Minutes of the North West Region Cross Border Group Meeting held in Derry City and Strabane District Council, Derry Road, Strabane on Friday 15th May 2015

PRESENT:

Derry City and Strabane District Council: Councillor Gus Hastings  
Councillor Kieran McGuire  
Councillor Maoliosa McHugh  
Councillor Paul Fleming  
Alderman Allan Bresland  
Mr John Kelpie

Donegal County Council: Councillor Paul Canning  
Councillor Albert Doherty  
Councillor Bernard McGuinness  
Councillor Martin Farren

In Attendance:

NWRCBG Secretariat: Ms Maureen Doherty  
Ms Anne McNaught  
Ms Linda White  
Ms Dara Doherty  
Ms Eilish Gallagher  
Ms Geraldine Hughes

ICBAN: Colin McKenna

Welcome

Councillor Paul Canning welcomed Colin McKenna from ICBAN who was in attendance to deliver a presentation on Broadband issues in the Central Border Region. A copy of the presentation was distributed to members.

Mr McKenna told members that rural areas need support as currently areas in Donegal can only get 0.5 Mbits where 2 Mbits at least are needed. He advised that ICBAN carried out a survey of 2,000 homes but even with 3g and 4g people cannot get instant connections. People are leaving their homes to go elsewhere to try and access the internet. 2Mbits is insufficient to run SME’s. He said he was delighted that the North West was looking at this and said it’s important to keep lobbying for super fast broadband.

Councillor Canning thanked Colin for the presentation and said that Donegal members had the issue of broadband accessibility at the top of their agenda. He said that the Chief Executive, Mr Seamus Neely had suggested that Magee and LYIT should come together as a project on the issue of broadband. Councillor Canning asked where responsibility for this lies and suggested bringing Councils into a meeting to discuss the issue.

The Acting Manager advised that NWRCBG had co-ordinated a meeting with NWRCBG Councils and the two other Cross Border Groups in relation to this issue and that it was scheduled for the coming week.

Mr Kelpie thanked Mr McKenna for his excellent presentation and said that this issue is a major impediment to economic growth and development. He added that the way forward was through the Councils and that this issue needed to be a priority in the new Council community plan as infrastructure and connectivity are vital.
Mr Kelpie asked Mr McKenna what was the scale of investment required in the ICBAN area. Mr McKenna said that he had met with DCENR regarding their announcement for funding in December 2014 to support state funded fibre broadband in rural areas. He also met with DETI NI regarding £24.5m investment with the hope of targeting 45,000 premises targeted by December 2015.

Mr Kelpie asked Mr McKenna had he looked at other areas of Europe who have done this. Mr McKenna advised that Lancaster in England completed a self help scheme and had set themselves up as a limited company.

Councillor Albert Doherty said that people see “3” as useless and many areas in Donegal would love the opportunity to have optimum broadband.

The Acting Manager said she would speak to Mr Richard Osterhus to see if he was aware of any schemes and funding bodies that could provide the Groups with an opportunity to work on this issue as a region together.

Members thanked Mr McKenna for his presentation.

**Item 1 - Apologies**

Councillor Gerry McMonagle  
Mr Seamus Neely

Mr Paul Canning welcomed new members of the Group, Councillor Paul Fleming and Alderman Allan Bresland.

**Item 2 – Minutes and Matters Arising**

Councillor Canning advised that letters of thanks had been sent to previous board members.

The Acting Manager said that there was some interest shown by Members in relation to SPACEial training for members. She reported that if there were additional places available that the training could be offered to Council officers as well.

The minutes of the meeting of 20th March 2015 were **PROPOSED** by Councillor Hastings, **SECONDED** by Councillor McGuire.

**Item 3 – Work Programme**

The work programme was distributed to members for information.

**Item 4 – Newsletter**

The Acting Manager advised that the NWRCBG Quarterly Newsletter had been sent out to a database of approximately 750 members. A copy was distributed to members.

**Item 5 – Project Updates Paper**

Projects Updates Paper outlining activity since the last meeting was distributed to members.

