

**LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE WICKLOW**  
**2021-2024**  
**ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

# LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE WICKLOW

## 2021 – 2024 DEVELOPMENT PLAN FRAMEWORK

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## Executive Summary

The last three year period from 2017, till the beginning of 2020, have been productive years for LEO Wicklow despite the emergence of significant business challenges such as Brexit.

2020 has been marked by severe economic challenges due to the emergence of the COVID 19 pandemic and subsequent society and business lockdowns affecting micro enterprises in all sectors throughout the county. 2020 rapidly became an extremely busy year for LEO Wicklow due to the number of small businesses seeking COVID 19 related business supports. In response to the lockdown, Local Enterprise Office Wicklow moved the delivery of all supports services such as the Business Advice Clinics, mentor assignments and business skills training to online platforms.

During the last four years, LEO Wicklow dealt with over 3000 new enquiries, provided training supports to over 4290 business people, provided one to one business advice and mentoring services to more than 2203 businesses and engaged with over 4978 students to develop enterprise awareness. From 2017-2020 LEO Wicklow awarded €2,619,566 euro in grants to 154 companies.

The enterprises on the LEO Portfolio (companies that have received grant aid) created 171 net new jobs over the report of the last plan.

From 2017-2020 LEO Wicklow approved 597 Trading Online Vouchers, assisted 58 companies to apply for Microfinance Ireland funding, supported 12 craft and food companies to exhibit at Showcase and the National Ploughing Championships, and provided a specialised business boot camp to over 50 participants in three Irelands Best Young Entrepreneur Competitions as well as mentor and business advice supports.

Under the Customer Care score and satisfaction ratings carried out in 2019, LEO Wicklow achieved a high ranking, with an overall high satisfaction rating of 76%. LEO Wicklow aims to build on this and continue to deliver high quality and multi-varied services and supports to its expanding customer and client bases throughout Wicklow.

LEO Wicklow is looking forward to a productive and innovative next four year period with a particular focus on mitigating the challenges of economic recovery once the economy opens up, meeting climate targets, assisting with digital transformation and supporting micro enterprises through the post Brexit trading situation while maximising the opportunities for entrepreneurs from national programmes and new initiatives at local and regional level.

The strategic objectives for LEO Wicklow for the period 2020-2024 are set out in The Local Enterprise Office Framework Plan 2021-2027 and in detail in Section 2 of this plan.

These strategic objectives flow from a number of national and regional policies such as the Report of the SME Taskforce: National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, The OECD Report on SME and Entrepreneurship Policy in Ireland, The Mid East Regional Enterprise Plan, Programme for Government, and the Co. Wicklow Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) as well as the Co. Wicklow Tourism Development Strategy, and The County Wicklow Food Development Strategy and the County Wicklow Screen Development Strategy.

A number of key actions for each of the seven strategic objective areas to be achieved within the next four year period have been identified.

These priority areas and associated actions, where LEO intervention will be required (either directly or in collaboration with others) to address enterprise deficits identified, include:

- Provide an **enhanced** and nationally recognised **First Stop Shop** (FSS) referral and advisory service (Online business diagnostic tool and enhanced agency integration)
- **Foster** and support local **entrepreneurship**.
- Increase the level of **innovation** within micro and small businesses.
- Improve the **competitiveness** and **productivity** of small and micro enterprises.
- **Enhance** the confidence, **ambition** and **leadership skills** of small and micro enterprises.
- **Increase** the **export capabilities** of small and micro enterprises (beyond the UK.)
- Support businesses in their climate action response
- **Promote economic development** at local level.
- Deliver the development of the Screen Content Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus in Rathnew and the consolidation of the local screen sector cluster.
- Maximise the opportunities flowing from the development of multiple wind farms of the coast of Wicklow and developing the renewable energy cluster.
- Support the development of the local food sector and Food Incubation and development Hub.

## Section 1 – Context

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

The Local Enterprise Development Plan 2021 - 2024 (LEDP) for the Local Enterprise Office Wicklow arises out of the strategic vision for the development of the micro enterprise sector in County Wicklow. This vision is informed by national, regional and local strategies such as the *County Wicklow Local Economic and Community Plan*, the *Draft Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2026*, *Report of the SME Taskforce: National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan*, *OECD Report on SME and Entrepreneurship Policy in Ireland*, *The Mid East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020* and the *Regional Enterprise Plan, Programme for Government*, The County Wicklow Local Economic and Community Plan (LECPs), as well as a number of County Wicklow specific strategies such as The Tourism Development Strategy, the Food Development Strategy, and the Draft Screen Development Strategy as commissioned by the Economic Development Team within Wicklow Local Authorities.

The purpose of the LEDP is to outline a four year strategy for the Local Enterprise Office Wicklow for 2021- 2024 and to set out the annual activities that will be undertaken to further the strategic objectives.

2014 saw a fundamental change in the way services are delivered to micro and small business at local level. The objective of the reform was to establish a network of first stop shops (LEOs) which would:

- Bring together the micro and small business supports provided by the CEBs, Enterprise Ireland and the Local Authorities in one place.
- Remove anomalies in the existing system and ensure that all micro and small businesses can access supports.
- Through the establishment of a Centre for Excellence in Enterprise Ireland with responsibility for setting policy and monitoring delivery, ensure delivery of world class supports for micro and small business in a uniform manner across the country.

The County Enterprise Boards Dissolution Bill 2013 was enacted and the CEBs were dissolved on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2014. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2014 the Local Enterprise Office commenced operations within the Wicklow Local Authority structure under a Service Level Agreement between the Local Authority and Enterprise Ireland. The LEO Wicklow was officially launched by An Taoiseach on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

The economic context within which the LEDP will be implemented includes:

- A strong performing economy severely impacted in 2020/21 by the global COVID 19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns resulting in unemployment level at 24% in Q1 2021.
- Anticipated opening up of the economy and ongoing required supports for micro businesses towards recovery and building resilience from Q2 2021.
- Climate Change and the obligations to meet the targets within the Climate Action Plan.
- Futureproofing the economy with increased focus on research and development to stimulate innovation.
- Need for enhanced competitiveness and productivity in SMEs.
- Increasing importance of indigenous enterprise & industry as a driver of future growth .

- Improved access to finance for micro enterprises, but some on-going difficulty for very early stage enterprises in accessing finance.
- Continuing pressure on Government and local government spending.
- Global economic and political uncertainty that may have a negative impact on the Irish economy & FDI.
- Focus on placemaking, regional strengths and clustering.
- Need for enhanced digitalisation.
- Challenges posed by post Brexit imports and exports and opportunities arising from Brexit.
- Mitigation of COVID19 on economy .
- Need for upskilling and reskilling to maximise local growth opportunities.

Due to the impact of the global pandemic and the lockdowns of the economy, the challenges facing small businesses include, in the immediate future the uncertainty of when their sector will be allowed to open up, liquidity, providing a safe trading environment for staff and customers, retaining staff, upskilling staff, insurance costs and dealing with built up debt.

In the long term, the challenges facing small business in Ireland continue to include a higher cost base relative to competing countries. Increasingly even those businesses only trading domestically are competing with international companies operating in Ireland or offering their products & services to the Irish market.

On the positive side, Ireland's traditional focus on export (driven by the small home market), means that Irish businesses are poised to take advantage of any uplift in the global economy. Due to the difficulties in trading with our largest trading partner, The UK, there is evidence that the small business export sector is diversifying and developing new markets and this is expected to continue, however there continue to be serious concerns regarding the impact of Brexit in the long term.

The most recent statistics from the CSO (Business Demography 2018) states that there are 8,817 enterprises operating in Co. Wicklow providing employment for 29,700 people (CSO 2018). Of these, there are 7,670 micro-enterprises (classified as employing less than 10) operating in County Wicklow, providing employment for 12,929 people.

These businesses operate in a wide variety of sectors including retail, construction, hospitality, professional services, agriculture, tourism, engineering, food & beverage manufacture, ICT, personal services etc. A common feature among many of these businesses is an increasing dependence on the use of technology and the internet.

When compared with national statistics for 2018 (where 270,344 enterprises provide employment for 1,607,911 people and where 248,333 micro-enterprises provide employment for 413,076) it is striking that while Micro-enterprises at national level account for 25% of employment, in County Wicklow Micro-enterprises account for 43% of total employment.

This indicates a significant dependency on micro enterprise for the economy of County Wicklow.

### 1.1.1 Socio Economic Profile

#### *Population & Education*

County Wicklow's location within the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) and proximity to County Dublin is of key importance to the economic development of the County. The population of the County has been steadily increasing

and in 2016 stood at 142,425 (2016 census) with forecasted growth to 158,000 by 2022. A considerable proportion of Wicklow residents, 21,050, work outside the county.

- Population: 142,425 (4.21 % growth since 2011 Census)
- Population density: 70.2 per km<sup>2</sup>
- Under age 25: 34% (national average 33%)
- Over age 65: 13% (national average 13%)
- Average household income: €73,204 (103.2% of national average)
- Average house price: €293,000. Strong demand combined with growth in remote working has driven the price up 3.1% on the December 2019 average of €284,200.

Population of the largest towns in County Wicklow:

- Bray: 32,600
- Greystones: 18,140
- Arklow: 13,163
- Wicklow Town: 10,584

The social class makeup of Wicklow in comparison with the State in 2016.

Wicklow has a higher proportion of professional workers (8.6% compared to 8.1%) and managerial and technical workers (31.8% compared to 28.1%) respectively than seen nationally. The proportions of the constituency's workers classed as non-manual (17.1%), skilled-manual (14.1%) and semi-skilled (10.1%) was broadly similar to those seen nationally.

Industry	Wicklow	State
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	3.5%	4.4%
Building and construction	5.9%	5.1%
Manufacturing and industries	9.7%	11.4%
Commerce and trade	26.3%	23.9%
Transport and communications	8.6%	8.6%
Public administration	4.4%	5.3%
Professional services	23.4%	23.5%
Other	18.2%	17.8%

#### *County Wicklow skills indicators*

- Participation rate: 62.2% of labour force (national average 61.4%)
- Third level graduates 34.1% of labour force (national average 31.2%)
- STEM-related graduates 8% of labour force (national average 7.3%)
- Above average proportion employed in high value industrial sector of 'Information & Communication, Financial and Professional Services' – 22%

Wicklow has a higher rate of managers, directors and senior officials (9% compared to 7.4%) than the State. Wicklow's proportion of those in associate professional and technical occupations is greater than that see for the State (12.6% compared to 10.9%). The constituency shows a lower proportion of its residents working in process, plant and machine operatives (6.1%) than nationally (7.2%).

The 2016 Census shows that Wicklow had among the highest percentage of the population in Ireland with a third level education. However, the sole higher education institution in the county is IT Carlow at Wicklow County Campus in Rathnew. The Campus is a joint venture developed by Wicklow County Council in conjunction with the Institute of Technology Carlow as a Centre of Excellence in Education, Enterprise and Innovation. It provides a variety of lifelong learning (LLL) higher education programmes on a part-time basis. The campus should be well placed to benefit from the merger between IT Carlow and IT Waterford into a Technical University in 2022.

The offices of LEO Wicklow are based in the Campus and the Economic Development Team in Wicklow County Council works closely with IT Carlow to grow the LLL centre and the student numbers.

### *Size and scale of the Enterprise Sector*

The most recent figures from the Business Demographic 2018 indicate that over 43% of total employment in the County is in enterprises employing less than 10, which is significantly higher than the national average of 27%. 2018:

Size	Under 10	10-19	20-49	50-249	250 & over	Total
<b>No. Active Enterprises</b>	7,670	316	143	52	6	8,181
<b>No. persons engaged</b>	12,929	4,194	4,423	5,115	3,039	29,700
<b>% of total</b>	43%	14%	15%	17.5%	10.5%	100%
<b>State</b>	248,333	11,303	6,774	3,277	657	270,344
<b>No. persons engaged</b>	413,076					1,607,911
<b>% of total</b>	25%					

There are currently 19 IDA Ireland client companies based in County Wicklow and, as of 2019, they employed circa 2,659 people. Sectors represented in the county include Live Sciences sector, Financial Services, plastics, Pharmaceuticals, Media Production and Manufacturing with Servier, Sigma-Aldrich, Elavon, Takeda, Oriflame and Holfeld Plastics choosing to invest in County Wicklow. Wicklow is part of IDA Ireland's Mid-East Region and contributes to the 68 companies and c. 13,435 employed in Foreign Direct Investment in the Region;

Table A: Total jobs created by IDA Ireland-supported companies by county in the Mid -East Region in 2019

	<b>New Created Gains)</b>	<b>Jobs (Gross</b>	<b>Additional Created Change )</b>	<b>Jobs (Net</b>	<b>Total Jobs</b>	<b>Number of Companies</b>
<b>Kildare</b>	<b>225</b>		<b>-29</b>		<b>8,872</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Meath</b>	<b>309</b>		<b>250</b>		<b>1,904</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Wicklow</b>	<b>144</b>		<b>8</b>		<b>2,659</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>678</b>		<b>229</b>		<b>13,435</b>	<b>68</b>

The employment figure in Enterprise Ireland supported companies in Co. Wicklow in 2020 was 3,903, down about 8% on 2019 employment of 4,270 jobs. The Enterprise Ireland (EI) client companies in Wicklow operate in the Industrial, Life Sciences and Consumer sector, ICT and in Food.

There were 97 companies which received grant aid from Wicklow LEO (formerly County Enterprise Board) in the LEO portfolio<sup>1</sup> at year end 2014. In total these companies employed 450 people (includes full time and part time jobs). At year end 2020, there were 150 companies in the portfolio employing 640 people.

### *Export*

There were 8,531 SMEs exporting goods in 2018. The total value of their exports was €39 billion, or 28% of total exports. This includes 5,247 micro enterprises, which exported €6.8 billion of goods.

Micro enterprises accounted for 59% of the number of exporters, but only 5% of the value of goods exported<sup>2</sup>.

Many micro enterprises trade only in the home economy (approximately 75% in 2012), however increasing numbers are looking to export or have started exporting, with the main export market being the UK followed by the European Union.

<sup>1</sup> In 2014 the portfolio was significantly reduced by removal of companies that had transferred to EI, re-located outside the County or were operating in sectors considered ineligible under the new guidelines for direct financial intervention

<sup>2</sup> CSO 2018: There were 8,868 exporting enterprises in 2018 (i.e. with goods exports of over €5,000 in the year).

There were just 298 large exporting enterprises (with over 250 employees) but they accounted for 69% (€96 billion) of all exports in 2018. These large enterprises comprised only 3% of all enterprises.

Of the €15.8 billion of goods exported to the UK in 2018, almost €7 billion was exported by large enterprises (250 or more employees). Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) comprise micro enterprises (up to 10 employees), small (10 to 49 employees) and medium (50 to 249 employees), and these enterprises accounted for €8.5 billion of goods exports to the UK in 2018.

In Ireland, just under 70% of micro enterprises have been in business for more than 11 years and 41% have been in business for more than 20 years. While the greatest growth in terms of job creation occurs in the first five years (two thirds of jobs created), it is also the most volatile time for new businesses in that approximately half of them will fail within the first five years (CSO).

