



Northern & Western
Regional Assembly

CORPORATE PLAN

2020-2024



Ireland's European Structural and
Investment Funds Programmes
2014-2020

Co-funded by the Irish Government
and the European Union



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



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> VISION TO ACTIONS

Developing our Corporate Plan is an opportunity to review our 'strategic space'.

The Corporate Plan is the place we integrate and align complex systems of EU programme management, national / regional spatial planning and political cycles.

IT ALLOWS US TO...

- › Examine our capabilities to see if we are maximising our resources.
- › Study the external environment (macro / micro).
- › Tailor a strategic response that creates value across the Northern and Western region.
- › Install a systems approach to innovation and knowledge transfer (internal / external).
- › Determine a clear purpose for the organisation up until 2024.
- › Consider 'big' ideas and strategic opportunities.

PURPOSE

Our clear Purpose is now implementing the priorities contained in our Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

Its development objectives will guide future involvement with EU, National, Regional and Local programmes.

We believe this Corporate Plan will act as a framework to deliver our statutory responsibilities but also be adaptive enough so the internal capabilities of the Regional Assembly can be moulded to support the sustainable growth of the region.

FOREWORD

This region shares the traits of many successful places – tolerance, diversity, creativity and innovation. But future successful places will also require a steadfast commitment to ‘sustainability’.

THIS WILL BE THE DIFFERENTIAL

That translates into delivering the right housing, infrastructure, jobs and services where and when our communities need it. That means we must be even better at the things we do well to create new growth.

We are perfectly positioned to lead development if we connect our strengths as a low carbon, green and natural economy. We are not just part of a local ecosystem but regional, national and European; sitting in a global marketplace.

This Corporate Plan serves as the Northern and Western Regional Assembly’s (NWRA) strategic framework for action in the future.



Declan McDonnell
Cathaoirleach



David Minton
Director

The Corporate Plan comes at a critical stage as we aim to connect the regional development and regional planning side of our functions considering;

- › Our comparative advantages and business competitiveness
- › Methods for sustaining and attracting increased human capital
- › Attracting existing and new forms of capital flows
- › Supporting investment in infrastructure that underpins our ‘sustainable’ differential
- › Future settlement patterns

In legislative terms, Section 55 of the LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1991 (REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES) (ESTABLISHMENT) ORDER 2014 requires the Assembly to adopt a Corporate Plan. But **how we do it**, will be as important to us, as **what we do**.

Finally, our operating environment is highly dynamic. At times it can be described as ambiguous. So, where possible, we have alluded to strategic ambitions that we would like to explore in the lifetime of this plan. Covid-19 has added an additional layer of complexity to this.

1

OUR MISSION

WE WANT TO...

Be the primary driver for regional sustainable development through planning, resourcing and delivering programmes with the support of our partners.



WHILE WORKING TOWARDS...

Consolidating the region as a leader in smart and green practices.

