

Initiatives to Support Local Economic Development



**CHAMBERS
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IN BUSINESS FOR BUSINESS

In association with



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Foreword by Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Alan Kelly, T.D.

Local chambers of commerce throughout the country play an important role in stimulating and promoting business and employment, and have a strong track record of working with local government in this regard. This is mirrored at national level by Chambers Ireland which has consistently taken a keen interest in local government, helping to foster productive collaboration between local authorities and the business sector and to promote quality and good practice in local government. A good example is the annual Excellence in Local Government initiative which Chambers Ireland and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government have jointly sponsored for more than ten years.



The idea of producing a document highlighting Initiatives to Support Local Economic Development fits very well with this approach, showing the initiatives which local government, with funding from my Department, are engaged in to help businesses to grow and create employment. Its timing is very apt, as local government has taken on a range of new or enhanced functions in the economic area which have great potential benefit for the Chambers and the businesses they represent. These functions include the operation of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), supporting the development of the Community and Local Development Programmes and the formulation of Local Economic and Community Plans and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies to be adopted by the new Regional Assemblies. The establishment of the LEOs is a major advance in supporting local business development, bringing together existing local authority business supports, access to relevant local authority services, along with an enhanced enterprise support service, in a "one stop shop" for existing and prospective enterprises.

The achievements to date of local authorities in supporting business are exemplified by the range of initiatives recorded in the Chambers Ireland document. Examples include Cork City and Cork County Councils' €1.67 million rates-funded Economic Development Fund to promote business growth; Wexford County Council's Vacant Property Incentive Scheme providing rates refunds of up to 75% against fit out costs of previously vacant premises and similar schemes in other areas such as Waterford; the Kildare Expo networking event where companies can meet buyers; numerous town centre development projects; and production of information brochures like that by Donegal County Council to showcase the area's strengths as an attractive place to locate a business.

Local authorities have also played a significant role in attracting major FDI projects, for example through meeting infrastructure requirements, from Intel and HP in Kildare in the 1990s, to PayPal in Louth more recently, and at South Dublin County Council's international business park at Grange Castle, to mention but a few. It is impossible to do justice to the range and importance of such initiatives in this short foreword, but perusal of this booklet will be very rewarding in that regard and hopefully will also serve to generate further ideas and practical initiatives.

The formulation of the Local Economic and Community Plans will bring greater strategic co-ordination and coherence and added impetus to the economic development role of local authorities. Development of the Plans is at an advanced stage in most areas. My Department has issued extensive guidance on the Plans, stressing in particular the need for local authorities to identify specific actions that will make the most of particular local strengths and assets and ensure that all areas reach their full economic potential.

It is important to achieve good regional and local balance in economic development, whether in the context of FDI or developing indigenous enterprise. Local government now has a lead role in working to achieve this balance, particularly through the regional strategies and local economic plans. A key requirement is to maximise the potential of all cities and towns.

Major urban centres such as Cork, Galway and Limerick need to become true regional economic powerhouses, alongside Dublin. In the case of other urban areas, the actions to be implemented under the Local Economic and Community Plans will be critical not only to reversing the decline that many provincial towns have experienced as a result of the recession, but also ensuring that they can act as vibrant economic hubs for their hinterlands.

This is the first edition of this booklet on local economic initiatives and, no doubt, it will evolve and develop in the future, taking account of the increasing local authority role in economic development. I look forward to future editions providing further guidance on good practice in that regard and practical advice both for local authorities and local chambers on ways to maximise the benefits of mutual collaboration.

Alan Kelly, T.D.
Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Foreword by Conor Brennan, CEO Zurich Insurance, Ireland

Zurich Insurance is delighted to support this important publication by Chambers Ireland, highlighting many of the great initiatives Local Authorities and the extended Chambers network deliver to make a positive impact on our country.

As one of Ireland's leading insurers and recently voted the most reputable financial services company in Ireland, we recognise the crucial role businesses play in driving sustainable economic growth. We first opened our offices in Wexford, in addition to those in Dublin, seven years ago having had great support from Wexford County Council to make a home there. Since then, we've grown from just 30 employees to 200. Now the largest financial services employer in the county, we have continued to benefit from the Council's support.



Now we want to give something back to the community that has supported us. Recently, we were delighted when, together with Waterford Wexford Training Services and the Insurance Institute of Ireland, we were able to launch a dedicated Insurance Traineeship Programme for the Wexford area to help tackle youth unemployment in the county.

Furthermore, Government recently announced that Zurich will lead apprenticeship proposals to help tackle youth unemployment in Ireland. The Zurich apprenticeship is the first of its kind in the insurance sector and, in addition to helping people find their role in the workplace, will help to deliver a pipeline of talent into the industry.

