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Application form “AEBR-Cross Border Award” 2017
Deadline: 31st July 2017

Please, fill in the grey gaps and return this form by e-mail!

Periphery – In the Centre of Cohesion
- CBC in the light of the 7th Cohesion Report
- CBC – driving force for the future European Cohesion

1. General information

1.1 Applicant border / cross-border region:
North West City-Region (Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council functional area)

1.2 Title of the cross-border measure* [project(s), programme(s) / strategy(ies)]:
The North West Strategic Growth Plan and the North West Strategic Growth Partnership (NWSGP)

1.3 Period:
2014 to Present Day

1.4 Application Lead Partner:
Donegal County Council

Contact:
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1.5 Partners:
Donegal County Council
Derry City & Strabane District Council

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1.6. Was there any financing of the measures/projects?
If so, what kind:

Council-funded to date from own budgets – between 2014 to present day; with monies committed by both the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive under the 2015 ‘A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan’ (the North West Development Fund) yet to be fully allocated and released.

1.7 Links to other projects, measures (only if applicable):
Ireland NW: Gateway to Growth - <http://irelandnw.com/>

2. Contents

2.1 Objectives of the measures/projects (strategy?) with regard to the motto 2017:

The North West Region of the Island of Ireland is the fourth largest urban agglomeration on the island of Ireland and experiences a national jurisdictional border – soon to become an EU external border. It is well recognised across the island of Ireland that while the North West faces many challenges - not least because of its peripherality from Dublin and Belfast and associated lack of investment over many decades - this region is an untapped source of great potential - economically, socially and environmentally. It is widely accepted that the challenges can only be met, and the opportunities pursued, with a consistent and long-term approach to coordination of the development of the region. During the course of 2014-15, a number of processes aligned which created an exciting background for enhanced collaboration; namely:

- the reform of local government in both jurisdictions which resulted in Councils experiencing greater alignment in their functions on a North-South, cross-border basis and
- the development of an aligned vision for the North West Region by the Elected Members and Executive of both Councils

In 2014, both Councils commenced discussions with both Governments on the collaborative potential of this region, and the role it could play in turning its peripheral location from a challenge to an opportunity. With the support of both Governments, the Councils then engaged the International Centre for Local and Regional Development, a North-South-US partnership of academic experts in the field of spatial planning and regional development to work them on co-designing a new collaborative process for the North West.

Led by Local Government and involving close and co-ordinated partnership working with Central Government in both jurisdictions, this model was developed with the strategic assistance of the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD).

These structures, endorsed by the North South Ministerial Council at its Plenary Meeting of 4th July 2016, are a result of the continued engagement under the North West Gateway Initiative (NWGI), between officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Executive Office (TEO) and regional stakeholders regarding the direction and priorities for the North West region.

The resulting North West Strategic Action Plan was completed in September 2015 (and further updated in July 2016) and firmly sets out the vision for the North West as a net contributor to the all-island economy; and the mechanisms to be employed to make this a reality. The new model, providing an overarching framework to promote jobs and growth in the region, is founded on the concept of place-based leadership as a means to delivering ongoing sustainable growth, has best practice in spatial planning as its core driver. The place-based structures to support the growth of the North West Region of the Island of Ireland consist of:

- The North West Regional Development Group – driving an integrated cross-border approach to implementing shared priorities arising from the Community Planning (GB)/Local Economic and Community Planning (IE) processes; and
- The North West Strategic Growth Partnership, which involves Local Government and key Central Government representation and will deliver durable coordinated and partnership-based cooperation between the region and central government in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and in a wider East-West context.

The Strategic Growth Partnership, with a key role as the regional driver for cross-border cooperation, is central to building strong linkages between the respective programmes for government, North and South and, as relevant, funding programmes. The function of this body is to be a focused forum that can inform the alignment of relevant investment from both sides of the border to meet the growth needs of the region and through which place-based leadership (demonstrated by the Councils) can connect with Government, North and South. The core purpose of this group will be the harnessing of opportunities within and across the region as they arise, supporting central government to deliver on the priorities as envisaged originally under the North West Gateway Initiative (NWGI) and in tracking key central government investments relevant for the growth of the North West Region. To date, the Growth Partnership has met twice (16 December 2016 and 28 June 2017) and already a number of core areas for strategic cooperation have been identified - transport and infrastructure, tourism, telecommunications, industry/education alignment – all of which are central to unlocking the economic potential of the region and opening it up to more investment.