Councillor Canning advised members to visit the Fort George and LYIT sites to see the fantastic results in each area. The Acting Manager pointed to the photographs in the newsletter of the build
at the Science Park at Co-lab LYIT from March until now and said a phenomenal amount of work has been completed in such a short space of time.

**Item 6 – INTERREG VA**

A copy of the Citizen’s Summary of the INTERREG V Programme was distributed to members. The Acting Manager said that the document was very informative and will be useful to members. Also included is the indicative funding call timetable for applications to the new programme.

Councillor Canning said members should take the time to read the document as it gives information on the areas of activity that will be funded in the new Programme and the amount of monies associated with each area. The Acting Manager highlighted that match funding of 15% is required in INTERREG V.

Mr Kelpie voiced concern that Council’s would not be leading at local level. He referred specifically to the Sustainable Transport theme and the reference to the multi-modal public transport hub. He was concerned that there was no consultation with Derry City & Strabane District Council and other key stakeholders regarding this. He asked if there was any update regarding this. The Acting Manager advised that she would liaise with DRD and advise them of the Group’s desire to be consulted.

Councillor Canning referred to the Environmental section and suggested discussions with Irish Water and Northern Ireland Water regarding plans for this theme. The Acting Manager advised members that she had been liaising with both Departments and they have reported that they have appointed someone to look into this theme in more detail. She will follow up on this and will provide an update at the next meeting.

Councillor McGuinness asked what input the Departments had in relation to Steering Groups. He added that it would appear that the activity is more geared towards Departments. The Acting Manager said that although this would appear to be the case, it was still important for the Group to be involved in consultation processes to see what we can influence at a local level.

Mr Kelpie commended the Group for working with Departments in these areas and stressed the need for the Group to be involved in further consultations regarding activity.

Councillor Canning suggested sending a letter to the relevant Departments requesting the Group’s involvement in the INTERREG VA Programme. Councillor Mc Guinness added that the NWRCBG was a strong Group in itself and should be seeking an opportunity to be involved in future activity planning.

**Item 7 – Priority Actions Update**

The Project Updates paper was distributed to members. Staff updated members in the areas of:

- Funding
- Lobbying
- Regional Development

**Item 7.1 – Funding**

The Acting Manager said that there were still six live projects and the NWRCBG Multi Annual Plan is due to be completed at the end of September. She added that that the amount to be submitted by N+2 is €5,758,953, to date €3,466,561 has been submitted to the EU database leaving a balance of €2,292,392 to be put on the EU database by the end of July.
NW Regional Science Park
In relation to the NWRSP, the Colab building is now complete and has exceeded targets with exceptional success in tenancy. She said that Fort George had 29 tenants which is 100% occupancy. The NISP are going to provide a passport for joint tenancy which will enable tenants to use any of the sites in a “hot desk” method.

Ms Linda White presented the funding update as follows:

Urban and Village Renewal - Post Project Evaluation – Findings
- Financial Assessment - €956,973.40 / €995,000 = 96.2% spend
- Operational Assessment – performance against 10 targets
- Targets met = 9
- To be assessed 2yrs post funding = 1
- 30 conditions attached to the LoO = all met
- Response from wider community:
- Positive - high level of satisfaction with works undertaken
- Hopes for further development and investment in the area.

SPACEial NW Post Project Evaluation – Findings
- Strategic Assessment – the SPACEial NW project complements the aims & objectives of a number of key Government Departments & non-departmental public bodies in ROI & NI
- Operational Assessment – performance against 25 targets:
- Targets Met = 15
- Targets Exceeded = 5
- To be assessed 2yrs post funding = 4
- Project has met all 6 key objectives with the LoO
- Financial Assessment - €506,152 / €518,036 = 97.7% spend
- Project Website = www.spaceialnw.eu
- Training has been delivered on how to use this resource. The system will be kept going by the Resource and Policy Unit at Donegal County Council.

