



Derry City & Strabane  
District Council

Comhairle Chathair  
Dhoire & Cheantar  
an tSratha Báin

Derry Cittie & Stràbane  
Destrìck Cooncil



**Comhairle Contae  
Dhún na nGall**  
Donegal County Council

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# **The North West Strategic Growth Plan**

## **A Model for Regional Development and Growth of the North West of the Island of Ireland**

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Updated July 2016

ICLRD

#### **Purpose of this Document:**

- **To provide a comprehensive overview of the structural approach proposed to release and sustain the development and growth potential of the North West region of the island of Ireland, as a continuation and development of the objectives of the North West Gateway Initiative and in a way which is consistent with these;**
- **To secure, amongst senior leaders and decision-makers, an ongoing understanding of the opportunity which now presents for both local and central government in both jurisdictions to commit to working together in a formalised partnership - with the core objective of achieving the outcomes associated with the North West region becoming a very strong contributor to the economy in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland;**
- **To provide a briefing context for the progression of decisions to secure central government commitment to participate in the proposed structural cooperation arrangement, and for the operationalisation of that commitment in line with the overall process timescale.**

#### **Key Messages:**

- **The North West Region of the Island of Ireland is the fourth largest urban agglomeration on the island of Ireland; it is the only functional economic region of such scale on the island which experiences a national jurisdictional border. As such, specific arrangements involving regional and local government leadership and partnership with central government are required 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 context; the consistency of the arrangements outlined in this plan with the objectives of the North West Gateway Initiative has been noted by the North South Ministerial Council at Plenary Meetings in June 2015 and July 2016;**
- **An opportunity has been created, through the alignment of Local Government functions in a place-based leadership model, for a new arrangement which allows central government to coordinate its resource planning and spending as they relate to the region - leading to a corresponding impact on the region's growth potential and optimal value for money as regards public investment in both jurisdictions;**
- **Proposed structures are set out in this document for an approach which can 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;**
- **This plan is a result of the continued engagement under the North West Gateway Initiative, between officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Executive Office (TEO) with regional stakeholders regarding the direction and priorities for the North West region and can also facilitate the implementation of specific commitments set out in 'A Fresh Start- The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan' (2015). The above referenced**

**engagement was noted by the North South Ministerial Council in the Plenary Joint Communique issued on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2016, in addition to NSMC agreement that senior officials from relevant departments in both jurisdictions should meet with the two Councils as part of the Framework laid out in this document.**

## 1.0 Introduction

1.1 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 2015, a number of processes have aligned which create an exciting background for enhanced collaboration. The main councils in this region - namely Donegal County Council and the new Derry City and Strabane District Council - are fully committed to working together to harness this opportunity and, in this context, to working on an inter-agency basis within the region.

1.2 In relation to the process in which the stakeholders are currently involved, and which the ICLRD is facilitating, the ICLRD notes that:

- Through the Review of Public Administration (RPA) in Northern Ireland, and the Reform of Local Government Agenda in Ireland, **a landscape of larger or consolidated councils is in place, with councils having more functions**. Of particular significance is the integration of economic/community/land-use planning within one executive structure at the local level;
- With reform of local government comes **the emergence of like-with-like functions across local authorities in each jurisdiction**; the presence of which is a known and powerful enabler for effective cross-border cooperation on mutually-agreed priorities;
- Since early 2014, the Joint Chairs of the **North West Gateway Initiative (NWGI)** have been liaising with key stakeholders in the region to not only better understand how projects pursued under the Initiative have impacted on the region but also if/how the aims of the Initiative should continue to be brought forward;
- **The Stormont House Agreement makes a commitment to relevant Ministers considering strategic approaches to the development of the North West region**; a commitment that has led in part to the formation of a Ministerial Sub-Group on Regional Opportunities that is focused on the economic development of Northern Ireland as a whole - but with an initial focus being placed on the North West<sup>1</sup>;
- **'A Fresh Start'- The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan (2015)** further commits to the development of the North West Region of the Island including support for specific resources to assist with regional development and growth;

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<sup>1</sup> It is also worth noting the value for money inherent in this shared, outcomes-led approach to the use of public resources available for the region is entirely consistent with the need for effective long-term management of Northern Ireland public finances and reform of public administration set out as agreed priorities of the Stormont House Agreement, as well as key principles for reform of public administration in Ireland.

- The Councils recognise that to become the author of the North West region's economic future, they must work smarter and be more focused and agile. Such an approach does not only enjoy widespread political and civic support but also the backing of central/regional government across the island. **Councils in the North West confirm that they are ready to respond operationally to this opportunity** to establish new, more interconnective working arrangements for collaborative development of the region into the future, and to optimise the potential of the new arrangements. In this regard, they recognise that there is a need for a closer alignment of strategic priorities and interventions at the regional and local level.

1.3 This cross-border region is renowned for its rich tourism, culture and heritage offerings, industrial history, breath-taking scenery, its robust maritime tradition, the entrepreneurial spirit and creativity of its people, and its strong sense of community. While each Council has been proactive to date in utilising these assets to market the region as a place to live, work and holiday, these are shared assets which deserve a shared approach to their sustainable development to the benefit of the region as a whole. Councils are in a position to take pro-active leadership in a developmental agenda in this regard. In so doing, they recognise that a successful North West region needs a vivacious, attractive and connected metropolitan core to drive growth, surrounded and supported by a vibrant rural hinterland.

1.4 In the North West, the renewed commitment to advancing the objectives of the NWGI by both administrations is heartening; and from the perspective of the key stakeholders in the North West the ensuing process requires strengthening the capacity of the local councils to be strong local partners with the relevant central government departments.

1.5 Indeed, the wider public sector and financial reform priorities across both jurisdictions - as outlined in the aforementioned Stormont House Agreement for Northern Ireland and the Public Expenditure and Reform Agenda for Ireland - expedites the need for improved efficiencies at all levels of public administrative working, including local government (referencing back to Footnote 1). The key stakeholders in the North West would argue strongly that the proposed arrangements being tabled in this document can provide a forum for the co-ordination and focusing of resource and expenditure planning on both an inter-governmental and cross-council basis.

1.6 The proposed bespoke arrangements for the North West can facilitate greater day-to-day joint working between both administrations and local government through shared approaches, co-ordinated planning/delivery, and optimisation of value for money (VFM) in public financial investments focusing on three key regional growth pillars:

- Economic growth and investment;
- Physical and environmental development; and
- Social and community cohesion and wellbeing.

#### *Economic Growth & Investment:*

- In addition to ensuring strategic alignment, the proposed arrangement in the North West can facilitate the planning, promotion, and monitoring and implementation of major public expenditure projects and growth and development initiatives impacting on the City region. This will provide an opportunity for enhancing risk management of major public expenditure initiatives, both capital and revenue-based, and for pro-actively driving best outcomes;
- Having considered other economically functional areas where an international border is present, the proposed approach for the North West is based on international good practice in place-based leadership. It is the express aim of the stakeholders who have provided leadership for the development of this proposal that effective and efficient planning and management of regional growth leads to the Region being a net contributor to both economies, thus maximising its revenue potential in public fiscal terms;
- The proposed arrangement will allow for normalisation of, and mechanisms for, joint working on a specific territorial interface between the Northern Ireland and Ireland which can, in turn, deliver benefits relevant to the core developmental agendas of both administrations while also tackling the problematic issue of managing growth and development in an international border region.

#### *Physical and Environmental Development:*

- The proposed arrangement in the North West can facilitate the planning, promotion and monitoring and implementation of major initiatives aimed at maximising the spatial and infrastructural connectivity of the region in both a domestic Northern Ireland/Ireland context and also in a European and Transatlantic/Atlantic Seaboard context.
- The proposed arrangement in the North West can also facilitate the planning, development and implementation of approaches and measures aimed at maximising the potential for sustainable development, management and protection of shared environmental resources, and for innovative cross-border approaches to the management of environmental resources; this includes exploration of the potential for driving growth in the 'Green Economy', with an emphasis being placed on renewables.

#### *Social and Community Cohesion and Wellbeing:*

- The proposed arrangement in the North West can facilitate a population-based approach to the crucial building blocks of social and community cohesion and wellbeing of those who live in the region - the population of the region being one of its most significant resources. This can include shared, scaleable approaches to issues of social need and disadvantage, health inequalities and a sustainable health economy, all of which underlie successful regional growth strategies. This pillar can also include co-operation on issues relating to civic participation, social inclusion and specific interventions focusing on targeted groups within the overall population. This pillar can facilitate area-based approaches to community and social wellbeing initiatives such as those focused on Early Intervention, and Peace and Reconciliation /post conflict transformation.

In addition, there are a number of identified cross-cutting themes across the three regional pillars as outlined above:

#### *Shared Approaches*

- 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);
- The proposed arrangement for the North West removes a longstanding challenge that has faced the region - that of multiple voices speaking for the region. The current proposal would offer government departments access to a single body for a range of engagement, consultation and evaluation purposes. This would not only lead to efficient use of public time and resources but also, because of the new functions of local government, 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 proposed arrangement for the North West will provide opportunities for exploration, learning and sharing of innovative approaches to more efficient public administration and service design. It will, for example, create an environment where Councils will 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.

#### *Optimising Value for Money in Public Financial Investment*

- The arrangement being put forward for a coordinated approach to the development of the North West is based on a comprehensive and evidence-informed analysis of the needs of the region - and the sectors operating within it. This is a key building block for any region wishing to improve its performance in terms of sustainable growth;
- The envisaged North West Model can lever value for money (VFM) for both administrations by driving down cost through joint funding implemented in a coordinated way through a bespoke regional structure. Such joint planning and resourcing will achieve optimal VFM on a continuum from instigation to legacy by delivering effective targeting and implementation of resources.

## **2.0 A Strong History of Collaboration**

- 2.1 The councils of Donegal, Derry City and Strabane District have a long history of cooperation dating back to the 1970s and the formation of the North West Region Cross Border Group (NWRCBG). Initially, through this mechanism, council officials and elected representatives alike jointly engaged in activities ranging from advocacy and lobbying around strategic regional priorities to securing EU funds for a broad range of initiatives - again addressing key priority issues for the region at particular point in time. Over time, the cross-border group has evolved to become a network of councillors concerned with the economic and social progress of the region; an objective actively pursued through lobbying and the application and roll-out of EU funded programmes. The reform of local government has, in the past year, seen the membership of the Group reduced from five to two member councils - namely Donegal and the newly constituted Derry City and Strbane (with Magherafelt - now part of Mid-Ulster District Council - joining ICBAN, and Limavady - now part of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council - joining the North East Partnership).
- 2.2 In 2002, under the auspices of the *National Spatial Strategy (NSS)* - published by the Irish Government - Letterkenny was designated a 'linked Gateway' along with the City of Derry. This was followed in 2005 by the British Irish Intergovernmental Conference announcing the North West Gateway Initiative (NWGI), billed as the primary vehicle which would take forward the socio-economic regeneration of this region. At a more local level, various plans and strategies including the Border Regional Planning Guidelines (2010) have noted the role of 'Lifford-Strabane' as an important linkage between both jurisdictions - given its location on the strategic N14/N15/A5 corridor, its role as an access point to the wider retail hierarchy of the region and the urban strengthening opportunities it represents.
- 2.3 Since 2010, the key stakeholders in the North West, largely led by the Councils, have been involved in a number of different programmes and initiatives to align their priority themes for cross-border cooperation, and begin to identify key priorities and initiatives that have mutual regional benefits. Table 2.1 outlines the priorities identified at different stages in this process of 'coming together'...and what is most striking is not how much the list has changed

over time but moreso, how many of the themes have remained constant.

2.4 To advance cooperation at the strategic level, and to ensure a coordinated approach to advancing the North West Gateway Initiative (NWGI), Donegal County Council/Donegal County Development Board (CDB) and Derry City Council/Derry Strategy Board formed the North West Partnership Board (NWPB), as noted in Table 2.1. A multi-sectoral platform, its aim has been to promote a coordinated and collaborative approach to the economic, social and cultural development of the region on a cross-border basis. Since its establishment in 2011, the NWPB has created a strategic regional dialogue on shared interests for the region; identified thematic areas for cooperation as well as strategic projects; and represented their shared, mutual interests at various strategic meetings in Belfast and Dublin. The NWPB comprised senior officials from Councils and other regional stakeholders such as chambers of commerce, ILEX, HSE, UU, LyIT, and IDA Ireland, together with the elected representative Chairs of the (now former) Donegal County Development Board and the Derry City Strategy Board. While the NWPB provided some degree of additional integration, the opportunity now presents for an arrangement which is designed to deliver more comprehensive and effective engagement and alignment with central government. This proposed new arrangement will continue to recognise the importance of engagement and cooperation with key agencies and sectors who have a crucial role in the growth of the region; for example, economic and business development bodies, third level education sector and health.

**Table 2.1: Identified Thematic Priority Areas for the North West since 2006**

2006 NWGI	2011 (ICLRD Exec Training Programme)	2012 (Analysis of 'One Plan' and Donegal CDB Strategy)	2014 (NWPB Action Plan)
<b>Higher Value NW Economy</b> - Skills/adaptable workforce - Strengthening business envir. - Building R&D innovation - Location, location, location - Promoting the region - NW tourism	Tourism, Culture & Creative Assets	Enterprise, Skills & Education	Culture & Creative Industries
<b>High Quality NW Living, Working &amp; Leisure Environ</b> - Natural assets / quality - Built environment	Green Economy & Renewables	Green Economy	Renewables & Green Economy
<b>Connected NW</b> - Transport - Telecommunications - Energy	Skills, Education & Enterprise	Place-Making / Connectivity	Health Innovation (Strategic Innovation & Well-Being/Quality of Life)
<b>Integrated NW</b> - Sustainable development - Matching demand with capacity - Strengthening rural service centres	Data Capture	Tourism, Culture, Arts & Leisure	Tourism
	Connectivity - Transport & Communications		

(Source: ICLRD, 2015)

- 2.5 More recently, as a result of the local government reform agenda in both jurisdictions, both Councils are now engaged in a process of Community Planning. Whilst the notion of community planning means something slightly different in each jurisdiction, and both are working to different timescales, the Councils acknowledge that they can learn from each other as each develops its plan - the Community Plan in Derry City and Strabane and the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) in Donegal. The Councils are committed to putting in place a formal working relationship to facilitate the sharing of experiences and, where it makes sense to do so, the alignment of policies. This in many respects represents the 'first step' to actioning this initiative.
- 2.6 In 2013, the city of Derry/Londonderry was the inaugural UK City of Culture. Coinciding with the City celebrating the 400th anniversary of its unique walls, this heralded a year of events that not only boosted the City's global profile but that of the wider North West region. During the course of the year, an amazing cultural programme was rolled-out which included the All-Ireland Fleadh, the Clipper Round-the- World Yacht Race, Hofesh Shechter's 'Political Mother' and the Return of Colmcille. A core legacy emanating from this year of events was the demonstration by the Councils - and other key stakeholders - that they can deliver a successful and diverse programme of activities on a world stage.
- 2.7 Notably, the Councils have not confined their cooperation to the island of Ireland. In Boston-Massachusetts, the Golden Bridges Conference and Awards celebrates the role of 'bridge-builders' in the areas of commerce, education and community building. This annual event, dating back to 2008, focuses on Derry-Donegal and Boston-Massachusetts and the role of skilled bridge-builders in forging transatlantic partnerships which are of mutual advantage to both American and Northwest Ireland partners. Since its inception, participation by the Councils in this initiative has led to strengthened links between Universities such as UMass Lowell, biotechnology biomedical and renewable energy entrepreneurs, regional chambers of commerce and economic development councils, and philanthropic and funding organisations.
- 2.8 This long history of collaboration, on various stages, demonstrates a strong collaborative culture not only between officials and elected representatives of the councils of Donegal and Derry City and Strabane but also between the Councils and a wide range of regional stakeholders spanning a myriad of sectors. While much of this collaboration has been informal to date, the Councils are fully committed to put such cooperation on a more formal standing within their respective governance arrangements; an opportunity for which has been created by the reform of local government agendas in both jurisdictions.

