

# LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE CLARE

## 2021 – 2024 DEVELOPMENT PLAN FRAMEWORK



Comhairle Contae an Chláir  
Clare County Council



Section 1: Executive Summary .....	3
1.1: Strategic Pillars and Objectives .....	3
1.2: Strategic objectives underpinned by specific actions.....	4
1.3: 2021-2024 Initiatives: .....	5
Section 2: Context .....	5
2.1: Overview / 4-year outlook for enterprise development in the LEO Area .....	5
2.2: Summary of reports relevant to Strategy Development .....	7
2.3: SWOT Analysis .....	9
2.4: Review of 2017-2020.....	10
Section 3: Vision/Mission and Overarching Objectives .....	13
3.1: LEO Vision .....	13
3.2: Mission Statement: .....	13
3.3: Business Information & Advisory Services: .....	13
3.4: Enterprise Support Services: .....	14
3.5: Entrepreneurship Support Services:.....	15
3.6: Local Economic Development Services: .....	15
Section 4: Strategic Priorities .....	16
4.1: Strategic Priorities for LEO Clare 2021-2024 .....	16
4.2: Capacity and Capability Development.....	18
4.3: National LEO Programmes .....	18
Section 5: Associated Actions and Activities.....	21
5.1: Protocols.....	21
5.2: Other Initiatives.....	23
Section 6: Risks.....	25
Section 7: Delivering the Strategy.....	26
7.1: Funding.....	26
7.2: Training.....	26
7.3: Communications.....	26
APPENDIX 1: LEO Clare - Performance Metrics .....	27

## Section 1: Executive Summary

The Local Enterprise Office (LEOs) are an office of the local authorities, which are the “First Stop Shop” for anyone seeking information and support on starting or growing a business in Ireland. Our role, as LEO Clare, is to drive the development of local enterprise, putting local micro and small business at the heart of job creation. We support business start-ups and work to increase the job potential of new and existing micro and small enterprises with information, advice, training, mentoring, seminars and selective financial support.

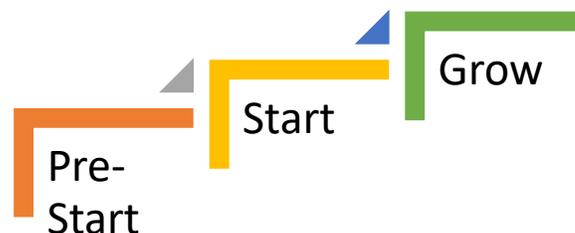
The 4-year period of the last development plan 2017-2020 represented a positive period for Clare enterprises albeit somewhat tempered in the final year due to the twin threats of Brexit and COVID-19. Over €2.77million was grant aided to 108 different projects with a potential to create 380 new jobs for both start-up and existing businesses. This period saw a further increase in participants in training courses and networking events while mentoring assignments and mentoring clinics also saw a higher demand. All these supports were promoted to, made available for, and tailored specifically towards the needs of small, micro and start-up businesses in Clare. Dedicated programs were designed and run to support target groups such as the food and craft sector, steel fabrication, women in business, tech related enterprises with a specific focus on developing export capacity among our enterprises.

Building on the Customer Care scores and satisfaction ratings of 2015 and 2016 in which LEO Clare rated very highly, a Mystery Shoppers Report was conducted in Q1 2020 and again LEO Clare scored excellent results well above the LEO network average. LEO Clare aims to build on this and continue to deliver high quality and multi-varied services which supports our many enterprise clients to achieve their goals.

Over the 4-year period LEO Clare participated and supported enterprises to attend, a wide range of programmes and events including Showcase, Meet West, Ploughing Championships, Food and Hospitality Exhibition and National Women’s Enterprise Day.

### 1.1: Strategic Pillars and Objectives

This plan is framed around the 3 strategic pillars of:



Using this strategic framework our strategic objectives are focused on the following key enablers:



## 1.2: Strategic objectives underpinned by specific actions

- ❖ Embedding the concept of “First Stop Shop” among the community of micro-enterprises.
- ❖ Strategically engaging through various forms of media to increase awareness of the LEO and endeavour to influence a positive culture of enterprise development.
- ❖ Supporting entrepreneurs, owners and managers in accessing financial supports and enabling them to plan, grow and sustain productivity, innovation, competitiveness, and realise their export potential.
- ❖ Providing access to training and mentoring supports to an increased number of participants.
- ❖ Support business in accessing and participating in exhibitions, seminars and networking events.
- ❖ Promotion of the Micro-Finance Ireland Loan Fund
- ❖ Promotion of Trading Online Vouchers
- ❖ Promotion of Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters Grant to facilitate increased export potential.
- ❖ Liaise directly with Enterprise Ireland regarding the progression pathways for clients.
- ❖ Collaborating and ongoing work with local Chambers of Commerce, Local Development Company and educational providers.
- ❖ Promotion and active engagement in national programmes i.e. Student Enterprise Programme, Irelands Best Young Entrepreneur, Showcase, Ploughing Championships and National Enterprise Awards.

### 1.3: 2021-2024 Initiatives:

1. Aid enterprises in developing environmentally friendly and sustainable business models, initially developing awareness through the Green for Micro programme.
2. Assist Clare enterprises to overcome the challenges posed by Brexit through one to one mentoring support and upskilling in meeting Customs declaration requirements.
3. Renewed focus on the significant benefits of participating in our LEAN programme.
4. Develop the capability, and confidence, of enterprises to enter new markets through training, mentoring and funding through our Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters (TAME) grant.
5. Encourage and support enterprises to develop a culture of innovation by raising awareness of Innovation Vouchers, Agile R&D and research capability within the Region.
6. Targeted focus in developing female entrepreneurship using the Women in Business network as a platform to raise awareness of various programmes designed specifically for female entrepreneurs.
7. Develop a new strategically focused Sales programme to enhance the capacity of enterprises to win and retain customers.
8. Explore the introduction of a Leadership programme targeted at those enterprises growing rapidly and need enhanced skill set to manage that transition from being a micro enterprise to a larger entity.
9. Encourage the development of enterprises focused on new technologies by facilitating early stage entrepreneurs engage in the wider eco-system of technology focused practitioners.
10. Proactive engagement in development of robust Regional Enterprise Plans with a bias towards those actions that will enhance the economic environment of our micro-enterprises.

## Section 2: Context

### 2.1: Overview / 4-year outlook for enterprise development in the LEO Area

County Clare is situated on the west coast of Ireland and has a population of 118,817 (2016 census), a 7.1% increase from the 2006 census. Clare covers an area of 3188km<sup>2</sup> and is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest county in Ireland. Ennis, the county's main town, has a population of 25,267 (2016 census) and is the largest town in Munster. Ennis is the administrative centre of the County and its importance is recognised in its designation as a Hub Town in the National Spatial Strategy (NSS). Shannon, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest town in Clare has a much smaller population of 9,792, however Shannon is a major employment and industrial centre in the region and is also home to Shannon International Airport. In conjunction with Limerick, Shannon is designated as a Gateway under the NSS.

Clare is home to some of the leading global companies in medical tech, aviation and other sectors who offer prospective employees an excellent combination of a challenging career in an environment that lends itself superbly to work/life balance. Intel, Lufthansa Technik, GE Capital, Schwarz Pharma, Magellan Aviation, GECAS, Avocent, Jaguar Land Rover and River Digital are just some of the major international companies located in the county. Clare continuously attracts new employees as the mean annual earnings in the county is €42,241 and commuters in Clare have an

average travel time of 24.5 minutes, which is just under 10 minutes less than commuters in counties such as Meath and Wicklow. 53.1% of the county’s population over 15 years of age are employed (49,511). Of these 49,511 employees 67.9% are employed in the services sector, 20.6% in the industry/construction sector and 6.9% in agriculture and forestry. Industry is a significantly more important employment sector in Clare 15.5% of overall employment compared with 11.4% nationally. Growing by 10.4% since 2011, industry in Clare outperformed the national average (9.4%). The county’s labour force differs most notably from the national pattern in self-employment with Clare having a far higher share; 10.4% compared to 8.3% nationally. This is reflected in the fact that Clare has 8,732 active enterprises, of which 93.77% are micro-enterprises. This is slightly higher than the national average of 92.08%. The labour catchment (i.e., the area from which it draws most of its workforce) for Ennis was 21,409 in 2016, a minor increase from 21,333 in 2006. These figures are the number of workers living in the catchment areas of these towns, which is illustrated by the map below.

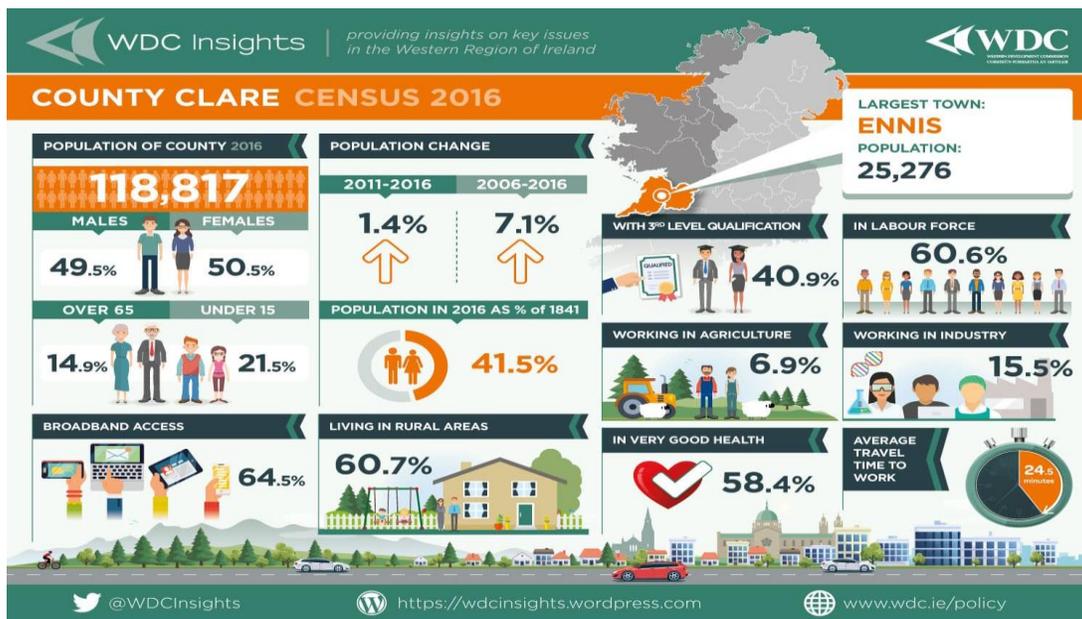


The County has excellent national and international connectivity. Shannon International Airport directly connects County Clare to the UK, US and mainland Europe and served 1.7 million passengers in 2019. For the 9,886 residents who travel outside the county for work it’s vital that Clare is directly connected to major cities via the national rail and motorway network. Within the County the main population centres are connected via the national and regional road network. This is highlighted by Clare’s strong growth in employment in Transport and Storage from 4% to 10.1% since 2011.

Given its natural attributes, County Clare has a highly successful tourism industry that contributes significantly to the local economy each year. The Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience ,owned and managed by Clare County Council, consistently attracts over 1 million visitors per annum. Other major tourist attractions include Bunratty Castle and Folk Park, Loop Head, Doolin, The Ailwee

Cave, Lough Derg Blue Way etc. Activity-based holidays feature strongly from surfing in Lahinch, walking in the Burren to golfing at world class courses such as Lahinch and Trump International Doonbeg. These are complimented by a wide variety of top-class accommodation from self-catering to the 5-star luxury of Dromoland Castle. The Accommodation and Food Service sector enjoyed Clare's second highest employment growth, up to 13% compared to 12.9% nationally, indicating strengthening tourism activity.

40.9% of the county's population have 3<sup>rd</sup> level education enabled by proximity to 3<sup>rd</sup> level institutions in Limerick and Galway and enhanced by the recent introduction by Limerick Institute of Technology of a campus in Ennis.



## 2.2: Summary of reports relevant to Strategy Development

### Key findings from the OECD report on SME and Entrepreneurship growth plan:

- Increasing business dynamism and SME productivity growth are priorities.
- The overall business environment is strong but there are priorities in skills and finance.
- SME and entrepreneurship programs could be up-scaled and refined in some areas.
- Local Enterprise Offices have an important role to play: There are large spatial variations in conditions for SME and entrepreneurship activity within Ireland. Potential to enhance local level policies to build local networks of enterprises working on common skills and innovation projects, particularly in local industry clusters. Approaches are also needed to connect SMEs and entrepreneurs in remote regions with broader entrepreneurship ecosystems in urban centres and larger cities.
- A multi-pronged approach is needed to increase SME productivity growth.

- There is scope to strengthen business advisory services. Business advisory services can play an important role in helping SMEs and entrepreneurs to see how to address their challenges and in increasing the effective use of business support programmes.

### Key recommendations by the SME Taskforce Development plan

- Establish a National Entrepreneurship Forum as a permanent policy task force to monitor progress of recommendations from the SME Growth Taskforce Report
- Address areas of market failure for competitiveness for products and services which are essential to SMEs.
- Create a more diverse source of funding for entrepreneurs and SMEs, including credit, hybrid and equity investment.
- Support the digital transformation of SMEs through a people-centred and financially accessible approach.
- Support SMEs to develop financial resilience to unexpected shocks and force majeure.
- Establish a Government programme/unit that supports and provides funding to cluster management organisations and formal business networks across Ireland.
- Create an information portal that offers an overview of the Irish networks and cluster landscape.
- Form and fund a “National Climate Cluster” of Irish SMEs, research institutions, larger enterprises and other interested parties who are focused on innovating and the ‘Internationalisation’ of products and services for the low-carbon global economy.

### Key objectives from Clare Development plan 2017-2023

- Clare Local Authority to support the development of LEO (LEOs), in their business support roles as set out in ‘Putting People First’, in partnership with Enterprise Ireland and DETE.
- To encourage, support and facilitate enterprise development at appropriate locations throughout the county.
- To work in partnership with Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, adjoining local authorities, the Regional Assembly and all other relevant agencies to proactively pursue sustainable enterprise and economic development in line with the policies and objectives as set out in national, regional and local strategies.
- To support the development of a network of digital hubs in order to attract new enterprises to locate in County Clare and to support the further growth and development of the digital and media industries in the county.
- To encourage and support the development of a network of Food Hubs throughout the county to support the expansion of the food industry in County Clare.
- Clare Local Authority will work in coordination with LEO Clare and all relevant stakeholders to support the further development and expansion of craft industries in County Clare and to proactively seek new market opportunities for locally produced crafts at local, national and international level.

- Promotion and active engagement in National programmes e.g. IBYE, Showcase, County and National Enterprise Awards, Ploughing Championships, Student Enterprise Programme etc.

### 2.3: SWOT Analysis

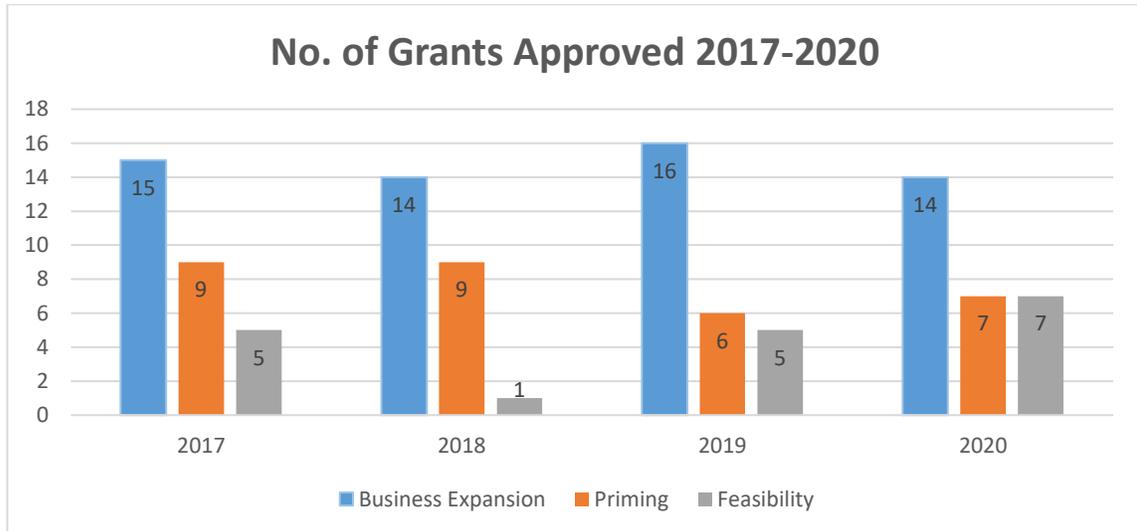
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proximity of 3<sup>rd</sup> level Institutions ensuring a varied and highly educated workforce.</li> <li>• Easy access to cities of Dublin, Galway and Limerick via extended motorway network</li> <li>• Shannon International Airport provides a gateway to a global market.</li> <li>• Strong cultural heritage which may provide development opportunities.</li> <li>• Strong and well-developed tourism sector.</li> <li>• Affordable housing and shorter commute times.</li> <li>• Pro-business environment.</li> <li>• Presence of multinational companies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High dependency on traditional sectors with low growth markets.</li> <li>• Skills gaps in ICT, science, technical skills, and languages.</li> <li>• Access to appropriate level of funding to drive investment.</li> <li>• Lack of incubation space for early-stage start-ups.</li> <li>• Lack of infrastructure to support indigenous start-ups, e.g., commercial kitchens.</li> <li>• Low confidence of enterprises to move beyond the domestic market.</li> <li>• Knowledge-intensive services employ a lower-than-average share in Clare.</li> <li>• Skills gap in financials.</li> </ul>

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support traditional sectors through focused resources.</li> <li>• Leverage support from nearby third level institutes/research centres to add value to local enterprise, including research, innovation, training and graduate placement.</li> <li>• Leverage our Diaspora to assist the export potential.</li> <li>• Proactive engagement with those clients who have the drive and capacity to grow to Enterprise Ireland level.</li> <li>• Support the growth of strong regional eco-systems, particularly in the IT, Engineering and Knowledge intensive services.</li> <li>• Potential to develop world-class wind, wave, tidal and other renewable potential.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migration of skilled entrepreneurs to large urban locations aligned with proximity to third level research facilities.</li> <li>• Brain drain resulting in lack of innovation capacity and sustainability of enterprise with growth potential.</li> <li>• Insufficient finance/credit to provide the necessary infrastructure, promote the county and to kick start new ventures.</li> <li>• Global economic issues and changes in barriers to trade e.g., Brexit, Covid-19 restrictions.</li> <li>• Costs of operating business premises e.g., commercial rates.</li> </ul>

2.4: Review of 2017-2020

2017-2020 represented a very successful 4-year period for Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Clare. Over the past decade Ireland has emerged from a deep recession caused by the global financial crisis. Clare SME’s have been dealing with Brexit looming on the horizon for the past number of years and now the increased uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. New themes have also taken centre stage, such as sustainability, digital disruption and transformation, diversity in the workplace and new ways of working. LEO Clare has assisted enterprises to face these challenges head on in this historically challenging period.

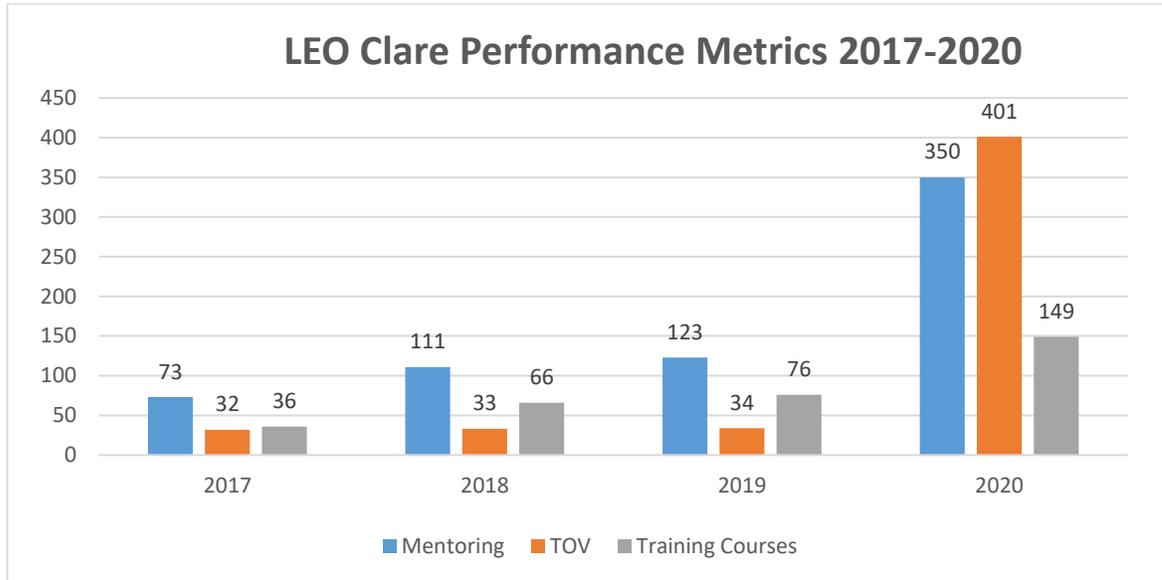
LEO Clare sustained a consistent performance in delivering financial supports to enterprises in Clare with 108 enterprises receiving funding of €2.77m underpinning the creation of 380 new jobs. The following chart summarises the breakdown:



One significant event arising from COVID-19 was the success of The Trading Online Voucher scheme (TOV’s) aimed at enabling enterprises develop an e-commerce presence. 2017 to 2019 saw a gradual increase in TOV’s being approved, however the onset over the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 saw a dramatic rise with 401 TOV’s being approved in 2020.

