

# Minutes of Meeting of SPC 1 – Economic Development, Enterprise Support & Tourism

**Held in County Hall on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2015 at 2.00pm**

**Present:** Cllr Pat Millea (Chair), Cllr Pat Fitzpatrick, Cllr Tomas Breathnach, Cllr Michael Doyle, Cllr Patrick McKee, Mr Phil Funchion, Mr Michael Kennedy, Ms Deirdre Shine, Mr John Bambrick, Ms Theresa Delahunty and Mr Charles Wani.

**Apologies:** Cllr Patrick O'Neill.

**In Attendance:** Sean McKeown, Head of Enterprise; Martin Prendiville, Head of Finance; Brian Tyrell, Senior Executive Officer; Aisling Hayes, Administrative Officer; Stephen O'Connor, Administrative Officer.

The Chairman welcomed Ms Deirdre Shine, representing the Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce, to her first meeting of the Committee.

## **1. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2015 were proposed by Cllr Patrick McKee, seconded by Mr John Bambrick and agreed.

## **2. Matters Arising**

RE: Update on Local Economic and Community Plan

The Head of Enterprise reported that since the last meeting of the Committee: the 3 Municipal Districts adopted the draft socio-economic statements and report on public consultation; and the Regional Assembly provided feedback on same as per correspondence dated 1st Sep last (as circulated to the Committee.) It was noted the Regional Assembly welcome the clarity of the High Level Goals and indicated that they are well founded and provide a good indication of the direction of the LECP. The Chairman noted that an update will be provided on the LECP later on the agenda.

## **3. Update on Local Enterprise Office (LEO)**

It was noted that a 'Year-To-Date' (YTD) Progress Update (to 8<sup>th</sup> Sep 2015) on the implementation of the LEO's annual action plan had been circulated to the members in advance of the meeting. The Head of Enterprise reported that this Update was presented at the meeting with Enterprise Ireland (EI) held on 8th Sep to review the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between EI and Kilkenny County Council. It was noted that EI are satisfied with the SLA, and the YTD Update. It was also noted that LEO Kilkenny achieved a score of 70% in the independent customer service survey that EI commissioned across the network of 31 LEOs nationally, which compares favourably to the national average LEO score of 63%. There followed a discussion on the Update. In particular:

- Targets under some of the actions are lagging, in particular the grant approval figures and numbers participating on enterprise training programmes. The Head of Enterprise explained that the targets were in line with the YTD timeline of 8 months, as the out-turn activity figures are only for two thirds of the year. He said he is confident the LEO will achieve or exceed all of the targets set in the annual action plan.
- Good use of social media to promote the services of the LEO. The Head of Enterprise reported that social media is especially effective in targeting younger people for initiatives and supports, such as Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur (IBYE) Competition.
- Details of Grant recipients. The Head of Enterprise confirmed that a summary outline of projects supported by the LEO with financial assistance will be circulated to the members as part of future Progress Updates.

- Access to Credit from the banks. Following discussion, it was noted that small business start-ups and expansions are finding it easier to access credit from the banks compared to 5-6 years ago, Bank of Ireland cited a 30% increase in lending to SMEs. This is supported by recent reports on the issue. It was also noted that a greater range of credit schemes have become available in recent years, such as Micro-Finance Ireland and the Credit Union Small Business Support Loan Scheme.
- Non-nationals can often find it difficult to access supports to start a business frequently due to lack of credit history / track record. It was noted that an increasing number of non-nationals are accessing supports from the LEO.

#### **4. Update on Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)**

The Head of Enterprise provided a summary overview of the LECP Project Plan, in particular the key steps and milestones that have yet to be delivered. A copy of the draft economic actions was circulated. It was also noted that members will receive (early next week), copy of the draft community actions that were presented to the LCDC earlier in the day, and that both sets of actions will go on public display from 6th – 30th November next. A public notice to this effect will be placed in Kilkenny People next week. Hard copies of the draft actions will be made available in County Hall, the Area Offices of the Council and in local libraries. The draft actions will also be placed online and on the consult.ie website.