### **3.0 A Growing Knowledge Economy**

- 3.1 In this wider context, Donegal County Council and the new Derry City and Strabane District Council acknowledge the growing rationale for policies with an emphasis on mobilising assets and fostering a regional perspective on growth and competitiveness (through collaboration) that is centred on 'outcomes'. To this end, the Councils are jointly committed to not only leading and delivering on economic, environmental and social well-being and regeneration in their respective areas but for the North West region as a whole. This will, in part, be achieved through their respective additional expanded statutory responsibilities of socio-economic planning and community planning as well as enhanced inter-jurisdictional local and regional/central government relationships.
- 3.2 The Councils vision is of a region which releases its significant potential and becomes a very strong contributor to the economy of both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. With a cross-border catchment of around 400,000 people, the North West region represents the fourth largest urban agglomeration on the island of Ireland and the only one of such scale to experience an international border within its functional hinterland. Whilst traditionally noted for its higher concentrations of lower value added industry, the retreat of traditional industries, higher levels of social disadvantage and weaker infrastructure relative to the east coast, the region is increasingly being characterised by flourishing growth within a diverse SME sector, and has a relatively strong record of successful foreign direct investment (FDI) and reinvestment. However, it is recognised in the region that its growth potential cannot be effectively maximised without a strategic coordinated approach based on regional leadership in partnership with central government stakeholders. The process the Councils have animated since late 2014 represents an agenda-setting approach to such a new arrangement.
- 3.3 Over the past decade, and more significantly since the global downturn, the economy of the region has shifted away from the aforementioned traditional industries of construction and manufacturing towards a knowledge economy. Central to this is a strong communications/ access network which is starting to emerge in the region - from Project Kelvin through to recent investment in the City of Derry Airport and Port of Killybegs. Project Kelvin, for example, ensures parts of the region have access to a world-class telecommunications infrastructure. This, together with Digital Derry and initiatives pursued through networks such as ERNACT, is leading to strong growth within the digital business sector.
- 3.4 Emerging growth sectors include digital media/software, clinical life sciences, creative industries such as film, health technologies and tourism. The demand for talented staff for these services is being met by the third level institutes proactively working to meet the needs of industry - now and in the future. Ongoing and proposed investment in education and science is contributing to the region's reputation as a strong knowledge economy demonstrating research excellence with a talented graduate pool viz Ulster University, Letterkenny Institute of Technology, North West Regional College and, indeed, South West College (Omagh Campus) which many students from

the Southern part of the District attend. However, if the region is to maintain and attract talent as well as investment, it will require a clear focus on place building and connectivity.

- 3.5 Also of importance, when compared with the larger urban agglomerations on the island, the region is competitive in terms of labour and property costs. Commercially, the region offers an extensive range of development opportunities to meet the needs of the emerging knowledge economy. It offers a wide choice of housing - ranging from urban, city living to rural vibrant communities of varying scales. In terms of access to health, the region is well serviced by both Altnagelvin Hospital and Letterkenny General which, together, offer a broad range of specialities.
- 3.6 But having facilities in place to attract and support business is not enough in and of itself. There must be facilities and activities for the families of those who chose to locate in the area - and to this end, the region does not disappoint. From surfing to mountain walking to trails (greenways and blueways) to theatres to a diverse range of cultural festivals to dog-racing, there is quite literally something for everyone. The region benefits from being part of the 'honey-pot' tourism initiative, the Wild Atlantic Way, to having intact City Walls on its doorstep.
- 3.7 It is clear that the region has considerable potential, and a diverse range of assets to harness, and to this end, the key stakeholders in the region - not least the Councils - have been proactive in the marketing, promotion and (re)growth of the North West. **However, to continue to be an attractive and competitive location, further and coordinated, strategically-focused investment underpinned by an interagency and civic regional consensus is required economically, physically and socially.**

#### **4.0 The Emerging Focus of Future Strategic Collaboration**

- 4.1 While there are many 'positives' within the North West region which are, in part, steering its development pathway, the key stakeholders in the region including Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council recognise that there is a need for further concentrated investment in the region. This is especially the case in the areas of skills and job creation. This required strategic investment is both cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary in nature. The Councils, who are committed to taking a lead in the future development of the region and supporting the strategic priorities of central government, agree that focus is required across three Pillars:
- Regional Economic Growth and Investment;
  - Regional Physical and Environmental Development;
  - Regional Social and Community Cohesion and Well-Being.

Collaboration in these three areas initially taps into many of the principles of the circular economy (Ellen MacArthur Foundation). They establish a framework and the building blocks for a resilient system able to work in the longer-term. Adaptivity and versatility are key aspects of the collaborative model adopted. It provides new opportunities for innovation across fields such as product design, service and business models - and recognises the inter-play and symbiotic relationships that emerge from defined actions. For example, investment in research excellence in education with a focus on nanotechnology or bioengineering, for example, will lead to improvements in the health care system; while improvements to road/rail will support faster access to health care facilities.