Globally and locally, Zurich's ambition is to build a reputation for being the best insurer as judged by our people, our shareholders and the communities in which we operate. That doesn't mean being the largest or having the greatest market share. It means providing fulfilling careers for our employees, providing quality products at the right price for our customers and it means taking a meaningful role in supporting the long term, sustainable success of our communities.

This publication profiles many outstanding examples of initiatives where local government and enterprise are working together to be their best and develop and grow local economies. Together, anything is possible.

Conor Brennan
CEO Zurich Insurance, Ireland

Foreword by Ian Talbot, Chief Executive of Chambers Ireland

Chambers of Commerce have always played a key part in driving business growth and development of local economies. Every day, our affiliated Chambers work closely with local businesses, stakeholders and decision makers to improve the local economic and social environment and ensuring that the necessary physical and social infrastructure are in place to facilitate growth.

The past years have been difficult for Local Government as well as businesses. Many of the issues were common, not least dramatically falling revenues. Businesses were forced to re-engineer to survive and Local Government has experienced the biggest restructuring in its history in Ireland. Thankfully, we now find ourselves in a much more stable situation with the necessary evolutions well under way. As we now experience a much needed and welcome phase of renewed growth, our surplus energy should focus on ensuring a balanced, sustainable recovery and that no region is left behind.



The purpose of this guide is just that; assisting in ensuring inclusive growth. By learning from the best examples of collaboration between Chambers, Local Government and Local Enterprise Offices we can help transform local areas both economically and culturally.

With this guide, Chambers and their local partners will have a ready resource to assist them in devising new ways of driving local economic growth and developing new economic strategies.

I am sure many will be inspired by its content and we look forward to following the many innovative projects I am sure will arise from it.

Ian Talbot
Chief Executive
Chambers Ireland

Importance of Local Government and Economic Development

Importance of Local Government and Economic Development

Ireland is entering a challenging phase in its economic history. As we emerge from a period of deep recession, our recovery has been characterised by economic growth that has been uneven across the country and a legacy of youth and long term unemployment. The role of Local Authorities in advancing the economic growth of their communities has never been more important. Local Authorities have always played an integral role in the economic development of their local area, but with the ongoing reforms of Local Government, a new emphasis has been placed on Local Authorities as drivers of local economic development.

Chambers Ireland and its affiliated network have long worked in partnership with the County and City Management Association, the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, and the network of Local Authorities to advance and support our mutual goal of local economic development. To this end, Chambers Ireland has compiled this document to highlight some of the initiatives being undertaken by Local Authorities to support enterprises in their area.

Twenty-two Chambers worked with Chambers Ireland to identify initiatives and projects being undertaken by their respective Local Authorities that they viewed as having a positive impact on the business community. A number of these initiatives are being delivered by Local Authorities in partnership with Chambers. The purpose of this document is to give a snapshot of some of the positive actions currently being undertaken to foster enterprise development at local level, and to provide a ready resource for Local Authorities and Chambers as they seek to develop programmes within their own communities.

The document is structured as follows:

1. Section 1 describes current initiatives adopted at local level to support economic growth
2. Section 2 outlines former Local Authority winning projects recognised as best practice in supporting local development
3. Section 3 provides examples of innovative international approaches to generating growth which potentially could be implemented in an Irish context.

In addition to this document, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation recently published a report outlining 15 practical options which can be replicated throughout the country in support of local economic growth. This report contains a number of Chambers Ireland's suggestions and can be accessed [here](#).

It is our belief that Local Authorities and Chambers must develop ever closer partnerships if we are to successfully drive economic development at a local level. To achieve this, Chambers Ireland will continue to support the constructive engagement of Local Government and local businesses. We expect that this document will inspire new ideas for how local cooperation can be improved to pursue our common objective of economic growth.

Current Initiatives Adopted at Local Level to Support Growth

Current Initiatives Adopted at Local Level to Support Growth

In early 2015 Chambers Ireland asked our affiliated network of Chambers for feedback on initiatives adopted by Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in support of local economic growth.

Twenty-two Chambers throughout the country worked with Chambers Ireland to identify numerous initiatives which highlight the importance of Local Government in developing and growing local economies.

The following section describes current initiatives adopted at local level to support economic growth under the four headings of:

1. Attracting new business
2. Supporting existing business
3. Town centre development
4. Increasing competitiveness

It is our expectation that some of these initiatives will inspire other Chambers, Councils and LEOs to continue the important work of implementing projects that have a positive impact on the business community and through this strengthen local economic growth.

The projects below are listed in alphabetical order by county.

