



MID-EAST REGIONAL AUTHORITY

ÚDARÁS RÉIGIÚNACH AN MHEÁNOIRTHIR

MINUTES

OF THE MID-EAST REGIONAL AUTHORITY

HELD ON

THURSDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 2009

IN

COUNCIL CHAMBER

WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTE NO. 25.09 – 31.09



**MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE MID-EAST REGIONAL AUTHORITY
HELD ON THURSDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 2009 IN COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL AT 6.00 P.M.**

Present:

Cllr. George Jones, Cathaoirleach

Cllr. Bill Carey

Cllr. Anne Dillon-Gallagher

Cllr. Pat Doran

Cllr. Jimmy Fegan

Cllr. Brian Fitzgerald

Cllr. Senan Griffin

Cllr. Martin Heydon

Cllr. Conal Kavanagh

Cllr. Paul Kelly

Cllr. Tracy McElhinney

Cllr. Pádraig McEvoy

Cllr. Jenny McHugh

Cllr. John McGinley

Cllr. Barry Nevin

Cllr. Micheál Nolan

Cllr. John Ryan

Cllr. Pat Vance

Apologies:

Mr. Tom Dowling, Meath County Manager and Designated Manager MERA

Cllr. Francis Browne

Cllr. Jim Holloway

In attendance:

Mr. John Byrne, Director MERA

MINUTE NO. 25.09

Minutes of AGM of the Mid-East Regional Authority held on 16 July 2009

The Minutes of the AGM of the 16 July 2009 were proposed by Cllr. Pat Doran, seconded by Cllr. Micheál Nolan and agreed.

MINUTE NO. 26.09

Matters Arising

No matters arose in relation to the Minutes.

MINUTE NO. 27.09

Review of Regional Planning Guidelines – Draft Regional Economic Strategy for the Mid-East Region 2010 – 2022

The Members had been circulated with a Draft Economic Strategy document for the Region, which represents the input of the Regional Authority into the overall Economic Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area, in a context of the Reviewed Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area 2010 – 2022. The purpose of the document is:

- To set out the challenges facing Meath, Kildare and Wicklow Counties in the future economic development of the Dublin Area.
- To summarise the initiatives taken by the three Counties in promoting economic development.
- To make recommendations, which if included in the Reviewed Regional Planning Guidelines for the GDA, would enhance the Regions ability to compete for investment and jobs, and promote a more sustainable balanced economic growth pattern across the seven Counties of the GDA.

- The Strategy then set out the general principles of an Economic Growth Strategy, which included strategic initiatives on planning, business creation, economic development, and action to be taken on those priorities.

In opening the debate on the document, An Cathaoirleach, Cllr. George Jones, pointed out that over the past few years the scenario for the development of the Mid-East has worsened since the economic downturn and the Region is now in a worse position than it was in 2004 when the Guidelines were brought into force. He emphasised that it was important for the Members of the Region to have a strong input into this document and to have the priorities of the Mid-East Region highlighted strongly in the Reviewed Guidelines.

Cllr. Brian Fitzgerald agreed that the Regional Members should have a much more serious attendance to the importance to the Regional Planning Guidelines, and with planning legislation forthcoming it is apparent that the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is trying to ensure that the Regional Planning Guidelines are not just Guidelines but will have force in Local and County Development Plans. One current threat to future possible development is a series of objections and appeals taken by bodies like the National Roads Authority, the DTO and An Taisce in relation to planning applications. The jobs ratio figures need to be updated for each County and it is obvious that in Meath the ratio figures have worsened since the last Guidelines. It will also be necessary for each Local Authority to set out a strategy for future zoning in their Counties to enable continued economic development.

Cllr. Paul Kelly suggested that specific locations for future economic development should be listed in the document and highlighted in the Reviewed Guidelines.

Cllr. Pádraig McEvoy said that there should be continued support for the sustainability for small and medium enterprises going into the future. The Economic Strategy should promote expanded growth in the urban centres and should encourage small and medium enterprises to focus their energies towards increasing their exports.