Through collaborative action on these Pillars, Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council are committed to the North West becoming a resilient economy. While there are Pillars that the Councils will continue to roll-out on an individual basis which support these key strands, there is a formal commitment emerging whereby the Councils - together with other key regional stakeholders including elected representatives - assent to collaborate on the three Regional Pillars as noted above, with an initial specific emphasis being placed on the following priorities (some of which in their full dimensions relate to more than one Regional Pillar):

- **Job creation, growth and inward investment:** Key to transforming the growth potential of the region is a considered focus on ongoing job creation, growth and inward investment through an approach which recognises and takes account of the interrelated components of building successful regional growth. This demands an understanding and operationalisation of interagency coordination, information sharing, shared goals and agreed targets towards which all available resources can be mobilised. This approach will include a coordinated approach to skills development and workforce development within the region, referred to below under 'Skills and Training'. Job creation, growth and inward investment also necessitate the synchronisation, on a cross-border basis, of all statutory agencies with a remit for job creation, attracting inward investment, and supporting indigenous enterprise and business growth through skills, capacity building and financing. This approach will also require ongoing harmonisation and planned engagement with, and participation from, prospective and existing employers, their representative organisations/federations, and business champions from all sectors of the business and enterprise community - local, regional, national and multinational.
- **Skills and Training:** Education, and especially expansion and investment in third-level education, is central to the continued growth of the knowledge economy of the North West. This is an economy that is fast-moving and progressive as new innovations come on-stream. To remain competitive and at the cutting-edge, the Regional Colleges, University of Ulster and Letterkenny Institute of Technology must increasingly collaborate and adopt a joined-up approach to attract students to their campuses and, in turn, develop prospective and aligned approaches to service the needs of existing

and emerging industries. Greater investment is required around R&D which, in turn, will attract new industry and encourage existing industries to reinvest and expand. To this end, the region is already making good progress - with facilities such as the Regional Science Park complexes in both Derry/Londonderry and Letterkenny and Co-Lab in Letterkenny providing start-ups derived from R&D with state of the art facilities to grow.

- **Tourism:** Central to the ongoing growth and development of a shared tourism product for the North West region will be a focus on enablers for access to and from the region for both domestic and international tourism. A continued focus on supporting the growth and promotion of tourism products based on the region's established and emerging strengths is required. Collaboration on tourism must, for example, include cross-border clustering of products within the region. As regards advocacy on the region's tourism development requirements, relevant stakeholders in the region - including the Councils - must continue to emphasise and demonstrate the value of seamless cross-border area-based tourism products and maximising these. The resulting tourism products should also include maximisation of the significant Greenways and walking infrastructure which exist throughout the North West Region.
- **Energy/Renewables/Green Infrastructure (including Greenways):** In addition to continuing to develop Green Infrastructure for the region, including sustainable travel and transport options and Greenways (all of which have an additional impact on an enhanced Regional Tourism Product), the Councils are committed to prioritising the development of key growth sectors relating to Energy production, Energy conservation, production of Renewables and secondary industry based on renewable materials. Growing the Green Economy for the region will involve development of focused connections between R&D, industry needs, innovation supports and the coordination of those in public development agencies, communities, industry and third-level on an integrated basis to achieve common goals for the region.
- **Regional Connectivity:** Connectivity is regarded as key to the future success of the region - not only in terms of attracting FDI and encouraging existing companies to expand, but also in growing the indigenous SME sector and developing the research excellence of the North West. Improving connectivity in this instance entails investment in road, rail (access) and broadband (communication) as a priority. Immediate specific priorities are the A5/N2 North-South and A6 East-West transportation corridors, Rail Infrastructure, Air Access, and (building on the existence of significant broadband infrastructure as a result of Project Kelvin and previous initiatives) Broadband Access with a particular focus on the need for adequate and resilient access in rural areas.
- **Health:** Core to the health agenda is improving services for the citizen. Opportunities exist for shared services including the joint commissioning of population-based health and social-care provision and interventions. Stakeholders in the region believe that in the context of health catchment areas, there is scope for the development of joint key

clinical specialities to meet the needs of the overall population of the region. A number of priorities will be progressed simultaneously: prioritising health promotion and early intervention (both in Early Childhood terms and in terms of disease prevention/management) - with the population of the region recognising the importance in regional growth processes of addressing health inequalities in the population. Initiatives such as the 'Early Intervention City Model' will be progressed in this context, as will the exploration of shared approaches to public health promotion. Healthcare access is an equal priority for the region, recognising that the region is often viewed in peripheral terms but that a shared cross-border population catchment and joint development/investment in shared services have the potential to support solutions to healthcare access and provision of speciality care, supporting better health and clinical outcomes for citizens of the region. Healthcare provision has traditionally being a strong sector in the North West with the presence of both Altagelvin Hospital and Letterkenny General. In response to recent changes relating to investment in health infrastructure in the region, and in particular the situation in Letterkenny General, stakeholders within the region have come together to establish the Clinical and Research Academy, in conjunction with NUIG. It is envisaged that the Academy will be a hub for clinical research in a range of areas of importance including cancer, cardiac disease, renal and respiratory diseases in both adults and children. This will have the knock-on effect of attracting and retaining high quality medical researchers in the region.