NW Construction - The final event of the project was held on 25th March 2015. This was a “Meet the Buyer” event in Glasgow. Project will complete on 31st March 2015. Ongoing evaluation process is continuing and achieving positive feedback from businesses involved. Final claim is due in May.

Ren Net – Project completed 28th February 2015 and it is anticipated that the last claim will be submitted in May 2015. 99% spend has been achieved. SEUPB are reviewing the evaluation report at present. Ren Net has been established as a brand with over 50 suppliers registered to the website.

Ms Anne McNaught presented the funding update as follows:

NW Allotments - The capital works at all the allotment sites are now complete and launch events have taken place over the last few weeks. All project activity ended in April 2015. Training was provided to over 1000 pupils from schools within the four district areas and over 50 community groups took part. This training provided guidance to communities on the importance of healthy living and eating. Post project evaluation will be completed by end of June and final claims submitted by July 2015.

Inch & Foyle Wildfowl – This is a tourism project around bird watching. The project is now complete after a month’s extension to allow for the delivery of the Lough Foyle footbridge which was the only remaining element of the project to be delivered. There will be a press event for
launch of the footbridge in the coming weeks. The evaluation has been submitted to SEUPB for review.

ITEM 7.2 - Lobbying

Lobbying - Future Funding for the Cross Border Groups

Joint Conference Agreement - Funding a Core Priority. Meeting of the Chairs & Vice Chairs on the 5th November.

Next steps agreed:
- All MEPs contacted by NWRCBG to arrange meetings to lobby SEUPB/EU Commission
- To date have met with: MEPs Martina Anderson, Matt Carthy, Jim Nicholson, Diane Dodds, Mairead Mc Guinness
- Meeting with MEP Marian Harkin - 12th June 2015
- Met with Minister Hamilton - 13th April 2015
- Meeting with Minister Howlin - TBC
- Ms Maureen Doherty advised the members that outline meetings have taken place to discuss the ongoing funding concern for NWRCBG. Future core funding is not available from INTERREG to finance the work of the group.
- Feedback from MEPs was very positive in relation to role played by Cross Border Groups
- INTERREG VA Cooperation Programme has been adopted by EU and there is no role for the Groups in this
- SEUPB advised that the Groups can make applications to the Programme
- CEOs continue to work together regarding future role and structure of the NWRCBG going forward.

North West Gateway Initiative

A commitment has been made to hold a future meeting of Ministers and officials in the North West to consider strategic approaches to the development of the region. NSMC were due to present at today’s board meeting, however this is now to be rescheduled.

NWRCBG submitted a response to NSMC in relation to the NWGI consultation, which was well received. A further meeting with Ministers and officials in the North West is due to take place hopefully in late May or June. NWGI have asked to reschedule the meeting between NSMC and NWRCBG until after the Ministerial meeting.

Councillor McHugh asked what the remit of the NWGI was. The Acting Manager said that the Initiative was set up by the Departments to improve the economy of the Northwest and is now being revived.

ITEM 7.3 - Regional Development Activity

Previously the Manager had outlined regional development opportunities that may be presented to the Group through the INTERREG V Programme, namely Regional Smart Specialisation and Sustainable Transport (Greenways). Members agreed that we would seek to utilise NWRCBG funding to develop business cases for development work for INTERREG V projects.

Ongoing work in Regional Development

Smart Specialisation Business Plan
- NWRCBG have appointed Fearon Consulting to develop a Smart Specialisation Strategy for the North West.
- Miriam Fearon is currently working with Project partners to progress this.
• A business morning will be hosted by NWRCBG as part of this piece of work.
• Secretariat will make a report on this at the next meeting.

NW Greenways Plan
• Developing a NW Greenways Plan that will present a vision for future Greenway development across the region, tender process complete - Sustrans appointed
• Steering Group formed - NWRCBG and Council Officers with support and input from Department representatives
• Review of current studies available at single Council level underway
• Aim is to consolidate and add to this work in order to present a strategic network at regional level
• Action plan will be developed to present long term, medium term and short term objectives
• Plan will be used to inform future route provision, prepare business cases for a cocktail of funding programmes and will help Councils avoid back to back planning.

Broadband Forum
• Members raised the issue of poor/lack of broadband coverage in areas of Donegal and Strabane Council areas
• Initial discussions carried out with Donegal County Council, Derry City & Strabane District Council, ERNACT, ICBAN and EBR
• ICBAN have undertaken substantial work in this area, Colin McKenna presented earlier in the meeting
• NWRCBG seeking to establish a forum on this issue to engage critical mass of the border area
• Also aligns with members wishes from Cross Border Conference
• First meeting arranged for Tuesday, 26th May 2015.

Cross Border Crime
• Dermot Harrigan & Vanessa Russell, Derry City & Strabane District Council Policing & Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) contacted
• Charles Sweeney, Donegal Joint Policing Committee (JPC) Administrator contacted
• Awaiting the establishment of the Donegal Joint Policing Committee
• A planning workshop for it’s Members is being organised for late May/early June.
• Following this, NWRCBG will host a meeting of Officers from PCSP and JPC to raise concerns expressed by NWRCBG Members and to determine if there are opportunities to work together

Town Centre Vacancy Group
• This group consists of Derry City & Strabane District Council Officers, City Centre Initiative, Derry~Londonderry, Letterkenny and Town Centre Management Team.
• The Group originally met in October 2014 as a means of introduction and to share information on the work being undertaken in each area.
• A report prepared and submitted to NWRCBG, actions agreed at initial meeting. Follow up meeting to be held on Friday, 5th June 2015.

NWRCBG Celebration/Funding Information Event - Friday 26th June 2015
• Full day event is planned
• Morning session in the Guildhall, reflecting on the success of the NW in the INTERREG IVA Programme and showcasing NWRCBG projects.
• Afternoon session in the City Hotel will provide information in relation to the next round of funding programmes (INTERREG, PEACE & Transnational) and a networking opportunity for potential project partners.
• Deputy First Minister McGuinness and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cross Border Cooperation, Sean Sherlock will open the event.
Environment Working Group
- Recent seminar highlighted European environmental funding opportunities, organised by NI Environment Link
- Also opportunities in INTERREG & PEACE for Joint Working
- NWRCBG have arranged information/networking meeting for Tuesday, 19th May 2015.
- Council officers from Donegal County Council, Derry City & Strabane District Council, RAPID and National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- Aim to update on current plans, establish areas for cooperation and identify funding opportunities.

Item 8 - Derry City Council Internal Audit Report
A copy of Derry City Council’s Internal Audit Report was distributed to members for information. The report highlighted that controls in place over the NWRCBG provide substantial assurance that the system objectives will be achieved. It added that Internal Audit was satisfied that a strong system of internal control was in place and had no recommendations to make.

Item 9 - Member Discussion
Councillor McGuinness asked who was involved in the Town Centre Vacancy Group and if this could be widened, as there was a need to include smaller areas throughout the region in economic decline.

The Acting Manager advised that the attendees were Derry City and Strabane District Council, Letterkenny Chamber of Commerce and City Centre Initiative. She said she was meeting with the Town Centre Vacancy group in the coming weeks and would voice the Board’s concern for the involvement of more groups and report at the next Board meeting.

Councillor Doherty spoke about the Environment Working Group which was meeting on Tuesday 19th May. Councillor Doherty asked if the issue of coastal erosion could be included. Councillor Canning said the issue of coastal erosion will be in the next agenda.

Councillor McGuinness voiced concern regarding the department’s involvement in INTERREG V. The Acting Manager advised that although the themes for INTERRG VA appeared to be more aligned to activity of departments, Councils can apply for funding and can also liaise with departments to influence projects. The issue with the Cross Border Group is that core funding is not available going forward into INTERREG VA.

Councillor Bernard McGuinness PROPOSED to seek funding from Europe so that the NW Study which was initially produced in 1990 is updated. This was SECONDED by Councillor Martin Farren

Item 10 – AOB
The next meeting of the Group is due to take place on Friday 17th July 2015 in Donegal County Council, Lifford.