Small businesses are also not immune to the effect of global trends. The technology advances that will transform the way people live and do business, the impact increasing global connectedness has on value chains and sources of competition, the implications of climate change and environmental considerations, the mobility of talent, the ageing population, the increase in demand for resources and the increasing urbanisation of communities all have implications for even very small businesses. In addition, the particular challenges posed by the post Brexit trading environment are significant as the UK is the main target market for small early stage exporters. The full picture of the impact on micro enterprises has not been established yet.

An emerging challenge, in particular for certain sectors such as the IT sector, is obtaining suitable employees. Another significant challenge for County Wicklow businesses is the lack of robust and comprehensive broadband infrastructure in areas away from the main growth towns. In addition, many of the businesses availing of LEO supports are predominately reliant on the domestic economy and are still struggling due to the decrease in consumer and business spending over the past year.

### *COVID Impact*

Ireland is currently dealing with a severe public health crisis from Covid-19, which has substantially reduced social and economic activity. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, the most imminent risk to the strong performance of the Irish economy seemed likely to come from a hard Brexit.

The hardest hit sectors due to the public health lockdowns include the retail sector, tourism, travel and hospitality which are traditionally an important sector in the county.

Food producers are reporting mixed impacts with some able to pivot and retain revenue due to changing to online sales and take away delivery options while others were hit with decreasing sales due to the closure of their routes to market, such as farmers markets.

The content creation sector, driven by Ardmore and Ashford Studios which employs over 1000 crew directly locally while filming, has picked up filming activity after the first lockdown, but large parts of the film budgets now need to be set aside for health and safety measures.

Wicklow has a higher than average proportion working in the construction sector which was impacted by various lockdowns.

LEO Wicklow has supported a number of portfolio clients to respond to the pandemic lockdown and pivot the business offering including a small number starting production of hand sanitiser or face masks / shields.

During 2020, LEO Wicklow also approved 430 Trading Online Voucher applications, assisting these micro businesses in enhancing their e-commerce capabilities and becoming less reliant on traditional revenue streams.

There have been speculations regarding an expected trading boom due to pent up demand and a built up of large once the public health restrictions are lifted.

However, consumer spending patterns are likely to be uneven across the economy, tracing the already uneven impact of the pandemic across income and demographic brackets.



### Brexit Impact

A survey of LEO Portfolio clients was carried out in November 2016. A number of key issues for businesses were identified:

Of 85 client companies on the LEO portfolio (M1 grant recipients) that completed an online survey, 35% expressed concerns about the impact of Brexit on their businesses in 2016.

The main concerns expressed were:

- Uncertainty and lack of information
- Potential loss of sales and potential increase in costs caused by:
  - Fall in sterling value / loss of competitiveness
  - Increase in transport costs
  - Introduction of Trade Tariffs
  - Increase and changes in legal / export documentation / VAT rules
  - Competition from UK companies selling into Ireland
  - Declining UK economy / reduction in consumer confidence/ spend
  - Hard border
  - Increase in production costs

The type of assistance being sought by the companies that responded to the survey centred on three main issues:

- Up to date, accurate, advice and information on trends, legal issues, export documentation, tax (VAT), changes in procedures & regulations
- Assistance to increase efficiencies, reduce costs, improve competitiveness
- Assistance in strengthening market position in the UK including: marketing assistance, securing UK suppliers, identification of potential UK based partners, support to develop compelling propositions

LEO Wicklow has identified that micro-enterprises potentially facing challenges from Brexit in either the immediate or medium term fall into 4 categories:

- Companies that are exporting directly to NI/UK
- Companies whose customers are exporting to NI/UK (i.e. where they are part of a supply chain)
- Companies trading domestically or into other EU countries where their main competitor is UK based
- Companies whose suppliers are UK based

The challenges faced by each category are different, but each cohort requires assistance to take immediate steps to:

1. Understand the implications of Brexit for their particular business
2. Conduct a risk / opportunity analysis of same
3. Put in place and start to implement a plan to mitigate / minimise risks or maximise opportunities with the assistance of the LEO.

Over the last four years LEO Wicklow has supported clients get ready for Brexit through a range of supports. The supports include the regular LEO supports, a Brexit scorecards, checklists, information guides, workshops, currency exposure calculator, financial supports, mentoring, webinars, Customs training events, and Lean for Micro programme, access to finance through Microfinance Ireland loans, as well as a weekly newsletter and social media promotion.

In addition the following Brexit specific supports were also available:

- Two dedicated Brexit Business Advisors to support small businesses to get Brexit ready by signposting these to available supports through the LEO and other agencies.
- Seven Prepare your Business for Customs workshops have been held in 2020 with 100 participants attending.
- 42 One to One Brexit mentoring clinics have taken place with Brexit and customs experts.



In 2020 a similar survey was carried out and of the 138 portfolio clients, 50 responded to the question as to the potential threats facing their business due to Brexit.

The main concerns expressed were more or less identical to 2016:

- Uncertainty around a hard Brexit and lack of information
- Cash flow issues
- Supply chain issues.
- Potential loss of sales and potential increase in costs caused by:
  - Fall in sterling value / loss of competitiveness
  - Increase in transport costs
  - Introduction of Trade Tariffs
  - Increase and changes in legal / export documentation / VAT rules
  - Competition from UK companies selling into Ireland
  - Declining UK economy / reduction in consumer confidence/ spend
  - Increase in production costs due to increase in cost of raw materials

The type of supports sought included:

- Up to date, accurate, advice and information on trends, legal issues, export documentation, tax (VAT), changes in procedures & regulations.
- First steps to get ready.
- Assistance to increase efficiencies, reduce costs, improve competitiveness
- Assistance in strengthening market position in the UK including: marketing assistance, securing UK suppliers, identification of potential UK based partners, support to develop compelling propositions, opening of office in UK.

## *Tourism*

Wicklow's scenic unspoilt landscape and rich cultural heritage including the Wicklow Mountains and Glendalough make it an obvious location for tourism and recreation. The County's tourism attractions and recreational amenities are important for the social and economic well-being of the county. Attractions range from scenic uplands, beautiful coastline and extensive woodlands to historical sites, manor homes and gardens, attractive towns and villages.

### **Visitor numbers**

- 272,000 international visitors during 2016 generated €86 million revenue (ranked 9th county nationwide).
- 329,000 domestic tourists generated €71 million revenue in 2016 in County Wicklow. This represents 33% of the domestic nights spent in the East and Midlands region and 4% of the total nights in Ireland, which compares well with Wicklow's 23% (regional) and 3% (national) share of the bed stock.

The hospitality, travel and tourism industry in County Wicklow are badly hit by the COVID pandemic but are well positioned to benefit from the reopening of the economy and lifting of both domestic and international travel restrictions late 2021 and into 2022 and beyond.

Wicklow Mountains National Park covers 20,000 hectares making it the largest national park in Ireland. The Park is an invaluable recreational space for locals and tourists. The most visited area is Glendalough, which attracted 732,824 visitors in 2018 and was third on Ireland's top ten 'free to enter' attractions for 2018. Powerscourt House

Gardens and Waterfall were ninth on the top ten fee-charging attractions during 2018 with 472,523 visitors. The Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2019 – 2024 has just been launched by the County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee. This will inform the development and management of outdoor recreation in the County.

Tourism is a key sector for County Wicklow. Fáilte Ireland information reveals that Wicklow is the major visitor destination within the Midlands East region. The sector had been experiencing positive growth, with strong growth in all overseas visitor numbers and positive sentiment expressed by product providers in the County up till the COVID19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns hit the Tourism and hospitality industry hard in County Wicklow.

Ireland's Ancient East has been developed by Fáilte Ireland as a branded visitor experience encompassing the rich heritage and cultural assets that the Mid-East has to offer. This presents a significant opportunity for Wicklow to tap into and harness the potential of cultural tourism. Wicklow Tourism Strategy and Marketing Plan 2018 – 2023 sets out the County's vision for tourism and identifies priorities and actions to ensure the County is successful in realising its tourism potential. The Strategy recognises that Wicklow is performing well but has enormous untapped potential arising from its natural and built assets and proximity to large markets.

The Strategy identifies five priority actions:

- Develop new accommodation;
- Develop Wicklow, Bray, Greystones, Enniskerry, Blessington and Arklow as visitor hubs;
- Masterplan for Glendalough;
- Grow thematic experiences, i.e. ecotourism, film induced tourism, food and craft trails etc.
- Develop a common narrative.

Greenways are off-road routes for walkers and cyclists and are a valuable asset in terms of their tourism potential and as a recreational amenity for the local community. The Blessington Lake Loop, a 42km greenway around the Blessington Lakes incorporating Russborough House and the villages of Vallemount, Ballyknockan and Lacken, was awarded €5 million in funding in 2019 and further funding in 2020. The Council have appointed consultants to examine the feasibility of building the East Coast Wicklow to Greystones Greenway. This Greenway will also be informed by the Irish Rail coastal erosion study.

Wicklow County Council has consulted a number of agencies regarding the proposed Arklow to Shillelagh 35km Greenway which links in with Tinahely, Annacurra, Aughrim and Woodenbridge. The feasibility study and final route have yet to be finalised.

LEO Wicklow supports the development of the tourism and hospitality sector through COVID 19 business supports as well as through their soft supports such as sector specific business and IT skills training, business advice, Trading Online Vouchers and mentoring. Initiatives such as the Lean for Micro and Green for Micro are also available for tourism businesses.

#### *Enterprise and Innovation Enablers: Broadband*

Wicklow benefits from its proximity to Dublin but there are large parts of the county where there are inadequate broadband facilities. The major towns along the east coast such as Bray, Greystones, Kilcoole/Newtownmountkennedy, Wicklow and Arklow have access to high speed broadband services but services in areas around Tinahely and Baltinglass are more problematic. An exception to this general trend is Blessington

where businesses can potentially have access to very high speeds. The low population density in certain parts of the county poses a problem for broadband suppliers.

Wicklow has a higher rate of PC access than the corresponding national share (75.2% compared to 70.8%). Wicklow households have a higher rate of access to the internet than households in the State overall (84.2% compared to 81%). Covid-19 has promoted a mass mobilisation of digital across economy and society. County Wicklow also reported a 34% increase in .ie registrations in 2020 indicating a strong interest in e-commerce and digitalisation amongst the business community.

There is limited incubation space for high potential technology based enterprises and there are no dedicated programmes (such as New Frontiers / Accelerators) operating in the county. However the development of the Arklow Courthouse Enterprise Hub in 2020 and the expected launch of the Clermont Enterprise Hub in Rathnew in 2022 will remedy this situation.

### *Renewable Energy and maritime Sectors*

The maritime sector offers significant opportunities for economic development in the County based on developing existing infrastructure. A muscle seed company in Arklow and the feasibility of the development of an oyster reef of the coast of Arklow represent examples of the innovation and opportunities in the maritime sector.

The two main ports for commercial development are Arklow and Wicklow, Greystones and Bray harbours are particularly suited to leisure and recreation development. Three major wind farm developments are planned, with a value of over €1-2 billion each, in the next couple of years offering multiple opportunities to micro enterprises operating in and providing goods and services to this sector.

Two Data Centres are also in development in South Wicklow promoting cluster development and between the Data centres and offshore wind energy solutions and providing opportunities to LEO clients.

### *Content Creation Sector*

The screen industry is a unique aspect of the County's economy and offers potential for significant development. The audio-visual sector is worth more than €1 billion to the Irish economy with 12,000 people employed in film, television and animation production. The global demand for screen content is growing and in Ireland alone there is further demand for 1 million sq. ft of high-quality studio space.

The industry contributes significantly to direct and indirect employment and also contributes to the international image of the County.

Competition is emerging in other parts of the country as well as from Northern Ireland and the UK, however Wicklow benefits from a number of key advantages including its long history of film production, the location of two internationally renowned film studios in the county (Ardmore and Ashford), the availability of locally based experienced workers in the industry, the proximity to Dublin and the abundance of diverse locations.

Both Ardmore and Ashford Studios are in expansion phases, adding additional studio infrastructure to their existing offering which will increase the level of production in the County and require substantial additional trained crew. When complete, Ardmore studios will have over 140,000 sq ft of sound stages and 160,000 sq ft of support buildings on their site in Bray.

Ashford Studios currently has 57,000 sq ft of studio space, consisting of three sound stages and state-of-the-art ancillary facilities in an eco-friendly environment.

Ashford Studios are home to series MGM / History Channel 'Vikings' and Netflix production 'Valhalla' currently filming. Construction is due to commence on a €90m expansion with four new film studios of 40,000 sq ft each, a TV studio, offices and support space. The expansion also includes a visitor centre and parking space for 100 coaches and 650 cars.

In addition, The Greystones Media Hub, a €150 million campus consisting of 14 studios, offices and ancillary production buildings, is due to start construction in 2021 adding an additional 170,000sq. ft in studio infrastructure. The planned expansion of studio facilities will build upon the existing Dublin-Wicklow film and screen cluster, the leading economic cluster of its type in the country and will further consolidate Wicklow's position as the traditional heart of television and film production in Ireland. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy supports the development of the Mid-East as a hub for the Screen Content Creation Sector. It is envisaged that the development of the film industry cluster will enable the County to realise the potential value from film making directly, plus film tourism, accommodation services and other support services.

Wicklow Local Authority and Wicklow LEO are the main drivers in the development of a Content Creation Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus further consolidating the strong cluster present.

#### *Food sector*

Within Wicklow there is an established cluster of artisan / SME Food processing companies, estimated to be in excess of 50 companies, with potential for growth.

In addition, there is a vibrant food service industry in the County, many being customers of the artisan segment. 'Wicklow Naturally' was launched in 2019 to promote the County Wicklow Food brand. It has been created as part of the ongoing implementation of the county's Food and Beverage Strategy, which will champion local producers, their products and the businesses which sell and serve those products. It also aims to boost tourism by highlighting Wicklow as a leading "foodie" destination in Ireland's Ancient East.

#### *Research & Development*

Wicklow County Campus is a joint venture developed by Wicklow County Council in conjunction with the Institute of Technology Carlow as a Centre of Excellence in Education, Enterprise and Innovation. It provides a variety of lifelong learning (LLL) higher education programmes on a part-time basis. The campus should be well placed to benefit from the merger between IT Carlow and IT Waterford into a Technical University in 2022.

#### *Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)*

The LECP is a six-year plan containing the measures necessary to promote and support community and economic development in County Wicklow. The economic elements of the plan will be overseen by the County Wicklow Economic Development and Enterprise Support SPC. LEO Wicklow has been centrally involved in the development of the economic plan including the setting of objectives linked to the high-level economic goals set out below. LEO Wicklow is also responsible for implementing certain actions aimed at achieving the objectives (as set out in section 2).

## ***High level economic goals LECP 2016-2022***

1. Develop Infrastructure and measures that are positive and supportive to investment, enterprise innovation and knowledge creation.
2. Sustain existing enterprise and develop quality employment and income opportunities for the wide range of employment needs in the county, with possibilities for reversing commuting patterns.
3. Capitalise on Wicklow's unique attributes and proximity to Dublin market, excellent quality of life, human capital, tourism, landscape, marine, agricultural and forestry resources.
4. Support a shift towards low carbon and climate resilient economic activity, reducing energy dependence and sustainable use of resources and leading in the Smart Green economy.
5. Harness efficiently the full resources of the County and promote interagency collaboration.

The implementation of the objectives of the LECP and higher order national and regional economic strategies is ongoing, with particular focus on key sectors including film, the maritime sector, the food industry and tourism.