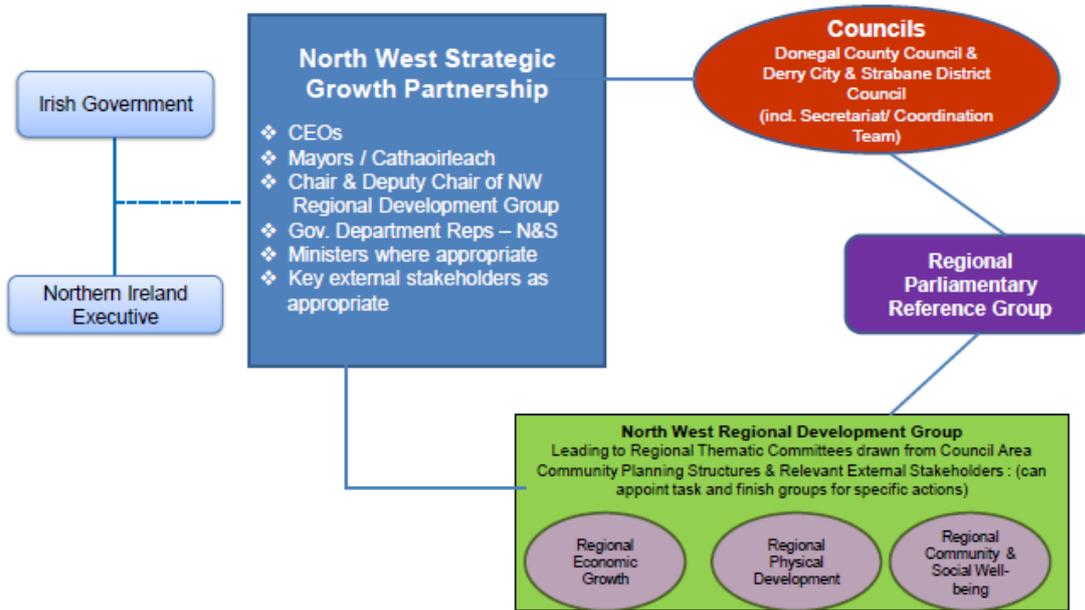
The ultimate aim of this project is to allow the North West Region of the island of Ireland, through the Councils, to respond in a coordinated and flexible way to both internal and external opportunities for co-operation, development and investment. The Councils, who are committed to taking a lead in the future development of the region and supporting the strategic priorities of central government, have set out three objectives under which a range of strategic projects will be delivered over the short to medium-term. These objectives are: (1) Achieving regional economic growth and investment; (2) Driving regional physical and environmental development; and (3) Promoting regional social and community cohesion and well-being.

2.2 Organisational structure and activities to implement the objectives (e.g. joint secretariat, contract, etc.):

The approach as highlighted below (see Figure 1) has been designed to deliver a resilient and durable coordinated and partnership-based cooperation between the region and central government in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and in a wider East-West context. The organisational structure, placing the Councils of the North West 'front and centre', was co-designed with representatives from Central Government in Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive in a year long process facilitated by the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD).

The arrangement being put forward for the North West, with all partners at Central Government level fully engaged, offers an opportunity to both administrations on the island to demonstrate change leadership on an international stage through a solution/outcomes-focused, collaborative and area-based mechanism which has the citizen's needs at its centre (regardless of changes or fluctuations in the macro-political environment).

Figure 1: Structure and Membership of the New Collaborative Partnership



The new arrangements remove a longstanding challenge that has faced the region - that of multiple voices speaking for the region. The new structures offer government departments access to a single body for a range of engagement, consultation and evaluation purposes. This will not only lead to efficient use of public time and resources but also, because of the new functions of local government (following local government reform in both jurisdictions during 2014 and 2015), ensure greater integration and 'proofing' of policy across local government units (for example, Community Plans in Northern Ireland and Local Economic and Community Plans in Ireland);

The new arrangements for the North West provide opportunities for exploration, learning and sharing of innovative approaches to more efficient public administration and service design. They create an environment where Councils continue to explore and test best international practice models for shared services - with stakeholders also benefitting from the informal networking and professional learning and development opportunities which accompany collaborative working.