Cavan Chamber & Cavan County Council



- ✓ **Attracting new business:** In its efforts to increase Cavan's attractiveness as a destination for investment the Council has adopted an interagency approach to planning and development.
- ✓ **Increasing competitiveness:** The Council has invested heavily in activities and attractions that highlight its commitment to make Cavan accessible and bring people to the town and county. While this includes supporting smaller scale projects like a local walking tour of the town centre and Age Friendly Business initiatives, it also means much larger events like the annual Taste of Cavan festival. In 2014, this festival attracted around 35,000 people to the town for two days to meet Cavan businesses and experience some of the best artisan food producers in the country.



Ennis Chamber, Shannon Chamber & Clare County Council



- ✓ **Attracting new business:** Clare County Council has initiated a redevelopment project of the Ennis market area which seeks to promote locally sourced goods and foods.
- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** Clare County Council has introduced a development contribution scheme with reduced rates. A shop front scheme is also available to businesses located in Kilrush.
- ✓ **Town centre development:** In 2015, Clare County Council allocated €100,000 towards the Public Area Enhancement Scheme in support of community-based projects in towns and villages across County Clare with a view to enhancing the overall performance of the county's tidy towns in the Supervalu National Tidy Towns Competition.



Cork Chamber, Cork City Council & Cork County Council



- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** Cork City and Cork County Councils have established the Economic Development Fund (EDF) which is dedicated to drive business growth throughout the region by supporting targeted sectors. The EDF was an initiative that was proposed by Cork Chamber based on in-depth research of international best practice and was heavily lobbied for by Cork Chamber in advance of its adoption by Cork City and County Councils in 2011. Since its adoption the Councils have committed to ring-fencing 1% of the annual rate base creating an annual fund. The value of this fund comprises approximately €1.07 million from the County rates and €600,000 from the City rates.
- ✓ **Town centre development:** Cork County Council's 2015 budget included provision for a €1,000,000 Town Development Fund which has been established to support the revitalisation of town centres. This money will be allocated to supporting local town development through a variety of options including as a means to support business initiatives, to carry out town enhancements, co-ordinate with local partnerships and support tidy towns throughout the counties' municipalities.





- ✓ **Attracting new business:** A brochure promoting Donegal is currently being developed by Donegal County Council. The aim of this brochure is to showcase Donegal's strengths as an attractive place to locate a business.
- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** The County Council offers payment of commercial rates by direct debit and grants a €250 reduction to businesses which pay in a timely manner. Donegal County Council also assists inward investment companies with their expansion plans. This is done by providing technical and planning advice for new premises and by reaching out to qualified staff through the Council's Diaspora Project. The Council is furthermore forthcoming in terms of creating connections between local companies, prospective employees and trading partners, particularly in the US.
- ✓ **Town centre development:** Letterkenny Chamber in cooperation with local main street retailers has formed a Town Team Initiative. The Council has matched funding which has enabled the employment of a Town Centre Development Manager whose responsibility is to manage the town centre and attract new brands to the main street for a better and more sustainable retail mix.
- ✓ **Increasing competitiveness:** The Shop_LK initiative by Letterkenny Chamber and the Retail Promotions Initiative support retail in Letterkenny under funding from Donegal County Council. The Council also spearheads the Donegal Gateways Forum which brings together key stakeholders to develop a strategy for Letterkenny to remain a gateway town. The Forum has identified some priority areas which are feeding into the County Economic Development plan. One such priority is roads infrastructure which is a key concern for all businesses in the region and for the Chamber.



Dublin Chamber & Dublin City Council



- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** With the launch of the joint initiative Activating Dublin in 2012, Dublin Chamber and Dublin City Council set out a vision for generating growth and employment in the Dublin region involving public and private sectors working together. As part of the initiative, an Action Plan identifying five projects to bring positive change in the city was completed. One of these projects focused on eCommerce: an area which many Irish firms were neglecting and thus losing out to competitors. Dublin Chamber and City Council then got Facebook, eBay and PayPal to collaborate and provide training for SMEs looking to accelerate their online business. The result was that 55% of participant firms saw sales increase, with the Government coming on board to provide them with grant support .
- ✓ Activating Dublin has furthermore played a leading role in getting young jobseekers into jobs, work experience, education or training as well as it has led to the creation of the office of the Startup Commissioner.