Wicklow has a higher percentage of professionals than the state average and also has a higher proportion of managerial and technical professionals (31.8%), which is higher than the average for the State (28.1) and the Eastern and Midland region (29.8%). The number of persons educated to third level or higher in Wicklow is also slightly higher than the national average.

The data suggests that County Wicklow residents have the skills, abilities and education to run businesses, to establish new enterprises and to be innovators and entrepreneurs, but they are for the most part not doing so in the County. A key challenge for the County Council continues to be to put in place an environment and a framework that encourages Wicklow residents to establish businesses in the county and in particular within the County's identified key urban centres.

According to the County Wicklow Development Plan, entrepreneurial activity will be supported and facilitated wherever possible, for example, by facilitating developments / applications engaged in training and education, and business start-up and incubator facilities. Supporting small scale, start-up developments in rural areas, town / village centres and in suitable residential areas, will be supported wherever possible, as this is seen as key stepping stone to the development of a larger enterprise.

The Council will support and facilitate the development of a network of co-working Hubs. These are co-working spaces that provide desk and office space, a co-working community, and the supports and networks that technology entrepreneurs and businesses need to start, internationalise, and grow their business. It is an objective of the Regional Enterprise plan to 2020 to build a network of innovative co-working spaces in the Mid East.

## ***Mid East Regional Enterprise Plan till 2020***

The Regional Enterprise Plans play a key role in the delivery of the aims and objectives of Project Ireland 2040, Enterprise 2025 Renewed and Future Jobs Ireland, and more specifically in the implementation of the National Planning Framework and its constituent Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs) at NUTS 2 (Regional Assembly) level. The Regional Enterprise Plans set out regional strategic objectives and actions aligned with these

national strategic documents with the actions to be carried out by regional stakeholders – the Local Enterprise Offices being critical stakeholders in every region.

These regional plans will set the context for the next iteration of the Local Enterprise Office Enterprise Development Plans 2020 -2023.

The last Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) for the Mid-East aims to build on the strong progress achieved under the Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative.

### **Employment and Unemployment**

Since launch of Regional Action Plan for Jobs in 2015:

- 44,400 more people in employment (Q1 2015 to Q4 2020) – an 15% increase (exceeds RAPJ 2020 target)
- Unemployment fell from 9.6% to 5.1% over the same period (below the State average 7.1%)
- **56,464 people in the region in receipt of Pandemic Unemployment Payment at the end of January 2021, and 1,430 premises supported under the CRSS at the beginning of January 2021 (not included in the above data)**

Renewed emphasis in the REP to 2020 was placed on collaboration between the agencies to add value to the core work of the agencies and delivery of measurable actions. A ‘bottom-up’ approach was adopted in terms of its strategic objections. The Mid-East Regional Implementation Committee focussed in a regionally co-ordinated manner on important considerations to do with strengthening productivity, driving job creation, and supporting enterprise resilience in the Mid East region.

These include: diversifying the regional economy, building on place-specific strengths, regional brand development, business clustering and ecosystem strengthening initiatives to support new business creation and investment.

### **The Mid East REP focused on four core objectives:**

1. Developing the Mid-East as a hub for the Screen Content Creation Sector.
2. Developing a Network of Innovative remote-working Workspaces.
3. Building an ecosystem framework to support the Agri-food sector.
4. Ensure the availability of Skills and Talent to realise the Region’s future economic potential and address upskilling requirements.

The achievement of these objectives has been progressed through the delivery of defined actions, outlined in the Plan.

LEO Wicklow contributed to the setting of these actions and is playing a central role in the development of a Content Creation Enterprise Hub and the development of a network of co-working hubs throughout the region.

Work has commenced on the next Regional Enterprise Plan 2021-2023 is due to be launched in September 2021, see section 4.2 Other Initiatives.

### *Wicklow Commuter Survey*

In 2018, Wicklow County Council commissioned GAMMA Ltd, to prepare a study on the commuting patterns of Wicklow residents. The results of the study would provide insights in commuting patterns, the level of commuting and destinations as well as the level of satisfaction of those involved. The findings of the study feed into the setting of the new County Development Plan and other local enterprise and economic development strategies with a focus on reverse commuting and local job creation.

**The main points:** 65,759 County Wicklow residents regularly commute either to work (92%) or to third-level study (8%). Of these, 44% remain in County Wicklow and **56% leave the county**. Dublin is the most popular destination outside County Wicklow, split between DLR (20%), Dublin City (20%), South Dublin (6%) and Fingal (2%).

### The Commute

The majority of County Wicklow commuters drive, accounting for 68% of those who commute to work. The next most popular modes of transport are walking and train/DART/LUAS, each accounting for 6% of commuters to work. The most popular start time for commuters to work is between 6:30am and 8:30am (59% of commuters), and the typical commute lasts less than 45 minutes (59% of commuters).

### The Commuter

County Wicklow commuters at work are highly educated with 53% holding a third-level or higher qualification, compared to 52% for the state. They are also over-represented in the construction, information, communications & finance industries, with 27% of commuters travelling to work in these industries compared with 24% for the state. 37% of those who completed the commuter survey were working in the business or financial sector.

### Commuter Satisfaction

74% of those who completed the commuter survey reported themselves as unhappy or very unhappy with their commute, while only one in eight was happy or very happy.

70% of commuters who work outside County Wicklow said that they would be likely or very likely to consider switching to a job in County Wicklow if one were available and 33% said that they would be likely or very likely to consider a lower salary if it meant they could work in County Wicklow.

Survey respondents were receptive to the idea of remote working, with 48% saying that they would be likely or very likely to consider working from an e-hub or teleworking location in County Wicklow.



### Remote working

The COVID19 lockdowns has brought the increase in remote (home) working to the forefront of working life and this has changed the way we work forever and remote working is here to stay. While the development of a network

of remote working hubs throughout the Mid East region was one of the objectives in the REP to 2020 plan, it will continue to be an important objective in the next REP.

It is unclear what the patterns of those currently working remotely will be whenever remote working is no longer necessary to contain the spread of the virus, but there is a clear appetite for some form of hybrid working model involving a blend of home and workplace<sup>3</sup>. The OECD have pointed out that the experience of remote working during the COVID-19 disruption may catalyse wider adoption of remote working practices also after the crisis with the potential to improve firm productivity by facilitating cost reductions and by raising worker satisfaction, and thus worker efficiency<sup>4</sup>.

The National Remote Work Strategy focusses on the following main actions:

- ✓ Mandating that home and remote work should be the norm for 20% of public sector employment.
- ✓ Review of treatment of remote working for purpose of tax and expenditure
- ✓ Mapping and investing in a network of remote working hubs across Ireland
- ✓ Legislation for the right to request remote working
- ✓ Code of practise for the right to disconnect
- ✓ Provision of high-speed broadband to all parts of Ireland.

#### *Policy Context for Local Enterprise Office Strategy:*

Supported by Enterprise Ireland and within the policy and funding responsibility of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the Local Enterprise Offices operate within the context of national and regional enterprise policies and plans.

At local level within their respective areas of operation, each Local Enterprise Office is required to produce a three-year Enterprise Development Plan and is also a key stakeholder in the development and delivery of the Regional Enterprise Plans.

However the content, aims and objectives of these local plans are all set within Government policies as set out in key Government and international strategic documents such as

Project Ireland 2040, Future Jobs Ireland, Enterprise 2025 Renewed, Taskforce's SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, and the most recent OECD report on Ireland.

#### **Project Ireland 2040.**

Project Ireland 2040 - *Investing in Business, Enterprise and Innovation 2018 -2040*, is the government's overarching policy initiative to make Ireland a better country for all of us - a country that reflects the best of who we are and what we aspire to be.

Informed by the [Programme for a Partnership Government](#), Project Ireland 2040 recognises that economic and social progress go hand in hand, and is made up of the [National Planning Framework](#) to 2040 and the [National Development Plan](#). Project Ireland 2040 seeks to achieve ten strategic outcomes, building around the overarching themes of wellbeing, equality and opportunity. These ten shared priorities are aimed at ensuring a consistent approach between planning objectives under the National Planning Framework and investment commitments under the National Development Plan. Two of these ten strategic outcomes are particularly relevant to the Local

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<sup>3</sup> Whitaker Institute and Western Development Commission (2020): Remote Working During COVID-19

<sup>4</sup> OECD (2020) Productivity Gains from Teleworking in the post-COVID-19 era: How can public policies make it happen?

Enterprise Offices – A Strong Economy, Supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills and Strengthening Rural Economies and Communities.

The document also sets out the Governments Strategic Investment Priorities for 2018 -2027.

### **National Development Plan 2018 – 2027.**

The NDP sets out the investment priorities that will underpin the successful implementation of the National Planning Framework. Within the section under National Objective 5 – A Strong Economy supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills it states that this element of the Plan will be achieved by:

- supporting entrepreneurialism and building competitive clusters in strategic sectors and activities;
- through collaborative actions at regional and local level
- by realising a significant uplift in the performance of enterprises in terms of innovation, export potential and productivity; and
- by attracting further investment to the regions.

### **Enterprise 2025 Renewed.**

Enterprise 2025 Renewed, is Ireland’s national enterprise strategy with the stated vision to make Ireland “*the best place to succeed in business*”, and aims to embed resilience in Irish enterprises and contribute to strong economic performance over the longer term through a number of key policy priorities. These include:

- An increased emphasis on developing Irish owned enterprises – enhancing productivity and delivering quality jobs – and helping companies to navigate Brexit;
- Building on our existing strengths and seeking out new opportunities through collaboration and clustering within our distinctive foreign and Irish owned enterprise mix;
- Placing a spotlight on innovation (including disruptive technologies) and talent development, so that more enterprises are developing new products, services and solutions, and are more competitive internationally;
- Realising the full potential of our regions – developing places that are attractive for business investment and for people to live and work; and
- Raising Ireland’s visibility internationally, protecting Ireland’s reputation, and providing opportunities for our enterprises supported by the Global Footprint 2025 initiative.

### **Future Jobs Ireland – Preparing Now for Tomorrow’s Economy.**

To ensure Ireland's economy is well positioned to adapt and prosper in the future, the Government launched in 2019 a new economic pathway for Ireland based on embracing innovation and technological change, improving productivity, increasing labour force participation, enhancing skills and developing talent and transitioning to a low carbon economy. Future Jobs Ireland seeks to drive our development as a resilient, innovative, and globally connected economy, capable of coping with technological and other transformational changes ahead.

At the national level, the **Future Jobs Ireland 2019** initiative will, as part of a multiannual framework, give effect to national enterprise policy objectives and leverage a ‘whole of Government’ approach so that all policy levers at the national level, relevant to job creation and labour force participation, talent development, enterprise growth, innovation and competitiveness, and transition to a low carbon economy, are engaged on an agenda that will prepare for Ireland’s future enterprise and economic needs. The coming together of public and private sector stakeholders to set regional strategic objectives for enterprise development under these refreshed Regional

Enterprise Plans will have an important role to play in the realisation of Enterprise 2025 Renewed and the ongoing Future Jobs Ireland agenda.

A key challenge for the Local Enterprise Offices arising from this policy document is how they will address within their client base the issue of improving their productivity. This challenge calls for greater diversity in our enterprise base, the promotion of enterprise productivity, the enhancement of the framework conditions for firm creation and growth, an improvement in leadership and management skills in SMEs and for the need to encourage SMEs to use technology and business process improvement to increase productivity.

### **OECD Roadmap & Review of SME and Entrepreneurship Policies in Ireland.**

This report, published on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019 following an extensive review of SME and Entrepreneurship Policies in Ireland, examines how SMEs and entrepreneurship can be strengthened across the economy. It covers the characteristics and performance of SMEs and entrepreneurship, the business environment, the framework for policy formulation and delivery, national programmes for SMEs and entrepreneurs, the role of local bodies and interventions in tailoring policy to spatial differences, the productivity performance of SMEs, and the design and delivery of business development services.

The report identifies a number of challenges for policy in Ireland. These include increasing productivity growth in SMEs, increasing the business start-up rate and business dynamism, facilitating entrepreneurship among women, youth and migrants, scaling up micro-enterprises and generating more medium-sized firms, and increasing SME activity on foreign markets. A number of recommendations are provided to help meet these challenges, some of which are particularly relevant to LEOs.

The report highlights large spatial variations in conditions for SME and entrepreneurship activity within Ireland. It states:

*“The LEOs play an important function in providing tailored support for SMEs and entrepreneurship in their areas in collaboration with other bodies working locally and regionally. However there is 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.”*

### **Taskforce’s SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan**

The 'Report of the SME Growth Taskforce: SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan' results from the commitment in the 'Programme for Government – Our Shared Future' to draw up an ambitious long-term strategic blueprint for SMEs and entrepreneurs beyond COVID-19. It has been developed by an SME Growth Taskforce of entrepreneurs, business leaders and other individuals uniquely positioned to contribute to a long-term vision for the SME sector.

The Taskforce’s Growth Plan sets out a wide range of recommendations with long-term strategic relevance for SME and entrepreneurs, including measures to assist companies to start up, scale up, enhance their digital capabilities, and increase export activity. These recommendations will be reviewed and taken forward, as appropriate, by an SME and Entrepreneurship Implementation Group in early 2021.

### 1.1.2 SWOT Summary Co. Wicklow

An in-depth SWOT analysis was carried out in the Local Economic and Community Plan and is summarized below:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong population growth.</li> <li>• High disposable income rate per capita.</li> <li>• High levels of third level participation amongst students.</li> <li>• Proximity to third level institutions in Dublin and Carlow.</li> <li>• Good access to key national and international road, rail, air and sea transport routes</li> <li>• A diverse economic market and a wide range of employment opportunities</li> <li>• Strong settlements within the County.</li> <li>• Strong tourism sector.</li> <li>• Presence of an established film industry.</li> <li>• Strong farming economy.</li> <li>• High speed fibre broadband accessibility and connectivity in some areas of the County.</li> <li>• Wicklow County Campus in Clermont, Rathnew.</li> <li>• Distinctive and attractive geographical characteristics including coastline and Wicklow Mountains.</li> <li>• Coastal and mountain recreational amenities.</li> <li>• High quality natural and built environment.</li> <li>• Access to R&amp;D supports but low uptake in micro enterprises.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High levels of outward-commuting amongst the resident population.</li> <li>• Construction and craft related workers remain the largest group of unemployed.</li> <li>• Some areas particularly in the south have poor access to third level education.</li> <li>• Infrastructural constraints in certain settlements may inhibit development.</li> <li>• High levels of retail leakage to neighbouring counties.</li> <li>• High levels of commercial vacancy in some of the County's settlements.</li> <li>• Loss of manufacturing industries in areas of the County.</li> <li>• Traffic congestion in towns and on M11/N11 at peak times.</li> <li>• Poor broadband connectivity in parts of the County, particularly in rural areas of the County. Restricted public transport in some rural communities resulting in barriers accessing commercial services, education and employment opportunities.</li> <li>• Lack of connectivity to Dart and Luas many constrain development.</li> <li>• Pattern of day trip tourism, rather than longer-stay.</li> <li>• Slow adoption of digitalisation within business community.</li> <li>• SME productivity growth is stagnant affecting competitiveness.</li> <li>• Potential skills shortages to service growth areas such as green energy and content creation.</li> <li>• Weaknesses in micro enterprise owners in management skills, financial capabilities and technology adoption.</li> </ul>

Opportunities (Key Sectors identified)	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A high youth cohort will translate into higher working population in the longer term.</li> <li>• The high rate of third level participation may help to attract investors to the County.</li> <li>• Build on the county's proximity to Dublin and the national and international access routes.</li> <li>• Potential to build on Wicklow's strong craft food and drink industry and enhance the Wicklow 'brand'</li> <li>• Development of Wicklow County Campus can deliver skills needed at a local level and reduce loss of educated employees to other employment locations.</li> <li>• Potential to enhance business performance through better dialogue between Wicklow County Council and the County's business community.</li> <li>• Stronger education and business linkages may lead to greater employment and training opportunities.</li> <li>• The identification of strategic locations for increased FDI investment will create employment opportunities.</li> <li>• Availability of development lands at Fassaroe facilitates development and investment to a wide hinterland.</li> <li>• Potential to combine the County's strong agri-food sector with other strong sectors such as tourism.</li> <li>• Significant potential to develop an internationally recognised Film Industry Cluster.</li> <li>• Opportunities for enterprise and tourism initiatives building on the recreational tourism reputation of the county.</li> <li>• Development of at least 3 Wind Farms of the coast of Wicklow and new opportunities within the renewable energy and green technology sectors to harvest natural energy supplies.</li> <li>• Development of Blue and Green ways.</li> <li>• Development of two Data Centres in Arklow.</li> <li>• Public access points to high speed broadband at Wicklow County Campus, Brockagh Community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient delivery of new housing to accommodate the increasing population.</li> <li>• Increasing pressure from coastal erosion.</li> <li>• Proximity to Dublin may inhibit economic growth and divert investment from the county.</li> <li>• Long-term unemployment in some areas.</li> <li>• Continued retail leakage may lead to the deterioration of town centres affecting community and economic sustainability.</li> <li>• Inability to control delivery of broadband restricts potential to direct development to preferred locations.</li> <li>• Lack of committed investment in transport infrastructure may constrain development in north east of county</li> <li>• Continuance of current public transport policy likely to affect connectivity between settlements and restrict efficient delivery of education, employment opportunities and services.</li> <li>• Lack of clear identity for the county in marketing and promotion.</li> <li>• Mis-match in tourism accommodation quantity and quality with initiatives to expand visitor numbers.</li> <li>• Global political and economic threats including post Brexit trading environment.</li> <li>• Need to adapt to Climate change and futureproof business offering.</li> <li>• Need to develop local eco-systems through cluster building and regional strength recognition.</li> <li>• Lack of scaling into new markets amongst micro enterprises.</li> </ul>

<p>Centre in Laragh and Ballycoog Community centre.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding for Arklow under the Rural Economic Development Zone (REDZ) initiative will aid local community employment and rural development projects.</li> <li>• Opportunity to develop a coordinated strategy through local County Tourism body, Fáilte Ireland and the 'Ireland's Ancient East' tourism initiative.</li> <li>• Avondale House Treetop Adventure park developed by Coillte.</li> <li>• Move to circular economy.</li> <li>• Strong remote working interest and move towards.</li> </ul>	
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*Wicklow County Council*

The Economic Development Unit in Wicklow County Council takes a proactive approach to supporting enterprise development. In addition to the services offered by the LEO, the Economic Development Unit works closely with both the IDA and Enterprise Ireland to develop offerings aimed at attracting inward investment. Officials in the Unit regularly meet with entrepreneurs both locally based and those looking to locate in the county, to assist in identification of suitable premises or land and in relation to planning and development issues. In addition, the Council is proactive in engaging with businesses including hosting Business Briefing events.

LEO Wicklow works closely with the Economic Development Unit in Wicklow County Council to further the objectives and actions within the Local Economic Community Plan and is also represented on the Strategic Policy Group.

The Economic Development Unit has particular focus on the development of the recommendations within the Maritime Development Strategy, The Food Development Strategy, the Draft Screen Sector Development Strategy for County Wicklow, The draft Development Strategy for Wicklow County Campus and the draft Craft Development Strategy as well as the wider economic development of the county.

Initiatives run by the unit include initiatives to make County Wicklow the best place to do business in, such as the annual meetings of the **Co. Wicklow Business Advisory Council** and the annual Business Breakfast Briefing. **The Business Advisory Council** is made up of key industry actors and is an important communication structure and can help achieve sustainable benefits for businesses, residents and visitors alike. At the inaugural meeting of the Business Advisory Council in 2019, the members contributed ideas and suggestions to make Wicklow *“a better place in which to do business, live and visit”*.

The second meeting of the Advisory council took place in early 2021 to discuss areas of activity that the Council should focus on

**The Business Breakfast Briefing** is an annual opportunity to network with a large representation of local businesses and for senior management and the Economic Development Team to inform the business community of positive developments throughout the County and areas of particular focus for opportunities and development to enhance the county from a business perspective.

Wicklow County Council has a number of business supports in place to supports businesses:

## Vacancy Relief on Rates Scheme

### The Small Business Support Grant

A Small Business Support Grant/Rates Incentive Scheme at 5% of the annual bill (up to a maximum of €250) is available to qualifying ratepayers in Co Wicklow. The Scheme is subject to the following conditions:

- Rates liability per property of €10,000 or less
- 5% incentive to a maximum grant of €250
- Incentive only applies to current 2018 rate demand amount
- Arrears have to be paid in full

### New Business Rates Incentive Scheme

The New Business Rates Incentive Scheme will provide a grant on commercial rates for the first two years of a new business when it re-occupies a property that has been vacant for a long period of time. Wicklow County Council wants to encourage thriving and diverse business centre's and wants to see the number of vacant retail/ commercial properties decrease. This grant is intended to incentivise and encourage reoccupation of vacant retail/commercial properties.

In 2017, the councillors of WCC voted to reduce the rate of development levies for the construction of film infrastructure to 0% in order to stimulate the development of the screen sector.

### Placemaking

Wicklow County Council has a firm focus on the need for enhanced placemaking and through the Economic Development Team and the Community Cultural and Social Development sections has a pipeline of URDF and RRDF applications to enhance public places and facilities in the county.

Placemaking focuses on the interaction between people and the built environment, a sense of place and facilitating a high quality of life. There is growing acceptance that placemaking generates social and economic outcomes and fosters healthy sustainable communities. Placemaking encapsulates all the elements that make a place memorable and enjoyable to be in. There are key elements in the creation of attractive places and these include, but are not limited to, the quality of the built environment, the public realm, how buildings and spaces interact with each other, active street frontage, variety of uses, permeability and pedestrian activity, the availability of community facilities and amenities. The experience a place offers is now considered as important as the range of shops a place can offer. The principles of placemaking have the potential to transform underutilised public space into vibrant assets that enhance the town or village centre.

The Economic Development Unit supports the work of the Town Teams in their efforts to develop the local economy

And also supports participation in the Enterprise Town Awards, twinning and other such initiatives.

### Grant Aid applied for Economic Development and Enterprise Support:

Category	Project	Total Project Cost	Matched funding required
URDF	Arklow Harbour	14,064,000	3,516,237
URDF	Bray Harbour	9,500,000	2,380,000
URDF	Wicklow Harbour	13,598,000	3,399,500
RRDF	Rathdrum Community Enterprise Hub	6,978,000	697,800

Failte Irl Destination Towns	Abbey Grounds	667,000	167,000
REDF	Clermont Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus	Est. €3,300,000	€1,960,000

### **Love Local Campaign**

The Economic Development Unit has developed a Love Local promotional and advertising campaign to promote shopping for local goods and services and ran in partnership with the local media.

### **Wicklow Enterprise Park**

Wicklow Enterprise Park provides affordable high quality work spaces, training rooms and meeting rooms in Wicklow Town. WEP aims to engage in the promotion and development of industry in the county of Wicklow by providing a comprehensive range of services and facilities to each generation of local businesses and entrepreneurs aimed at stimulating, creating and sustaining local employment and enterprise on a 'roll over', continuing and ongoing basis and developing a high grade and professionally operated centre by offering a comprehensive range of high quality services and facilities, working closely and in partnership with all other local organisations and groups in impacting on the unemployed, together with the local authorities and with the relevant State agencies.

Wicklow local authority and LEO Wicklow are represented on the board of WEP and support the services provided by WEP.

### **Arklow Business Enterprise Centre and Arklow Courthouse Enterprise Hub**

Arklow Business Enterprise Centre offers state of the art, purpose built remote working units, offices, office pods and light industrial units to the Arklow business community at affordable rates. Recently upgrade with an Enterprise Ireland COVID fund.

Wicklow local authority and LEO Wicklow are represented on the board of WEP and support the services provided by WEP.

### **Baltinglass Enterprise Hub**

The conversion of the former Baltinglass Courthouse into a co-working hub and new library is an RRDF project as part of placemaking and larger Baltinglass public realm improvements and will support the efforts of Wicklow County Council to reverse the commuting trend and meet demand for remote working facilities.

## Four year outlook

### 1.2 Review of 2017-2020

As part of the LEO **Business Information & Advisory Services**, during the last four years, LEO Wicklow responded to over 2500 new enquiries for support and assistance and provided one to one business advice and mentoring services to more than 2200 businesses.

#### **Enterprise Support Services:**

From 2017-2020, LEO Wicklow awarded €2,619,500 in Feasibility, Priming and Expansion and Technical Assistance for Micro-Exporters grants to 154 companies in order to assist them to scale, grow and create employment. The enterprises on the LEO Portfolio (companies that have received grant aid) created 171 net new jobs over the last reporting period, and currently provide employment to 640 people.

Over 60 companies seeking alternative finance were assisted with applying for Microfinance Ireland funding, and 12 craft and food companies were financially supported to exhibit at Showcase and the National Ploughing Championships prior to 2020.

In order to maximise business potential, LEO Wicklow provided business skills and IT skills training supports such as workshops, seminars, and training sessions to over 4290 business people over the same period. These training supports are provided to equip entrepreneurs, owners and managers with the knowledge to plan, grow and sustain productivity, innovation and competitiveness, as well as encourage greater technology uptake.

From 2015-2020 LEO Wicklow approved 597 Trading Online Vouchers to enhance their trading online offer or start trading online for the first time.

Fifteen businesses progressed to become Enterprise Ireland (EI) clients and others were informed of potential EI financial, business and innovation / research supports such as the Innovation Voucher, the New Frontiers programme, the Agile R&D supports, GradStart, as well as new market development supports and the research library.

Under the strategic objective of **Entrepreneurship Support Services**, LEO Wicklow engaged with over 4978 students from over 18 local secondary schools in the Student Enterprise Programme to develop enterprise awareness.

As part of the Irelands Best Young Entrepreneur Competition, all entries over the 3 years were provided with specialised mentoring support and a specialised business boot camp to over 50 participants.

To **Encourage an Entrepreneurship Culture**, LEO Wicklow organises an annual networking event with keynote speakers for National Womens Enterprise Day and runs the Network of Entrepreneurial Women who met 28 times over the last four years with the participation of over 550 female entrepreneurs.

LEO Wicklow and Wicklow County Council contributed and sponsored the Network Ireland National Conference when it took place in County Wicklow.

**In 2020**, Local Enterprise Office Wicklow has supported and assisted over 2,800 small businesses through the challenges that both Brexit and COVID-19 presented them.

The supports provided were as follows:

- **Online Business Skills and IT skills Training Courses**

Training courses and seminars are an important aspect in the development and management of any small business. Local Enterprise Office Wicklow recognised the need to provide training courses that were relevant to the sudden changes and challenges that small businesses in County Wicklow had to deal with. 1148 businesses participated in the 64 digital training courses and workshops.

- **Business Advice Clinic**

The Business Advice Clinic is a free service provided to pre-start, start-up, or established businesses throughout Wicklow. It is a one-to-one visit, that has been held remotely during the pandemic, that gives clients an opportunity to speak with a business advisor confidentially. During the past 12 months over 510 clients have availed of this service.

- **Trading Online Voucher Scheme**

The Trading Online Voucher is a financial incentive for small businesses to develop or enhance their ability to trade online. Under the scheme, a qualifying business may apply for funding to a maximum value of €2,500. As a result of the COVID lockdowns, small business owners quickly realised the need to start selling online resulting in 430 funding applications being approved worth over €1,000,000 in the past 12 months.

- **Brexit Specific Mentoring**

To assist micro enterprises get Brexit ready, the Local Enterprise Office Wicklow ran a number of 'Prepare Your Business for Customs' workshops. Over 100 businesses participated in these free workshops to get ahead of the impact of Brexit. 42 Wicklow businesses also availed of free customs specific mentoring where clients could speak one-to-one remotely to a customs consultant.

- **Business Continuity Voucher Scheme (BCV Scheme)**

This scheme was launched in response to COVID-19. The Voucher was worth up to €2,500 in third party consultancy costs for businesses with up to 50 employees and open to all sectors. 283 applications were approved to work with mentors towards a Business Continuity Strategy. Value of this scheme was over €300,000.

- **#LookForLocal Campaign**

A nationwide #LookForLocal campaign was run by the network of 31 LEOs in partnership with Enterprise Ireland. As thousands of businesses had transformed how they provided goods and services to COVID-19 it was more important than ever to support local businesses and buy locally. Local Enterprise Office Wicklow along with Wicklow County Council advertised and promoted this campaign through the local media.

- **Networking**

Networking is a valuable and productive activity for business owners/managers. Networking puts you in contact with like-minded people whose experience and knowledge can help greatly in helping you solve the day-to-day problems of business and exploit the opportunities. This was especially



important during the past 12 months which was why additional Network of Entrepreneurial Women (N.E.W) were established online. Over 90 women in businesses participated.

- **Micro Enterprise Assistance Fund**

The objective COVID-19 Micro-Enterprise Assistance Scheme is to provide a grant of a minimum of €500 to a maximum €1,000 in respect of vouched expenditure contribution towards the cost of reopening or keeping a business operational and re-connecting with employees and customers. 18 Applications received and 7 approved. Others didn't meet eligibility criteria but were offered other supports.

- **Stimulus Scheme**

32 portfolio clients qualified for this scheme, which includes specifically focussed consultancy support to enhance capabilities.

- **Microfinance Ireland: Brexit and COVID Loan for businesses affected by COVID.**

The MFI loan was reduced from €50k back to €25k, interested dropped to 4.5% for applications submitted through the LEO. The office noted a sharp increase in interest in applying with assistance of a LEO mentor but not all resulting in an actual application as overall there was a reluctance to apply for a loan. 21 Applications for MFI loans were submitted through the LEO in 2020, 14 were approved.