BACKGROUND

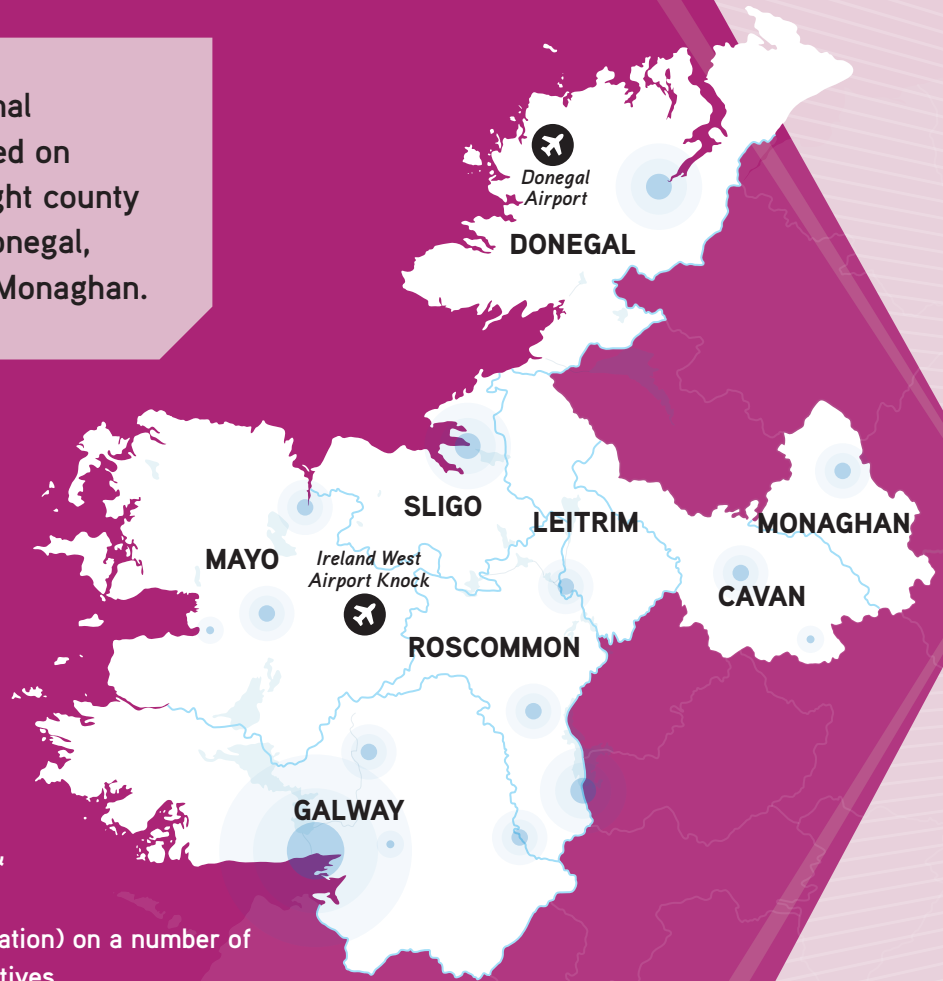
ABOUT US

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) was established on 1st January 2015 covering the eight county region of Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Donegal, Roscommon, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan.

The NWRA is responsible for:

- › Regional economic and spatial planning
- › Management of European Regional Development Funding (ERDF)
- › Developing and promoting innovative research and knowledge transfer
- › Act as National Contact Point for transnational programmes such as Interreg Europe, Northern Periphery & Arctic, Atlantic Area Programme
- › Collaborating (lead and active participation) on a number of EU, National, Regional and Local initiatives
- › Promotes effectiveness in local government and public services.

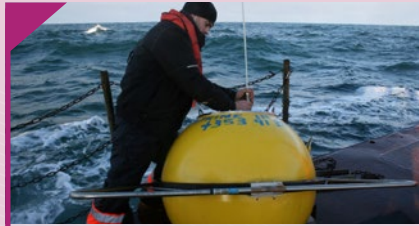
Value is achieved more readily through the active integration of these roles. Strategically, the organisation has adjusted its structure, system and management to ensure a smoother alignment between its core functions.



ACHIEVEMENTS IN BRIEF



Recognising this region's weaker urban infrastructure, the NWRA in 2016 submitted an evidence based proposal to the National Planning Framework advocating in Growth Centre status for Letterkenny, Sligo and Athlone.



Between 2016-2019 the NWRA supported stakeholders access over €28m from European Programmes like NPA, Atlantic Area and Interreg Europe.



The NWRA manages the BMW Regional Operational Programme which is a €320m European Regional Development accelerator co-financed by the European Union and Irish exchequer.



In 2018 the NWRA led a partnership (130 stakeholders) application to be recognised as a European Entrepreneurial Region.



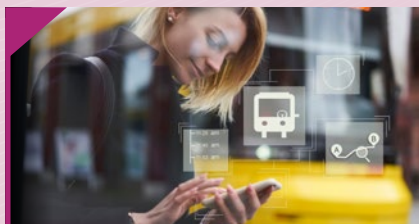
In 2020 the NWRA published an extensive piece of analysis titled 'Region in Transition: The Way Forward' calling for a policy of Positive Discrimination.



The NWRA is involved with a number of cutting-edge European Research projects relating to regional specialisations such as ag-innovation, renewable energy, digital transformation and cultural heritage.



The NWRA, in 2016, developed an innovative 'Diploma in EU Funding' targeting senior stakeholders across our region. By the end of 2019 we will have over 67 graduates.



The NWRA aims to pursue a Smart City Agenda. Our Smart Region will be Smart City+Smart Rural=Smart Region.



In January 2020 the Northern and Western Regional Assembly published the first Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

FUNCTIONS

The Assembly has a clearly defined statutory role under section 43(1) of the Local Government Act, 1991, and to the matters relating to a regional spatial and economic strategy set out in Chapter III of Part II of the Planning and Development Act of 2000.