Training courses remain a core part of our activities and we continually seek to develop training relevant to the needs of our enterprise client base. Over the 4-year period LEO Clare experienced a steady increase in the numbers participating in our many programmes however this simply exploded in 2020. As lockdowns caused businesses to close, the number of courses being delivered increased dramatically to 149. This enabled enterprises to up-skill and adapt to the new Covid-19 guidelines on re-opening. The demand for mentoring maintained a positive increase throughout the period as enterprises took advantage of “one-to-one” mentoring with highly

experienced and skilled individuals. Similarly, 2020 was the highlight for LEO Clare’s mentoring programme as 350 local enterprises took advantage of this service.

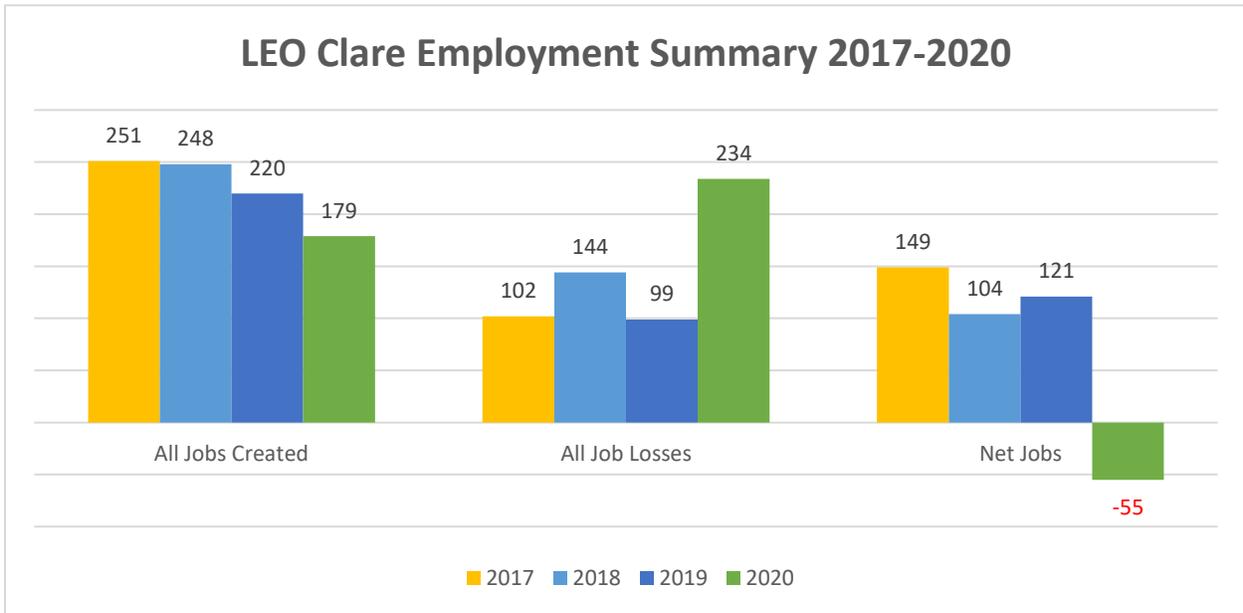


In 2020, despite the challenges of social distancing and lockdowns, we continued our proactive engagement in various national programmes. The Student Enterprise Programme at which over 225 students from 11 different schools participated, the National Women’s Enterprise Day and the National Enterprise Awards. In 2020 LEO Clare’s client WowWee.ie was a winner at the National Enterprise Awards taking home the pivot award which recognises an enterprise that had to dramatically change the way they do business to survive the negative impact of COVID-19 on their business. LEO Clare also supported the attendance of various enterprises at major trade fairs and events such as Showcase and Food fairs

Aligned with one of our core objectives to support and promote Clare enterprises, LEO Clare introduced, in 2019, a series of Facebook live interviews with 11 enterprises which reached an audience of 27,500. This was followed with a podcast series called #Making It Happen which was launched in September 2020. Eight clients of the Local Enterprise Office took part. These recordings were published on several podcast platforms including Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Overcast. Listeners tuned in from all around the world with Ireland and the United States yielding more listeners than any other countries. To date the podcast series has 367 listens, 61% of which were on the Spotify platform. In the lead up to Christmas LEO Clare, along with the Clare Echo, launched the Click for Clare campaign. Click for Clare provided a platform for LEO supports to be promoted to the public, as well as a free marketing platform for local enterprises as consumers were encouraged to “shop local”. This campaign was a major success, overall visits on Click for Clare-related articles were over 62,000. The print version of the Clare Echo newspaper featured 18 full printed pages with LEO Clare branding comprising of 16 full business profile interviews and business listings.

By the nature of early-stage start-ups there is often a degree of volatility as some enterprises either thrive or fail for any number of reasons. At the commencement of 2020, we had a high

level of confidence that our core enterprise client base had entered a period of stability and were well positioned for further growth and by extension an increase in employment numbers. Then COVID-19 happened. Unsurprisingly this had an immediate negative impact on our enterprise base and many had to take the hard decision to lay off staff and defer future investment plans. This understandably resulted in a high level of job losses representing a reduction of circa 7% of our employment base. Despite that reduction, Clare enterprises, supported by LEO Clare, still provide employment for 1,283 people and is evenly spread throughout the County. The early days of 2021 have shown encouraging signs of a return to employment growth with many enterprises already implementing investment plans which will lead to employment growth. We are confident that Clare enterprises will recover quickly in the weeks and months ahead.



The period 2017-2020 has been very encouraging for the future of Micro-enterprises in Clare. The response to the Covid-19 pandemic was the key stand-out challenge of the period, which required the adoption of new ways of working and establishment of a digital platform to enhance client engagement. The flexibility of the team and early adoption of new ways of working enabled LEO Clare to continue delivery of our core services culminating in the highest level of engagement by enterprises since the inception of LEO Clare to its clients in 2014.

Despite the challenges of Brexit and Covid-19, the signs are very encouraging for the future of Micro-enterprises in Clare. There remain many challenges, however we are well placed to assist and facilitate local enterprise’s needs.

## Section 3: Vision/Mission and Overarching Objectives

### 3.1: LEO Vision

“To develop and sustain a positive enterprise ecosystem at local level throughout the country that will in particular drive new added-value start-ups, the further growth of small and micro enterprises and enhance local economies.”

