benefit Cork County.

Cllr Pat McMahon acknowledged the productive discussion taking place stating the future goal is for high quality jobs and growth. He highlighted some of the attributes in Clare that need to be built on such as:

- 25% of the country's electricity is generated from Clare and the Shannon Estuary;
- Companies such as Jaguar in Shannon are providing high-quality jobs;
- Cliffs of Moher as a visitor attraction;
- Northern distributor road;
- Valencia hub is of importance;
- Aviation jobs.

Cllr McMahon reiterated these attributes need to be built on.

Cllr Gerard Murphy acknowledged that most points raised had been responded to however there are a few outstanding points to clarify, they will review the draft and consider anything further which needs to be raise. He inquired if brownfield sites in rural Ireland have been considered.

In response to the queries raised **Mr Kevin Lynch** confirmed the following:

- Brownfield sites in rural Ireland will be considered. The NPF promotes the development of brownfield sites but there is further work to be done on the specifics;

- In response to the issues raised by Clare he confirmed that they are all dealt with in the draft and they are happy to support them and specifically concerning the issue on the population figures, these have been raised with the Department and they will continue to be actively dealt with;
- The Light Rail system for Cork is included in the RSES and again they are happy to support adding there has been good engagement with the Local Authorities on this;
- Monard will be referred to;
- The educational facility in Wexford will also be referenced;
- Mr Lynch reminded everyone that while working collaboratively with EMRA and NWRA we are also in competition for funding opportunities and this must be a strategic document that presents the region in the best light;
- Zoning and population are not working in contradiction. The national guidelines are being followed outlining density that is appropriate to scale of the settlement and this will be emphasised in the RSES.

Mr Kevin Lynch reported on subsequent submission received:

- No objection in principle to including Dungarvan as a key town;
- The comments on airports/infrastructure have been noted;
- He acknowledged the concerns raised over population targets however the Assembly has no scope to increase targets but have asked the Department to review them and this will be reflected in the draft. The first RSES covers the transition period and will be reviewed in 2021;
- New comments will be considered from Cork City & County and will be dealt with strategically;
- Late submissions were received from Tipperary and Kilkenny which will be summarised and reported back on but in the meantime, he can clarify that some of the issues raised by Kilkenny have been dealt with already and they will come back to clarify the headroom figure;
- There were 22 points raised by Tipperary most of which were very helpful. In response to the proposal to extend the Limerick-Shannon boundary to include parts of Tipperary he confirmed this will be reviewed but could cause some difficulty. The MASP boundaries are set out in the roadmap issued in July allowing no scope for change. Mr Lynch advised that they had worked with the Technical Working Group on the MASP warning any changes would have consequences for the population figures and other regions.

Cllr Mattie Ryan responded saying the towns suggested by Tipperary for inclusion in the MASP are within 10 minutes of the boundary and he proposed that they be included.

Mr Kevin Lynch stressed that the draft being proposed is what the executive see as best for the region and asked Members to review it in this context.

Cllr Larry O'Brien stated any questions being asked today were essential. He acknowledged the members are there to represent both region and county. While he recognises that Dungarvan is a major town close to Waterford New Ross is closer and queried why it is not being mentioned.

Mr David Kelly confirmed an objective of the RSES is that regional towns and cities are drivers of growth and Waterford doing well won't take from New Ross. He stressed the need to assess and reflect on what has been proposed and when the final draft is issued he asked that the members look at it from an overall context. Mr Kelly also suggested that the consultation process provides a further opportunity to raise issues, in particular issues such as the MASP boundary extension.

Cllr Mattie Ryan informed he had been instructed to make the proposal, he accepted that there was a second chance in during the consultation process but said his proposal still stood.

Cllr Jason Murphy said everyone was guilty of being parochial but stressed the need to look East for balanced regional development. Tramore like New Ross is a town within close proximity to Waterford. Cllr Murphy felt the executive were also guilty of being parochial and deflecting it under the purpose of the document being to lift the region.

Cllr Bill Slattery informed that there were 13 points outstanding from Clare and suggested that each Authority are consulted with on their outstanding issues.

Mr Kevin Lynch confirmed they met with Clare County Council and are aware of the outstanding issues however have not yet received a formal submission. He informed that two drafts had issued to the Local Authorities for consideration in parallel with extensive consultation. He assured the Members the draft which is now being finalised is for the benefit of the Region and will be distributed in advance of the next meeting.

Mr David Kelly informed the other two Regional Assemblies appear to be at a more advanced stage however the Southern Regional Assembly seemed to have had more engagement with local authority officials. Mr Kelly said ultimately the Assembly have a strong document and is hopeful it has the support of the Local Authorities. He assured the Members that we are not working in isolation and that the key towns had been selected in consultation with the Local Authorities. Mr Kelly confirmed that the issues raised would be incorporated where appropriate.

Cllr Pat McMahon inquired if the Department are being too onerous.

Mr David Kelly said government policy must be reflected warning the Minister can intervene if it is not reflected. Mr Kelly informed the meeting the structure and consistency had been an issue for the Department, but this has been addressed.

Mr Kevin Lynch reflected on the nature of the region and the fact it has 3 cities and a strong network of towns. The three MASPs resulted in a bigger body of work compared to the other Regions but offer a better regional proposition. He stressed the need to ensure the content is right as the MASPs are a new component having never been done before. He reminded everyone that ultimately the RSES is a Regional Assembly document.

Cllr Mattie Ryan suggested meeting with the officials again before the final draft saying it would prove worthwhile in the end. If the officials are happy than this helps the members in their role.

Mr David Kelly said the intention was to meet with the officials again confirming the Senior Officials Advisory Group will be meeting in the coming weeks and meetings would be scheduled with the Chief Executives subject to their availability.

Cllr Pip Breen inquired if many changes had been made since the last draft they had received.

Mr Kevin Lynch informed the overall structure had changed and document had been simplified. The issues raised had been taken on board to ensure a better document.

Cllr Gerard Murphy said the effort and work put into the RSES was appreciated reflecting it is ultimately down to the members to accept. Due to the limited timescale the draft needs to be as close to the final document as possible.

Mr David Kelly agreed with Cllr Murphy saying it was still possible to meet the April 2019 deadline for formal adoption if the draft goes out to public consultation as soon as possible.

Cllr Henry Cremin stressed the need to have sight of the draft in advance of the next meeting.

Mr David Kelly confirmed the draft is being finalised and will than go through the Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Appropriate Assessment. Based on this the earliest there will be a draft issued to Members is the 26th of October but more likely on the 02nd November. He cautioned there are processes outside of the control of the Assembly but the earlier the strategy is out the more time there is at the other end of the process.

All agreed to a provisional date for the next meeting of the 01st November but have also agreed that if this is not achievable November 9th is agreed as the fall-back date. The draft will be issued one week in advance. It was also agreed by the meeting that all proposed amendments to the draft will be submitted in writing in the form of Motions to be received by the executive no later than the day before the meeting.

Cllr Larry O'Brien said he wanted the planners in his Local Authority to have sight of the draft as well.

Mr David Kelly confirmed the executives in the Local Authority will also get the draft in advance of the meeting. He recapped that the aim is to have the draft RSES issued on the 26th October with written submission received on or before the 31st October to facilitate the meeting on the 01st November. Mr Kelly said if this turned out be unachievable than the meeting would be postponed to the 09th November.

Signed: Seamus Cosai Fitzgerald Date: 9/11/2018

Cllr. Seamus Cosai Fitzgerald
Cathaoirleach