- 4.2 For all of the above, mechanisms are required across each of these priority areas to keep Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council informed of progress and discussions taking place centrally around the future - including timetabling - of these initiatives. Having access to this most basic of information, in developmental terms, is key to the future planning and future proofing of the North West. The proposed working structures supporting the new arrangements for the North West region aim to ensure that this coordination can take place with ease on an ongoing basis, allowing an integrated approach to take hold and develop momentum across all three Regional Growth Pillars.
- 4.3 This strategic focus on the Three Pillars of Regional Economic Growth and Investment, Physical and Environmental Development, and Social and Community Cohesion and Wellbeing, will bring many benefits to the North West over the medium to long-term. These include:
- The leveraging of existing competencies to expand the economy - these include the economic, physical and social assets of the region through enhanced cooperation, or a healthy model of co-opetition;
  - The development and roll-out of an integrated collaborative approach to economic, social and physical development involving the public, private and community sectors;
  - The creation of additional employment through the attraction of new business and companies (including reinvestment by existing companies) which, in turn, will lead to a

demand for more housing, retail services and leisure facilities for example, as well as requiring greater access to schools and health services; and

- A growth in GVA.

## **5.0 Delivering a Stronger Vision: Proposed Structures & Membership**

- 5.1 Through the joint leadership demonstrated by the Councils in recent months within the North West region, consensus exists on the need for a refreshed, singular and clear collaborative arrangement to be put in place. Given the presence of a national border within the region, the Councils acknowledge that special arrangements and ways of working are required to harness the possibilities and overcome the avoidable obstacles to releasing the region's full economic potential and to provide a better quality of life for its citizens. To this end the Councils are inviting central government in both jurisdictions to engage as key stakeholders in a new type of dynamic partnership process of regional cooperation.
- 5.2 Cross-party, cross-jurisdictional political support within the region for the development of this initiative has been gained through the endorsement by the Councils of the exploratory process in which we are currently involved. Consensus further exists as to the principle that this should be appropriately linked to core Council governance structures and arrangements, and that any resulting structure should be relevant, fit for purpose and flexible enough to set a development agenda for the region as well as responding on a timely basis to external opportunities.
- 5.3 As part of this process, regional stakeholders have an opportunity to facilitate and promote an enhanced connectivity within the region through working to agree arrangements for collaborative development which make better operational and economic sense in both public administrative and accountability terms. In this context, an emphasis is being placed on the establishment of place-based collaboration and leadership for regional development and growth. The ethos of this emerging location-based leadership model - developed by the Councils and involving Senior Management and Elected Representatives as well as other key regional stakeholders - is centred on working in close cooperation with each other so as to consolidate and ensure the strategic coordination of all available investment resources for the region from, for example, Central Government in Ireland/Northern Ireland, and indeed beyond.
- 5.4 Recognising the role of various types of 'leadership' - drawing from the wide range of stakeholders that can exist (see Figure 5.1 below) - and ensuring their engagement in the process from the outset - this model of inclusive leadership, as advocated by Professor Robin Hambleton, will lead to innovation and the development of contemporary and resilient arrangements for all stakeholders involved in this course of action.

5.5 As regards the wider North-South cooperation agenda, the alignment of local authority statutory functions and similar management structures on a cross-border basis presents opportunities for the articulation of regional development based on measurable outcomes - as highlighted within the joint DRD/DoECLG *Framework for Cooperation*. These opportunities are centred on developing an effective mechanism and governance arrangement - as illustrated in Table 5.1 - for an ambitious and long-term approach to developing the full potential of the North West region.