This means, for the 2019-2024 period, that the NWRA will continue:

- › To promote sustainable economic development and planning in the Northern and Western Region
- › To effectively Manage EU Regional and Inter-Regional Programmes
- › To drive innovative collaborative projects that assist priorities identified in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.

The Assembly publishes an annual Programme of Work in accordance with Article 21 of the Local Government Act 1991 (Regional Assemblies) (Establishment) Order 2014. In addition, under Articles 20 to 40 of the Local Government Act 1991 (Regional Assemblies) (Establishment) Order 2014, the full mandate of the Regional Assembly is set out.



FUNCTIONS

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly consists of 25 nominated elected representatives from our constituent local authorities.

The NWRA is audited annually by the Local Government Audit Service. In addition the NWRA publishes its Income and Expenditure Account in our Annual Report. In guiding the governance of the organisation the NWRA also adheres to recommendations set out in the Code of Practice for Governance in State Bodies.

The BMW Regional Operational Programme is overseen by the Programme Monitoring Committee consisting of representatives from the EU, Member State, Managing Authority, Intermediary Bodies and Social Partners.



3 OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

THE BIG CHALLENGE

The European Commission classifies regions within the EU as either being a “Less Developed Region”, a “Transition Region” or a “More Developed Region”, based on their GDP per head of population relative to the EU27 Average.

Recently, the European Commission downgraded the Northern & Western region from a “More Developed Region” to a “Transition Region”, providing further evidence of the region’s continued economic decline.

An examination of trends in other key economic indicators of the region reinforces this decision. Commercial activity within the region has significantly worsened over the past number of years. Disposable income per head of population within the region remains well below the State average and its fellow Irish regions.

In January 2020, the NWRA published its report ‘Region in Transition’. The report examines trends in government investment in key growth enablers. The purpose of publishing the data is that it can be used as an individual and collective ‘tool’ to support targeted investments from European Structural and Irish exchequer funds.



RISKS IDENTIFIED

CORONAVIRUS

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted systems, structures and business practices. Our world will be very different in the short term and we expect the post Covid-19 era will have our economy shaped by new habits, practices and regulations based on reduced close-contact interaction and tighter mobility and travel restrictions. Adapting our strategic response incrementally, to this new 'Low Touch' economy, will be vital. This means strict adherence to government advice and continuous review of our organisational response plan.

BMW REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Since 1999, the Regional Assembly has been involved in the management and monitoring of EU programmes, specifically the delivery of the Border, Midland and Western Regional Operational Programme. The Assembly oversaw the €4bn Regional Operational programme 2000-2006, €458m programme for the 2007-2013 period and currently managing the €320m 2014-2020 programme. With changes to EU legislation, reduced funds and a push towards increased simplification there is an identified risk to the status of the Assembly as a 'Managing Authority' for the period of 2021-2027.

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (COR)

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is an EU advisory body composed of locally and regionally elected representatives coming from all 27 Member States. The CoR gives regions and cities a formal say in EU law-making ensuring that the position and needs of regional and local authorities are respected. The Irish delegation consists of nine full Members and nine Alternates and is appointed by Government. For this period, the region is under-represented with only one full nomination. The Northern and Western Regional Assembly would like to work with the Government and relevant Departments to ensure equity of representation from the regions.



THE BIG OPPORTUNITY... SMARTER & GREENER

The EU works in cycles and up to now the focus has been on growth. We have come to the end of the current cycle - 'Europe 2020'. It was Europe's ten year growth strategy.

The strategy included 'flagship initiatives' providing a framework through which the EU and Ireland mutually reinforce their efforts in areas supporting the Europe 2020 priorities such as innovation, the digital economy, employment, youth, industrial policy, poverty and resource efficiency.

Has it worked? EU strategy ultimately influences national policies. GDP growth nationally exceeded 5% each year since 2014. This growth has been driven by both domestic and exporting sectors. Incredibly employment grew by 230,000 between 2012 and 2017, unemployment down from 15% to 4.8%. Department of Finance forecast these trends to continue, reflecting a successful economy. This is why its important to celebrate both identities - Irish and European. In December 2019, the Commission adopted a Communication on the European Green Deal, setting out its roadmap towards a new growth policy for Europe - between 2020-2027.

With this shift in focus, our region can be a net beneficiary of new green and smart policies.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THIS?