Cllr. John McGinley reiterated that the number one priority for the Region should be the creation of jobs. Recent major job losses particularly in Intel have led to a huge reduction in rates revenue for Local Authorities and the Regional Authority should make these concerns known to the Tánaiste asking her to do everything possible to retain jobs in this Region. He also said that a focus should also be made on the number of vacant houses in the three Counties over the last few years.

Cllr. Conal Kavanagh said that the recent report of An Bord Snip Nua has called for the abolition of County Enterprise Boards. It would be a retrograde step as the County Enterprise Boards are a crucial element in small job creation and retention, and any change in their operational status would result in the erosion of a job creation strategy for the three Counties.

Cllr. Bill Carey said that the expectations in relation to economic development coming following the motorways in the Region were not met as with increased access, it is easier to get to Cavan rather than Navan and this had led to more businesses starting up outside our County and Region.

Cllr. Tracey McElhinney said that in the recent past there has been a loss of jobs to foreign countries, and the County Council and the Authority should have a strong

lobby with agencies like the IDA and Enterprise Ireland to encourage a stronger effort towards job creation.

An Cathaoirleach said that further meetings are scheduled between the Director and the Economic Development Directors for the Region, and the Strategy will be updated and brought forward for the consideration of the Members at the next available opportunity.

MINUTE NO. 28.09

Regional Planning Guidelines 2004-2016 – Budget 2010

The Director had circulated with the Agenda a Draft Budget for the operation of the office of the Regional Planning Guidelines for the GDA over the coming year January – December 2010. He explained that this budget is apportioned between the seven Counties of the GDA in the ratio of population and is a separate budget from the normal annual budget drawn up and approved by the Regional Authority for its own operations. Total expenditure for the year 2010 will amount to €200,307 and is made up of the salary details for a Senior Planner and for a Research and Policy Development Officer, also for Consultants fees and for communications and administration costs. On a proposal of Cllr. Pat Vance and seconded by Cllr. Conal Kavanagh the budget 2010 for the RPG's was approved.

MINUTE NO. 29.09

Consideration of implications of the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure.

The Director gave a general overview of the Local Government Sector proposals in this Report, and noted that the structure of Local Government is under active consideration by the Government through the White Paper on Local Government Reform which is expected to be completed before the end of the year. The Groups Report recommends that the rationalisation of Local Authority Agencies should be considered in the context of this White Paper. The group recommends a move to a single tier of local Government through the abolition of Regional Authorities and Town Councils. It proposes a reduction in the 34 Local Authorities, in the remaining single tier of Local Government, to a maximum number of 22. There should also be an equivalent reduction in corresponding Local Authority Agencies and Authorities.

A general discussion took place on the recommendations contained in the Report, and various Members referred to the continuing need for a Regional Authority presence particularly in light of the Reviewed Regional Planning Guidelines, and the economic downturn which will need a stronger involvement of all Agencies in the drive for job creation. Concern was also expressed too about the proposal in the Report to rationalise or dilute the operation of the County Enterprise Boards. These are also a very important job creation agency and should be maintained and supported into the future. It was generally agreed that any focus on Regional Authorities in the future should include a strengthening of powers of the Regional Authorities, and the Members are looking forward to the bringing forward of the New Local Government Planning and Development Bill which should improve the linkages between Regional Planning Guidelines, County Development Plans, and Local Area Plans.

MINUTE NO. 30.09

Correspondence/Conferences

The Director outlined the continuing arrangements in relation to the schedule of conferences and how the rota system is in operation between all four groups on the

Authority. Each group Whip is to give names of the upcoming conferences to the Director or to the Office as soon as possible.

MINUTE NO. 31.09

Any Other Business

No business arose under this heading and the next meeting of the Authority is scheduled for the 8 October at 6 p.m. in County Hall, Navan, Co. Meath.

Signed:

Cllr. George Jones
Cathaoirleach

Mr. John Byrne
Director

Date:
