



**Minutes of the Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee Held on  
30th May 2023 at 10.30am in Thurles MD Civic Offices and by Zoom.**

<b>Members of Council in Attendance</b>	<b>Sectoral Interests in Attendance</b>	<b>Staff in Attendance:</b>
Cllr. Imelda Goldsboro <b>Chairperson</b>	Pat Carroll, Farming Pillar (Zoom)	Brian Beck (Director of Services)
Cllr. Peggy Ryan	Laura Jones, Business Pillar (Zoom)	Anthony Fitzgerald, Head of Enterprise and Economic Development
Cllr. Seamus Hanafin	Tom McGrath, Business Pillar (Zoom)	Kathleen Prendergast, Economic Development Officer
Cllr. Joe Hannigan (Zoom)	Mary Spillane, PPN (Zoom)	Marie Cox, Administrative Officer
Cllr. Phyll Bugler (Zoom)		Donough Leahy, Clerical Officer
Cllr. John Fitzgerald (Zoom)		
Cllr. Siobhan Ambrose (Zoom)		
Cllr. Tony Black (Zoom)		

**Apologies:** Seamus Hoyne (TUS), Cllr. Seamus Morris, Cllr. Mary Hanna Hourigan, Cllr. Mairín McGrath and Cllr. John Crosse

**Absent:** Clare Cashman (PPN).

### **1. Welcome**

Cllr. Imelda Goldsboro (Chairperson), opened the meeting by welcoming all present.

### **2. Adoption of the minutes of previous meeting and matters arising**

The Minutes of the last meeting were considered. Cllr. Peggy Ryan proposed the adoption of the minutes and Laura Jones seconded this item.

Cllr. Siobhan Ambrose stated that the minutes should reflect the fact that she had requested a workshop regarding the Commercial Vacancy Incentive Scheme. It was noted that, rather than a workshop, an information session was what was understood as the request and this information session was held. Considerations of the Scheme would be dealt with in full under item 5 on the Agenda.

### **3. Local Development Strategy 2023-2027**

Brian Beck, Director of Services advised the Rural Development Program (RDP) for 2023-2027 is a follow-on from the previous LEADER program which will run until 2027 and has €7.8 million of funding allocated to Tipperary for this period.

Brian advised an expression of interest process for a Local Action Group (LAG) to develop a Local Development Strategy (LDS) was launched by POBAL last year. A partnership between Tipperary County Council and the two (North & South) Tipperary Development Companies was formed and they submitted an expression of interest. Being the only LAG in Tipperary to do so, they were nominated to prepare the LDS for County Tipperary. The budget for the program is €7.8m but this does not include National Food Projects or Cooperation Projects, which had been included in the previous round. It was noted that there were very little funding options available in 2014 (the time of the last LEADER program) compared to now when there are a large range of funding streams. Over the last number of months Tipperary County Council has been working with their partners to prepare the Local Development Strategy and a draft has been sent to POBAL for an initial review. It is expected to finalize the document at the June LCDC meeting.

Marie Cox, Administrative Officer, informed the group about LEADER, which has been in place for thirty years with a remit to support a wide range of innovative and sustainable projects leading to the development of the Irish rural economy. It is based on a community led 'Local Development' model where the local groups can figure out for themselves what is needed to improve their communities.

Marie then listed the eight specific objectives of RDP 2023-2027, those include: vibrant rural areas that can promote employment, growth, gender equality, include the participation of women in farming, social inclusion along, local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry. The seven Principles of the LEADER Approach include a 'Bottom-Up' Approach, 'Area-Based' Approach, 'Local Partnership', An integrated and multi-sectoral Strategy, Networking, Innovation and Co-operation.

In 2014, Tipperary County Council was originally allocated €7.5 million through LEADER funding, but Tipperary County Council received a final amount of over €12 million in project funding, which included €5 million for Economic Development for 125 projects, Social inclusion received over €3 million for 70 projects and the Rural Environment received over €1.2 million for up to 30 projects. The County received €500,000 in additional funding for being one of the top performing Local Action Group in the country. Case studies which were supported by LEADER over the last number of years were provided such as 'Lunch Bag' in Nenagh, 'Red City Kitchens' in Carrick on Suir, Cashel Playground Development Group, Age Friendly Roscrea, Edna Citizen Science Water Sampling & Training and Clonmel Scout Energy Retrofit.

The purpose of the new Local Economic Community Plan (LECP) is to set out, for a six-year period (2023-2028), the objectives and actions needed to promote and support economic development and local and community development in Tipperary, both by itself directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders. The LECP will only include collaborative actions- actions that require a number of organisations to work together for a common good and these organisations will consult with the wider communities. There were five public consultations (one per MD) held in person and three online consultations giving opportunities for feedback, with online surveys and a number of stakeholder meetings taking place. A draft has been submitted to POBAL and they have provided positive feedback but sought to have more evidence of targeting 'areas' and 'groups'

The new inclusions now are:

To address gaps in non-sport activities available to young people in rural areas.

To encourage rural youth participation in issues that affect their daily lives

To build youth Leadership capabilities

To provide on-going input to the development of future rural youth initiatives.

It is expected to adopt the Action Plan at the next LCDC meeting on June 19th and have the final submission in by the end of June, with the closing date for this on July 14<sup>th</sup>. Councillor Imelda Goldsboro thanked Marie for the in-depth presentation and then opened up the floor for any questions.

Councillor Joe Hannigan advised that previously the Local Action Group (LAG) engaged with partners and agreed a figure that would be paid to them out of the overall budget. This time around, as those partners are now part of the LAG, he asked if there was any question of a potential conflict of interest.

Marie Cox advised that the conflict of interest is covered off extensively and they are obliged to put in place documentation to ensure this is the case. This would have also gone through the independent evaluation committee. LEADER operated under guidelines that a maximum of 25% could be used for administrative budget and in the past, this was

divided between the two LEADER companies present in the county. Brian Beck advised that both LEADER and POBAL operate under strict operational guidelines. And stated that a very strict memorandum of understanding and partnership agreement will be in place which detail how this is to operate with documentation clearly support this.

Cllr Joe Hannigan enquired why support to main-stream sporting organisations is no longer part of the remit and questioned this. Marie Cox stated that the main stream sporting organisations have access to 'Sports Capital' funding. She felt if mainstream sporting organisations applied for funding to develop a rural infrastructure which meets some of the needs for a strategy, that it may be acceptable. An example of this would be funding to put a walkway around a sports field. The important factor is to apply for items that fit with the Local Development Strategy rather than a sporting activity.

#### **4. Local Enterprise Office: Mid-Year Reports & Update**

Anthony Fitzgerald, Head of Enterprise and Economic Development provided an update on the activities of the Local Enterprise Office (LEO). Anthony provided the results for the end of 2022 for supports under Measure One and Measure Two.

Measure One supports the allocation of small capital grants and employment grants for small start-up companies or companies that are in business expansion. Last year the target was to support 42 companies with output being 38 companies being supported through the Local Enterprise Office (LEO).

Measure Two deals with training and development and last years targets were exceeded with 1889 people involved in various training programs which was ahead of the 1500 target. The Tipperary LEO came out second in the national league table compared to other Local Enterprise offices. The total number of gross jobs created last year was 398 among the 238 companies within the LEO portfolio.

Anthony advised that the LEO and Economic staff are involved in RRDF, URDF and a number of different projects and the successful roll out of these initiatives will determine the medium and long-term strength of the County and Fethard Town Park as a great example of this which was jointly funded by the RRDF and Local resources where €3.5 million was invested and will serve the community in Fethard for generations to come. This was a really good example of Local and National collaboration on both the public and private side and is a testimony to the staff working in the district.

The main focus of attention for the next two to three years is the activation of landbanks that the Council currently own or are in the process of acquiring. The value of having good quality industrial accommodation has really provided benefits for the County. One example is Waystone in Cashel, which employs 160 people and could potentially grow to 300-400 if a suitable building becomes available. Another example is Revive Environmental which is based in Thurles and have a further application for a building in Lisheen. They currently have 40 jobs but this will grow to over 100 once the building in Lisheen is complete. Anthony emphasised the importance of having the accommodation to support this type of industry across the County, citing it as a top priority of the Council to establish. Brian Beck reiterated that the Land activation is very important to create economic activity. New staff are in place to work on developing this land to make it available for potential businesses and this is a key focus over the coming year.

Councillor Imelda Goldsboro thanked Anthony for his update and acknowledged the great work being done. It is great to see the growth and development in the different towns and the knock-on effect on the neighbouring villages and communities. Cllr. Goldsboro then opened to the meeting for questions.

Cllr Hanafin commended the great work being undertaken by Tipperary County Council with the common thread of successfully attracting new funding to the County. He was

particularly impressed by the phenomenal result whereby 28% of the national funding under RRDF and URDF had come to the County of Tipperary. Cllr Hanafin noted another success in Thurles with H&MV having opened in Thurles 18 months ago are now about to open a second site office in Thurles.

Cllr Hanafin referred to the recent census figures showing that the county has a population of 5.1 million now. The aim of Project Ireland 2040 was to redistribute the growth of the population across the whole country, but there is still great inequality. The population growth around the M50 is up 12% but the population growth in County Tipperary is up by only 5%. Cllr Hanafin stated that while we have been very successful, we still have a lot of work to do and the plan to deliver on the availability of landbanks in the county is a crucial priority that is welcomed.

In response, Anthony Fitzgerald advised that the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) figures have seen an increase and will continue to grow. He noted that Abbot Vascular and Boston Scientific in Clonmel are both very strong pillars in regard to the figures. Boston has circa. 1,650 staff currently and they are set to employ a further 400 people over the next 4 years. Abbott employs circa. 1800 staff and Clonmel is the largest plant of the 50 Abbott plants world-wide. With a good eco system in engineering and technology companies Anthony advised that many other smaller companies are surviving as spin-offs. Part of the growth of the 300 people in the northern end of the County is as a result of Technopath in Ballina and this is an example of an Irish company being set up and then being purchased by a larger international company.

Councillor Peggy Ryan commended the work of the LEO. She noted the commitment of Mary Ryan to the REACH project in Roscrea which had been on pause for some time. She also enquired if there was a stronger take-up in the Micro for Green Grants since the last update. Anthony Fitzgerald acknowledged the dedication of Mary Ryan to the REACH Project. He stated that the take up on Micro for Green Grants is very slow and it was felt that this is due to the small businesses owners not having the time to apply for them.

Councillor Siobhan Ambrose acknowledged the work of Anthony Fitzgerald especially with the Ballingarrane development. She enquired how development is progressing in regard to the IDA Advanced Building Solutions for Clonmel. Anthony advised that there was a technical issue that caused a delay but was resolved over the last two months. Now planning permission is expected to be achieved by Q1 2024.

Councillor Joe Hannigan congratulated the LEO staff on the success of the extent of work being carried out. He asked type of industries are being targeted for the landbanks in Nenagh and Roscrea and what are the steps an interested party would need to take in order to apply for these. Anthony advised Cllr Hannigan that P.J Power Property have been engaged to handle any expression of interest. Along with that some of the individual sites are currently under negotiation and this element is being managed directly by the Municipal District.

Cllr. Hanafin asked about Archerstown Industrial Estate in Thurles which is owned by Shannon Development property and is only half full. He is not aware of any site sold from there in 20 years. Cllr. Hanafin stated that there are companies like H&MV are looking for a second site in Thurles but the facilities are not there for them. Brian Beck acknowledged this and said we are responding to the current need for sites through address the land banks and properties within our control.

## **5. Customer Vacancy Incentive Scheme (CVIS)**

Kathleen Prendergast, Economic Development Officer provided an update on the Customer Vacancy Incentive Scheme Information Meeting which was held on April 13<sup>th</sup> for any members of the SPC interested in getting more detailed information on the CVI Scheme. Kathleen listed the members of the committee who attended the meeting and informed the SPC of the topics covered in her presentation at the meeting including the rationale

for the original scheme and how the scheme had evolved following a review in 2021 including consideration of the impact of the original scheme, consultation with four different groups via surveys, discussions with the Planning and Finance sections, as well as looking at similar schemes operating in the different Local Authorities.

Referring to the rationale for the grant sum payable being limited to €5,000 in any one year, she had explained that this was based on the fact that 5,424 properties equating to 85% of the customers of the County Council, would be eligible in this bracket; along with this this same cohort of customers produce 20% of the total rates amount received to the council; and the fact that by limiting the sum, there was a limit to the financial exposure for Tipperary County Council thus providing protection of the income to the Council. Kathleen had also provided a full breakdown of the Income being brought into the Council by Rates collection.

Kathleen advised that it had been a very fruitful discussion on the topic. The following was agreed at same:

- Changes to the scheme, if any, should be limited to small changes that would not impact on the fundamental scheme, given that the overall scheme has been through process and consultation and been adopted by the County Council in 2021.
- The only area in the scheme for consideration for any changes would be the Prime Retail Area (PRA).
- A survey of the current vacant properties on the Prime Retail Area of all the towns should be carried out and the findings be presented to the SPC with a recommendation for the SPC to consider based on those findings.

Kathleen stated that following the meeting a full survey had been facilitated by the staff in the Finance Section and she then presented the findings in relation to the Prime Retail Area Vacancies as follows:

As of May 2023, there are 222 Properties Vacant in Prime Retail Areas of County Tipperary and of these 203 (- i.e. 92%) can avail of the full benefit of the current scheme as their rates demand is lower than €5,000. 19 businesses in total have a higher rates demand than the €5,000 = 8%

- 7 are between 5K and 8K = 3%
- 3 are between 8K and 10K = 1%
- 9 are above 10K in rates demand= 4%

### **Considerations**

- Some properties are currently under refurbishment and will reopen once completed.
- Some are in Legal disputes and until these are resolved will not be available to reopen.
- Currently 92% of these properties will be able to get the full benefit of the scheme.
- Of the remaining 8% of customers, 3% of these (5 customers are under 6K).

Following the review of this information Kathleen stated that the following factors influenced any recommendation:

1. Any changes made will be to the benefit of just 19 premises.
2. The 19 premises that will benefit from any adjustment to this scheme are properties that would either have to be taken over by large operators to be viable. Alternatively, they would have to be broken into smaller units and this will result in reducing the rate costs anyhow for new businesses taking up these smaller units. This is particularly the case for the 9 buildings that are over €10,000.

3. The current scheme was consulted upon widely and any changes may require returning to the members for any adoption.
4. Marketing material which had been invested in would become outdated immediately following any change.
5. A review is scheduled for June 2024

Arising from the research, Kathleen Prendergast stated that there was not a case for making any changes and therefore she was recommending that we would continue with the current scheme and make no changes.

Cllr. Ambrose stated that her main concern was for the prime retail areas and increasing the grant allocation to over €5,000 for the properties in this areas. She stated that at the information meeting, Director Brian Beck had suggested that we could increase the amount to €8,000 or €10,000. Cllr Ambrose stated that it is the long-term we should be focusing on and therefore we should not leave it until next year's review to make these changes.

Councillor Imelda Goldsboro said we now have a clearer picture with the figures being provided. She emphasised that costs for businesses have gone up dramatically and the units we are talking about are going to be a hard sell. As it would involve only 19 businesses, she felt the scheme should to be increased for these properties. The Council are currently receiving no rates income for these premises for many years, so by taking a hit for three years it might entice a business to take that unit on and they are likely to stay once in place.

Councillor Joe Hannigan stated that he understands Councillor Ambrose's position and what she is advocating for. He asked if the 19 businesses would be entitled to the €5,000 grant if they applied under the current scheme. Kathleen confirmed they would be entitled to a grant amount of up to €5,000 - subject to complying with the other conditions. As this was the case, he suggested that as they are entitled to €5,000 that it would be best to leave the scheme as it is for the meantime.

Brian Beck emphasised that in the Prime Retail Area, we have 203 businesses properties vacant that can avail of the full scheme, with a number of the businesses who are just over the €5,000 being very close to the threshold also. We need to be very conscious of what this scheme is and how it was adopted by the Council and if the figure was eliminated it may not fit with the ethos of the scheme which is there to support the smaller operator. He added that if the Council had wanted to eliminate or increase the figure, it would have been done at the time the scheme was adopted and therefore we need to be very careful with how we proceed with this. If we were to increase the amount, it could be a different argument which may need to be taken to the full Council.

Councillor Ambrose asked should they increase the sum to 8,000 or 10,000 or how far could they go before altering the entire scheme. She stated that the time it went out for consultation is a very different time to how it is now. Cllr. Ambrose proposed that the amount be changed to €10,000 for the interim period between now and consultation next year as had been recommended by the Director Brian Beck at the information meeting. Brian Beck clarified that his recommendation was to leave the scheme as it is and not increase the amount to €10,000 for the reasons outlined by Kathleen Prendergast.

Cllr Hannigan suggested that it would be best to leave it until the full review and consultation in 12 months' time and not go for a vote today on this. Cllr. Ambrose accepted this position but she wanted her disappointment noted that a change was not being made to the scheme giving the rising energy costs and the challenging economic landscape arising from Ukraine & Brexit concerns.

**6. Any other Business**

Cllr Imelda Goldsboro, Chairperson confirmed there was no other business to discuss.

**7. Close of Business – Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was proposed at September 5<sup>th</sup> 2023. Kathleen stated that she would ensure that the meeting would not be held the day after a Council or Municipal District Meeting. The meeting then concluded.

Signed: Imelda Goldsboro Date: 6/9/2023. Chairperson