South Dublin Chamber & South Dublin County Council



- ✓ **Attracting new business:** South Dublin County Council facilitates inward investment into the county through the South Dublin County Council owned business park Grange Castle, which accommodates the needs of large enterprises. Grange Castle is marketed by the County Council in conjunction with the IDA as an international business park of regional and national importance.
- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** The County Council has a range of business support initiatives, many of which are implemented in cooperation with South Dublin Chamber. Some of these initiatives include the offer of pre-planning advice for businesses through which developers and the Council can achieve better mutual understanding of the constraints and objectives associated with a planning project. In turn, this speeds up the planning process and increases clarity for all. The Council also offers a phased payment regime for development contributions, and a direct debit scheme for business rates.
- ✓ **Increasing competitiveness:** The Business Support Initiative seeks to improve competitiveness in South Dublin County through a multi-agency collaborative approach involving South Dublin Chamber among others. Programmes under this initiative comprise a business support grant for enterprises incurring commercial rates of €10,000 or less; a €30,000 fund providing grants in support of small events involving overseas visitors; and a fund co-managed by the Chamber and County Council to finance infrastructural upgrading, innovation and start up-advice; and targeted training delivered by the LEO. Finally, an economic profiling survey has been undertaken by South Dublin Chamber and South Dublin County Council to bring clarity to all economic activity within the county.

- ✓ **Town centre development:** The Sustainable Business Executive has established a Retail Fora to support retailers and identify areas where focused programmes can be put in place. Some of these programmes include the Shop Front Grant (ranging from €800-€4,000) which is intended to improve the appearance of independently owned shops fronting public streets, and the recent roll out of free WiFi.



Fingal Dublin Chamber & Fingal County Council



- ✓ **Attracting new business:** In order to showcase Fingal as a first class investment destination, Fingal County Council and Fingal Dublin Chamber recently co-hosted the ITLG Silicon Valley Global Tech Summit. The Summit, which brought more than 350 tech executives together, provided high-value networking opportunities and has to date resulted in one Silicon Valley based company to start discussions about locating a European office in the Fingal Region.
- ✓ Fingal Dublin Chamber has moreover successfully lobbied the County Council to rebrand industrial zoned lands in Blanchardstown to “Dublin Enterprise Zone” to better promote the area with IDA and Enterprise Ireland.
- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** In order to support SMEs promoting their business, Fingal County Council has created a special fund of €100,000. Funds are given to winning businesses following a review and selection process from applicant companies.
- ✓ **Town centre development:** Over the next three years, Fingal County Council has allocated €3 million in funding towards developing Swords Castle Cultural Quarter to provide major new tourism opportunities for the town. In addition, Fingal Dublin Chamber is currently working closely with the County Council to bring the Purple Flag for Evening Business to Swords on a pilot scheme.
- ✓ **Increasing competitiveness:** Working with the other three local authorities in the Dublin Region, Fingal County Council has established the Dublin Economic Monitor which provides Dublin specific economic data for the Dublin City Region. This will assist business to plan forward with the key data they require.



Galway Chamber & Galway City Council



- ✓ **Supporting new business:** As part of Galway City's Innovation District initiative, the PorterShed has been created by Galway Chamber alongside other key stakeholders. The PorterShed is described as an innovative ecosystem which facilitates idea generation, open learning, collaboration and accelerates commercialisation. Entrepreneurs can avail of the PorterShed to network with other entrepreneurs, get tech insight, and access legal and financial advice. Galway Technology Centre, in which the Chamber is the majority shareholder, has equally housed many start-ups and developing companies by offering flexible, high-quality, serviced office space since its establishment in 1994.



Tralee Chamber Alliance & Kerry County Council



- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** One initiative taken by the Local Authority is financial support given to the Chamber. Kerry County Council match fund a portion of membership income in an effort to promote Tralee as a great place to live, work and visit.



North Kildare Chamber & Kildare County Council



- ✓ **Attracting new business:** North Kildare Chamber and Kildare County Council are currently planning a trade visit to the US to attract new businesses into the county and further develop the strong relations to the US market present in the region.
- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** North Kildare Chamber has partnered with Kildare County Council to host the first ever Kildare Expo – an industry specific networking event where companies can meet buyers. Recognising the importance of collaboration and joint-up thinking, the Chamber CEO and County Manager have fortnightly meetings focusing on growing the region. An Advisory Forum comprising stakeholders from the Chamber, County Council and main businesses has also been established.



