

7th March 2018

Economic Development & Enterprise Support

Report for Carlow County Council

The Local Enterprise Office is charged with the provision of business support and economic development of County Carlow with a variety of stakeholders as defined under the Local Enterprise Development Plan, Action Plan for Jobs and other strategy documents. The office operates under a Service Level Agreement with Enterprise Ireland and covers 4 main functions:

- Business Information & Advisory Services
- Enterprise Support Services
- Entrepreneurship Support Services
- Local Enterprise Development Services

The Local Enterprise Development Plan was approved by the SPC during 2017 for a 3 years period and funding has been provided by Enterprise Ireland to facilitate the delivery of the Enterprise Support Programme in line with the plan for 2018. Carlow County Council has made provisions in its budget to allow for the delivery of the Economic Development Programme and the executive on an ongoing basis pitch for competitive funding for the delivery of supports. The envisaged budget for Economic Development & Business Support operated by the LEO Offices will be in the Region of €3.1 million in 2018 with 21% being provided by Carlow County Council & 79% being provided from exchequer, EU sources and generated income.

The Economic Development programme attracted significant investment during 2017 in terms of Town & Village Projects, Rural Economic Development Zones, Food Tourism Funding, Diaspora Strategy Funding & Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur Programme.

The programme staff compliment in line with the requirements of the Enterprise Ireland funding model are:

- Head of Enterprise
- Senior Enterprise Development Officer
- Business Advisor
- Administrator

An open competition is currently in progress in respect of the Senior Enterprise Development Officer (replacement post), European Project Officer & Economic Development Officer to work on a cross functional basis on a variety of economic development projects.

Review of 2017

Summary 2017 Key Statistics

- Investment Client Companies: 216
- Net Jobs Increase 2017: 95 Jobs
- Investments Approved: €449k
- 25 Project Approvals
- Approved average value €17,960
- 81 Training Courses & Networking Events
- 1589 Training Course & Networking Participants
- 1473 Students Engaged in Student Enterprise Programmes
- 309 One to One Business Advice Meetings
- 301 Specialised Mentoring Sessions
- 100% Town & Village Renewal Scheme Projects Delivered
- €884,000 investment achieved in Town & Village Renewal Scheme for 2018 Delivery
- Festival & Events Scheme Delivered
- Rural Economic Development Zones – Digital County Project Completed
- Support Provided for Christmas Lights & Programme
- Diaspora & Twinning Strategy Competed
- Delivery of Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur Scheme
- Delivery of LEO Investment & Innovation Fund
- Two EU Funding Applications Completed for Evaluation in 2018
- Focused Promotion & Development
- Delivery of Agri-Food Tourism Project
- Support to Carlow Tourism
- Support to Carlow Community Enterprise Centres Ltd
- Economic Development Programme Developed.

Business Information & Advisory Services

- During the period 1st January 2017 - 31st December 2017 the Executive of the Local Enterprise Office facilitated 309 One to One Office & Site Meetings. These meetings give advice to start up and developing enterprises on a variety of issues including business planning, finance, state supports, marketing and procurement. This service also includes active engagement and signposting to a variety of National Protocol Partners where clients can access other Financial & Non-Financial supports from the State.

Entrepreneurship Support Services

- **The Student Enterprise Programme** is designed to engage 4th year students in the development of Micro-Enterprise as part of a project based competitive aimed to encourage awareness of enterprise as a career choice. At present 10 out of 11 Schools participate in this programme.
- The LEO facilitated the **South East Regional National Women's Enterprise Day Event** which was hosted in Qtr. 4, 2017.
- The **Student Concept Competition** is designed to develop creativity among students and delivered in association with IT Carlow, Fairgreen Shopping Centre, AIB, Carlow Youth Services & VISUAL.
- **Enterprise Awards 2017:** During 2017, the Local Enterprise Office facilitated the Local Enterprise Awards 2017 which engaged 10 companies in Business Plan Development and evaluation. An awards lunch was hosted and attended by 50 people, Paul & Olivia McNally went forward to the National Finals in May 2017.
- **Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur is a National Programme designed to engage young people from 18-35** to develop their business ideas and enterprises to the next level. This includes an investment fund of €50,000 for each Local Authority Area. During Qtr. 4, 2017, the LEO Office rolled out this programme which was

attended by 26 young entrepreneurs and 6 were selected for investment.

- **Enterprise Week 2017:** The Executive engaged in the delivery of the first Local Enterprise Week which contained 6 events focused on highlighting the different level of engagement by the LEO offices with clients.
- **Development of Clusters:** Clustering is seen as an effective methodology of the development of sector specific companies. During the year the Local Enterprise Office engaged in a variety of cluster activities in the area of Craft (FORM) and is currently in the process of developing a project in the Engineering space
- **Enterprise Promotion Activities:** The Local Enterprise Office engaged in a variety of enterprise promotion activities which included participation by Carlow companies in The Local Enterprise Village, National Ploughing Championships.