- › Moving away from fossil fuels towards a greener low carbon society
- › Urban, networked, digitally smart and vibrant rural communities
- › Divesting from traditional digital growth in the ICT sector to Bio tech and advanced technology
- › A deeper awareness of our environmental, cultural and heritage assets
- › Rail, port and public transport, high residential density and cycling / walking

The question is though, at what pace will this be achieved?



TOOLS TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGE

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is the Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of our country out to the year 2040.

It is a framework to guide public and private investment, to create and promote opportunities for our people, and to protect and enhance our environment - from our villages to our cities, and everything around and in between.

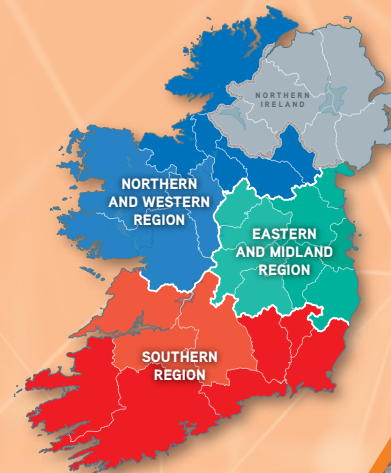
A NEW STRATEGY FOR MANAGING GROWTH

From an administrative and planning point of view, Ireland is divided into three regions: the Northern and Western, Southern, and Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly areas. We need to manage more balanced growth between these three regions because at the moment Dublin, and to a lesser extent the wider Eastern and Midland area, has witnessed an overconcentration of population, homes and jobs.

The National aim is to see a roughly 50:50 distribution of growth between the Eastern and Midland region, and the Southern and Northern and Western regions, with 75% of the growth to be outside of Dublin and its suburbs.

The NWRA has played a leadership role in identifying regional policies and coordinating initiatives that support the delivery and implementation of national planning policy.

The primary vehicle for this is the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). This strategy will provide regional level strategic planning and economic policy in support of the implementation of the National Planning Framework and provide a greater level of focus around the National Policy Objectives and National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF.



4

WHAT WE DO

WHY THINK REGIONALLY?

The regional economic narrative is complex. These complexities require careful diagnosis and deep understanding of what makes regions tick. Regional economies share many common traits, but also many differences. The common threads suggest a common, coordinated approach to policy is a good starting position.

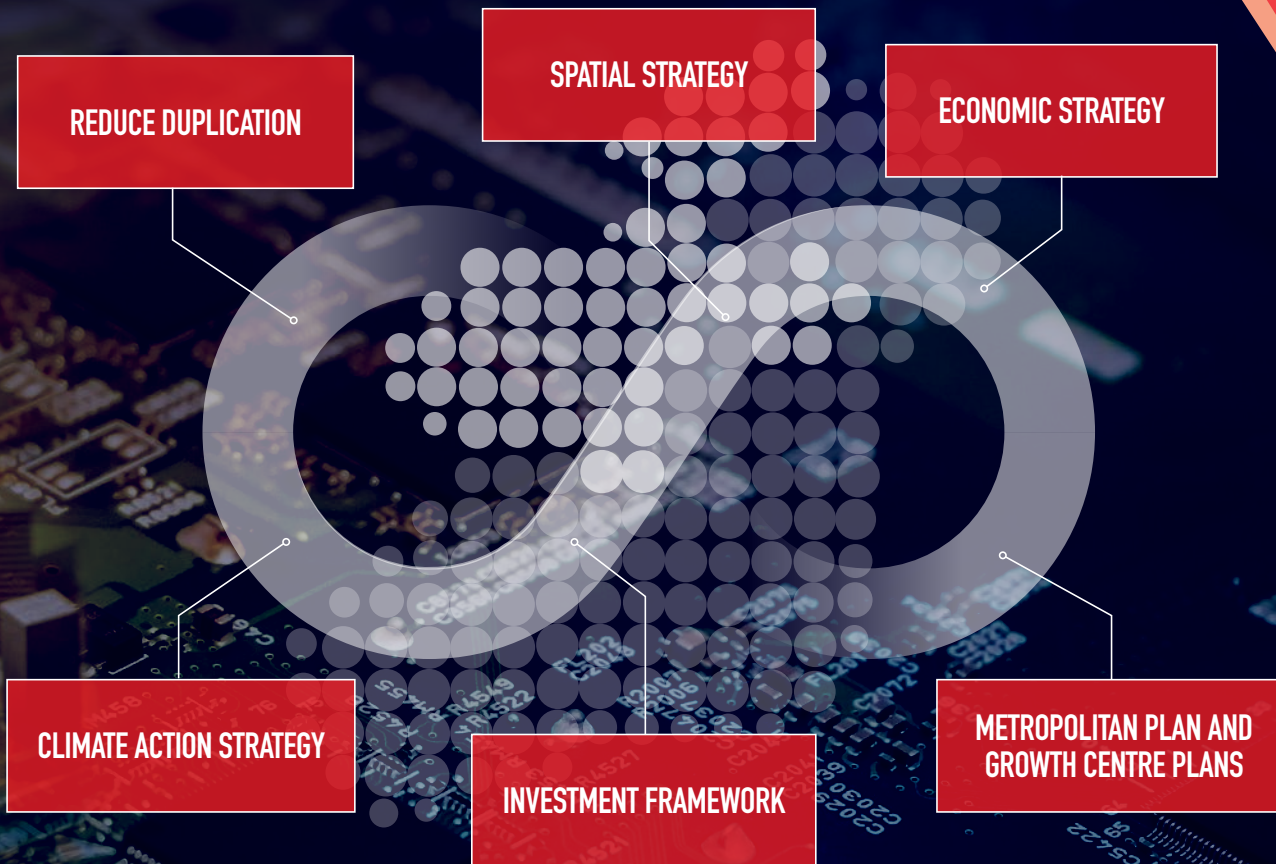
The challenge for central government and our region is to build long term competitiveness so that all regions can contribute and share in the benefit of growth. Place based strategies recognise that geographic context, including economic, social, cultural and institutional dimensions affect economic and social behaviour.

