



Oifig Fiontair Áitiúil  
Local Enterprise Office



Comhairle Chontae Chill Chainnigh  
Kilkenny County Council

# Local Enterprise Development Plan Kilkenny 2026 to 2027



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



## Section 1: Context

## Section 2: Vision/Mission

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# Executive Summary & Review of 2025

The range of supports and services provided by Local Enterprise Office Kilkenny has broadened in recent years. In 2025, the LEO Kilkenny supported the business community in terms of promoting entrepreneurship, supporting new start-ups and helping businesses to prepare for the future by embracing sustainability, innovation, and productivity.

LEO Kilkenny is the first stop shop for any person with an idea or ambition to start and run their own business. 134 potential entrepreneurs participated on our Start Your Own Business Programmes during the year. Also, a successful initiative “**Start Exit 4**” was organised by the LEO Kilkenny in conjunction with the South East Technological University (SETU) and the Urlingford Town Team. The competition involved a series of business workshops and one-to-one mentoring culminating to the finale, whereby finalists pitched their ideas towards an investment fund worth €10,000.

During 2025, LEO Kilkenny launched a new vlog series ‘**Spark Series**’ offering entrepreneurs and small business owners, valuable insights, practical tips, and inspiring stories from some of the region’s most successful business leaders. LEO Kilkenny continues to promote inclusion and accessibility in entrepreneurship, in particular among under-represented groups, including people with disabilities and the traveller movement community. For example, Kilkenny Traveller Interagency Group – Business Clinic Event held in May offered an opportunity to meet with representatives from the Local Enterprise Office, KCETB, the INTREO Office, Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement and others.

Through a variety of programmes hosted in 2025, the LEO Kilkenny fosters a strong enterprise culture and promote entrepreneurial activity nationally. This is achieved throughout the year through a number of events. During **Enterprise Week 2025**, LEO Kilkenny ran the County final of the Student Enterprise Programme. The winners represented Kilkenny at the National Student Enterprise Final with finalist Michael O’Keeffe from St. Kieran’s College awarded the Overall Winner in the Intermediate Category. Hi-Tec Medicare Ltd based in Clogh represented Kilkenny at the National Enterprise Awards 2025. The National Enterprise Awards celebrate the achievements of Ireland’s micro-enterprise sector and recognise the achievements of companies supported by the LEOs.

The Local Enterprise Offices of Carlow and Kilkenny came together to celebrate **National Women’s Enterprise Day 2025** on Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> October, with a vibrant event held at the Parade Tower, Kilkenny Castle.

LEO Kilkenny supported businesses Wildflower Designs and Valley of Roses had the opportunity to meet buyers from all over the world as



part of the **Local Enterprise Showcase at Showcase 2025**, while Adam Brennan, Chance 3D Design; participated at the Local Enterprise Village at National Ploughing Championships.

LEO Kilkenny offer supports and grants to businesses to enhance their productivity and improve their competitiveness; with a focus on **Green, Lean and Digital initiatives**. As part of the implementation of this, Productivity-25 hosted by the South East based Local Enterprise Offices in conjunction with South East **LEAN** Network and SETU Lean Industry 4.0 provided participants with the opportunity to attend a transformative half-day Masterclass dedicated to **LEAN** Thinking and receive LEAN Certification (i.e. White Belt). A visit to Adman Steel Sheds was arranged for a number of LEO supported clients to participate on the **LEAN** tour. Along with these supports, the LEO Kilkenny & Carlow developed “**The Retail Accelerator**”, a new, dynamic programme designed to help local retail businesses improve their efficiency and profitability.

**Going Green 2025 Conference** was organised by the LEO Kilkenny in partnership with Kilkenny County Council Climate Action Team and Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce showcasing the green supports and funding opportunities for businesses in Kilkenny at Hotel Kilkenny in September. 44 Green for Business supports were awarded with 26 businesses availing of the Energy Efficiency Grant. These schemes support businesses to become more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

Small businesses with up to and including 50 employees in almost all sectors are eligible for productivity and competitiveness funding. 31 Businesses availed of the **Digital for Business Programme** to prepare and implement a plan for the adoption of digital tools and automation. The **LEO Grow Digital Voucher** which has replaced the Trading Online Voucher is now available to those who have completed the Digital for Business Programme to support them in the implementation of their digitalisation plan. Masterclass events such as **AI Masterclass - Tools that Change the Way We Do Business** and A ‘**Cyber Security for Operational Technology**’ breakfast briefing also inform business with regard to adopting new technologies and the challenges and opportunities across their journeys.

LEO Kilkenny offered a total of **€432,489** in direct financial assistance to **23 small businesses with up to 50 employees** in manufacturing and/or internationally traded services sectors. In terms of supporting export potential and entering new markets, the new Market Explorer Grant launched in 2025 provides support to first time and small-scale exporters to undertake essential market research and to support the market entry strategies.

Activities that strengthen the local entrepreneurial ecosystem and in 2025 the LEO Kilkenny has continued to support initiatives such as **Taste Kilkenny, Shop Kilkenny** and took the lead with regard the development of a **Craft Strategy for County Kilkenny**. The LEO Kilkenny also plays an important role in helping to drive initiatives which supports **Tourism and Festivals**, the and the **Nighttime economy**.



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Local Enterprise Office

## Local Enterprise Office Kilkenny 2025 Awards to Businesses

A total of **€438,439** in direct financial assistance has been approved for 24 manufacture /export service businesses located throughout the county

**€271,883** awarded in Business Expansion Grant Assistance and **€30,000** in GradStart assistance

**€60,000** awarded in start-up/priming assistance

3 Market Explorer grants awarded to support businesses in exploring new export market opportunities.

**€49,074** awarded in a feasibility study grant assistance.

11 applicants have been supported to make loan application to the Micro Finance Ireland Loan Fund

44 Green for Business supports awarded with 27 businesses awarded an Energy Efficiency Grant amounting to **€221,830**. These scheme support businesses to become greener and more environmentally friendly.

31 Businesses are availing of the Digital Start programme to prepare and implement a plan for the adoption of digital tools and techniques across the enterprise

1,040 people participated on focused small business training, including 134 people participating on the Starting Your Business programme

423 businesses have availed of specialised business specific mentoring on a variety of topics including finance, marketing, social media marketing and HR.

11 business have been approved a Grow Digital Voucher totalling **€29,506** to support the enhancement of their online trading capacity.

16 Businesses have commenced LEAN one to one consultancy programmes to investigate possible resource efficiencies and process improvements their businesses

The priority strategic objectives and actions which will be delivered with this plan align directly with the four strategic areas set out in the SLA between Enterprise Ireland and Kilkenny County Council and the priorities identified in the LEO Policy Statement 2024 to 2030 which are:

### SLA

- Business Information and Advisory Services.
- Enterprise Support Services.
- Entrepreneurship Support Services; and
- Local Enterprise Development services

### LEO Policy Statement 2024 to 2030

- Integrating decarbonisation and net zero commitments.
- Placing digital transformation at the heart of enterprise policy.
- Strengthening the Irish-owned exporting sector.
- Enabling locally traded enterprises to thrive
- Stepping up enterprise innovation



Six After 6 – Night-Time Economy Initiative

# Section 1: Context

LEO Kilkenny is part of the national network of 31 LEOs. The functional responsibility for LEO Kilkenny rests with Kilkenny County Council (KCC). The LEO operates within the terms of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between KCC and Enterprise Ireland (EI) and implement overall policies on behalf of the Department of Enterprise Tourism & Employment (DETE).

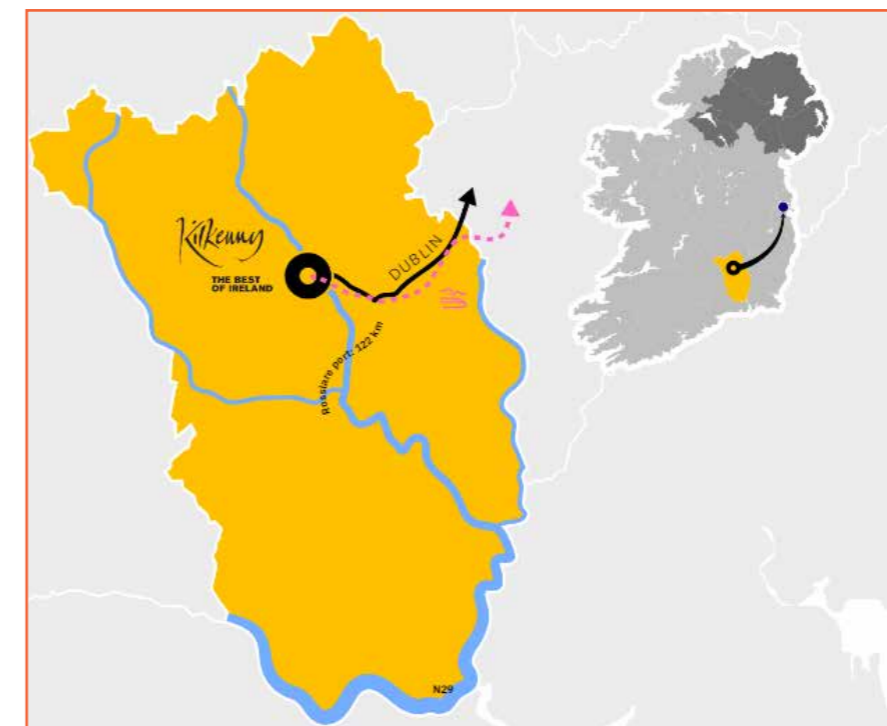
This Enterprise Development Plan (2026 to 2027), outlines the targets under the key indicators contained in the SLA and in the annual budget letter of offer.

The Enterprise Development Plan is submitted to KCCs' Strategic Policy Committee 1 (SPC) for Economic Development, Enterprise, Tourism, Planning & Development and the SPC provides oversight of the implementation of the Development Plan on behalf of KCC.

Oversight of annual performance metrics is provided by Enterprise Ireland on a quarterly basis via scorecards and an annual performance review. The LEO has the services of a specialist Evaluation & Approvals Committee to assess applications for financial support.

## 1.1 County Context

### 1.1.1 Location



County Kilkenny is a medium-sized inland county located in south Leinster, covering just under 2,100 square kilometres. County Kilkenny is part of the Southern Region and is strategically located within the southern half of the Country. The county has direct access to the Irish Sea, through Belview Port on the River Suir and through New Ross on the River Barrow. Kilkenny is the 16th largest county in Ireland by area. Kilkenny City is the largest settlement in the county and is the main catalyst area for the local economy.

Kilkenny City is the largest town in the County and is in proximity to Dublin (115km) and other major urban centres, including Cork (145km), Limerick (110km) and Waterford (48km). Kilkenny is also close to Shannon International Airport (155km) and Rosslare Europort (105km).

### 1.1.2 Population

104,160 people currently live in County Kilkenny, according to the findings of the 2022 Census (growth of 5% since 2016 census). Kilkenny ranks 21st in terms of population size in Ireland. The population of Kilkenny City is now 27,184, this has grown 2.5% between 2016 and 2022.

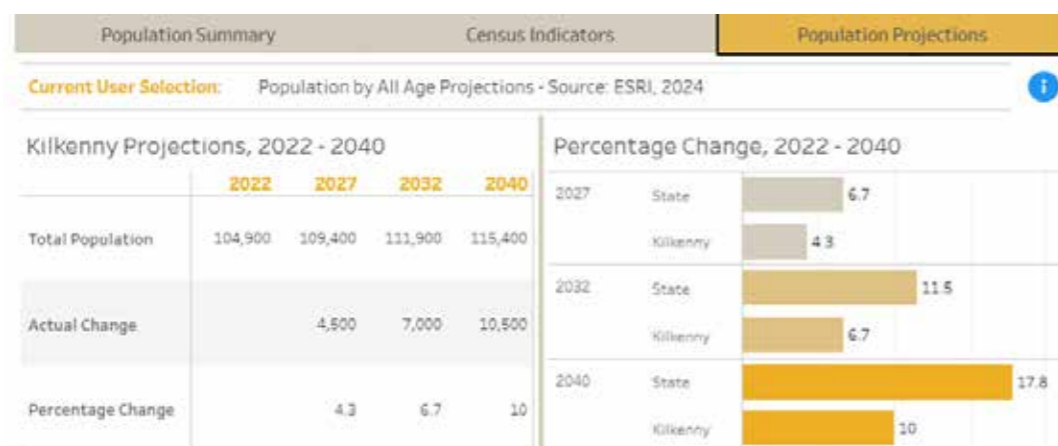
Within the South East, Kilkenny City is 3rd in the ranking of urban centres by population with the top four in the below order:

- Waterford City at 60,079;
- Carlow Town at 27,351;
- Kilkenny City at 27,184;
- Wexford Town at 21,524

Nationally, Kilkenny is 13th in the CSO 2022 ranking of Ireland’s largest urban centres, as measured by population. Key regional towns in county Kilkenny include Callan (population 2,678); Thomastown (population 2,305); Castlecomer (population 1,500) and Graignamanagh (population 1,500).

The average age of Kilkenny’s population in 2022 was 39.7 years, compared with 37.9 years in 2016. Kilkenny has a young, diverse, and talented workforce – over half the population of County Kilkenny is under 44.

By 2027 Kilkenny is projected to have 109,400 residents.



### 1.1.3 The Local Economy and Labour Force

Some 93% of the County’s businesses employed fewer than ten people, slightly exceeding the state average of 92%. The Labour force participation rate in Kilkenny among people aged 15 and over was just over 60% in 2022.

There were **46,196 people** (aged 15 and over) at work in Kilkenny in 2022, an increase of 4,833 or 12% from 2022. Nationally, there was an increase of 16% from 2016. In Kilkenny, 12,906 people (aged 15 and over) worked from home at least one day a week in 2022. This represented 28% of the workforce. The national figure was 32%.

The Monthly Unemployment rate for people aged 25-74 years in Kilkenny was 2.9% in January 2026, down from 3.3% in December 2025. There were 2,236 people on the live register in Kilkenny in January 2026 -Kilkenny is one of only eight counties with less than 3,000 on the Live Register.

## 1.2 Business Profile

County Kilkenny has a rich diversity of mainly indigenous enterprises across the full spectrum of industry sectors with increased FDI activity in recent years. County Kilkenny has circa 6,000 enterprises in its private business economy, according to the most recent Business Demography Survey.

The predominant business types by employment are:

1. Wholesale & Retail
2. Manufacturing
3. Accommodation and Food Services

The following industry sectors are identified as being key to Kilkenny’s future economic development, especially in terms of employment growth:

- Financial Services
- Technology including cyber security
- Manufacturing including pharmaceutical
- Agriculture & Food
- Creative Industries
- Tourism & Hospitality

In addition to the above sectors, the retail sector is critical in terms of promoting the vitality and viability of town centres.

### 1.2.1 Financial Services

Kilkenny has attracted significant investment from leading financial services companies such as State Street International, Aztec, UKG, Carne Group and BOI 365. A proven

location for financial services, Kilkenny has a cluster of other high-profile companies in the sector including personal & corporate tax solutions provider Taxback.com part of the Clunetech group.

### 1.2.2 Technology

Kilkenny is home to global tech organisations and start-ups including global cyber security specialists, CipherTechs and Security Risk Advisors, State Street have located their global cyber security hub in Kilkenny.

### 1.2.3 Manufacturing & Offshore Renewable Energy at Belview

The Belview Port area near Ferrybank in South Kilkenny is just 8 Kms miles from Waterford City and is an ideal location for large-scale industries and manufacturing companies. Belview Port is the nearest major Irish port to mainland Europe providing a saving to shippers of both time and fuel while being a natural hub for the integration of port, shipping, road and rail freight services.

Existing businesses operating from there include Mediates Smartply, part of the Coillte group. Belview provides zoned land for large scale industries, including a strategic IDA site of 53 hectares, the Marine Point Business Park and Belview Port. Belview has all the necessary infrastructure for high volume production and is supported by significant water, waste water and gas capabilities.