### 3.2: Mission Statement:

We aim to promote entrepreneurship, foster sustainable business start-ups and develop existing micro and small businesses to drive job creation and to provide accessible high-quality supports for your Business ideas. Entrepreneurs and Businesses are supported to:

- Increase exports
- Build resilience
- Increase productivity
- Prepare for the Low carbon economy
- Embrace the Digital economy
- Innovate
- Be managed by ambitious & capable individuals
- Fuel regional growth

### 3.3: Business Information & Advisory Services:

#### *First Stop Enterprise & Business Support Solution*

Provision of first stop shop activities in respect of Business Support, Enterprise Development and Promotion, including Signposting.

#### *Make It Easier to do Business*

Provide supports, guidance and solutions that make it easier for entrepreneurs, owners and managers to identify opportunities and implement actions to start-up, grow and survive within a competitive business environment.

#### **Actions**

During the period 2017 – 2020 LEO Clare increased the digitisation of its services, incorporating online application forms for grants, online training courses and events, and enhanced strategic usage of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram) to raise awareness of our services. This complemented existing communication channels such as website, online newsletters, local media (newspapers and radio) and attendance at relevant events to highlight our services. LEO Clare also worked closely with other agencies to cross-share activities in order for our clients to be aware of other supports they could access.

LEO Clare annually facilitated business clinics in each of the county's Municipal Districts using the local digital hubs as the meeting point in order to ensure we were more accessible to the public wishing to engage with us. These clinics also facilitated raising awareness of the services available in our digital hubs and their suitability as potential places for businesses to work from.

For 2021-2024 LEO Clare will further develop the use of digital technology platforms to enhance the client engagement service and streamline the administrative requirements to avail of our services. This will complement a focused calling programme aimed at developing those enterprises with the greatest potential to enhance their competitiveness and achieve their growth ambitions.

### 3.4: Enterprise Support Services:

#### *Maximise Business Potential*

Deliver support services that equip entrepreneurs, owners and managers with the knowledge to plan, grow and sustain productivity, innovation and competitiveness, as well as encourage greater technology uptake.

#### *Collaborate with Enterprise Ireland*

Enhance communication with Enterprise Ireland to facilitate potential progression of companies from LEO to EI, facilitating access to relevant EI financial, business and innovation/research facilities, and two-way transfer of clients to ensure appropriate services and maximum impact.

#### **Actions**

In the period 2017-2020 LEO Clare proactively adopted a 4:2:1 client engagement model i.e. 4 contacts per year either by phone or meeting with a minimum of 2 face to face meetings and one business review meeting. This has been further supported by broadening the skill set available within our mentor panel and increasing the number of focused one-to-one mentor sessions to develop the business capability of the entrepreneur.

LEO Clare has an excellent working relationship with Enterprise Ireland which has facilitated the up-take of Enterprise Ireland supports by Clare enterprises, such as Agile funding, Innovation partnerships, market research library and export training programmes. The success of this collaboration has been demonstrated in a consistent transfer of high potential enterprises to Enterprise Ireland.

For 2021-2024 LEO Clare are committed to sustaining this proactive engagement with Enterprise Ireland and will continue to enhance and develop the soft support services to facilitate the growth and development of Clare enterprises. There will be a specific focus on enhanced engagement with Enterprise Ireland overseas offices as pathways to opening new market opportunities for Clare enterprises.

### 3.5: Entrepreneurship Support Services:

#### *Promote a Best Practice Enterprise Culture*

Act as the catalyst and advocate for the establishment of a best practice enterprise culture among start-ups, micro and small enterprises; also promoting enterprise and self-employment as a viable career option among the wider population.

#### *Actions*

In the period 2017–2020 LEO Clare explored the development of ad-hoc networks to enhance the sharing of best practice among our cohort of entrepreneurs. Three specific examples of this were: Follow-up networking event for participants from our Start Your Own Business programme, women in business networking events and a follow-up networking event for the successful enterprises in our Tech Disrupt project.

LEO Clare continues to focus on developing our future entrepreneurs through proactive engagement in Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur and our Student Enterprise Programme. The Student Enterprise Programme has seen a high level of engagement with 1,456 students participating over the 4-year period. This programme is designed to raise awareness among our younger population that self-employment is a viable career option.

Our assigned mentors fulfil a hugely important role in both sharing their expertise and also their experiences from the wide variety of enterprises they interact with. In that context LEO Clare also facilitated workshops for our mentor panel to share their experiences and develop their own knowledge and understanding of the many challenges faced by early stage enterprises.

### 3.6: Local Economic Development Services:

#### *Environment for Start-Ups*

Leverage the full range of potential enterprise support/economic development promotion mechanisms across the Local Authority economic development remit, including enterprise space, local authority rates framework, economic development etc, to start-ups and small businesses in county.

#### *Actions*

LEO Clare works very closely with the wider Local Authority sections and in particular the Economic Development section, Finance and the Rural Development section via the LCDC. This enables positive cross communication, knowledge sharing and input into any existing or new initiatives which may benefit the business community.

Clare County Council are currently expanding its network of Digital Hubs with a particular focus on rural locations where access to reliable broadband is challenging. These developments enhance

the opportunity for local enterprises to achieve a wider global reach, particularly those enterprises with a focus on internationally traded services. This aspect will be a key future objective to support employment creation in our more rural locations.

## Section 4: Strategic Priorities

### 4.1: Strategic Priorities for LEO Clare 2021-2024

#### Entrepreneurship

- Introduce a 2 hour Start Your Own Business (SYOB) workshop as a progression line towards increasing the number of participants in the 6-week SYOB programme.
- Introduce a follow-up SYOB network meeting 6 months after programme completion.
- Proactive engagement with technology networks to encourage an ecosystem of tech-related entrepreneurship.
- Enhance the interaction of the women in business network through a dedicated Facebook page to share best practice and facilitate more collaboration.
- Introduce a follow-on SYOB “Financial” workshop to enhance the financial capabilities of early-stage entrepreneurs.
- Enhance the skill-set of our entrepreneurs through targeted programmes such as leadership skills, financial skills and selling skills.
- Ongoing close collaboration with Enterprise Ireland representative on the Evaluation and Approvals Committee to identify potential HPSU entrepreneurs at an early stage.

#### Competitiveness and Digitalisation

- Identify minimum 20 enterprises with the potential to grow and commence a structured calling programme to:
  - a) Identify potential gaps in the management skills set.
  - b) Assess the cost benefits of participation in “LEAN for Micro”
  - c) Develop a structured leadership programme for 8-10 entrepreneurs annually.
- Develop the online capabilities of TOV participants through strategic workshops e.g., managing your online business, supply chain management, search engine optimisation etc. to enhance the online trading capabilities of enterprises.
- Pilot a “Search Engine Optimisation” audit of key TOV recipients to identify opportunities to enhance their online promotional activities.
- Raise awareness of the threat of poor cyber security and steps to mitigate through workshops and mentor engagement.
- Ongoing engagement with key enablers located in the Mid-West/West innovating in new technologies e.g. Confirm Centre, Dell, and Future Mobility Campus.
- Promote the facilities offered via DigiClare to mitigate adverse impact of poor broadband availability in rural locations.