# 2020 REVIEW

**Over 2,803 Small Businesses Assisted & Supported by Local Enterprise Office Wicklow**



## TRAINING

- **1148** Businesses participated

## TRAINING COURSES

- **62** Training events



## BUSINESS ADVICE CLINIC

- **513** Clients attended Business Advice Clinics - FREE 1 - to - 1

## MENTORING

- **243** Businesses received mentoring

## TRADING ONLINE VOUCHER (TOV)

- The voucher is a financial incentive for small businesses to develop or enhance their ability to trade online. Under the scheme, a qualifying business may apply for funding to a maximum value of €2,500.
- **475** Applications received
- **€1,000,000** Worth of approvals



## GETTING IRELAND BREXIT READY

### BREXIT MENTORING

- **41** Clients availed of Brexit Mentoring

### PREPARE YOUR BUSINESS FOR CUSTOMS WORKSHOPS

- **100** Clients attended the Prepare Your Business For Customs Workshop

## COVID-19 - BUSINESS CONTINUITY VOUCHER (BCV)

- A voucher worth up to €2,500 in third party consultancy and mentoring costs helped businesses to develop short-term and long-term strategies to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic
- **283** Businesses approved
- **€300,000** Worth of approvals



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## Section 2 - Vision/Mission and Overarching Objectives

### *Local Enterprise Office 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.”

### *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

**The overarching objectives of LEO Wicklow are set out below:**

### **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.**

**The Business Advice Clinic** is a free service provided to pre-start, start-up, or established businesses throughout Wicklow. The Business Advice meetings provide entrepreneurs at any stage of their development an opportunity to discuss their ideas with an experienced business advisor, obtaining confidential, objective and expert opinion and information. The meetings are of a one hour duration, provided by external business advisors. The Business Advisors follow up with an email outlining matters discussed and next steps.

During the past 4 years, 1910 clients were booked in for the free business advice clinics, over the last 12 months over 510 clients have availed of this service which is now done through virtual meetings.

The Business advice clinics will continue to be held 3 times a week or more if demand is high in order to deliver this objective for the period 2021-2024.

The business and IT skills training programme

To assist the small business community in meeting the challenges of the business world, LEO Wicklow provides a wide range of high-quality training supports which are tailored to meet specific business requirements.

Whether it is starting a business or growing a business there is something suitable for everyone including for instance the Start Your Own Business course, Idea Exploration, Bookkeeping and Tax & VAT, Digital marketing campaigns and Search Engine Optimisation for your website.

- **Make It Easier to do Business**

LEO Wicklow provides 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. Eligible clients can avail of the mentoring programme where a specialist mentor assists the client in overcoming a specific problem or issue.

LEO Wicklow has a communications strategy in place in order to promote, advertise and raise awareness of its business supports.

Some of the actions contained in the strategy include:

- Promotion of both LEO business supports and signposting to other support agencies, available to businesses at different stages of development through: active communications via PR, Marketing, Digital Marketing, Social Media, Website, Direct Marketing and weekly newsletters.
- Show-casing of role models including case studies. Case studies are shared with the central communications unit in order to showcase best practise in Wicklow and raise awareness of our supports.
- LEO Wicklow has implemented this objective over the last 4 years by adding all local authority business relevant information to the LEO website and by actively contributing to the business supports section on [www.wicklow.ie](http://www.wicklow.ie).
- A number of information events were held over the last 4 year in collaboration and partnership with our protocol partners and other relevant agencies to bring all business supports together in one venue enhancing information sharing and gathering for clients.
- LEO Wicklow will give updates and presentations of our services at information events with the local chambers of commerce, at local authority level, sector specific network meetings, and during virtual lunch and learn webinars.
- Our social media engagement has grown steadily over the last 4 years and the aim is to grow the reach of LEO Wicklow year on year:  
An **increase in the number of followers** on each Social Media platform.  
Twitter from 1915 followers to 2000 or more  
Facebook from 3341 follows to 3500 or more  
Instagram from 948 followers to 1000 or more  
(Date of numbers recorded 21/01/2021)

LEO Wicklow plan to deliver this objective for the period 2021-2024 in a similar manner as the actions above, aiming to hold a variety of information webinars / seminars per year.

### 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.

LEO Wicklow provided **business skills and IT skills training** supports such as workshops, seminars, and training sessions to over 4290 entrepreneurs over the last four year period in order to maximise business potential.

These training supports are provided to equip entrepreneurs, owners and managers with the knowledge to plan, grow and sustain productivity, innovation and competitiveness, as well as encourage greater technology uptake.

From 2017-2020, LEO Wicklow awarded €2,619,566 euro in grants to 154 companies. The enterprises on the LEO Portfolio (companies that have received grant aid) created 171 net new jobs over the last reporting period, and currently provide employment to 640 people.

An annual analysis of portfolio client companies takes place and the preparation of an annual plan for intervention based on assessment of the actual position and the potential of the company. Companies that are identified as high risk (including companies in the Start Up category and those losing jobs) will be targeted for a Diagnostic Health Check. Follow up interventions will include as appropriate: Finance, Mentoring, Business Planning, Referral to EI, Hi Start programme.

Companies that are identified as performing will be targeted with assistance to review, develop and implement strategic plans. Additional interventions as appropriate will include: LEAN for Micro, Green for Micro, The Breakthrough Innovation Programme, Marketing & Export Assistance, Referrals to EI, Finance, Mentoring, and other specialist programmes.

Other companies will be targeted with a competitiveness & opportunities assessment. Follow up may include as appropriate: LEAN for Micro, Green for Micro, The Breakthrough Innovation Programme, Marketing & Export Assistance, Referrals to EI, Finance, Mentoring, Other specialist programmes.

**Trading Online Voucher** uptake has been high since the introduction of this scheme in 2015. From 2015-2020 LEO Wicklow approved 793 Trading Online Vouchers to enhance their trading online offer or start trading online for the first time. In order to inform clients on the scheme, ensure maximum impact from the voucher and give tips on how to start trading online, 39 Trading Online Seminars have been held with 2017 participants from the business community attending.

- **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.

Fifteen businesses progressed to become Enterprise Ireland clients and others were made aware of potential EI financial, business and innovation / research supports such as the Innovation Voucher, the New Frontiers programme, HPSU supports, Competitive Start Up Fund, GradStart programme, the Agile R&D supports as well as new market development supports and the research library.

During the same time, a number of EI clients who didn't meet their agreed milestones came back to receive further support from us. These clients were offered business advice and mentoring support and a small number also progressed to become portfolio clients.

LEO Wicklow plan to deliver this objective for the period 2021-2024 in a similar manner as the actions above, aiming to assist portfolio clients to build resilience, raise productivity and competitiveness through programme such as Lean for Micro, hold a variety of higher level Management Development and financial management training programmes to encourage strategic thinking and business confidence and leadership.

An export development programme will be offered over the next three years to help businesses develop new markets.

## 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 businesses; also promoting enterprise and self-employment as a viable career option among the wider population.

LEO Wicklow has a role in encouraging entrepreneurship and promoting an enterprise culture in the County. There are three main strands to fulfilling this role, each of which is associated with particular activities undertaken by the LEO, as set out below.

### Raising Awareness

- Promotion of entrepreneurship and enterprise through: Active communications via PR, Marketing, digital Marketing, Social Media, Website, Direct Marketing.
- Show-casing of role models including case studies.

### Encouraging an Entrepreneurship Culture and Developing an Entrepreneurial mindset

LEO Wicklow takes part in the national competitions including the Student Enterprise Awards, Irelands Best Young Entrepreneur and the National Enterprise Awards.

**Student Enterprise Programme:** LEO Wicklow works closely with the secondary schools in the county, in particular at transition year, providing supports to teachers to roll out the Student Enterprise Programme in their schools. The programme facilitates the students to set up and run their own enterprise and culminates in a competition and awards ceremony.

LEO Wicklow engaged with over 4978 students from over 18 local secondary schools in the Student Enterprise Programme to develop enterprise awareness.

**Investigating Your Business Idea workshops.** This workshop and the Essential Idea exploration and Customer Validation workshops are held twice a year to encourage start-ups and established businesses with a new idea to validate and explore their idea, and provide them with tools and techniques to validate the idea in the market.

**Start Your Own Business courses:** LEO Wicklow main pre-start training support offer all the critical elements to Starting your own Business successfully. On average 6 training courses are offered throughout the year with 90 participants. For the next 4 years, sector specific SYOB courses will be included in the training programme, to reflect the growth areas for opportunities as identified in the next Regional Enterprise Plan: i.e. screen sector, maritime sector, tourism, food production and renewable energy.

### Irelands Best Young Entrepreneur

LEO Wicklow was heavily involved at both local and national level in the design and implementation of the IBYE initiative. In 2017, LEO Wicklow received 52 applications. Following appraisal of applications, 18 individuals aged between 18 and 30 were selected to participate in the LEO Wicklow intensive business boot camp. The finalists went on to compete at County and Regional level. As part of the **Irelands Best Young Entrepreneur Competition**, all entries over the 3 years were provided with specialised mentoring support and a specialised business boot camp to over 50 participants.

### Showcase and National Ploughing Exhibitions

The LEO Network collaborate on two major trade/consumer shows each year, taking a large branded space where LEO client companies are supported to exhibit. Over the last 4 years LEO Wicklow supported 12 companies to participate in the two shows, Showcase and the National Ploughing Championships.

### Networking and Clusters

LEO Wicklow organises an annual networking event with keynote speakers for National Womens Enterprise Day and runs the Network of Entrepreneurial Women who met 28 times with the participation of over 550 female entrepreneurs. LEO Wicklow also supported the development of the West Wicklow Business Network through provision of a facilitator to get the network established.

LEO Wicklow is involved in the promotion and events of the local food sector by promoting the 'Wicklow Naturally' food brand for the county. The artisan food sector is important in the county and through extensive promotions there is a strong local uptake in the regional Food Starter and Food Academy training programmes.

LEO Wicklow plan to deliver this objective for the period 2021-2024 in a similar manner as the actions above. Following the trends in remote working, and to build back better, there will be a focus on the development of a number of sector specific networks, and on promoting female entrepreneurship.

### **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, Rates framework, economic development, etc to start-ups and small businesses in county.

LEO Wicklow has implemented a wide range of objectives in the Local Economic Community Plan and Regional Enterprise Plan during the last period and will continue to build on these with such actions as the development of a network of remote working hubs, the continued development of the screen and food sectors underpinned by sector specific enterprise and incubation hubs.

The next Regional Enterprise Plan will contain actions to maximise on opportunities presented by renewable energy and in particular offshore wind energy and the focus will be on starting networks in these areas where there's interaction and learning between micro enterprise and SMEs in these sectors.

LEO Wicklow plan to deliver this objective for the period 2021-2024 with the focus on developing an enterprise friendly county in conjunction with the County Council, the Economic Development Unit and key partners such as Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Wicklow Enterprise Park, Arklow Business Enterprise Centre, KWETB, County Wicklow Partnership and Bray Partnership and others to address key development issues and ensure a supportive environment for growth.

LEO Wicklow will develop and implementation this three year local enterprise plans and will also continue to contribute to the development and implementation of the LECP and the REP as well as the County Development Plan.

We will aim to access EU and other sources of funding to support enterprise and economic development at local level. In partnership with the IDA and the Economic Development unit we will promote and market Co. Wicklow as locations for investment in.

As part of the Regional Enterprise Plan there will be ongoing development, management and maximizing of appropriate enterprise infrastructure or assets at county level.

## Section 3 - Strategic Priorities

### 3.1 Strategic Priorities for LEO Wicklow 2021-2024

The uncertainty and negative impacts on SMEs created by external influences such as Brexit and Covid-19 are a reminder that some areas of Local Enterprise Office activity can change radically and very quickly in the short term. The LEO will continue to deliver and build on a range of complimentary and reinforcing actions focused on achieving our strategic aims and objectives. Through these, and their associated actions, the impact of the Local Enterprise Offices will be greatly increased – a key deliverable of Future Jobs Ireland 2019.

However it is important that the LEO acting alone cannot achieve the vision or these aims but require the mutual support and integration of their actions and services with those of key stakeholders such as Enterprise Ireland, Local Authorities, third level Universities and Institutes of Technology, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and others. It is also important to recognise that the LEO needs adequate resources to be ambitious and achieve the proposed actions to address the following strategic priorities:

- Entrepreneurship,
- Competitiveness and Digitalisation,
- Green/Sustainability,
- Exporting/Internationalisation,
- Innovation,
- Infrastructure,
- Clustering and Networks

#### Entrepreneurship

The following priorities are planned to foster, promote and support local entrepreneurship:

In order to increase the conversion of SYOB participants to M1 Project Proposals we will conduct a 6 month follow up with past SYOB participants to identify clients who can progress to become HPSU or portfolio clients. In addition, an evaluation of the number and outputs from the current SYOB programmes may show the need for piloting alternative and more targeted approaches to start-up generation and support, such a higher level digital version of the SYOB which can be taken at any time and speed that suits the client.

In partnership with other LEOs or local agencies, LEO Wicklow intends to run innovative Start Your Own Business programmes tailored to local growth sectors such as the offshore wind / renewable energy sector / content creation sector, tourism and maritime sector.

In partnership with the Economic Development Unit in WCC, LEO Wicklow will focus on maximising opportunities for start-ups and established businesses through strategic alliances with SMEs in these sectors such as SSE Renewables and Echelon Data Centre

LEO Wicklow, in partnership with the local development agencies, will pilot new models for engaging new promoters in start-ups with a focus on under-represented demographics including female, youth, ethnic, disability etc.

Higher level Start Your Own Business digital course offering to fast track high-potential clients.

To promote entrepreneurship culture we will aim to expand to participation in the Student Enterprise Programme junior years.

In order to further our aim of reverse commuting and to maximise the COVID induced remote working trend, the LEO will assist the development of a network of high quality and attractive remote working hubs stimulating start-up eco-systems and cluster development.

The LEO Wicklow office will support the community Broadband Connection Point (PCP) at our office location in Wicklow County Campus, Rathnew and promote suitable business supports at this Point and the others throughout the county.

The trend towards accepted remote working presents an opportunity to build back better in a post COVID economy, especially in relation to enhanced female entrepreneurship opportunities.

The growing number of tech companies, especially in the North Wicklow area, and the positive uptake and interest in the Trading Online Voucher in Co. Wicklow shows the level of interest in embracing digitalisation and new technology and the LEO will continue to offer new and relevant IT skills training events and networking opportunities to facilitate this. LEO Wicklow will continually monitor local data to identify emerging trends and challenges and respond accordingly.

A new market development programme will be developed and offered, potentially regionally, to portfolio clients or potential portfolio clients looking to develop new export markets and grow their exports. Due to the implication of Brexit in Northern Ireland we will highlight opportunities for local food producers to supply retail chains in N-I whose UK suppliers have been affected by customs regulations and are no longer supplying into this market.

LEO Wicklow will continue to support the important work of local social enterprises with suitable supports.

LEO Wicklow will continue to partner with the Dublin LEO offices in the Hi-Start programme to assist potential HPSU clients become investor ready and progress to the HPSU unit in EI.

Through the new Content Creation Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus which is due to open in Q3 2022 there will be new opportunities to enhance our partnership with IT Carlow and position a New Frontiers programme in the county.

Our relationship with and collaboration with Enterprise Ireland towards furthering the HPSU Agenda will be at the forefront of start up portfolio clients. Already two portfolio clients have transferred to HPSU status in 2021, a trend we aim to continue where possible.

Through the actions contained in the REP and the LECF we will aim to develop an integrated enterprise support ecosystem at local, regional and national levels with key stakeholders such as EI, KWETBs, IT Carlow and other Third Level partners.

## **Competitiveness and Digitalisation**

As identified by the various national reports and policies, there is a need to drive competitiveness with small and micro enterprises to enable them to become more productive and compete internationally.

In order to maximise local knowledge sharing and competitiveness, there's a need to support and initiate the development of local sectoral networks and clusters to drive productivity as referenced in other parts of this plan. The success of the Lean for Micro programme has resulted in a near 100% uptake of this support over the last couple of years. We will continue to promote and develop the Lean for Micro programme, especially targeting portfolio businesses, with an aim to increase the uptake in the coming years.