Kilkenny Chamber & Kilkenny County Council



- ✓ **Attracting new business:** Kilkenny Chamber works proactively to attract new jobs to the area. Among others, the Chamber has developed relations with a US company looking to set up a base in Ireland. Following positive engagement involving the Local Authority, Kilkenny Chamber secured a decision from the company to choose Kilkenny as the base for its European operations. The company plans to employ circa 20 employees by the end of 2015 and significantly increase that in 2016. In partnership with the LEO and local sponsors, Kilkenny Chamber has furthermore promoted a Careers and Opportunities Fair which proved to be tremendously successful in securing new jobs for the region.
- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** In an effort to encourage visitors to extend stays in Kilkenny and leverage on the city's Medieval Mile brand, the Chamber has developed the Medieval Mile Pass providing visitors with access to a wide array of attractions in the city. The Chamber also operates a very successful Kilkenny Gift Voucher scheme which encourages people to shop locally and help the local economy. This voucher scheme has been in place since 2008 and during 2014 sales increased by +32% on the previous year giving a much needed boost to existing local businesses.
- ✓ **Town centre development:** Kilkenny Chamber is currently closely cooperating with the Local Authority to ensure the most appropriate development of the former Smithwicks Brewery city centre site. The Chamber aims to ensure that the adopted planning approach is cognisant of business needs both now and into the future. The Chamber moreover engages positively with the Tidy Towns Committee and the Keep Kilkenny Beautiful group, which has culminated in significant wins for Kilkenny in 2014.

- ✓ **Increasing competitiveness:** Kilkenny Chamber is represented on all five of the Strategic Policy Committees and has worked closely with the LEO in organising workshops tasked with securing inputs, viewpoints and opinions as part of the process in developing the Local Economic & Community Plan for County Kilkenny.



Limerick Chamber & Limerick City & County Council



- ✓ **Attracting new business:** The Business Incentive Scheme provides financial incentives to encourage new businesses establishing themselves in designated areas of Limerick City and County. Occupiers of vacant properties are offered incentives for higher order retail, office and business uses. The incentive consists of a grant relief of up to 50% of annual rates in year one and 25% relief in year two.
- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** The SME and Enterprise Support Scheme provides financial support to occupiers of commercial properties with a total annual commercial rate demand of up to €10,000. The support payments are aimed specifically at small and medium-sized enterprises. In 2014 the support payments totalled €55,820 and benefitted more than 400 companies and individuals.
- ✓ **Town centre development:** Co-ordinated by Limerick City and County Council with support from local businesses, the Team Limerick Clean-Up initiative brings together volunteers from all communities to clean up the local environment.



Longford Chamber & Longford County Council



- ✓ **Attracting new business:** New businesses occupying a premises empty for six months or more can avail of a grant back on rates paid. Businesses receive a 75% refund in year one, 50% year in two and 25% in year three.
- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** In January 2015, Longford County Council reduced the former Longford Town Council commercial rates by 3% to align commercial rates across the county at a level more favourable to businesses, and to support the competitiveness of businesses located in Longford town.
- ✓ **Town centre development:** Longford County Council is currently developing a regeneration programme under a dedicated executive to target redevelopment of the lower Main Street and Connolly Barracks area of Longford Town.
- ✓ **Increasing competitiveness:** The Council has introduced 30 minutes free parking at the end of every parking ticket to increase the popularity of Longford as a destination for shopping and recreation.



Westport Chamber & Mayo County Council



- ✓ **Attracting new business:** A New Enterprise Centre has been developed under funding from Westport Mayo Municipal District (formally known as the Westport Town Council), Mayo County Council, Westport Chamber and match funded by Enterprise Ireland.
- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** The Local Enterprise Centre supports business through various projects like the ongoing One to One Clinics with existing or start-up businesses. Current efforts are also ongoing with regards to Westport receiving the Purple Flag Award for the Town and Quay area. Westport Chamber is working closely with the West Mayo Municipal Council and local Garda Síochána on this project which would assist the marketing of Westport as a destination of choice.
- ✓ **Town centre development:** The Chamber and Council in association with other bodies are in the process of implementing a CCTV System within the town core in an effort to increase public safety.
- ✓ **Increasing competition:** Westport Shop 'n Spraoi na Nollaig annual Christmas festival within the town is a joint initiative between the Council and Chamber. The festival has successfully attracted visitors and shoppers to the town while also offering something to the local community.



Kells & District Chamber, Navan Chamber & Meath County Council



**Kells & District
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**Navan
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- ✓ **Attracting new business:** Meath Economic and Enterprise Team promotes Meath as a location for investment and business via the Economic Opportunities Brochure . In addition, the Boyne Valley Tourism Conference and Exhibition showcases the region to overseas tour operators and conference organisers.
- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** The County Council's Economic Action Plan - Keep Meath Working proposes interventions to support medium-term growth particularly for the local SME sector. Meath Economic Forum has been established to bring together business leaders and County Council representatives to get insight in blockages that can be alleviated for economic development and implementation of the County's economic strategy. The roll out of Kells Age Friendly Business Recognition Scheme has sought for local businesses to commit to Age Friendly practices . Furthermore, a grant towards commercial rates under the small business support scheme (businesses with annual rates less than €5K) supports the development of the SME sector.
- ✓ **Increasing competitiveness:** Meath County Council has commissioned an Economic Development Strategy report for the county providing measures to accelerate economic transformation, revitalisation, and the sustainable economic development throughout the country. Meanwhile in Navan, the free WiFi project which is part funded by Navan Chamber has brought free accessible wireless infrastructure to Navan Town Centre.