Our Regional Strategy is tailored to the needs of our 'place' and includes:

- › Spatial Strategy
- › Economic Strategy
- › Metropolitan Plan and Growth Centre Plans
- › Investment Framework
- › Climate Action Strategy
- › Digital Ecosystem Strategy (Smart)



REGIONAL STRATEGY



WHY DO WE NEED A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE?

There are a wide variety of reasons but primarily for intra-regional planning and inter-regional comparison.

INTRA-REGIONAL

Provision of essential link between national and local plans with prioritised investment.

INTER-REGIONAL

Achieve and monitor essential balance between people / jobs and regions.

AND OUR PEOPLE CAN DO?

Our biggest strength in the NWRA is our people and their experience. Albeit a lean and small organisation, the NWRA is committed to continuous innovation and performance improvement.

Some of the areas we excel at include:

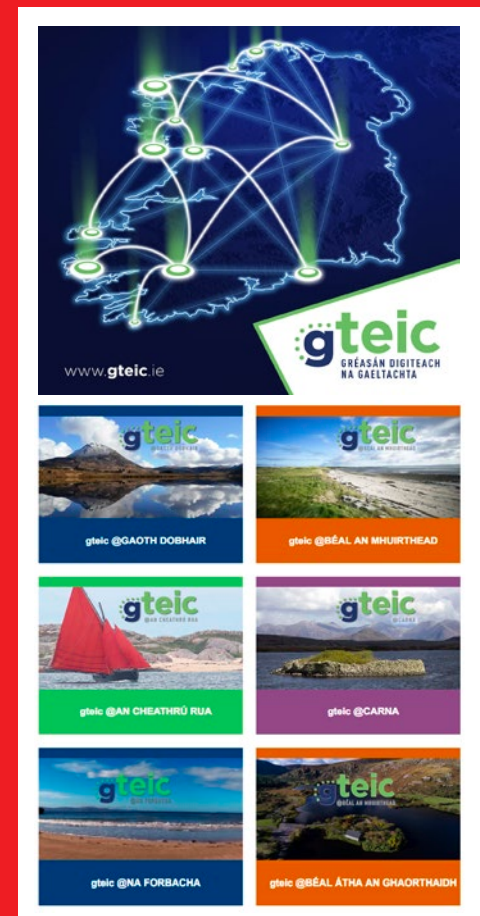
- › Regional Development
- › Spatial Planning
- › EU Policy / Public Policy
- › EU Fund Management
- › Geographical Information Systems (GIS)
- › National Delegation to the Committee of the Regions
- › Irish Regions European Office (Shared Service)
- › Economic Analysis
- › Communications / Partnership
- › Financial Management and controls of EU Funds (Audit & FLC)
- › Project Appraisal

For the first time we now have an opportunity to align our regional policy priorities with our corporate priorities. Consolidating the region as a leader in smart and green practices is the strategic space we are focused on. This allows us to tailor our supports, resources and people to the development of this green and smart agenda. This will direct our research, innovation focus and networks.