**Figure 5.1: Realms of Place-Based Leadership**



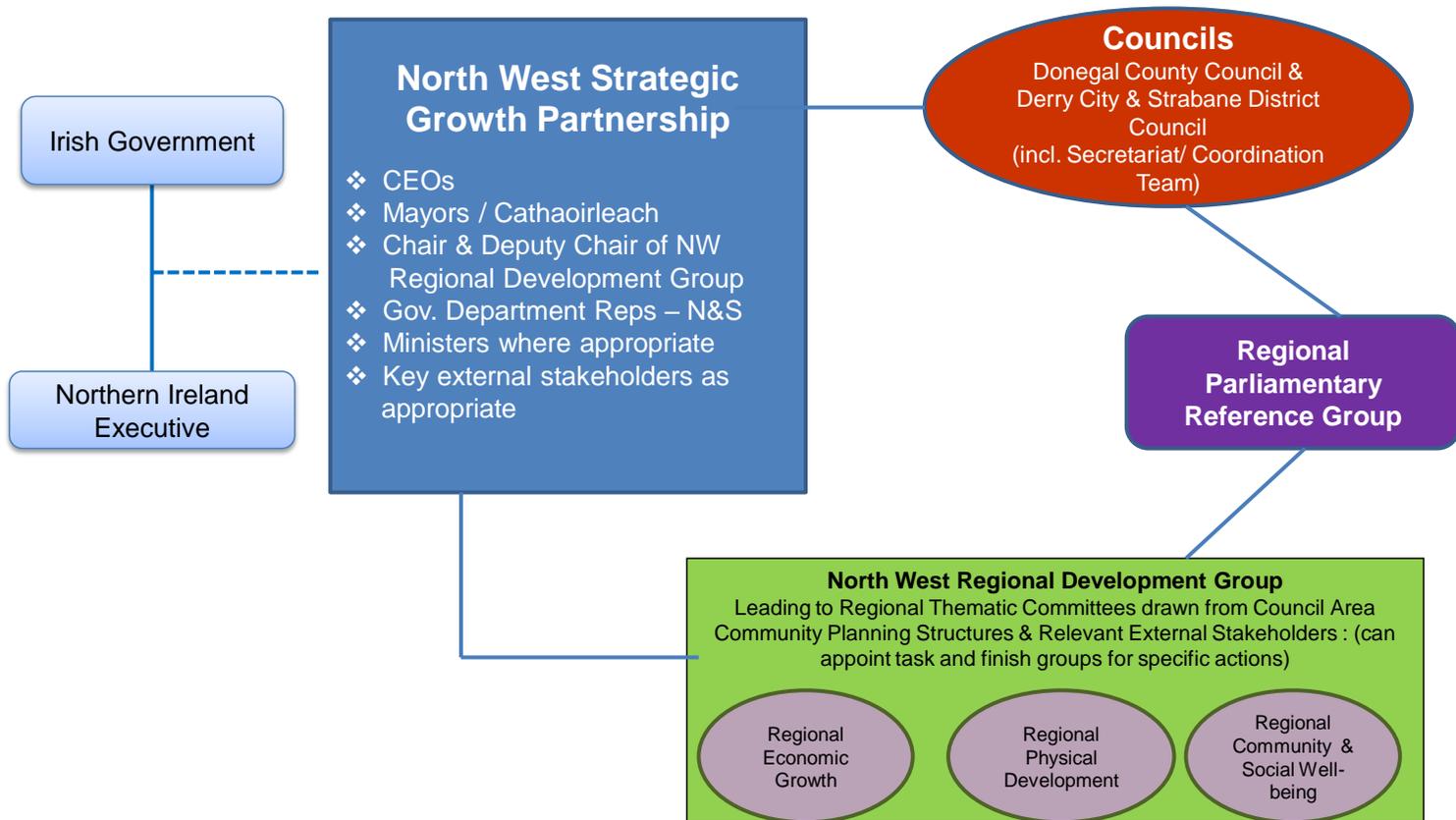
(Source: Hambleton & Howard, 2012)

### **Overview of Proposed Structures**

5.6 The emerging structure is Council-led and founded on a principle of partnership between local and central government; a key dimension of any process with place-making at its core (see Figure 5.2). The proposal comprises an inter-jurisdictional **North West Strategic Growth Partnership**, with joint Council and joint Government membership at senior/strategic level, underpinned by a strong cross-border joint Council **North West Regional Development Group**. External regional stakeholders will be invited to participate in, and contribute to both the Partnership and Development Group as appropriate.

A **Regional Parliamentary Reference Group** will be established, and the new Partnership and wider engagement structure will be supported by a **Secretariat/Coordination Team** reporting directly to the Councils. Oversight for this initiative rests with both Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council.

**Figure 5.2: Potential Structure and Membership of a New Formal Collaborative Partnership**



### ***North West Strategic Growth Partnership***

- 5.7 The proposed '**North West Strategic Growth Partnership**' will become a regional driver for cross-border cooperation, with strong linkages to the respective programmes for government, North and South, and EU funded 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. This Partnership will aim to play a key role in supporting central government to deliver on the priorities as envisaged originally under the NWGI and in tracking key central government investments relevant for the growth of the North West Region. It will do so in a way which ensures and levers greater value for money through focusing on the evidence-based needs and opportunities of the region, and ensuring they are aligned to the shared territorial priorities emerging from the community planning processes in both council areas.
- 5.8 The Partnership will aim to meet generally once every six months. Meetings will be convened by, and jointly chaired by the Councils. As well as the Chief Executives from Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council, core membership of the Partnership - at least initially - will comprise political representation (at level of Mayor/ Cathaoirleach of each Council and the Chair and Deputy Chair of the 'North West Regional Development Group'), senior representatives from key government Departments, North and South, and key regional stakeholders and other structures as appropriate. In terms of key government Departments, it is envisaged that in addition to representation from Departments with a remit for North-South diplomatic coordination (e.g. DFAT and OFMDFM), core members will also include Central Government representatives with a remit for cross-departmental coordination, and for economic, regional and infrastructural development. Departments responsible for other key areas relevant to the Regional Growth Pillars will be invited to engage, participate in, and contribute to the working and meetings of the Partnership as appropriate as will other relevant external key regional stakeholders. Where relevant, Ministers will be invited to attend meetings to discuss progress on specific strategic projects for the region and/or island as a whole.

### ***North West Regional Development Group***

- 5.9 The work and discussions of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership will inform, and indeed be informed and acted upon by an all-council working group - currently named as the **North West Regional Development Group**. The purpose of the North West Regional Development Group will be to develop, agree, implement, monitor and report on work programmes across the three Regional Development Pillars (at least initially); and, on an ongoing basis, to promote and support a cohesive approach to North West working and the

mobilisation of a range of resources to support work programmes. As noted in Section 4.1, the three Regional Development Pillars are:

- Regional Economic Growth and Investment;
- Regional Physical and Environmental Development;
- Regional Social and Community Cohesion and Well-Being.