Sligo Chamber & Sligo County Council



**Sligo
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- ✓ **Attracting new business:** The majority of initiatives undertaken by Sligo's Local Authority have been of the "Cross-Border Funded" variety with notable development of the walking infrastructure which forms part of Sligo's tourism strategy.
- ✓ **Town centre development:** Sligo County Council was central to the recent Purple Flag Award, the internationally accredited award for meeting or surpassing the standards of excellence in managing the evening and night-time economy, to Sligo town.



Clonmel Chamber & Tipperary County Council



**Clonmel
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Comhairle Contae Thiobraid Árann
Tipperary County Council

- ✓ **Attracting new business:** Clonmel Business Development Park, which was established by Clonmel Chamber and Clonmel Borough Council in 1998, offers indigenous companies competitively priced office, light engineering or laboratory space for the first five years while the business is developing. Almost 1,000 jobs have been created by companies that were or are currently based in the park.
- ✓ **Increasing competitiveness:** Since 2011, Clonmel Chamber in cooperation with Clonmel Borough and Tipperary County Councils has operated the Clonmel Retail Forum. The group meets regularly to develop, implement and monitor a promotional plan for retail in the town. The group has secured over €100,000 in funding since 2013 and this has been used to promote retail in the town on local radio, local newspapers, regional media and online.
- ✓ **Town centre development:** A €500,000 retail support programme was announced by Tipperary County Council in February 2015 to support retailers in town centres. County Tipperary Chamber and Clonmel Chamber were both heavily involved in the development of the scheme and the Chamber will be working closely with the Council to manage the promotional plans for the nine largest towns in the county.



Waterford Chamber, Dungarvan & West Waterford Chamber & Waterford City & County Council



**Waterford
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**Dungarvan &
West Waterford
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Comhairle Cathrach
& Contae Phort Láirge
Waterford City
& County Council

- ✓ **Attracting new business:** A Fit Out Grant Scheme is available to new retailers in Waterford City Centre Commercial Area which applies to both existing vacant properties and new developments. Grant relief is based on verified fit out costs associated with fit-out or shop front improvement costs. Similarly, the Office Refurbishment Grant Scheme provides grant relief on costs associated with refurbishments that bring vacant premises into office use in the urban centres of Waterford, Tramore and Dungarvan. The Vacant Premises Scheme is equally aimed at rejuvenating the retail centre. Under this scheme Waterford City and County Council facilitates the temporary uptake of vacant shops by artists by creating a three-way legal licence between owners of shops, exhibiting artists and the Council. In return for participation landowners benefit from rates being waived and weekly inspections of the property.
- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** Funded by the Council, promoted by the Chamber and executed by Retail Excellence Ireland a retail mentoring programme has been put in place to assist retailers in Dungarvan with innovation, display, purchasing, marketing and eCommerce.
- ✓ **Town centre development:** A painting grant scheme of up to €600 is provided for businesses located in Dungarvan town centre to paint their premises in order to ensure the town remains fresh, attractive and vibrant.





- ✓ **Attracting new business:** The Vacant Property Incentive Scheme grants up to 75% of rate bills refunded against fit out costs of previously vacant premises in year one, 50% in year two and 25% in year three. The County has also developed a range of marketing and promotional collateral to encourage people and businesses to choose Wexford as the place to visit, live and work and has proposed plans for a number of industrial parks around the county.
- ✓ **Supporting existing business:** Wexford County Council has introduced the Rates Incentive Scheme under which businesses receive a 6% rates reduction if paying commercial rates in a timely manner.





Best Practice in Local Government

Best Practice in Local Government

Since 2004, Chambers Ireland has annually celebrated best practice in Local Government with the support of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government through our Excellence in Local Government (ELG) Awards.

One category of the ELG Awards celebrates projects implemented by Local Authorities in support of local economic growth. The following section outlines former Local Authority winning projects within this category since 2010. More information on Chambers Ireland's ELG Awards and past nominees can be found at www.chambers.ie/events.

2010 Winner: www.fingalworks.ie by Fingal County Council

Fingalworks.ie is an online information resource which deals with four key categories: jobseekers, investors, business start-ups and those in existing business. The site aims to answer any questions or queries these four groups have and direct them to the relevant agency for further information if necessary.

The concept was developed through the innovative Invest Fingal group set up in response to the economic recession. The Council took the step of establishing the site in partnership with other state agencies to make information and services more accessible through a single website and also to ensure it is user friendly for the residents and businesses in Fingal.