2.3 When have the measures/projects (strategies) been implemented?

Since late 2015, senior management within both Councils have been working together to progress the measures contained within the North West Strategic Action Plan. Through collaborative action on the priority pillars, both Councils are committed to the North West becoming a resilient economy. The Councils - together with other key regional stakeholders including elected representatives – have assented to collaborate on the three regional pillars as noted above, with an initial specific emphasis being placed on the following priorities: job creation, growth and investment (incl. innovation); skills and training, regional connectivity, tourism, energy/renewable/green infrastructure and health. The emphasis on innovation and low carbon/renewables is in line with the emerging shift in cohesion policy and associated funding while that on regional connectivity – given the rural-ness of the region – is probably less so.

Key to the success of this has been ensuring the membership of both structures is correct – the North West Regional Development Group and the North West Strategic Growth Partnership; with initial emphasis placed on the Development Group and the shared working of both Councils. In support of the working arrangements, a Partnership Agreement has been co-designed by both Councils – and ratified by their respective Executives.

In addition, over the past year, the Councils have been developing a series of their core strategies – either for the first time (as planned for under the reform of local government) or through an embedded system of timed renewals; for example,

- the Donegal County Development Plan (under review), and the Local and Economic Community Plan for Donegal (recently adopted),

- the Area Development Plan for Derry City and Strabane District Council (new initiative at early stages) and the Community Plan for Derry City and Strabane District Council (new initiative – out for public consultation).

Each strategy in its own way is not only charged with reconciling local priorities with regional/national strategic priorities, but also capturing the priorities of the North West Strategic Action Plan as appropriate. This work is being supported by the new structures as outlined in Figure 1 above; in particular through the emerging inter-relationship between the North West Strategic Growth Partnership and the North West Regional Development Group.

The North West Regional Development Group involves senior management and elected representatives from both councils – and other key stakeholders as appropriate – identifying joint programmes of activity to be pursued over the short to medium term which aid in/support the delivery of national objectives. The Development Group meets every three months to develop, refine and progress its agreed action points – working through what is required, what it will cost, who needs to be sitting together to make this happen and where can the funding be sourced – with working groups then charged to make this happen. All activity of the Development Group is fed into the workings of the Growth Partnership – thus further demonstrating to the senior government representatives the commitment of the Councils to take a driving role in making things happen and delivering on a transformative agenda for the North West.

2.4 Special framework conditions (a. geographical, political, etc. / b. only rural area (no regional metropolis), mountainous areas, external border).

The North West region has long been regarded as one of the most peripheral regions on the island of Ireland. While the region is the fourth largest urban agglomeration on the island of Ireland, it is largely rural in nature and heavily reliant on traditional manufacturing, fisheries and the agricultural sectors for employment. While 35% of the population of the North West City Region are under 25 years of age (one of the youngest populations in Europe), it is proving difficult for this cross-border region to grow its population. The North West City Region currently has a higher and further education student population of 40,000; but a more concerted effort is required around matching industry needs to skills training and higher education programmes. The region is home to two major acute regional hospitals that serve a broad cross-jurisdictional catchment area; the future of which is uncertain under Brexit.

Indeed Brexit brings with it many challenges for this cross-border region. Brexit will result in this City-Region being cut in two by an external border/international frontier – a border that the majority in Northern Ireland voted against. Peripherality remains a defining characteristic for the region, with poor infrastructural and communication linkages (roads, rail, and broadband in particular) to major cities on the island of Ireland such as Dublin and Belfast. This in turn has implications for trade, inward investment, access to labour and labour mobility. The region is largely rural in nature with a high percentage of cross-border trade along the wider border region being dominated by the agri-food sector; a sector in turn highlighted by the Irish Government as being at high-risk under Brexit. The City-Region has worked tirelessly on negating the impact of back-to-back development over the decades – through the North West Region Cross Border Group, the North West Partnership Forum and now, these new collaborative arrangements. The new structures and resulting Strategic Action Plan are now viewed as a key mitigating action against the potential impacts of Brexit – even though this process commenced in advance of the Brexit referendum or vote.

3. Contribution of the measure (added value) to the improvement of the border/cross-border region: *(not more than half a page)*

The development of the North West Strategic Growth Plan and formation of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership, and associated structures as outlined in Figure 1, represents the evolution of economic, social and territorial cohesion in the region. The newly constituted collaborative structures allow for the North West Region, through Donegal County Council and Derry City & Strabane District Council, to respond in a coordinated and flexible way to both internal and external opportunities for co-operation, development and investment.