The development of offshore renewable energy (ORE) in the South East has considerable enterprise benefit potential for Kilkenny including:

**Job Creation:** The ORE industry is expected to create new, high-value jobs in engineering, construction, logistics, port services, operations, and maintenance

**Supply Chain Development:** There are opportunities for local firms in logistics, manufacturing, digital sectors, and precision engineering to integrate into the ORE supply chain



Final of the Start/Exit 4 Competition

**Attracting FDI & Innovation:** The availability of clean, scalable renewable energy makes the region more attractive for large-scale energy users and multinational corporations pursuing Net Zero-aligned operations

**Green Hubs:** The South East has the potential to establish Green Hub industrial parks, leveraging abundant clean energy to attract energy-intensive sectors like data processing, pharmaceuticals, and clean fuels production

### 1.2.4 Agriculture & Food

The agriculture sector remains a cornerstone of the local economy in 2026. There are approximately 3,479 farms in County Kilkenny, directly employing over 5,244 people. Beyond direct farming, the agri-food sector supports thousands of additional roles in food and drink processing, input supply, agricultural contracting, transport, engineering, and professional advisory services.

Kilkenny is a key part of the Waterford/Kilkenny Teagasc Advisory Region. As of the most recent regional reviews, the average farm size in this region is 46 hectares. Dairying continues to be the dominant enterprise, driving the region's high output value. Kilkenny's long-established agri-food sector is anchored by major global players, most notably Tirlán (formerly Glanbia's dairy and grain business, which rebranded following its transition to full co-operative ownership) and Connollys Red Mills. These industry leaders are complemented by an established base of artisan micro and food producers who continue to expand the county's reputation for high-quality food production.

### 1.2.5 Tourism

The tourism industry continues to be a vital economic driver for Kilkenny, supporting local jobs with €70m spending from overseas visitors and €109m from domestic tourism in 2024.

A core objective for Kilkenny County Council (KCC) is the implementation of the Tourism Development Strategy and Action Plan 2023–2028 and support the delivery of the Fáilte Ireland Destination Experience plan for Kilkenny. This strategy focuses on sustainable tourism growth and enhancing the county's offer to maintain Kilkenny's reputation as Ireland's premier cultural and heritage destination.

Kilkenny is a key "hero site" within the Ireland's Ancient East brand, with a strategic vision to become Ireland's best year-round destination by 2033. In line with the government's new national tourism policy, "A New Era for Irish Tourism" the county is targeting a significant increase in international visitor revenue.

### 1.2.6 Creative Industries and Services

Kilkenny remains at the centre of Ireland's design and craft sector, underpinned by the Kilkenny Craft Strategy 2025 to 2027. The county is home to the Design & Crafts Council Ireland (DCCI) headquarters and the Academy of Jewellery and Goldsmithing Centre of Excellence.

# You're in Good Company in Kilkenny



This facility, along with the planned Centres of Excellence for Ceramics represents a significant investment in securing the future of traditional and contemporary skills.

Kilkenny's global reputation is built on the legacy of the Kilkenny Design Workshops (KDW), which established a cross-disciplinary standard for excellence. Today, this legacy is honoured through Kilkenny's designation as a World Craft Council 'Craft City and Region'—one of small number of such regions in Europe.

The county's creative economy is further bolstered by Cartoon Saloon, a world-leading animation hub which continues to achieve global acclaim, now boasting five Academy Award® nominations.

## 1.3 Policy Context

Supported by Enterprise Ireland (EI) and within the policy and funding responsibility of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), LEO Kilkenny operates within the context of the White Paper on Enterprise (2022–2030) and the LEO Policy Statement to 2030.

At a local level, each LEO operates under an Enterprise Development Plan and is a key stakeholder in the delivery of the Regional Enterprise Plans  
Overarching national policies include:

### 1.3.1 Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040 remains the government's overarching policy initiative, comprising the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP). Two strategic outcomes remain central to LEO operations: *A Strong Economy Supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills* and *Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities*. The strategy now prioritises the "Twin Transition" (Digital and Green) as the primary engine for regional balance to 2030.

### 1.3.2 National Development Plan (NDP) 2021–2030

The updated NDP (2021–2030) provides a significantly increased capital investment of €165 billion. Under National Strategic Outcome 5, the LEOs are tasked with:

- Supporting "Green for Business" and "Energy Efficiency" initiatives to meet 2030 climate targets.
- Driving digital transformation through the Digital for Business framework.
- Building regional resilience by fostering industry clusters that link micro-enterprises with larger multinationals.