## Green/Sustainability

- Raise awareness of the increasing importance of enterprises adopting appropriate sustainable business practices through webinars, highlighting in all presentations and identifying local enterprises to act as “ambassadors” for sustainability.
- Endeavour to achieve a minimum of 10 enterprises to participate in the first “Green for Micro” pilot scheme.
- Educate those enterprises who sub-supply to large multinationals of the need to be responsive to the ever-increasing sustainability targets being placed on large organisations.
- Promote the new pilot programme “DigoEco” which is a 100% funded programme run by the Mid-West Regional Skills forum and specifically targets Micro/SME indigenous businesses.

## Innovation

- Introduce a pilot diagnostic tool (modified version of an existing Enterprise Ireland diagnostic appropriate for micro-enterprises) to assist in early stage identification of enterprises developing innovative concepts.
- Follow up this pilot scheme with 1:1 mentor engagement to identify enterprises that may benefit from Agile R&D funding options.
- Introduce a series of informative webinars to raise awareness of the innovation supports available via the 3<sup>rd</sup> level institutions in the Region.
- Continue the Creative Design workshops which is designed to de-mystify the innovative process and have enterprises think about innovation in a different manner and through a different “lens”.
- Introduce a series of webinars/network opportunities focused on specific sectors where innovation is encouraged e.g. Industry 4.0 technologies, Green initiatives.

## Exporting/Internationalisation

- Focused approach on developing export capability by utilising three dedicated export mentors to work with those enterprises with a desire to grow their presence in export markets.
- After an initial period of engagement seek feedback from the three mentors to identify skills gaps and look at developing a training programme to address the core issues to overcome potential obstacles to developing new export markets.
- Work closely with Enterprise Ireland overseas offices to assist with appropriate business introductions where required.
- Increase awareness among LEO staff of the information available through the Enterprise Ireland market research library and how micro-enterprises can access this resource.
- Use the TAME grant to facilitate attendance of local enterprises at international trade shows either virtually or physically, once circumstances allow.

## Networks and Clustering

- Conduct a review of the Women in Business with input from attendees, female entrepreneurs that do not engage with the network, and the facilitator to ensure Network remains “fit for purpose”.

- Continue the strong collaboration with both Shannon and Ennis Chambers of Commerce, Clare Local Development Company and Limerick Clare Education Training Board.
- Explore the potential to develop tech-focused networks in collaboration with LEO's in the Mid-West.
- Active engagement in the "Explore Engineering" cluster currently administered by University of Limerick.
- Continued proactive participation in the Mid-West Regional Skills Forum.
- Continued proactive engagement with development of the new Mid-West Enterprise Action Plan

### 4.2: Capacity and Capability Development

#### REDF Projects

Ennis remains deficient in availability of dedicated enterprise space to facilitate the growth and development of early stage enterprises, particularly technology-related operations which tend to migrate to 3<sup>rd</sup> level campuses. A premises has been acquired by Clare County Council and LEO Clare will play a key role in securing financial support from private institutions and seeking funding under future Regional Enterprise Development programmes.

#### Management Development Capability

In the immediate future, LEO Clare have identified three key skills deficiencies among our cohort of client enterprises. It is proposed to introduce programmes, aligned with mentoring support, to address the following:

1. Leadership skills as enterprises grow and scale.
2. Structured sales programme to enhance sustainable sales and client retention (refer expanded commentary under "Other Initiatives").
3. Financial capability and knowledge of financial measures to enhance appropriate financial management of the business.

### 4.3: National LEO Programmes

LEO Clare are committed to continue playing an active part in the delivery of national programmes which supplement local activities and enhance the environment for our enterprises to grow and prosper. These national programmes will play a key role during the period of this development plan, 2021-2024. The following is a brief summary of these programmes.

#### Student Enterprise Programme

The Student Enterprise Programme, an initiative run by the Network of Local Enterprise Offices, is Ireland's largest and most successful student enterprise programme with over 26,000 second level students taking part each year. Students from 1st year to 6th year get to set up and run their own business and find out what it's really like to be an entrepreneur by taking part in this 8-month long enterprise education learning programme. The Programme runs from September to May, and students

practice everything a real-life entrepreneur would do from coming up with the business idea to marketing, sales and preparing a business plan/business poster. In Clare for the academic year 2019/2020, 225 students from 11 schools took part in the programme.

### **National Enterprise Awards**

The Enterprise Awards Competition is designed to recognise and reward the commitment, dedication and entrepreneurial spirit of small enterprises at local and national level. The competition for the awards involves two stages: a local competition at County level, with the winner then representing the County at a National Final. The competition is open to enterprises that have received direct financial support from the Local Enterprise Office since its inception of the business. Clare enterprises that have been previously successful at the National Enterprise Awards include Aine Knitwear, Callan Technology, Aaron Value Adding Services, ABC Nutrition Ltd and WowWee.ie.

### **Local Enterprise Week**

Local Enterprise Week is held in early March every year. LEO Clare hosts a series of events aimed at stimulating business growth and new business creation to drive economic prosperity. A program of Events offers something for everyone, regardless of whether you want to develop a business idea, start a business, or grow your existing enterprise. In 2020, LEO Clare hosted 17 events including Start Your Own Business Workshops, PR Workshop, Social Media Workshops, National Enterprise Awards County Final and Student Enterprise County Final.

### **National Ploughing Championships**

The National Ploughing Championships are held in September each year. As part of its National Programme the LEOs host a Local Enterprise Village to provide an opportunity for clients to take full advantage of this unique consumer event. This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the quality and high standard of goods and services supported by LEO Clare. Although no event took place in 2020 LEO Clare will remain a strong presence when the Ploughing Championships are safe to re-commence.

### **Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur (IBYE)**

IBYE is a programme run by the 31 Local Enterprise Offices with the support of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The competition is open to people between the ages of 18 and 35 with an innovative business idea, new start-up or established business. IBYE has an investment fund of up to €2million. IBYE is a nationwide competition, run across three categories: Best Business Idea, Best Start-Up Business and Best-Established Business. Previous winners from Clare include Diarmuid McSweeney and Conor Murray who both run successful enterprises in Clare.

### **Showcase Ireland**

Showcase is the first major trade event of each year and is organised by Showcase Design & Crafts Fair CLG, supported by Design and Crafts Council Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Local Enterprise Offices nationwide. The dedicated Enterprise Zone on the balcony area, co-ordinated by the LEOs, has become

known as the home for emerging designers and craftspeople in recent years. A wide range of creative sectors are represented within the Enterprise Zone, such as ceramics, knitwear, jewellery, interiors, skincare and giftware. In 2020, this event took place virtually with Siar Photography and Creative Clay showcasing from Clare.

### Food Programmes

#### *The Digital School of Food*

An initiative of the Local Enterprise Offices, the Digital School of Food is an e-learning hub that has been designed to support food producers in developing their food manufacturing enterprises from start-up to the growth phase. This course must be completed before a food business can participate on the Food Starter and Food Academy Programmes. It is designed to allow producers to upskill in their own time and at a pace which suits them.

#### *Food Starter Programme*

An initiative of the Local Enterprise Offices, the Food Starter Programme is a short programme designed to help those with a food idea, or those at a very early stage of starting up a food business, typically the first 24 months. This programme is an excellent pathway for participants who may be interested in the Food Academy Programme.