DIGI-2-MARKET IS ONE EXAMPLE OF THIS WORK.

The project is designed to maximise opportunities in agri, marine and engineering sectors through immersive digital technologies.

The NWRA assisted from the conceptual stage right through to application stage, to ensure this transformative project was successful and received the funding it required to deliver a hugely important project to our region.



POLICY DRIVERS

The operational environment for the Assembly is driven by international, national and local influences. Thus, policy formulation must interpret risk, opportunity and trends at these levels on behalf of our constituent stakeholders.

The NWRA has a unique regional perspective that necessitates a macro view exploring best practice and developing systems of rapid knowledge transfer and application.

As a consequence of the above known drivers, and those that remain unquantified, the Assembly will keep a constant oversight on national and international policy developments, shifts in the political and socio-economic environment.

This Corporate Plan will therefore be reviewed on an annual basis to make sure it is correctly focused on the changing prevailing conditions impacting the region and governance of the Assembly.

Legislative and Policy Drivers influencing the Regional Assembly:

- › Local Government Act 2014
- › Local Government Act 1991 (Regional Assemblies) (Establishment) Order 2014
- › Planning and Development Acts
- › Europe 2020 / Post 2020 Growth Strategy
- › EU Green Deal
- › EU Cohesion Policy
- › Common Provisions Regulation
- › Partnership Agreement and Operational Programmes
- › National Planning Framework
- › National Development Plan
- › Climate Action Plan
- › Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
- › County & City Development Plans
- › Local Economic and Community Plans
- › Rural Development Programme
- › Regional Enterprise Plans



WIDER ROLE

In having regard to the above statutory obligations, the Assembly has developed a wider but related range of responsibilities which it delivers within its overall statutory framework.

In addition, the NWRA has a particularly unique role connecting our 'stakeholders' with European affairs.

So, what we do, is:

- Lead on the ongoing development and implementation of the integrated growth framework
- Identify a blend of funding instruments to accelerate implementation
- Ensure necessary monitoring and review systems are designed and prioritised
- Through collaborative leadership implement best practice and promote innovative practices
- Promote a consistent and sustainable approach to land-use planning
- Advocate policy or system change necessary to deliver on evidence based regional needs.

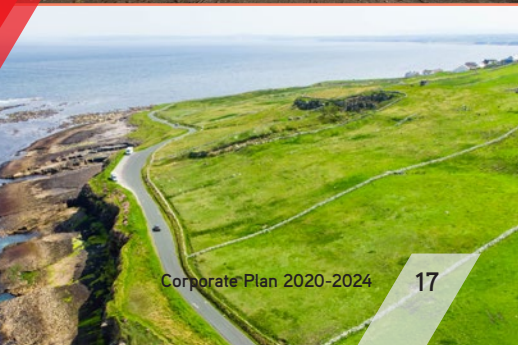


CAN ONLY BE DONE WITH OUR STAKEHOLDERS

- › Constituent Local Authorities
- › The National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC)
- › The Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government
- › The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
- › The European Commission, and
- › The European Parliament

Other Government Departments and Agencies also play a strategic role in the work of the Assembly. These include:

- › Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly / Southern Regional Assembly
- › Climate Adaption Regional Offices (CARO)
- › Local Development Companies
- › Údarás na Gaeltachta
- › Land Development Agency (LDA)
- › Office of Planning Regulator (OPR)
- › The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA)
- › The Committee of the Regions
- › Enterprise Ireland
- › IDA Ireland
- › Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
- › Department of Rural and Community Affairs
- › WDC / Westbic / Ernact
- › ICBAN
- › North West Strategic Growth Partnership
- › Adjoining Local Authorities in Northern Ireland
- › Loughs Agency
- › Department of Infrastructure (NI)
- › The tertiary education and training sector
- › Chambers of Commerce and Irish Business Employers Confederation
- › Other social partners



5 HOW WE WANT TO DO IT

OUR OVER-RIDING VALUES

The NWRA has a vision
'To be the most Connected Region in Europe'.