2011 Winner: Partnership Management Model for the English Market by Cork City Council

Website: <http://www.englishmarket.ie/>

In October 2007, in an effort to improve the operations and management of the English Market, Cork City Council introduced a new system of management of the English Market structured on active collaboration between Cork City Council, the Traders, and a new management company.

The aim of the project was to preserve the English Market as the unique municipal food market that it is, whilst also ensuring the Market develops and competes in a modern rapidly-changing retail environment.

Through a positive and dynamic business partnership between Cork City Council, the Market Traders and Aramark Property Management Company, the English Market continues to contribute to a multi-million euro local economy and provide employment for hundreds of people.



2012 Winner: Navan Town Renaissance Project by Navan Town Council

The Navan Town Renaissance Project was a collaborative effort between the Council, Navan Chamber of Commerce, retailers, businesses & community to transform the face of Navan Town, thereby creating a town which is known locally, nationally and internationally as an excellent place to invest, to visit, to shop and to live in.

Initiatives under the project covered rejuvenation of the town centre, introduction of a business shop front paint scheme, promotion of festivals in the town, and development of the THINK LOCAL --- SHOP LOCAL --- STAY LOCAL campaign.



2013 Winner: Made in Galway by Galway County Council

Website: <http://www.madeingalway.ie/>

The Made in Galway initiative promotes the range and quality of produce that is Made in Galway and encourages consumers to purchase from these producers in order to generate and sustain employment in the region.

It offers a marketing avenue for producers based in Galway at no cost and enables them to engage in a level of online marketing that they would not normally be able to undertake working on their own.

The initiative involves online marketing, demonstration at trade events/expos, tourism promotion, presence at festivals and events. The initiative is focused on having local producers to the fore, showcasing their talent and promoting products that are made in Galway.

The objective of this initiative is to generate more sales for local producers in order to sustain/create employment in the Galway region. It also highlights the attractiveness of the Galway region as a food and craft tourism destination.



2014 Winner: Cork County Council's Taste Cork Food Marketing Initiative

Website: www.tastecork.com

Recognising that Cork's vibrant food sector and community of innovative artisan food producers can offer amazing growth potential for the local economy, Cork County Council has been making significant investment into the support of this highly valuable industry.

The Taste Cork initiative is an innovative cluster marketing and training initiative supported by Cork County Council, the Cork Local Enterprise Offices and Bord Bia. The Taste Cork brand allows producers to collaborate and create a greater impact than for companies in a stand alone environment. Taste Cork reinforces the image of County Cork as a centre for some of the world's finest food products.

Through training, networking and collective marketing, the key aim of the initiative is to work together towards promoting and expanding Cork's invaluable food sector.



Examples of International Best Practice

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We conclude this report by providing examples of innovative international approaches to generating growth which potentially could be implemented in an Irish context. These examples have been identified through Chambers Ireland's interaction with international chambers as well as our own research.

Alternative Financing Models

As a consequence of the financial crisis, many Local Authorities have suffered from a reduction in funding for local services, which has affected their ability to invest in their local area.

In an attempt to overcome barriers, it may be useful for authorities to consider alternative avenues of accessing finance. Two such alternatives are public-private partnerships using crowdfunding platforms or the establishment of a microfinance fund.

The growing popularity of crowdfunding in Europe brings about many opportunities for local governments. Across the Atlantic, US councils have already successfully utilised crowdfunding to regenerate local areas and promote the take-up of underused or vacant properties. In San Francisco, for example, the Mayor's Office of Civic Innovation used a crowdfunding platform to seek inspiration from the public for ideas to put free spaces into use. Businesses or groups were invited to bid to use designated public areas on a temporary basis to showcase innovative projects. Potential partners included non-profits, entrepreneurs, local businesses or community groups. As an added benefit, crowdfunding also facilitates and encourages citizen engagement in local planning and development.

Closer to home, the opportunities presented by crowdfunding have also been embraced by UK local councils. Faced with budgetary constraints, British councils have turned to crowdfunding platforms to rejuvenate high streets and realise much-needed regeneration projects. Using crowdfunding platforms, Councils can pitch ideas to the local community so that the cost of the project is shared among those who benefit. Councils use this approach to top up available funding from Exchequer funded grants, while others may look for the full cost associated with a project. Successfully funded projects include a new community centre in South Wales, public art installations in East London, the roll-out of free WiFi in Nottinghamshire, and the conversion of an empty property into an entrepreneur hub in High Wycombe. More information on and inspiration for the range of civic projects which can be achieved using crowdfunding can be found at www.spacehive.com.

