

COUNCIL REVIEW

JOURNAL FOR CITY AND COUNTY COUNCILS



IRELAND'S HIDDEN HEARTLANDS

MIDLANDS ON MAJOR TOURISM DRIVE

**LAND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
MAPS €1.25BN PLAN OF ACTION**

**MIGRANTS & LOCAL ELECTIONS
TIME TO BUILD ON DIVERSITY**

**LACK OF POLITICAL WILL ON
DIRECTLY ELECTED MAYORS**

SOUTHERN REGIONAL UPDATES ON SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

As the Southern Regional Assembly prepares to publish the draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for public consultation, following months of work and engagement with key stakeholders since the process started in October 2017, its Acting Director David Kelly outlines the importance for regional development and growth to Olivia Kelleher.

The Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) is in “ongoing dialogue” with the key stakeholders in the region, in particular with the local authorities, to translate the National Planning Framework to Regional Level, according to its newly-appointed Acting Director.

David Kelly says the Assembly is currently in the process of identifying the key main economic drivers in the region, in a bid to create pre-conditions for sustainable jobs and to build on the potential of the region. “This will enable the local authorities to develop their plans and strategies at local level to realise the potential of their own regions,” he tells ‘Council Review’

Kelly, who recently stepped into the SRA Director’s position in an acting capacity following the retirement of Stephen Blair over the summer, says that the work is ongoing in the region, in particular with the local authorities.

“Over the last number of months we have been assembling the building blocks of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, through consultation, collaboration, and establishing the evidence base. We are getting to the stage where, following the approval of the Members of the Assembly, we will publish the draft which will go out for public consultation. I am hopeful that this will happen over the coming weeks.”

He says it is a rigorous and challenging process as the southern region has a very strong proposition in that it contains three of the regional cities (Cork, Limerick and Waterford) and has a very strong network of towns and villages.

“It also has a diverse and strong rural offering with a strong agri-sector and this brings the challenge of harnessing the potential and ensuring there are opportunities across the region whilst reflecting the objectives of the NPF.”

The SRA’s Acting Director observes that regional policy in Ireland hasn’t really evolved to the same extent as it has across the rest of Europe. “Across Europe there are very strong regional structures and governments, but this hasn’t evolved to the same extent in Ireland.

“In the mid-1990s the eight regional authorities were established, in line with EU policy to have a greater regional input into programme planning and monitoring of EU funds. Their role was then expanded in relation to the Regional Planning



Guidelines under the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) in 2000.

“The start of the noughties also saw the establishment of the inaugural regional assemblies (BMW and S&E) with the prime function of managing EU funded programmes.”

STRONG LEGISLATIVE BASIS

Now, for each of the three assemblies, in the preparation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies there will be a marrying for the first time of spatial and economic planning, which also has a strong legislative basis.

“There is also the fact that funding will now follow the policy, investments will be made based on the priorities identified in the RSES. So, I think this will be a key strength of the NPF and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.”

The Offaly native says it is vital that all key stakeholders are around the table during the process. "It is not being done in isolation or a vacuum. This has been very much and will continue to be a collaborative approach with all key stakeholders from national to local level, in particular with the local authorities.

"We are working very closely with all the chief executives, the directors of services, and senior planners to develop this strategy that reflects the priorities and the needs at the regional level, while also translating the key principles of the National Planning Framework."

The SRA's Acting Director says it is important to reiterate the fact that it all has a legislative basis. "All relevant public agencies will be required now to ensure that their strategies and plans are aligned with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies."

REGIONAL ASSEMBLY BACKGROUND

Established on 1 January 2015, the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) is one of three such Assemblies in the Republic of Ireland, following the dissolution of the Border, Midlands and Western (BMW) and Southern & Eastern Regional Assemblies (SERA).

The former eight regional authorities and two regional assemblies were consolidated under the Government's regional reform process under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 to form the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA), the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRRA) and the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA).

The three new Assemblies incorporate the functions of both the former regional authorities and assemblies, with significant enhancement of some powers, particularly in relation to spatial planning and economic development. Each one is charged with preparing new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies for their regions.

TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Each Assembly also plays a role in a number of transnational programmes collectively called European Territorial Co-operation Programmes (ETCP). These programmes are co-funded by the ERDF and were formerly known as INTERREG programmes.

The programmes are an integral part of the EU's Cohesion policy. The Assembly's role ranges from managing the programme to acting as the Irish contact point or providing the first level financial control function.

The SRA was the managing and certifying authority for the Ireland Wales Territorial Co-Operation Programme (2007-2013), and has continued in its role as the programme partner for the Ireland-Wales programme during the 2014-2020 period.