The Regional Assembly interacts with a wide variety of Government Departments and Agencies. In particular, it has an important relationship with the Local Government sector through the development of the RSES and with this, our Assembly's function and role have now been enhanced.

The Assembly will provide a stronger role in economic development through the implementation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), with participation by relevant agencies including the national economic development agencies in the formulation of and adherence to the regional strategies.

The Assembly will also have a new role in linking local economic development with local regional and national spatial planning through oversight of Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) and involvement in regional economic fora in conjunction with relevant interests.



CORE THEMES / COMMITMENT



This corporate plan is being published in tandem with our Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, allowing the organisation to frame its corporate priorities with regional delivery.

This also enables us to measure our success; in tandem with sustainable regional growth.

Interpreting the statutory function, our role and wider responsibilities above, the NWRA is adopting **Three Corporate Themes** and **One Corporate Commitment** in delivering its strategy.

These values have served us well under the previous plan but the NWRA is inserting one further over-riding value for the 2020-2024 period - 'sustainability'.

THEMES

1 BETTER PLACES:

Promote sustainable economic development and planning in the Northern and Western Region.

2 COMPETITIVENESS:

Effectively Manage the Regional Operational Programme and proactively explore alternative financial instruments to support our constituent stakeholders.

3 COLLABORATION:

Drive innovative collaborative projects that assist priorities identified in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.

COMMITMENT: EXCELLENT GOVERNANCE

All of this to be underpinned by excellent corporate governance, organisational development and commitment to public sector values.

6

ENABLING IT

WORKING WITH THE ASSEMBLY MEMBERS

The members of the Assembly will be supported by the Director and Executive of the Assembly to carry out their statutory responsibilities.

Members will work through various committees which may, from time to time, be put in place to address issues which they identify as being relevant to the overall effective working of the Assembly.

The Director and executive will:

- Support the Members, their work and responsibilities to ensure the objectives of this Plan are achieved.
- Provide the necessary training and development for both Members and staff to deliver effective, efficient and quality services across the full responsibilities of the Assembly.
- Enable the Members and the Assembly to actively communicate with each other, the staff and wider stakeholders of the Assembly.





WORKING WITH COMMUNICATIONS

The Assembly acknowledges the need to build on the much-improved communication of its messages over the past five years.

THIS WILL REQUIRE:

- › Putting in pro-active communication programmes internally and externally.
- › Applying a corporate expression of the communication messages consistently.
- › Application of a project management approach is required internally and this should inform the organisation review.



BUILDING A DIGITAL FUTURE FOR THE ASSEMBLY

Considerable effort has already been put in place to build up the Assembly's capacity to use digital platforms to complete its work programmes. Our agility in responding to 'remote working' through the Covid-19 response demonstrated this.

This will be further enhanced over the life of this corporate plan to:

- › Put in place a structure through which a value-added approach to digitalisation can be delivered
- › Explore the potential of remote hub working and adopt a policy on same within the new work force plan framework
- › Use a project management approach to using our technological platforms
- › Publish quarterly e-newsletters for public consumption
- › Need to update the website to underpin our external communications
- › Utilise digital platforms to communicate internally and externally with stakeholders



ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A comprehensive organisation review is now required, because we:

- Need to understand the changing nature of the work and the level of skills required to meet the demands of the work programme now and over the coming five years
- Need to understand our skills deficits and how to meet them from within the existing staff compliment in terms of possible training and development and, if necessary additional personnel and supporting technologies
- Study/review to underpin work flows and their management and the appropriate reporting structures as a consequence
- Provision for additional personal development processes and building organisational capacity to engage on performance, coaching and creation of an open environment



MONAGHAN

CAVAN

BLOCK 01

7

IN SUMMARY

WE WANT TO...

Be the primary driver for regional sustainable development through planning, resourcing, and delivering programmes with the support of our partners.

WHILE WORKING TOWARDS...

Consolidating the region as a leader in smart and green practices.





VISION TO ACTIONS

THEME: BETTER PLACES

To promote sustainable economic development and planning in the Northern and Western Region

RSES Develop	Launch the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) in Q2 2020
RSES Develop	Establish governance structures & framework for the implementation of the RSES in Q3 2020
RSES Develop	Prepare policy submissions on behalf of the Assembly in response to relevant public consultation
RSES Develop	Establish

(REAR POCKET)

[VISIT NWRA.IE](http://www.nwra.ie)



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