In terms of measures delivered on to date, the Councils have:

1. Developed a North West Strategic Action Plan (2015, Updated 2016)
2. Working through the North west Regional Development Group, prepared an Action Plan Matrix detailing specific projects to be pursued over the short-to medium-term with PIDs currently being developed for each (ongoing)
3. Carried out an Initial Analysis of the challenges and Opportunities of Brexit for the Derry-Londonderry North West City Region (2017)
4. Working with Maynooth University, commenced development of a North West City-Region Dashboard, the core objective of which is to enable city managers to efficiently and effectively operate a range of urban services in real-time and formulate evidence-based policy, and empowering citizens and businesses by sharing information that will facilitate participation, improve quality of life, and foster entrepreneurship (Batty 2013). This will be the third dashboard developed (after Dublin and Cork) but the first to be cross-border and cross-jurisdictional in nature. As the process of the U.K. leaving the EU gets under way, and in the context of the uncertainty this brings, the importance of having access to accurate and up-to-date data for this cross-border region cannot be underestimated (ongoing)
5. Continued to liaise with all other border councils on developing a coordinated response to Brexit and associated 'border' issues (ongoing)
6. Organised a series of meeting with senior government representatives, including Government Committees, on priority projects for the North West and wider border region including key regional economic development proposals, capital investment needs, and cross-border trade (ongoing).

Through the North West Strategic Growth Partnership, efforts are underway to align the priorities of various Government Departments (such as education and economy) to the wider development needs of the region; including examining the role of Local Government in laying the pathway for the delivery of key initiatives. For example, the Councils are working closely with the Departments of Education in both jurisdictions on the expansion of Ulster University- Magee Campus (and relationship of this expansion to the wider regeneration strategy of Derry City and wider North West Region) and the development of a North West Medical School.

4. Added value for the development of cross-border cooperation at European level

(not more than half a page)

A new model of territorial co-operation based on place-based leadership and best practice in international development is being developed and implemented in the North West City Region of the island of Ireland. This is being led by Local Government (Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council) and co-designed in full partnership with Central Government Departments across all policy briefs in both Ireland (IE) and Northern Ireland (UK). The model combines civic leadership/engagement and central and local government decision-making with robust governance arrangements to firmly link regional cooperation to grassroots priorities expressed through the community planning process. The model is based on international best practice in spatial planning and co-operation, and has been developed in partnership with expertise from the University applied research sector in Ireland, Northern Ireland and the US through the International Centre for Local and Regional Development. The resulting structures have full and robust formal risk and governance processes in place which meet with the satisfaction of the Member States (and protocols of the EU). The structures also carry technical expertise and experience arising from previous experience of the Local Government organisations of both delivering, and acting as an Intermediary Funding Body for, ERDF and ESF funds targeting the needs of the region.

The new model entails specific arrangements being put in place, involving regional and local government leadership and partnership with central government, in order for the region to release its full and considerable potential as a net contributor to the economy, North and South and in an East-West Ireland/UK context. The model aligns to the Local Government functions of the place-based leadership approach developed by Prof. Robin Hambleton in University of Bristol and the wider purpose of place-based planning and development as advocated in the Barca Report.

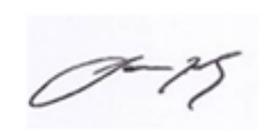
As a mode of good practice, the North West Strategic Growth Partnership highlights the benefits to be accrued by regions working closely with central government departments to progress priority programmes and ensure alignment between policies on a national/regional/local level. This model embeds collaborative working via methods that support all dimensions of territorial cohesion as they relate to core member state business and resource planning.

5. Further annexes

yes no

Which ones?

- a) North West Strategic Growth Plan (Updated 2016)
- b) Gateway to Growth Prospectus (2016)
- c) Initial Analysis of the Challenges and Opportunities of Brexit for the Derry-Londonderry North West City Region (2017)
- d)



Seamus Neely
Chief Executive
Donegal County Council



John Kelpie
Chief Executive
Derry City & Strabane District Council

28th July 2017
Date

Signature

(if submitted by e-mail please also insert your name and contact details!)