Another alternative financing option which may be effectively targeted at generating local growth is the establishment of a microfinance or development fund. Similar to the EDF in place in Cork, Local Authorities may allocate a certain proportion of commercial rates towards a fund offering lending to initiatives supporting social or economic development. For example, the fund could be utilised to invest in initiatives such as start-ups, festivals and markets, arts/craft studios, community nurseries, etc. Once repayments arrive the fund could grow gradually.

Explore Corporate Social Responsibility

Although Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is now an integrated part of modern businesses, the concept has yet to be embraced by public bodies to the same extent. For Local Authorities, which rely on a collaborative and harmonised relationship with the local community, a CSR strategy would be hugely beneficial. The Authority must be seen to be going above and beyond their remit by taking an interest in and supporting the local community, thus creating a positive environment in which citizens and businesses thrive. Given that most large companies now integrate CSR as a core principle of their business strategy, there is also scope for Local Authorities to partner with businesses and contribute to reaching common societal goals.

Notably, companies are increasingly considering CSR when making investment decisions. Local Authorities which are deemed to act proactively to promote CSR may consequently find it easier to market their region for inward investment by boosting the region's reputation. More information on CSR and advice on how to get started can be found here: <http://www.chambers.ie/policy/csr/>



Engaging the Diaspora

The high levels of emigration witnessed since the onset of the recession brings both challenges and opportunities. As previously described in this document it may be very beneficial for Local Authorities to reach out to their Diaspora. This has already been done with success by Donegal County Council in an effort to promote the county and draw inward investment.

Maintaining links to the Diaspora community and engaging directly with this network may additionally prove beneficial in terms of attracting skilled workers to return home to set up a business or fill vacancies as more jobs are being created.

Establishing Local Supply Chains

The value of local supply chains has already been accepted and embraced by many Irish businesses. With the expansion of some key sectors, such as the food industry, there is however scope for further linking local suppliers to local businesses.

Local Authorities can play a key role in improving local supply chains. We encourage Local Authorities to investigate the prospect of establishing a Local Suppliers Network to allow suppliers the opportunity to establish links with large firms or multinationals based in the area.

The merits of strengthening local supply chains have been well-documented internationally. Local chains of suppliers are particularly effective at growing rural economies in a sustainable manner and supporting jobs by increasing sales and attracting new customers. Within Ireland, a Consumer Review assessing the future of Irish high-streets undertaken by Deloitte also concludes that improved local supply chains offers potential for attracting more customers. When asked about how to improve their local high-street shopping experience, 81% of respondents expressed that they would like to see more local retailers. To put this into perspective, consumers thus value the offer of local retailers equally high as free parking, which 81% of respondents also called for.¹

Local supply chains furthermore have the added benefit of supporting the environment by reducing travelling times, emissions and transportation costs. Given the importance of tourism in Ireland, local supply chains can also be utilised effectively to market a region to an international audience which may lead to increased exports.

Providing free WiFi

As recognised in Navan Town and South County Dublin, the roll-out of free WiFi offers great potential for improving the competitiveness of a local economy. In a 2014 Consumer Review undertaken by Deloitte, 79% of Irish consumers viewed better access to free WiFi as an improvement to their local high-street shopping experience.²

The roll-out of free WiFi would, however, not only benefit the customer experience but also create an opportunity for local retailers to increase sales. By providing access to free WiFi, local retailers would be able to avail of push notifications informing consumers of products on sale or promoting local produce. In this way, free WiFi can be effectively utilised to support the best practice example of expanding local supply chains. Free WiFi furthermore offers the opportunity of collecting customer data whereby retailers are able to improve their marketing strategies, connect with customers on a personal basis, and gain a better understanding of consumer preferences.

Local economies which rely on tourism would particularly benefit from offering access to free WiFi. Tourists increasingly rely on internet access to make decisions about where to visit and to share their travelling experiences. Lack of access to free WiFi in this context represents a missed opportunity to market what the region has on offer.

1 Deloitte (2014), 'The Deloitte Consumer Review: The Irish High Street – What Lies Ahead?' <http://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ie/Documents/ConsumerBusiness/deloitte_ireland_consumer_tracker_survey_14.pdf>

2 Ibid.



Conclusion



Conclusion

As highlighted throughout this document, Chambers, Local Authorities and LEOs play a key role in generating local economic growth. The varied nature of the initiatives described here illustrates how growth can be facilitated in many innovative ways each in support of different objectives.

It is our expectation that some of the initiatives listed here will serve as inspiration for how local businesses, Chambers and Local Authorities can develop closer partnerships to drive local development and ensure that the economic recovery is felt throughout the country. In considering strategies for growing a local area through such partnerships, we finally recommend that Local Authorities and Chambers cooperate on a regional basis to leverage the full potential of a region's economic opportunities.

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