Enterprise Support Services

- The Local Enterprise Office provided **direct financial assistance** in the form of Innovation, Priming (Start Up), Business Expansion Grants. (See Summary Outputs)
- Delivery of a **Pre-Start Up Programme** with Carlow County Development Partnership under SICAP for people considering going on the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance.
- The Local Enterprise Office provided a variety of business support & **networking** activities during 2017. (See Summary Outputs)
- The Local Enterprise Office hosted "**The Business Picnic**" which was attended by 300 business people from across the South East in association with Netwatch and Arboretum.
- The Local Enterprise Office provided mentoring to start up and developing enterprises (See Summary Outputs)
- The Local Enterprise Office provided access to **Micro Finance**

- The Local Enterprise Office provided support for the **Development of Community Enterprise Centres & Incubation Centres** in County Carlow. Carlow County Council is currently engaged in a strategic review of Carlow Community Enterprise Centres T/A Enterprise House with a view to the development of a 3 year strategy.
- The Local Enterprise Office managed the **Bee Visible Signage Scheme** in Carlow Town & engaged in the development of a Lamp Post Banner Solution as part of the Town Centre Development Fund.
- The Local Enterprise Office actively engaged with Enterprise Ireland in respect of the development of LEO clients and **HPSU projects**.
- The Local Enterprise Office actively engaged with IT Carlow in respect of **product and service development projects**.
- The Local Enterprise Office are actively engaged in the **South East Skills Forum**
- The Local Enterprise Office is engaged in the delivery of the **Local Enterprise Village @ NPA** via management of a National Committee. The Village will feature 31 companies including 2 Carlow Companies.

Local Enterprise Development Services

- **First Stop Shop Services:** The executive provided a variety of information, advisory and facilitation services for potential economic projects over the course of the year.
- **Carlow Town Re-generation:** The executive supported and engaged in the work in respect of Carlow Town Centre in the delivery of the €150,000 economic development project. At the end of 2017, €50,000 of the project was delivered with the balance to be delivered in 2018 following an internal review of the appropriate mechanisms to strategically drive the project forward.

- **FORM Exhibition:** The executive facilitated in association with the Library Services the development of an exhibition for FORM as part of Carlow & Kilkenny Arts Festivals 2017.
- **South East Action Plan for Jobs:** The executive supported the South East Action Plans for Jobs.
- **Community Festivals, Events & Tourism Venues Scheme:** The executive coordinated the above fund which awarded €100k to 13 projects across County Carlow.
- **IDA & FDI Marketing:** The executive actively worked in respect of IDA & FDI Marketing by:
 - Facilitation of Site Visits with IDA
 - Facilitation of Property Solutions Surveys
 - Facilitation of Property Selection Support for the Advanced Technology Building
 - Engagement with key property owners
- **Carlow Tourism:** The executive supported the work of Carlow Tourism including the provision of supports for Trade & Consumer Fairs.

Representing Carlow County Council: The LEO Staff currently represent Carlow County Council on the following project and programme groups:

- Carlow Local Community Development Committee
- Carlow County Development Partnership CLG
- Carlow Tourism CLG
- Carlow Community Enterprise Centres CLG
- Carlow Early Years Training Services CLG
- South East Skills Forum
- South East Action Plans for Jobs – Implementation Group
- South East Action Plan for Jobs – Action Monitoring Group
- Local Enterprise Office – National Network
- Local Enterprise Office – National Communications Group
- Local Enterprise Office – National Steering Group
- Local Enterprise Office – Exhibitions Committee

Communications, Public Relations & Social Media:

The executive as part of various projects engaged in nationally focused Media & PR activities. This included specific features in the Sunday Business Post.

Social Media Communications is delivered as part of the LEO National Communications Plan and is evaluated and measured. The LEO facilitated a variety of PR requests during the year including client launches, TV preparation for clients, interview preparation for clients, national media opportunities for clients, programme launches etc.

Forward Planning 2018

In terms of forward planning a requirement for strategic planning & data development has been identified and the executive are currently supporting the following processes:

- RIKON Study (Scale Up Space & FDI)
- What's the Big Idea Process (Competitive Funding)
- Duckett's Grove Strategy (Tourism Potential Mapping)
- Town Plans – Tullow & Bagenalstown (Competitive Funding)

It is envisaged that these processes will result in a better net result for the County in terms of competitive funding. The funding for the above strategies has been sourced from external sources such as Town & Village Renewal and Enterprise Ireland.

Core Programme Development & Focus

An ongoing review of delivery of the core programme is underway to ensure that the office is suitably targeting investment in core employment generation areas.

Carlow Town Centre

The economic development unit will be actively involved in the delivery of a variety of supports for the business community in Carlow Town Centre.

FDI Marketing & Direct Selling

An FDI Brand for the County will be developed during 2017 and a direct engagement campaign will be engaged by the executive in order to accelerate the achievement of FDI for County Carlow.

Commuter Study Data Development (Commence: End March 2018)

A commuter study will be commenced to understand the skills availability in County Carlow.

Funding & Resource Development (EU & National)

The executive are currently examining a number of potential EU & National Funding Models for sustainable project development. The issue of enhancing the capacity of community and business groups to delivery projects requires examination given the new focus of National Funding.

Focus on Engineering Sector

The executive is currently in the process of designing a suite of supports for the Engineering Sector.

Eamonn Brophy

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Director of Services (Acting)

Kieran Comerford

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Head of Enterprise