The Head of Enterprise pointed out that a screening exercise needs to be undertaken of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) requirements, and that it is hoped to complete same by the end of November.

It was noted that members were not being asked to agree the actions at this point, and that the final actions are scheduled to be agreed as part of the final LECP at the SPC meeting to take place on 11th December next.

It was also noted that the formal launch of the LECP will take place early in 2016.

The Head of Enterprise provided a brief summary of each of the draft 54 economic actions in turn, during which a number of issues were raised.

Actions A3/A5: General consensus that there is a need for a County Food Strategy and Action Plan in particular to maximise current developments and in light of even stronger Savour Kilkenny Festival and the emerging #tasteKilkenny initiative.

Action A6: Importance of Diaspora engagement, following on the success of the Gathering and Kilkenny should engage with Connect Ireland to harness the positivity. Aisling Hayes updated on the viral you tube advert and pamphlet under production with Connect Ireland by year end.

Action A8: It is important that small/medium enterprises are supported to secure/win procurement contracts.

Action A14: A business Ambassador initiative to promote/brand Kilkenny as an investment/business location should also be considered. It was noted that this was the main objective of Action A53.

Action A15: Entrepreneurship open days should be held in Kildalton College to encourage start-ups in Agri-Innovation/highlight supports.

Action A21: Possibility of securing high profile business events such as TedTalks to promote Kilkenny for cutting edge symposia/conference location should be explored.

Action 22: Failte Ireland and local authority need to engage to register motorway annotation for the Ancient East initiative.

Action A23: Barriers to developing river tourism, fishing, etc were noted, and the lack of communication between agencies. For example, Inistioge could be developed as a fishing hub but this is dependent upon the hatchery being activated, so the Regional Fisheries Board need to engage with Failte Ireland and the local authority.

Action A24: Lack of adequate signage highlighted as an inhibitor to developing tourism products, particularly exiting the motorway and throughout city & county. It was suggested that each Municipal District take responsibility to address the signage deficit in their own locality in conjunction with the area engineers. A regional forum should also be established to co-ordinate the counties in the south east in a consolidated marketing /branding initiative.

Action A27: Requirement to educate our own communities on our heritage assets – suggested reigniting a 'Know you own county' type initiative to create visitor Ambassadors across the County.

Action A36: Stephen O'Connor confirmed that the broadband duct is in the process of being rolled out to Castlecomer.

It was agreed to issue the draft economic actions for public consultation.

## 5. **Small Business Vacant Premises Incentive Scheme**

Adrian Waldron, Administrative Officer responsible for debt collection with Kilkenny County Council joined meeting. Stephen O'Connor circulated hard copy of the draft 'Small Business Incentive Scheme' for vacant commercial property. He explained that:

- the scheme is for the occupation of previously vacant commercial property for a new business start-up or an existing small business expanding.
- The proposed vacancy period is 6 months.
- The grant is based on a correlation to the business's commercial rates, up to a cap of €2,000 on a reducing basis of 75%, 50% and 25%.
- This scheme will allow a business to receive up to €3,000 over the three years of the scheme.
- The business must pay rates and then get a rebate after year end.
- All applicants must pay commercial rates by direct debit and have their account up to date, this also includes any repayments due to the LEO.
- Certain categories of businesses are excluded from the scheme.

A discussion followed regarding: the conditions and criteria for the scheme; scenarios of types of businesses qualifying; the criteria for the excluded businesses; and the number of employees for qualifying businesses.

The proposed scheme was welcomed by the Committee and on the approval of Cllr Patrick McKee, seconded by Cllr Pat Fitzpatrick, it was agreed to recommend the adoption of the scheme at the next meeting of the Council.

## 6. **AOB**

It was agreed to convene the next meeting of the Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2015.

There being no further business, the Chairman concluded the meeting at 4.00pm.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

CHAIRMAN