#### *Food Academy Programme*

The Food Academy is an initiative designed collaboratively with Bord Bia, Musgraves and the Local Enterprise Network. Its aim is to give 'Small Producers a Big Chance'. The Food Academy works with and nurtures small enterprises through their journey from start up to getting their products on SuperValu shelves.

### National Women's Enterprise Day

The Local Enterprise Office initiative was launched by An Tánaiste and Minister Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar T.D., and is being funded by the Government of Ireland in partnership with Enterprise Ireland and Local Authorities. Figures released by Local Enterprise Offices to coincide with the launch reveal that 20,551 female participants took part in training programmes with the 31 Local Enterprise Offices in the first six months of 2020, an increase of 58% over the same period last year. There is also greater demand for mentoring support this year, with 3,567 female entrepreneurs taking up the support between January and June 2020, an increase of 19% on the previous year. In Clare 1,746 female entrepreneurs took part in part in training programmes. The interactive events on October 14<sup>th</sup> for National Women's Enterprise Day moved online in 2020. The themes of these events were resilience, self-care, innovation and opportunity. All events in the programme are free of charge and include workshops with experts, panel discussions, a virtual marketplace and facilitated networking to connect more entrepreneurs with each other.

## Section 5: Associated Actions and Activities

### 5.1: Protocols

The following protocols govern dissemination of information, information signposting and inter-organisation referrals. LEO Clare will continue to implement these protocols on an on-going basis and review locally as required. The aims of the protocols are:

- To establish a structured link between the Local Enterprise Offices and Protocol Partners to support the provision of information and guidance measures for enterprise development;
- To provide for an efficient customer service in response to LEO clients' queries;
- To provide for informing and updating staff from both organisations of respective programmes and services;
- To provide for cooperation on awareness and promotion activities;
- To provide for exchanges between the parties on the uptake and operation of the measures and levels of demand for information/guidance by clients of the LEOs;
- To provide for periodic review of the operation of the protocol;
- To provide for collaboration and efficiencies in the provision of training programmes where appropriate.

#### Department of Social Protection:

Agreed between the Department of Social Protection and The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (on behalf of Enterprise Ireland). This protocol aims to maximise the recruitment of appropriately skilled persons from the Live Register by enterprise agency client companies.

#### Credit Review Office

Agreed between the Credit Review Office and The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (on behalf of Enterprise Ireland). The Credit Review Office provides a simple, effective review process for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, including sole traders and farm enterprises, who have had requests for credit refused or existing credit facilities reduced or withdrawn.

#### Fáilte Ireland

Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority, whose role is to support the tourism industry and work to sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourism destination. Fáilte Ireland also works with other state agencies and representative bodies, at local

and national levels, to implement and champion positive and practical strategies that will benefit Irish tourism and the Irish economy.

### Microfinance Ireland

Agreed between Microfinance Ireland and The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (on behalf of Enterprise Ireland). Microfinance Ireland, as a not-for-profit lender, has been established to deliver the Government's Microenterprise Loan Fund. All business sectors are eligible to apply. Companies may be Sole Traders, Partnerships and Limited Companies with fewer than 10 employees and an annual turnover of less than €2 million. Loans may be used to fund the start-up of a business, the purchase of stock, equipment, machinery, and business vehicles and are also available to established enterprises.

### Skillnets

Agreed between Skillnets and The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (on behalf of Enterprise Ireland). Skillnets actively supports and works with businesses in Ireland to address their current and future skills needs on the basis that training and up-skilling are key elements in keeping Irish companies competitive. Skillnets funds groups of companies in the same region/sector, and with similar training needs, through training networks that deliver subsidised training to Irish businesses.

### Education and Training Boards (ETBs)

Agreed between Enterprise Ireland and Education & Training Boards Ireland. The ETBs are statutory authorities which have responsibility for education and training, youth work and a range of other statutory functions. ETBs manage and operate second-level schools, further education colleges, multi-faith community national schools and a range of adult and further education centres delivering education and training programs. Further education and apprenticeship training is also provided through 16 training centres nationally. ETBs are active in local communities through the direct provision of training and education programmes delivered in training centres, colleges and other training and educational settings.

### Revenue

Agreed between The Revenue Commissioners and The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (on behalf of Enterprise Ireland). The role of the Revenue Commissioners is "to serve the community by fairly and efficiently collecting taxes and duties and implementing customs controls". Specifically, in relation to business, Revenue provides information and support under three headings:

- A comprehensive range of information and guidance on taxation issues, customs and Revenue requirements relating to starting and running a business, including the Revenue Online Service.
- Tax Simplification Initiatives for Smaller Businesses.
- Supporting Job Creation and other Enterprise Supports.

## National Association of Community Enterprise Centres (NACEC)

Agreed between Enterprise Ireland and The National Association of Community Enterprise Centres. The National Association of Community Enterprise Centres is a strong representative body of 120 community enterprise centres in the Republic of Ireland. Its primary role is to support and develop the interests of community enterprise centres on a national basis.

## Leader

Agreed between The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The aim of the protocol between Local Enterprise Offices and Local Action Groups is to ensure that the available enterprise supports are complementary, are configured to meet local needs and ultimately, maximise the impact of both development bodies in their local areas.

## Údarás na Gaeltachta

Agreed between Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta. The rationale for the development of this proposal was to ensure that all client enterprises of Údarás na Gaeltachta and LEOs have equal access to services and funded programmes and benefit from enhanced collaboration and information sharing between the organisations. Údarás na Gaeltachta manages its client base in the Gaeltacht and uses its core funding (exchequer and own resources) to service existing commitments and Údarás-led schemes (grant-based supports for employment and capital projects). LEOs in the eight Local Authority areas comprising of Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas continue to operate in the county and city areas outside of the Gaeltacht and Údarás na Gaeltachta continue to deliver enterprise support in the Gaeltacht.

## 5.2: Other Initiatives

### Sales Programme

Ultimately the success of an enterprises depends on its capability to win customers and more importantly retain those customers. Our experience is that early stage enterprises focus considerable time and effort on their product/service and marketing promotion however do not often focus on the sales process itself. In an increasingly competitive global marketplace winning and retaining customers are the foundation for future success.

LEO Clare propose to develop a targeted pilot programme aimed at those enterprises with a strong desire to improve their sales processes. This programme will develop skills in how to locate quality sales leads, make contact with the potential customer and most importantly close the deal. It will incorporate a focus on negotiating skills to aid the enterprise to achieve a positive benefit from their customer engagements.

This will be an intensive, focused programme which will require face-to-face interaction and accordingly its commencement will be deferred until public health regulations allow.

### Promotion of Local Businesses through Podcast series

In 2020, LEO Clare ran a successful pilot podcast series in which eight grant approved clients took part. Listeners tuned in from all around the world and it demonstrated the potential of this medium to promote enterprises. Over the next 4 years LEO Clare will look to develop this concept.

### Video Promotion of Local Businesses

Building on the Podcast initiative consideration will be given to developing a suite of videos highlighting our enterprises and showcasing their product/service. With the increasing use of video in all social media channels this initiative is aimed at maximising the marketing potential of these channels.