As the prescribed body under the Planning Acts, this means that the Southern Regional Assembly must be consulted on material variations to County and City Development Plans and Local Area Plans. When assessing any such proposals the Assembly has regard to the general welfare, strategic planning and sustainable development requirements of the region.

FACTFILE – DAVID KELLY

David Kelly, who has almost 20 years' experience in managing EU funds and regional development, was appointed Acting Director of the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) in July 2018 following the retirement of Stephen Blair.

He first joined the Assembly in 2001 as a Programme Executive and was appointed Assistant Director in 2008. He has been responsible for managing ERDF co-funded Regional Programmes and acted as the managing authority for the Ireland-Wales Maritime Cross-Border Programme (2007-13).

David currently co-chairs the Ireland Wales Programme Project Steering Committee, and represents Ireland on the North-West Europe European Territorial Co-operation Programme Monitoring Committee. He currently chairs this programme.

He was also responsible for co-ordinating several INTERREG projects in which the SRA was a project partner. Prior to his employment with the Assembly, he worked for a local development company in Westmeath, managing the LEADER Programme. An Agricultural Science Graduate from UCD, David Kelly originally hails from Tullamore, Co. Offaly.



EU-FUNDED PROJECT UPDATES

Here's an update on four projects funded through the EU Interreg Europe Programme with which the Southern Regional Assembly is a partner.

EMPOWER:

A technical workshop on energy monitoring, regulation and management



EMPOWER
Interreg Europe

will be held in Almada, Portugal on 25-26 October as part of the EU-funded EMPOWER Project, which aims to reduce greenhouse gases through monitoring energy efficiency. The project has been running since January 2017.

The SRA – one of the partners of an inter-regional project – will attend the workshop along with Brian Cassidy, Cork City Council (one of the SRA stakeholders for this project), who will present on the rationale for monitoring energy efficiency.

This technical workshop will be a knowledge-sharing opportunity for all partners to identify the difficulties, find solutions and learn from mistakes to ensure the success of the policy objectives. This will form a part of the final action plan under the EMPOWER project.

MARIE:

The MARIE Project, which is helping to create responsible research and innovation policies, will participate



MARIE
Interreg Europe

in the 'Responsible Innovation Summit' in Croke Park on 16 October and will address Mainstreaming Responsibility into Innovation Policy.

This summit will allow the SRA and its stakeholders to be part of the conversation and influence how European projects can be used to integrate responsible innovation into public policy.

Participants will also have the opportunity to reflect on the projects presented at the summit and how MARIE hopes to influence the policy framework for innovation and how responsible innovation can be made a reality at public policy level.

MATCH-UP: This is a newly-approved and exciting Interreg Europe project to encourage the use of low carbon means of transport by improvements to modal interchange between walking, cycling, public transport, trains and green vehicles.

With increasing levels of air pollution, emissions and traffic congestion the development

of sustainable multimodal mobility is a key challenge for the EU. The inter-regional and multi-level exchange of experience processes through staff exchanges, site visits and the involvement of local stakeholders will increase the skills and knowledge among policy makers. This will influence their capacity to promote new initiatives towards sustainable mobility.

The MATCH-UP project partners include the University of Bologna, Italy (the lead partner), two regional government partners (Southern Regional Assembly, Ireland and County of Northeim in Germany), and two municipal partners (Municipality of Funchal, Portugal and Timisoara Municipality, Romania).

This new project offers an opportunity for the SRA to identify international good practices that could assist Ireland in meeting its European emission targets. The SRA will shortly launch a call for interest to invite local bodies to become members of the MATCH-UP stakeholder group.



MATCH-UP
Interreg Europe

FIRESPOL:

This project seeks to boost regionally-specialised and decentralised renewable energy private investment

through shared best practice and innovation within regional operational programmes. FIRESPOL aims to create inside operational programmes, new supporting schemes such as Financial Instruments that are capable of unlocking the great potential of private investment by overcoming the financial, legal and administrative barriers in decentralised investment for both Renewable Energy Source (RES) generation and storage.

In July 2018, the FIRESPOL kick-off meeting was hosted in Spain by the lead partner AGENEX. This was the first inter-regional event of the project. Participants included the six partner organisations from Spain, Ireland (SRA), Poland, Latvia, Germany and Croatia, as well as banking entities and promoters of renewable energies in the Extremadura region, who, as stakeholders of the project, have offered their vision on the financing of renewable energies. Similar events will be hosted by each partner over the course of the project.

For further information visit www.interregeurope.eu/firespol/



FIRESPOL
Interreg Europe