Through the inclusion of competitiveness modules in the Management Development Programme (MDP) and the planned follow on version of the MDP, we will seek to accelerate the adoption and implementation of sustainable business practices among small and micro businesses, including enhanced digitalisation .

The next Regional Enterprise Plan will contain actions to maximise on opportunities presented by renewable energy and in particular offshore wind energy and the focus will be on starting networks in these areas where there's interaction and learning between micro enterprise and SMEs in these sectors.

The large number of TOV participation offers an opportunity to further promote online sales opportunities, adaptation of new technologies and digitalisation resulting in enhanced competitiveness and productivity. Suitable training events such as the 'Work Smarter in Business using Tech' seminar will address the barriers micro enterprises face in relation to the adaptation of technology.

Tech mentors to help identify new technology to achieve enhanced productivity and the Lean for Micro are suitable supports to assist with overcoming barriers such as the need to integrate with older systems and ensuring that businesses have the right in-house capabilities.

## Green/Sustainability

Wicklow County Council was the first Council in Ireland to declare a Climate & Biodiversity Emergency and has also established a Climate & Biodiversity Action Strategic Policy Committee.

Priority areas include:

- Energy Efficiency & Reducing Emissions
- Sustainable Energy Communities – 8 signed up
- Mainstreaming climate action throughout all Wicklow County Council services
- Create awareness of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In 2019, Wicklow County Council launched it's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy which addresses how Wicklow County Council as an organisation responds to the impacts of Climate Change. It does not look directly at the work being done to prevent or mitigate Climate Change.

The Climate Adaptation Strategy aims to:

- Make Wicklow a stronger County by reducing impacts of future climate change related events.
- Fully consider and mainstream climate adaptation in the day to day delivery of services by WCC.
- Actively engage with and inform citizens and communities in Wicklow about the impacts of climate change. Public awareness is key to developing effective climate adaptation measures.

The Strategy features a range of actions across the following six themes:

1. Local Adaptation Governance and Business Operations (functions and activities of the local authority)
2. Infrastructure and Built Environment (climate resilient infrastructure)
3. Land use and development (sustainable policies and measures)
4. Drainage and Flood Management
5. Natural Resources and Cultural Infrastructure (natural capacity to absorb the impacts of climate change)
6. Community Health and Wellbeing (empowering resilient communities)

*The strategy states that 'Climate Change will be fully integrated as a concern in all relevant plans and policies that influence planning and development. It will ensure that the County Development Plan and associated plans focus on delivering sustainable communities with climate smart buildings and infrastructure. It will ensure the continuing focus on protecting habitats in the planning system and also recognises their role in*

*protecting against Climate Change threats*'. A number of actions have been identified to fulfil this goal by integrating climate change into the CDP.

LEO Wicklow is working to ensure our own operations and supports are proofed against Climate Change impact and the council's Climate Change strategy.

LEO Wicklow ran a 'Green your Business' seminar during Local Enterprise Week in 2019 and has continued to build on this event in a number of ways:

- Through our social media channels and newsletters inform businesses and signpost to suitable business supports and encourage uptake of same.
- Highlight circular economy and MODOS training programme
- Promote the Enterprise Ireland green supports
- Inform clients of their obligations under the sustainability and Climate Change agenda

Since the launch of the Green for Micro supports during Local Enterprise Week 2021, LEO Wicklow is actively promoting this pilot programme amongst our clients database and social media followers.

The objective of the Green for Micro programme - a new initiative from the Local Enterprise Offices - is to help prepare small businesses for the low carbon, more resource efficient economy of the future. This is a **FREE** programme, available to companies with up to ten employees.

Developing a 'greener' policy can offer many benefits to your business, including:

- Increased cost savings
- Improved resource efficiency (for example: using less energy, water and materials)
- Reduced environmental footprint and greenhouse gas emissions
- Opportunities for higher and additional value on products and services
- Increased access to customers, improved corporate image
- Increased resilience to climate change impacts

There's a strong rationale for businesses to seriously take action and 'green' their operations as a recent survey results show that 33% of respondents plan to **switch to businesses which are doing more about sustainability**, while 49% also said they intend to become better informed about **the impact their purchasing has on the planet**.

It makes good business sense. With climate change, changing regulations, rising resource costs and changing customer expectations adopting a more eco-friendly approach is the best way forward for business.

**The programme offers two days of mentoring with a specialist Green Consultant** – this will include recommendations on specific changes which your business can implement. The Green Consultant will be chosen from the Enterprise Ireland Green Directory or from your Local Enterprise Office mentor panel. Each applicants' specific needs will be matched to the Green Consultant's area of expertise and the consultant will prepare a detailed Green for Micro Report on the business.

So far 4 applications have been approved and consultants have been appointed to work with the clients on their strategy.

The LEO is working in partnership with the council's Climate Action Officer to promote this support amongst customer facing staff within the council to ensure a wide promotion.

LEO Wicklow is building up a library of local businesses that have pivoted or diversified to maximise the Green and Climate Change opportunities, for instance O’Hanlon Herbs, Wicklow Way Wines, Brooklodge Hotel, and CALT Dynamics to use as case studies on our website, digital marketing and for local and national media opportunities.

As part of the Regional Enterprise Plan there will be ongoing development, management and maximizing of appropriate remote working enterprise infrastructure to further the aim of reverse commuting and remote working thus aiming to reduce local carbon emissions resulting from daily commutes.

## Innovation

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on our country. Most businesses had to embrace innovation and pivot immediately as a direct result of the economic lockdowns. Embracing new digital technologies offers the opportunity to create new ways of doing things, promote innovation and breathe new life into local communities, making them more attractive places to live and work as well as contributing to a more sustainable future.

### Workplace Innovation

Building resilience and achieving and sustaining world-class levels of performance and innovation requires an integrated approach to investment in new technologies, skills and empowering workplace practices. Workplace innovation is about the systematic adoption of workplace practices, grounded in evidence, that unleash employee-led knowledge, skill and innovation at every level of the organisation, and is recognised as one further method to help retain and ultimately increase employment.

Evidence shows that workplace innovation leads to significant and sustainable improvements both in organisational performance (e.g. increased productivity, financial performance and profitability, and improved customer service), and in employee engagement and well-being (playing a particularly important role in reducing stress, enhancing job satisfaction and mental health, and improving retention).

LEO Wicklow aims to increase the level of innovation technology adaptation and digitisation within our client firms in a number of ways:

To encourage micro enterprise to embrace ongoing innovation, LEO Wicklow promotes **the Innovation Toolkit** to our start-up and established clients.

The diagnostic toolkit consists of an online questionnaire designed to facilitate self-evaluation of the organisation’s capacity to be an innovative workplace. The toolkit is based of four pillars and signposts resources and supports to enhance performance in the areas of employee engagement, training, innovation, and productivity.

LEO Wicklow has also partnered with the Dublin LEOs in the roll out of the **Innovation Breakthrough Programme**, and ten Wicklow Businesses have so engaged successfully with this programme with very positive results and feedback. The **Breakthrough Innovation Programme** is a disciplined framework to discover and analyse where the innovation potential lies in an enterprise and how the client can capitalise on those opportunities to strive for growth.

The Breakthrough Innovation Programme is a hands on programme, delivered by DBIC which will help clients discover the innovations that will effectively **drive long-term growth and survival**. The Implementation Plan will guide clients to achieve **revenue growth, export growth, improved profitability, greater efficiency, more employment, more engagement with the innovation ecosystem**, including Dublin City University and Trinity

College Dublin, to drive fresh impetus into businesses and ultimately lead to a more sustainable enterprise delivering value to customers.

The programme will continue to run throughout 2021.

LEO Wicklow will also continue to work with EI in maximising the opportunities arising from the **Agile Innovation funding** and promote this funding stream to portfolio clients in order to encourage innovation.

Innovative Start-Ups will be informed of the range of tools such as the Innovation Toolkit, Innovation Voucher, New Frontiers, supports through the Innovation and design centres such as DBIC, the Centre for Design, and Third Level research as well as the Feasibility Study grant.

Enhanced focus on the need to innovate and also to develop new markets will be included in our Management Development Programmes, Accelerator courses and other suitable interventions including connections between client firms and local innovation ecosystems, especially in the regional growth sectors such as renewable offshore energy and content creation sector.

### Exporting/Internationalisation

Exporting businesses have proven to be more innovative, productive and resilient relative to their non-exporting counterparts.

Success in export markets is crucial to the long-term growth of Irish businesses and the Irish economy. Support for companies focused on growth through international sales is a priority for LEO Wicklow. We are committed to facilitating the development of a strong exporting sector locally and have the following supports in place to encourage the development of new markets:

A dedicated Export Advisor is embedded to work with new and existing clients, currently nearly half of our portfolio client export to the UK or beyond, to realise their global ambition. The Export Advisor will advise clients of the current supports available through Enterprise Ireland and the LEO to develop new markets such as the Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters Grant (TAME), referral to the Export Division if appropriate, referring to the Market Research Centre, the international office network and any exporter development related events open to LEO clients.

Future Management Development Programmes will include a module on the need to innovate and to develop new markets aimed at portfolio clients.

A regional early stage exporter development programme is being developed for rolling out later in 2021 and beyond. The effectiveness of this intervention and outputs will be measured through the annual employment survey. Learnings from this pilot programme will be applied to shape future export supports. This new programme will be integrated with those of EI and where appropriate with EI overseas offices.

Uptake in the TAME grant was down in 2020 due to travel restrictions but renewed focus on promoting this support to portfolio clients should see an uptake for the coming years.

Businesses who have availed of the Trading Online Voucher are well placed to consider developing new markets, and further trading online training to maximise new market opportunities is included in the training programme going forward.

LEO Wicklow continues to support local firms to effectively respond to Brexit related challenges and delivers Prepare your Business for Customs workshops and one to one customs mentoring.

The above supports towards new market development is designed to grow the number of clients with exporting capability to in turn transfer to EI.

## Networks and Clustering

LEO Wicklow has its own Female Entrepreneurship network called Network of Entrepreneurial Women. The network meets monthly through an online platform. The virtual meetings have proven to be very popular since it switched from real meetings to zoom meetings with growing numbers attending month on month. The format of the NEW meetings can be changed depending on the needs and preferences of the group.

The next Regional Enterprise Plan will contain actions to maximise on opportunities presented by renewable energy and in particular offshore wind energy and the focus will be on starting networks in these areas where there's interaction and learning between micro enterprise and SMEs in these sectors such as SSE Energy and Echelon Data Centres.

LEO Wicklow in partnership with the Economic Development Team in WCC intends to develop the following networks to strengthen the local sectoral clusters and opportunities :

A Screen sector network, a renewable energy and maritime sector network, and we will continue to be involved in the further development of the local food brand 'Wicklow Naturally'.

LEO Wicklow is involved in the creation of a Craft Development Strategy which is due to be published later this year and will be involved if the strategy identifies a need for a craft network. This will be in partnership with the Local Action Group and the Economic Development Unit in WCC.

There may also scope for a tech sector network where established businesses and start ups can form new synergies and peer to peer learning.

If there's a demonstrable need, LEO Wicklow and County Wicklow Partnership will drive the development of a social enterprise network in the county.

## 3.2 Capacity and Capability Development

### REDF Projects

#### Content Creation Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus, Rathnew



REDF Funded project: Clermont Enterprise Hub, turning of the sod at Wicklow County Campus, Rathnew, 2020

The screen industry is a unique aspect of the County's economy and offers potential for significant development. Competition is emerging in other parts of the country as well as from Northern Ireland and the UK, however Wicklow benefits from a number of key advantages including its long history of film

production, the location of two internationally renowned film studios in the county (Ardmore and Ashford), the availability of locally based experienced workers in the industry, the proximity to Dublin and the abundance of diverse locations.

Funding of €1.43m was secured under the Government's Regional Enterprise Development Fund, through Enterprise Ireland in January 2020.

The Content Creation Enterprise Hub will provide 10,000sq ft of private and co-working spaces and aims to boost job creation in the sector and spin out services feeding into these industries.

It is intended to support content creation and will complement the film industry, with a particular focus on businesses servicing productions happening in Ashford Studios and Ardmore Studios.

The Hub will also offer a collaborative social space, conference centre, podcast studio and screening facility along with access to a range of existing meeting rooms and training facilities on the larger Clermont campus.

A suite of dedicated business supports to grow capacity and capability within businesses operating in this sector will be

developed by the company set up to run the Enterprise Hub in partnership with LEO Wicklow

The project will include the courtyard buildings, the second floor of the existing campus building and the chapel, which will be refurbished and renovated. It will also include a newly-built two-floor extension to the courtyard buildings.

The remainder will be matched by Wicklow County Council.

LEO Wicklow is the project lead on this project and will have very close connections and collaborations with the Hub once it's up and running. Both the LEO and the hub are based at Wicklow County Campus, Rathnew.

Construction on the Hub will commence in Q2 2021 and it's intended to launch the hub in Q2 2022.

County Wicklow is home to Ardmore Studios and Ashford Studios based in the county and a high level of screen content creation takes place in the county. It's an important economic driver and globally the demand for content is growing. The Wicklow Local Enterprise Office (LEO) has been working with small providers in this sector and Stakeholders and development agencies as well as training providers in this sector have been widely consulted and are extremely supportive of this innovative project.

### **Offshore /Renewable Energy**

Wicklow County Council and LEO Wicklow recognise the opportunities presented by the offshore renewable energy sector and is committed to developing the County as a centre of excellence for offshore wind energy through the development of its harbours as operations and maintenance bases, through developing a sector specific workforce, through provision of enterprise space for businesses within the sector.

The development of a centre of Excellence for the Offshore Wind Energy Sector has the potential to link in with 2 key areas of the past Regional Enterprise Plan for the Mid East till 2020:

- STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: Develop a network of innovative co-working spaces
- STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4: Ensure the availability of skills and talent to realise the Mid-East's future economic potential and address upskilling requirements.

Offshore Wind farms proposed for off the coast of Wicklow include:

- Arklow Bank Windfarm SSE Renewables
- Dublin Array RWE
- Codling Wind Park EDF/Fred Olsen

Each project is valued at €1 to €2 billion

## **Food Development Hub**

As part of the Food Development Strategy for County Wicklow, Wicklow County Council has commissioned a feasibility study for the development of a Food Development Enterprise Hub in the mid term. Artisan food production and larger food production companies make up an important part of the food production sector in the County. Once artisan producers start to scale there is a lack of production units to move into. To support the growth of this sector a need has been established for the development of such a hub that can link with the services in the Boyne Valley Food Hub and the Athy Food hub through the network of innovative co-working spaces.

The development of a Food Development Enterprise Hub for County Wicklow has the potential to link in with 2 key areas of the Regional Enterprise Plan for the Mid East

- STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: Develop a network of innovative co-working spaces.
- STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: Build an eco-system framework to support the agri-food sector in the Boyne Valley.

## **Remote working**

Earlier this year, the government launched 'Making Remote Work', the country's new National Remote Work Strategy. As part of the strategy, the Government has committed to introducing new legislation which will give employees a legal right to request remote working. Network of remote working hub throughout the Mid East Region.

While work has commenced on the next REP 2021-2024, there is no draft version yet. However there will be a number of actions in the REP concerning the opportunities of offshore Renewable Energy developments in the county, a Food Incubation and development Hub and a network of remote working hubs in the region and REDF funding may be sought for any of these actions in which LEO Wicklow will be involved.

## **Management Development Capability**

LEO Wicklow will work with portfolio clients to drive the strategic priorities mentioned of Entrepreneurship, Competitiveness and Digitalisation, Green/Sustainability, Exporting/Internationalisation, Innovation, Infrastructure, Clustering and Networks using Management Development and/or Individual Coaching.

All these strategic priorities will be reflected in modules within the MDP and the MDP Advanced programmes which also includes individual coaching as part of the programme.

## **3.3 National LEO Programmes**

### **Local Enterprise Week**

Local Enterprise Week(LEW) is a national initiative by the Government of Ireland and organised by the network of Local Enterprise Offices and supported by Enterprise Ireland and the local authorities.

In 2021, Over 270 events took place online for Local Enterprise Week, which ran from Monday March 1st to Friday, March 5<sup>th</sup> 2021. The schedule included 10 special 'Spotlight' events, organised locally but open to all in addition to the local events. The theme in 2021 was #MakingitHappen.

Each year for LEW, LEO Wicklow organises an extensive programme of events to cater for clients at Pre-Start, Start and Established phase.

The events include one-to-one clinics (Customs, GDPR, Digital Marketing), specialist seminars and webinars (How to Green your Business), online or real live networking opportunities (Network of Entrepreneurial Women), and

training workshops covering our priority areas and business and IT skills, such as the Start Your Own Business, a Leadership workshop and the Trading Online Seminar.

The schedule of events is promoted and advertised extensively through local and national media and social media.

### **National Ploughing Championships**

The National Ploughing Championships have been held annually in September, with the exception of 202 due to COVID 19 pandemic. Over 250,000 consumers visit a 50 acre exhibition and trade arena.

This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the quality and high standard of goods and services supported by the Local Enterprise Office.

As part of the LEO's National Programme to enable enterprise culture, the Local Enterprise offices are hosting a Local Enterprise Village to provide an opportunity for clients to take full advantage of the unique consumer event. Wicklow LEO usually have one stand available for interested Wicklow Businesses and puts out an expression of interest for clients wishing the opportunity to exhibit in the LEO stand at a subsidized rate.

Priority is given to enterprises manufacturing their own product or offering an innovative service relevant to the audience expected at the show.

### **National Women's Enterprise Day**

LEO Wicklow runs a Network of Entrepreneurial Women which meets virtually on a monthly basis. The meetings are free and are organised and steered by the co-ordinator.

The format of the meetings is informal but generally one business will be featured as star business and given the opportunity to make a short presentation.

These meetings are well attended and provide valuable opportunities for attendees to learn and share experiences, build new relationships and partnerships, the sell, to test new products and conduct market research amongst peers and receive feedback on their offering.

The meetings attract established and experienced female entrepreneurs as well as start-up which guarantees an optimal learning and networking environment.



### **Student Enterprise Programme**

The Student Enterprise Programme, an initiative run by the Network of Local Enterprise Offices of Ireland, is Ireland's largest and most successful student enterprise programme with over 26,000 second level students taking part each year.

The objective of the programme is to give students from 1st year to 6th year an opportunity to learn how 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 get to do everything a real life entrepreneur would do from coming up with the business idea to marketing, sales and preparing a business plan.

At the end of the Programme, judges appointed by LEO Wicklow select an overall winner during our Student Enterprise Awards and this winning business gets to compete at the National Final for the 'Student Enterprise of the Year' award.

## National Enterprise Awards

Organised by the network of Local Enterprise Offices, the awards recognise the achievements of Ireland's small businesses in creating jobs, contributing to their community or innovating new products and services.

The National Enterprise Awards are an initiative of the Local Enterprise Offices and supported by Enterprise Ireland, local authorities and the Government of Ireland.

Each year finalists are competing for eight regional awards: Dublin Region, South West, Mid East, South, South East, North West, North East and West.

In addition to the established awards for export success and for innovation in bringing a new product or service to

market, in 2020 several new award categories were introduced, designed to reflect the changing business landscape. These include a Future Focus Award that recognises actions taken to improve sustainability, to implement lean initiatives or to improve their business's carbon footprint or energy efficiency.

The Pivot Award will go to a business that has taken specific actions to address the unprecedented challenges of the last 12 months.

LEO Wicklow nominates a local business each year to represent County Wicklow at the national awards.

In 2018, Wicklow based business Asistec won the South East Regional Award during the NEA.

## Irish Best Young Entrepreneur

In 2019, 1,644 young entrepreneurs entered IBYE nationally, which is an initiative of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and supported by Enterprise Ireland and local authorities.

The aim of the IBYE initiative, which is delivered nationally through the Local Enterprise Offices, is to encourage the establishment and development of new innovative businesses by Ireland's young entrepreneurs (18-35 year olds). This is hugely important for job-creation as two thirds of all new jobs are generated by businesses in the first five years of existence – more start-ups and a thriving entrepreneurial culture will lead to more jobs being created. This project was initially an integral part of the Action Plan for Jobs and is supported by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

The uptake in participants in LEO Wicklow in this initiative has been very strong, with nearly 60 entries submitted in the 2018 County IBYE. All entries are offered suitable supports and mentoring, in addition to the 10 shortlisted entries who participate in a 2day long bootcamp.

The business advisors in LEO Wicklow stay in regular contact with the previous winners in order to track progress in the start up category and offer suitable supports and several past entries have graduated to become portfolio clients. Previous LEO Wicklow national finalists include Kate Dempsey of **Irish Mussel Seed Company**, Maurice



Figure 1: Peter McParland, CEO Gravitie Ltd

Sheehy of **Fleet**, Cathal O’Sullivan of **Game X**, Shane Bonner of **Newmarket Kitchen**, James Keogh of **Rathwood**, Michael Noble of **Noble Education**, Shane Byrne and Philip Kirwan of **Showoff**.

The 2019, the Wicklow entry **Calt Dynamics**, a mobile 3D printing solution, won the South East Regional Awards and represented Wicklow at national level. Since then, **Calt Dynamics** have transferred to the HPSU unit in Enterprise Ireland.

### **Showcase**

Showcase Ireland, Ireland’s Creative Expo, showcasing Ireland’s leading makers and designers, usually takes place from on the third week of January at the RDS, Ballsbridge, Dublin.

Showcase is one of the industry’s largest international trade fairs where designers and craft makers provide a choice of contemporary and heritage collections, offering innovation, quality, sustainability and a distinctive point of difference to retail buyers from across the globe.

The craft and design sector is an important sector in County Wicklow, compared to other counties there’s a high proportion of DCCOI registered craft makers in the county:

- Co. Wicklow: 147 registered craft makers\* (0.10% of population)
- Co. Dublin: 649 registered craft makers\* (0.05% of population)
- Co. Cork: 301 registered craft makers\* (0.06% of population)
- Co. Tipperary: 70 registered craft makers\* (0.04% of population)

Source: DCCOI crafts registry.

Local Enterprise Office Wicklow offers places to a combination of first time exhibitors and those who may have exhibited at Showcase Ireland before. Participants must be running their own craft/design/creative business in County Wicklow, and in most cases have availed of supports through LEO Wicklow.

Prior to 2021, the network for LEOs sponsored the Balcony at Showcase which offers a subsidised opportunity for LEO clients to exhibit at the Balcony at Showcase. A call for expression of interest is published early in the year to recruit suitable design / crafts businesses for the Balcony.

In 2021, Showcase had to pivot to a new innovative Virtual Showroom format in response to the limitations imposed by the Covid 19 pandemic.

Training on how to maximise the selling opportunity at trade fairs is provided by LEO Wicklow to those who are selected which will prepare exhibitors for Showcase Ireland.

The project is organized by Showcase Ireland Crafts & Design Fair CLG, a subsidiary of Design & Crafts Ireland. It is supported by DCCI, Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices.

The ‘Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters’ grant is available through all Local Enterprise Offices to help more small businesses in Ireland develop products and services that will unlock export markets.

### **Food Academy and Food sector specific interventions**



County Wicklow hosts a very active artisan food and drinks sector, of the 100 members of the Wicklow Naturally food brand, developed recently by Wicklow County Council LEO Wicklow and County Wicklow Partnership, 55 are active producers.

Food Academy is a training programme aimed at supporting and nurturing start-up food businesses and to help develop Ireland's artisan food industry. The Local Enterprise Offices have joined forces with Bord Bia and SuperValu on this initiative to provide a consistent level of food marketing knowledge to new and early-stage food business owners.

At the final workshop, participants will get the opportunity to present their product to a panel from SuperValu and if successful, can participate in a trial based in local shops, which in the right circumstances, could progress over time to a national listing with SuperValu.

LEO Wicklow currently has 4 local producers participating in the regional Food Academy programme and keeps a pipeline of start

ups ready for the next one.

In addition to Food Academy, LEO Wicklow organises and develops food sector specific supports and training initiatives regularly and will continue to do so in the next three years.

## Section 4: Associated Actions and Activities

### 4.1 Protocols

The following protocols govern dissemination of information, information signposting and inter-organisation referrals. Local Enterprise Office Wicklow 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.

Locally LEO Wicklow has a very positive working relationship with local representatives from the Department of Social protection and partner regularly on client information events and sessions.

### **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**

Agreed between Enterprise Ireland and 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 programmes. 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 use its core funding (exchequer and own resources) to service existing commitments & 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.

## 4.2 Other Initiatives

### *Mid East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024*

The Mid East Enterprise Plan cover the Counties Wicklow, Kildare and Meath.

The next REP will be alignment with National Policy and reflect the themes of *top down* and *bottom up* approach, *realising the potential of the regions, a coherent approach for every part of Ireland to ensure an inclusive and regionally balanced recovery, as well as the need to building resilience, and future-proofing our economy and society*, as reflected in Enterprise 2025 Renewed (National Enterprise Policy), The Programme for Government, the forthcoming National Economic Plan.

*At the same time the next REP will also take into consideration the New Smart Specialisation strategy for Ireland (forthcoming 2021) – place based, Powering the Regions, The Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy and Rural Development Policy.*

The objectives of the Mid East REP till 2024 are as follows:

- ✓ Place based - Complement and make national enterprise policy more impactful in the regional context.
- ✓ 'Bottom-up' - Collaborate regionally to identify and prioritise ecosystem gaps and opportunities.
- ✓ Additional – build on mainstream activity, add value and/or do new things
- ✓ Action oriented - Use collective insight and resources in each region, and available regional funding, to progress initiatives.

#### Areas of Focus:

- Resilience and Recovery – *post Brexit, post pandemic, upskilling/re-skilling*
- Low carbon/transition – *PFG Climate Action targets (resilience and opportunity)*
- Remote/flexible working – *National Hub Network – regional infrastructures/services*
- Smart specialisation – *building on assets and sectoral strengths through innovation, clustering etc.*

#### Screen Sector:

The Mid East Region & adjoining regions of Dublin & the South East, often referred to as the M11/M9 Screen Corridor, are at the heart of the Irish content creation sector.

It's been estimated by industry sources (World 2000 CEO) that *'about 70% of all Irish screen production is currently takes place along the M11 corridor stretching towards the M9 screen corridor'*. No other region in Ireland has seen the level of AV production that has taken place in County Wicklow over the last 50 years. An impressive catalogue of films & TV series that have been made here since the silent black & white films from the 1920's onwards including King Arthur, The Vikings, The Tudors, The Last Duel and Valhalla.

The level of screen productions are is set to dramatically increase with the addition of four large sound studios in Ashford Studios & expansion plans of Ardmore Studios. In addition to the existing film studios, Greystones Media Campus has received planning permission and is about to commence construction of 170,000 sq. feet of film infrastructure and Tara Studios just over the border with Wexford is currently going through the planning stage.

There is global demand for all this studio space with Netflix, Disney and Apple already producing film and television productions in Ireland and Screen Ireland is confident that this level of activity will be sustainable in the long term.

Of the 6,700 skilled crew working in the industry, a large proportion are based in the area. There is a growing need for the education and training of sufficient crew and services servicing the additional studio space coming on stream in the next couple of years.

Many post production companies are also based in the region.

The construction and development of a screen content specific enterprise hub at Wicklow County Campus, Rathnew, will provide the base for start up and established companies within the industry. Through the provision of sector specific business skills training, mentoring and networking, a unique eco-system can emerge around this sector facilitating the strengthening and future growth of the screen cluster.

LEO Wicklow has already delivered a screen sector specific initiative called The South Eastern Creative Corridor in 2017 which provided business skills training for over 75 participants with the aim to build capacity and job growth.

LEO Wicklow intends to deliver similar initiatives in partnership with national stakeholder Screen Ireland and Screen Skills Ireland as well as third level institutions and Kildare Wicklow Education Training Board and other partners.

LEO Wicklow is collaborating with Screen Ireland, Department of Social Protection, and Wicklow Screen Office film to provide skills training aimed at minority groups with the result of much needed diversification of the screen industry.

Wicklow County Council has engaged Saffery Champness, working with Nordicity, to prepare a Screen Sector Development Strategy for 2021-2026.

The Strategy will assess the County's financial, human, physical and cultural capital and help to develop policies for strengthening the County's position in respect of each.

In particular, the strategy will look at areas such as:

- A business and economic case analysis for the new Content Creation Enterprise Hub for Wicklow.
- Attracting foreign direct investment (including marketing and promotion).
- Support for the indigenous screen content creation sector.
- Developing screen tourism.
- Support for the development and training of local screen sector creatives and crew.

The strategy will suggest actions towards the development of the Mid East Screen sector cluster and consolidation of this Cluster.

LEO Wicklow in partnership with the Wicklow Screen Office will facilitate the establishment of a screen network in order to provide the screen sector with networking opportunities and to strengthen the local cluster. In time the network will be managed through the Clermont Enterprise Hub which has a specific focus on the screen sector including services feeding into the sector.

#### *IT Carlow at Wicklow County Campus, Rathnew*

The Economic Development Team of Wicklow County Council works closely with IT Carlow to develop its Life Long Learning campus in Rathnew and to grow the student numbers since its establishment in 2006. Launch of the Technological University for the South East by IT Carlow and IT Waterford

#### *Female Entrepreneurship*

Partnering with Network Ireland Wicklow branch and national branch to deliver information events for female entrepreneurs

#### *Craft Development Strategy*

County Wicklow Partnership in collaboration with Wicklow County Council and LEO Wicklow have identified Wicklow's craft sector as an area in need of support and development. CWP have commissioned Arts Leaders Associates to create a sustainable craft economy in Co. Wicklow, which will benefit the local economy, tourism and a wide range of communities across the county.

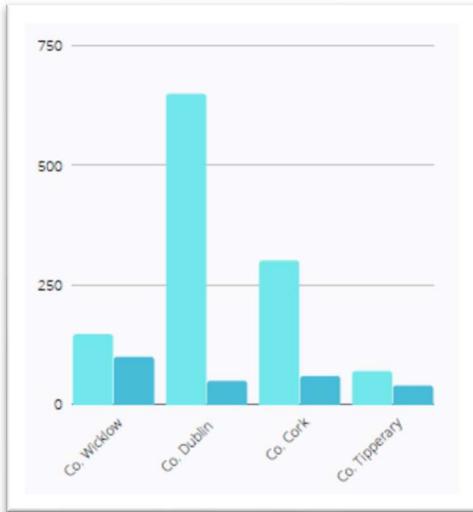
Co. Wicklow: 147 registered craft makers\* (0.10% of population)

Co. Dublin: 649 registered craft makers\* (0.05% of population)

Co. Cork: 301 registered craft makers\* (0.06% of population)

Co. Tipperary: 70 registered craft makers\* (0.04% of population)

Source: DCCOI crafts registry:



The key sectors identified within the County include: design, ceramics and pottery, high end furniture making, carpentry, woodwork, prop making, jewellery, armoury, basketry, textile, soap and candle making and metalwork.