### Click for Clare Campaign

Arising out of the number of Trading Online Vouchers approved in 2020, LEO Clare, in conjunction with a local newspaper, recently ran a very successful Click for Clare campaign. Overall visits on Click for Clare related articles were over 62,000. The print version of the Clare Echo newspaper featured 18 full printed pages with LEO Clare branding comprising of 16 full business profile interviews and business listings. This campaign also provided a platform for LEO supports to be promoted to the public, as well as free marketing for local enterprises in the lead up to Christmas as consumers were encouraged to “shop local”.

Given the success of this initiative, LEO Clare will look to run a similar type campaign at strategic times of the year e.g. re-opening of local enterprises after Covid 19 lockdown. This campaign will enhance the benefits accruing to local enterprises from the significant financial investment of the Trading Online Voucher scheme.

## Section 6: Risks

<b>List any risks that can adversely affect the achievement of the objective outlined above</b>	<b>Actions to mitigate this risk</b>
Lack of awareness among new and potential entrepreneurs regarding business supports available including funding options	Implementation of the LEO Communications Strategy, ensuring that all supports receive a tailored approach towards marketing and promotion, thereby ensuring that the message regarding enterprise support is clearly and widely understood.
Closures of small businesses in Clare, affecting employment levels.	Ongoing promotion of supports available to all businesses including any new government initiatives, reducing the likelihood of closure if addressed early and effectively, and/ or identifying supports to the business owner and staff in developing existing and new business markets.
Inadequate level of funding to implement Enterprise Plan	LEO Clare to prioritise allocation of funding to those enterprises with good job creation potential and monitor availability for additional funding to support enterprise services in County Clare.
Emigration and 'brain drain'	Support the establishment of a best practice enterprise culture and promote enterprise and self-employment as a viable career option among the wider population.
Loss of experienced staff members due to transfers, promotions etc.	Ensure all processes and procedures are fully captured and each staff member has the ability to cover work of others. Proper exit planning and discussion together with handover period of induction.
Ongoing restrictions due to Covid 19	Effective, and increased usage of digital-enabled solutions including online digital application platform, video conferencing and prompt response to email/telephone queries.

## Section 7: Delivering the Strategy

### 7.1: Funding

LEO Clare is funded annually by Government through Enterprise Ireland from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE). LEO Clare will continue to work with Enterprise Ireland and DETE on its annual funding and resourcing requirements to drive our strategy. LEO Clare commits to maximising its budget allocation ensuring value for money in fulfilling its objectives and strategic priorities.

### 7.2: Training

LEO Clare commits to the 2021-2024 Learning and Development plan for LEO staff and managers to ensure we have the necessary business development skillset to support our clients evolving needs to survive and thrive in the ever-changing business environment. A collaborative approach between Enterprise Ireland and the LEO's is taken to design programmes to support us in achieving the strategic priorities across Entrepreneurship, Competitiveness and Digitalisation, Green/Sustainability, Exporting/Internationalisation and Innovation. A best practice approach is adopted to deliver programmes such as the Professional Business Advisor programme, Green for Micro, Finance, Social Media and other business pillar programmes accordingly.

### 7.3: Communications

LEO Clare communications strategy will be fully aligned with the national 'Making It Happen' marketing and communications strategy for the Local Enterprise Offices, as set out by the LEO Communications Committee and LEO Communications Team in Enterprise Ireland.

This strategy will focus on four key pillars:

1. Promoting LEO-led programmes, supports and initiatives and those open to LEO clients from local authorities, Enterprise Ireland, protocol partners and other stakeholders
2. Showcasing LEO and client announcements, regular profiling through case studies and thought leadership
3. Rolling-out brand communications campaigns locally, to include 'Pre-Start', 'Start' and 'Grow' themed campaigns
4. Increasing the LEO's digital footprint online and enhancing social media presence and reach.

The LEO Clare Communications Strategy will continue to support National Initiatives such as those focused on Exporting, Innovation, Green, Digitalisation and 'Look for Local'.

This development plan is underpinned by our commitment to our Customer Service Charter which is focused on 'putting the customer at the centre of our work'.

## APPENDIX 1: LEO Clare - Performance Metrics

<b>Jobs:</b>	<b>Output 2020</b>	<b>Target 2021</b>
LEO Client Portfolio*	236	240
Total Portfolio Employment (All Jobs, both FT & PT)	1,283	1,393
Gross Jobs Created (All Jobs both FT & PT)	179	236
Net Jobs Increase (All Jobs created minus all Job losses)	-55	110

<b>Progression Pathway:</b>	<b>Output 2020</b>	<b>Target 2021</b>
Number of Clients transferred to E.I.	4	4

<b>Measure 1</b>	<b>Output 2020</b>	<b>Target 2021</b>
<b>Number of Clients Approved Funding:</b>		
Feasibility: Number:	7	5
Priming: Number:	7	7
Business Expansion: Number:	14	15
TAME: Number	4	4
No. of projected potential new jobs associated with Approvals (Priming & Business Expansion)	49	45

<b>Trading On Line Vouchers:</b>	<b>Output 2020</b>	<b>Target 2021</b>
No. of Trading Online Vouchers approved	401	80

<b>Agile R &amp; D</b>	<b>Output 2020</b>	<b>Target 2021</b>
No. of Companies approved Agile R & D	1	2

<b>EI Grant Support Measure administered through the LEO (e.g. Grad Start, IP Start, etc.)</b>	<b>Output 2020</b>	<b>Target 2021</b>
No. of Companies supported	0	2

<b>Measure 2</b>	<b>Output 2020</b>	<b>Target 2021</b>
<b>Training/Development Programmes (All Training and Networking events)</b>		
Total No. of All Programmes (Training/Networking/Events/Seminars)	149	75
Total No. of all Participants participating in above Programmes	2643	1125
No. of SYOB Programmes	14	14
No. of Participants attending SYOB Programmes	181	200
No. of Management Development Programmes	0	4
No. of Business Coaches assigned to Clients	0	55

LEO Clare Development Plan 2021-2024

---

<b>Mentoring:</b>	<b>Output 2020</b>	<b>Target 2021</b>
Total Number of individual mentoring – (participants availing of one to one mentoring – one to one engagement by a Mentor with one client)	350	200
Total Number of group mentoring participants – (are all group mentoring engagements or clinics where a mentor engages with a group of clients.	0	0
Total Number of Mentoring Participants (both one to one and group)	350	200

<b>Schools Entrepreneurship:</b>	<b>Output 2020</b>	<b>Target 2021</b>
Number of Schools Participating (Secondary schools only engaged in school enterprise programmes)	11	7
Number of Students Participating	225	60

<b>Competitiveness</b>	<b>Output 2020</b>	<b>Target 2021</b>
No. of Companies who have undertaken a Lean for Micro Assessment by a Lean Expert *	10	15
No. of Companies who will undertake Green Start Programme	0	10

<b>Export Enterprise Development Programme</b>	<b>Output 2020</b>	<b>Target 2021</b>
No. of clients undertaking Export Enterprise Development Programmes in Enterprise Ireland	0	8

<b>MFI:</b>	<b>Output 2020</b>	<b>Target 2021</b>
Number of Applications submitted	30	18