The work of this Development Group will centre on 'place-building'; on aligning the priorities and objectives of the different bodies throughout the region incl. various units within local government (esp. as it pertains to the LECP and Community Planning processes). It is envisaged that upon identification of the priority themes, task groups will be organised around each - and will involve other relevant key regional stakeholders; which in turn would contribute to a clear diagnosis of needs, opportunities, threats, and spatial patterns. These Groups, as such, can be chaired/led by either an appropriate member of Council staff or a representative of another key stakeholder body.

- 5.10 This Development Group will meet generally every two to three months. Membership of this Group will comprise elected representatives from each Council - initially on the same model as currently operating for the existing NWRCBG - together with the CEOs and Senior Directors of the Councils. It will appoint a Chair and Deputy Chair - both positions to be held by elected members - and who will also have a seat on the aforementioned Strategic Growth Partnership. Engagement with key regional partners/stakeholders and regional/national government will take place through sectoral sub-groups, and these key regional partners/stakeholders will be invited to participate in and attend full meeting of the Group as appropriate. This arrangement as proposed is unique and different to previous arrangements that have been in place in that it is council-driven, with both the governance arrangements and the core objectives being firmly embedded in the workings of council. Through this model, both Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council are stressing the importance of strategic, joined-up action - with a strong weight attached to regional advocacy.

This Group will seamlessly incorporate and in effect absorb the pre-existing NWRCBG and NWPB; thus bringing together and aligning their remits. In so doing, the key component functions of each will be brought together within a regional arrangement which can effectively drive and respond to the challenges of a regional growth process.

### ***Regional Parliamentary Reference Group***

- 5.11 In addition to the aforementioned North West Strategic Growth Partnership and the North West Regional Development Group, a **Regional Parliamentary Reference Group** will also be established as part of this structure. Demonstrating good governance, the purpose of this Group will be to bring local and national politicians from both jurisdictions together, facilitating

an opportunity to focus on the high-level strategic objectives of the North West region as a whole. This Group will afford a space to discuss priority issues and status of projects within the region in an open and frank manner. This body will meet generally annually. Meetings will be convened by the Councils to discuss priority issues/ projects within the region. This Group will be made up of councillors (equal party representation), T.D.s, MLAs/MPs and MEPs. Outside of meetings, this Group will be kept informed of progress through emails, newsletters, etc.

- 5.12 The Councils recognise that they have a bridging role to play in terms of the translation of trans-boundary national policy - often developed back-to-back in cross-border regions - at a local level. Given the already strong working relationship between Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council, this is viewed as an organic role for the Councils that has become much easier to fulfil given the new powers of council and the greater degree of alignment of function that now exists. It is, for example, acknowledged by Councils in the region that in the context of such a new arrangement, the opportunity would present itself for significant exploration and delivery of shared services and joint commissioning of activities relating to sustainable regional growth. The end goal, as previously noted, is for the region to become a net contributor to the economy of both jurisdictions.

## **6.0 The Role of Central Government**

- 6.1 The North West region has a strong reputation already for the roll-out of transformative initiatives - such as the development of the Radiotherapy Unit at Altnagelvin Hospital. This success is the result of partners throughout the North West collaborating effectively with each other but also because of wider North-South collaboration involving central and regional government. From the perspective of both Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council, active engagement from Central government in both jurisdictions is key to this initiative being triumphant.
- 6.2 Initially, the Councils would welcome the endorsement by Government in both jurisdictions of this initiative - and a commitment to undertake this journey with the Councils and other key stakeholders in the region. The Councils are not asking for something with no return - they, together with the wider public, private and community sectors in the North West, are committed to harnessing the potential of the region to the benefit of the island as a whole, and taking a lead role in this.
- 6.3 The Councils ask Central Government to commit senior personnel from key Departments and agencies to attend two meetings of the currently named ' North West Strategic Growth Partnership per year.

6.4 The Councils intend to avail of the opportunity afforded by the new collaborative structure to make joint pre-budget submissions to Government in both jurisdictions.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

7.1 The proposal to hold a joint Ministerial meeting in the North West in Autumn 2015 is welcomed by both Councils. As key stakeholders in the sustainable development of the region, the Councils appreciate the opportunity to highlight their shared investment priorities and emerging structures for a more formalised process of collaboration, as well as their commitment to ensuring the region becomes a net contributor to the island of Ireland. Councils have demonstrated their commitment to involving government departments in a co-design process for a new arrangement, and will invite those partners to celebrate the launch of the new arrangement in the North West.

7.2 Taking a longer-term perspective, the region has a young population which, if properly nurtured and prospects provided, is one of its brightest opportunities. Investment in education and sectors such as financial services, bio-medical/health, digital media and software development will stem the challenge of emigration gripping the island as a whole - and possibly prevent the population decline of the region that is being forecasted.

7.3 The reform of local government leading to the greater alignment of functions between Councils, the commitment by Government in both jurisdictions to ensure a strategic focus on the North West region, the establishment of a Ministerial Sub-Group on Regional Opportunities - with an initial focus on the North West - will provide the region with a unique opportunity to move towards a more formal process of strategic collaboration and cooperation; whilst still fulfilling the priority objectives of their respective council areas.