The Strategy is due for publication in Q3 of 2021 and LEO Wicklow will be involved in the delivery of the commercialisation of IP and sector specific business support, business skills and IT skills training and clustering recommendations.

### *Bioeconomy*

The bioeconomy uses renewable, biological resources sourced sustainably from land and sea such as crops, forestry, fisheries, aquaculture, micro-organisms and animals and converts these resources and waste streams into value-added bio-based products including proteins, feeds, fertilizers, plastics and energy. The National Planning Framework highlights the potential of the bioeconomy in terms of Ireland's future economic and environmental wellbeing. Ireland has numerous renewable biological resources with the potential for the creation of high value products. These include agricultural products and by-products, food residues and processing side streams, forestry and forestry by-products, municipal and industrial waste, waste water and marine and marine by-product resources. Our largest indigenous industry, the agri-food sector, provides significant co-processing streams in the food and beverage industries. In terms of marine resources, Ireland has rich resources in one of the largest sea beds in Europe (10 times our landmass).

The National Bioeconomy Forum was launched in October 2020 to promote, support and advocate for the sustainable development of the bioeconomy in Ireland. The bioeconomy has the potential to create new, sustainable opportunities for farmers and high-quality, green jobs in rural and coastal areas. It can play a significant role in meeting our climate change targets.

The National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy was published in March 2018. It sets out a framework to strengthen the bioeconomy in Ireland. There is significant potential to expand the bioeconomy in County Wicklow.

### *Maritime Sector*

The marine economy is a key enabler of effective economic growth. The maritime sector in Wicklow benefits from a host of assets and activities capable of expansion and development including: shore-side services, shipping services, repair and maintenance, fishing, tourism and leisure, servicing of the off-shore renewable energy industry, maritime financial services etc. Established ocean and coastal economic sectors include seafood related enterprise, such as commercial fishing and aquaculture, products of marine biotechnology and bio-discovery, marine tourism, energy exploration and production, maritime transport, shipbuilding and ship leasing. Wicklow County Council supports the identification and realisation of the economic opportunities within this sector.

The aims of the County Wicklow Maritime Business Development Group are to develop a Maritime Strategy for County Wicklow and to progress proposals for the major development of port facilities in the County. The Wicklow coastline has four harbours and Wicklow Harbour is designated as a Port of Regional Significance.

All four offer many opportunities to enhance and expand the local economy in a sustainable manner as well contribute to the county, regional and national economy. The coastal area of Wicklow supports and sustains important social, economic and environmental functions.

The blue economy is an important pillar of the County's economic development strategy and realising the potential of the County's maritime assets is of prime importance. Rapid urbanisation, coastal erosion and the need to accommodate varied needs and interests, have put significant pressure on the coastal area. It is now recognised that there should be a coordinated approach and integration of sectoral interests to achieve the sustainable development of the coastal and maritime area while fostering blue growth.

In the future, Wicklow could face significant changes with the potential development of marine renewable energy, more specifically wind, following the identification of the Assessment Zone 2 – Wind and Tidal in the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (OREDPA). The Government is committed to generating at least 70% of energy from renewable sources by 2030. There are 3 major offshore wind projects at various stages of planning off the County Wicklow Coast. The Arklow Bank Project is proceeding under an extant permission. The Codling Bank and the Dublin Array have been designated as Relevant Projects which allows them to proceed to develop planning applications in advance of the adoption of the Marine Planning and Development legislation.

The Local Economic Community Plan (LECP) recognises the need to prepare a maritime strategy for County Wicklow as a means to promote the County's marine assets in a sustainable manner. Several actions contained in the plan particularly aim at harnessing the potential of the County's marine assets, either built or natural. It specifically seeks to build on the potential of the County's ports and harbours to deliver improved marine commercial, tourism and leisure activities. As a result of this, Wicklow County Council has appointed consultants to assist the Council in delivering a Maritime Strategic Review for County Wicklow. There are 4 main strategic recommendations for developing County Wicklow's Marine Assets;

- i. Establishing a strong offshore wind offering to ensure that County Wicklow takes maximum advantage of this emerging sector;
- ii. Exploring the feasibility of constructing a new outer harbour near Wicklow Port to attract international business and to larger scale industrial users such as offshore wind
- iii. Develop a plan for supporting aquaculture development;
- iv. Develop a dedicated marketing strategy for marine tourism.

#### *Wholesale, retail trade, transportation and storage*

This sector forms the largest industrial group within the County. In regard to wholesale and retail sector significant opportunities to develop this area arise from the identified expenditure outflows from the County in particular to Dublin. Measures specifically addressing this sector are set out in the County Retail Strategy contained in the County Development Plan.

From a transportation and storage sector perspective the locational strengths of Wicklow offer significant opportunities for the expansion of this sector. The County's positioning along the east coast 'strategic transportation corridor', made up of the N11 / M11 and the Dublin to Rosslare rail line creates excellent connectivity between ports within the County and between the County and the ports in Dublin and Rosslare. These connections ensure Wicklow's role as a key entry point to the Greater Dublin Region with the potential to facilitate the expansion of existing or create new spin off industries within this sector.

The promotion of the Leinster Outer Orbital Route connecting the N11 and the east of the County (Arklow town/port) to the west of the County and the major national primary routes within Kildare namely the M9

and M7 create further potential for the expansion of this sector with ease of accessibility to the north and south of the Greater Dublin Region.

#### *Information and communications technology*

The information and communications sector forms the second largest industrial group in Wicklow. With Ireland being a technology hub of choice for many when it comes to attracting the strategic business activities of ICT companies, significant opportunities exist to develop this sector with the County. The presence of Wicklow County Campus and its envisaged expansion as a third level centre of excellence alongside Wicklow's highly educated workforce further enhance the attractiveness of the County to prospective new companies within the ICT sector maximising the potential of the County. In addition, a number of large scale data centres are either under construction or have permission in Arklow. LEO Wicklow in partnership with the Economic Development Team in WCC intend to develop a network for industries developing around the data centres.

#### *Rural policy:*

The Government has recently published 'Our Rural Future'. The policy reflects the unprecedented change in living and working patterns during COVID-19 and the significant opportunities this presents for rural communities – from remote working and revitalising our town centres to job creation, developing a green economy and enhancing our outdoor amenities.

#### **The key points of 'Our Rural Future':**

- Unprecedented opportunity for Rural Development post COVID-19
- Major focus on attracting Remote Workers to rural communities
- Revitalising town centres, rural jobs, adventure tourism, green economy and island development central to new policy
- Broadband roll-out to bring new opportunities in areas like eHealth, remote learning, online trading and new technologies
- Five-year strategy will be underpinned by updated National Development Plan

The policy will help rural Ireland to recover from the impacts of COVID-19, enable long-term development of rural areas, and create more resilient rural economies and communities for the future.

## Look for Local Campaign

### Section 5 Risks and New Initiatives:

The following risks may adversely affect the delivery of LEO objectives and strategic priorities during the period 2021 – 2024.

Details of the actions proposed to mitigate or remove these potential risks are detailed hereunder:

**Identified Risks:**

<b>Risks that can adversely affect the achievement of the LEO objectives</b>	<b>Actions to mitigate this risk</b>
Reduction in numbers of new clients / start ups accessing LEO services	Execute Communications plan with messaging focused on benefits for business and targeting a wider audience. Implement Key Upgrade Goals.
Difficulties accessing suitably knowledgeable mentors in areas of growing need such as Brexit	Engage with expert bodies to identify suitable mentors. Access Enterprise Ireland mentor panel.
Lack of progression of start ups	Implement 6 month follow up for all SYOB course participants
Excessive demand for services	More use of online services and 1 to many delivery
Insufficient internal human resources	Plan for deployment linked to Strategic objectives. Seek EI graduate programme placement. Prioritisation. Outsourcing.
Insufficient financial resources	Apply best practice procurement to reduce costs of outsourced services. Identify sources of additional funding. Prioritisation.

<b>Risks that can adversely affect the achievement of the objectives outlined</b>	<b>Actions to mitigate this risk</b>
Global / National Economic Downturn	Be prepared to have supports for our clients in place to respond to this risk
Brexit	Be prepared to have supports for our clients in place to respond to this risk
Climate Change	Assess the carbon footprint of the LEO supports, actions and events and where possible reduce that footprint
Resources, Human and Financial	Manage resources, horizon scanning for funding and staffing opportunities. Collaboration with other LEOs and (protocol) partners,
Policy changes	Influence and collaborate with policy makers

IT / Technology issues	Draw on support of IT section in Local Authorities. Bring in external expertise if necessary.
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## Section 6 Delivering the Strategy

### Funding

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

### Training

LEO Wicklow 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.

### Communications

Local Enterprise Office Wicklow 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:

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

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

### Customer Service Charter

**Our Mission:** We aim to promote entrepreneurship, foster business start-ups and develop existing micro and small businesses to drive job creation and to provide accessible high quality supports for business ideas.

**LEO Wicklow is committed to providing the highest levels of customer service as embodied in our Customer Service Charter and in line with the principles of quality customer service as adopted by all Government Departments and Public Service Bodies.**

The Customer Service Charter is a commitment to the quality of our service delivery to our clients and sets out what the LEO will do for the client, how we propose to do it, and in what time scale. LEO Wicklow is

committed to continuously monitoring and improving the quality of our service delivery to our clients. Service delivery is continuously monitored by the Line Managers and referred to the Head of Enterprise if necessary.

The Customer Service Charter sets out our customer service policy in relation to Client Communications, Accessibility, Equality, Privacy and Confidentiality.

The Customer Service Charter also explains how clients can make a complaint and how the complaint will be dealt with.

#### **Details of Wicklow County Council's formal complaints procedure.**

**Wicklow County Council** has the following process in place if a client wishes to make an enquiry or complaint:

Any person who feels any of the following may make a complaint:

- They have been unfairly treated by the Council
- A service to which they are entitled is not being provided
- A service that is being provided is inadequate
- A decision made with regard to them is incorrect or did not take into consideration all the facts
- A request for a service or information has been ignored
- The areas excluded from this procedure are:
- Formal appeals relating to decisions on planning applications
- Appeals against decisions under the Freedom of Information legislation

Comments or complaints should be set out in writing, on the appropriate form and posted or sent by email to the Senior Executive Officer of the relevant section.

The relevant contact details and the Wicklow Local Authorities Comments & Complaints Form can be found on: <https://www.wicklow.ie/Living/Your-Council/Customer-Care/Make-an-Enquiry-or-Complaint>

# APPENDIX 1: LEO Customer Service Charter

## CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER



### OUR MISSION

We aim to promote entrepreneurship, foster 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.

### SERVICES AVAILABLE FROM YOUR LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE (LEO):

- Providing a first point of contact for all enterprise related enquiries in the county/city.
  - Working with entrepreneurs, promoters, businesses and other relevant stakeholders in the county/city to foster entrepreneurship.
  - Delivering enterprise training, management development and mentoring to entrepreneurs and businesses.
  - Providing direct funding and funding options to entrepreneurs, promoters and viable businesses to support the growth and development of micro enterprises.
  - Working to create and maintain client centred business networks.
  - Developing a progression pathway to Enterprise Ireland's High Potential Start Up (HPSU) and Established Industry Departments.
  - Where your LEO cannot deal with your enquiry it will provide a referral service to the appropriate agency.
- Your LEO is committed to providing the highest levels of customer service as embodied in our Customer Service Charter and in line with the principles of quality customer service as adopted by all Government Departments and Public Service Bodies.

### WHAT IS A CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

This Customer Service Charter is a commitment to the quality of our service delivery to you and sets out what your LEO will do for you, how we propose to do it, and in what time scale.

Your LEO is committed to continuously monitoring and improving the quality of our service delivery to you.

### HOW CAN YOU HELP US

- You can help us by:
- Treating our staff courteously.
  - Providing feedback to enable us to improve our service.
  - Providing accurate information in your dealings with us.
  - Being punctual, prompt and professional.

### WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR LEO?

- We will endeavour to ensure that our staff:
- Have the relevant knowledge and experience, responsibility and authority, to deal with your enquiries or refer you to someone who can.
  - Deliver our services in a friendly and inclusive manner.
  - Treat you with courtesy and professionalism.
  - Give you clear, accurate and helpful information.
  - Deal with your requests, enquiries and concerns promptly.
  - Treat all customers equally and without discrimination.
  - Maintain confidentiality at all times.
  - Continually explore new and better ways of delivering our service.
- Where your LEO cannot deal with your enquiry it will provide a referral service to the appropriate agency.**
- The Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation and Enterprise Ireland have agreed protocols with the relevant agencies to ensure an efficient customer service in response to LEO clients' enquiries.

### ACCESSIBILITY

- Your LEO will provide a meeting room where appropriate in order to conduct business in a confidential manner.
- Your LEO will ensure that all of our offices, facilities and resources are fully accessible in line with the Disability Act 2005. Any queries in relation to accessibility should be directed to the Head of LEO.

### EQUALITY

In our dealings with customers we will ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation are upheld. The LEO does not discriminate on the grounds of age, disability, gender, family status, race, religious belief, sexual orientation and membership of the traveller community.

### PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All information, both personal and business, provided by you, will be dealt with in total confidence and in a manner that respects your dignity.

### COMMUNICATIONS

- Your LEO will deal with your enquiry promptly and in a helpful, courteous and responsive manner.
- We will identify ourselves by name on answering the phone.
  - Where a client seeks to meet a LEO staff member as far as is practicable this will be facilitated within 5 working days.
  - All written communications from clients will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt.
  - All emails received will be acknowledged within 48 hours of receipt.
  - All telephone enquiries will be responded to within 2 working days. A mailbox recording facility will be in operation at all times.
  - Written communications from the LEO will contain the name and contact details of the staff member dealing with your query/issue.
- Your LEO is committed to providing quality client services. To ensure that our clients are satisfied with our service delivery standard we commit to undertaking regular reviews and to publish indicators of customer service. In particular, application processing times, referral of cases to other agencies and response times.
- We will also publish an **Annual Client Survey**. These indicators will help us to understand how we are doing, to find out what our clients think of our service delivery and to identify if there are things that we need to improve.

### HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

- Our staff are dedicated to providing a professional service and getting things right first time. Despite our best endeavours we recognise that things may not always meet customer expectations. We have a standard procedure in place to ensure that we investigate your complaint fully and fairly.
- Some complaints can be dealt with immediately. Where this is not possible we will acknowledge your complaint in writing or by telephone to confirm that we have understood your concerns correctly.
  - We will investigate your complaint and respond within 5 working days of receipt. We will also inform you of any actions and endeavour to try satisfying your complaint.
  - If you are not satisfied with this response you may raise your concerns at a more senior level by writing formally to the Head of the Local Enterprise Office.