### 1.3.3 The White Paper on Enterprise (2022–2030)

Replacing *Enterprise 2025 Renewed*, the White Paper on Enterprise is the definitive strategy for 2026 and 2027. It shifts focus from volume of jobs to the "quality and sustainability of enterprise." Key priorities include:

- Integrating the SME ecosystem: Closing the productivity gap between Irish-owned SMEs and foreign-owned multinationals.
- Innovation Leadership: Encouraging LEO clients to engage in R&D via the Digital Transition Fund.
- Export Diversification: Helping micro-enterprises access international markets through the "Export First" initiative in partnership with Enterprise Ireland.

### 1.3.4 LEO Policy Statement 2024-2030

The priorities for Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), as outlined in the "LEO Policy Statement 2024-2030" document, align with the objectives of the White Paper on Enterprise. The LEOs act as the primary local resource for businesses, focusing their efforts across several key areas



Student Enterprise Christmas Launch

## Core Priorities for LEOs

The policy outlines five main priorities for LEOs:



**Integrating Decarbonisation and Net Zero Commitments:** LEOs are tasked with helping businesses transition to a low carbon economy. This involves promoting energy efficiency, offering grants for low carbon technologies, and providing consultancy support to help businesses understand their carbon footprint and reduce costs



**Placing Digital Transformation at the Heart of Enterprise Policy:** A key goal is to ensure that 90% of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) achieve a basic level of digital intensity by 2030. LEOs provide digital grants, consultancy, and promote a new Digital Portal to help businesses self-assess and adopt digital tools and techniques



**Enabling Locally Trading Sectors to Thrive:** LEOs will continue to offer advice, training, and mentoring to locally traded businesses with up to 50 employees. The goal is to improve productivity through innovation, digitalisation, and lean practices



**Strengthening the Irish-Owned Exporting Sector:** LEOs work with Enterprise Ireland to support prospective exporters, with an ambitious target of doubling the annual number of new exporters by 2030



**Stepping Up Enterprise Innovation:** LEOs aim to foster more innovation by promoting Innovation Vouchers and building links with European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) to provide access to expertise, testing, and skills development

### Additional Key Actions

Beyond these core pillars, the LEO policy includes further actions:

**Accessibility and Inclusion:** LEOs will continue to promote entrepreneurship among under-represented groups, including people with disabilities, ensuring inclusive and accessible services

**Streamlining Supports:** Eligibility criteria for LEO schemes will be reviewed and simplified to increase access and uptake for businesses, making the application process more straightforward

**Governance and Performance:** The established governance model for LEOs will be sustained.

### 1.3.5 The South East Regional Enterprise Plan

The South-East Regional Enterprise Plan is currently under development and will provide a future roadmap for enterprise delivery in the areas of Start Ups, Innovation, ORE and Tourism.

Kilkenny County Councils mission is to:

**work in a sustainable way with our communities to make Kilkenny the best place to live, work, visit and invest.**

## 1.4 Local Policies

At the county level, Kilkenny County Council (KCC) is committed to economic and enterprise development and has implemented targeted policies to support this:

**1.4.1 Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP 2023 to 2028)** - This is roadmap for delivery of economic and community actions in Kilkenny and included high level goals on enterprise support, the rural economy, tourism and Kilkennys workforce.

### 1.4.2 Abbey Quarter Regeneration:

The Abbey Quarter in Kilkenny City is the centrepiece of the county's inward investment strategy. By 2026, the Urban Park is scheduled to open, with commercial developments progressing to provide high-spec office space specifically designed to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and growing indigenous business.

### 1.4.3 Night-Time Economy Diversification:

Under the Night-Time Economy Programme, Kilkenny is implementing a 2026/2027 investment scheme to support the diversification of the city's evening offering.

### 1.4.4 Kilkenny Craft Strategy 2025–2027:

This policy leverages Kilkenny's status as a World Crafts Council 'Craft City & Region' to support and grow the craft and craft experiences sector in Kilkenny

### 1.4.5 Town Centre First & Rural Resilience:

Aligned with the national Our Rural Future 2026 to 2031 policy, KCC is actively implementing "Town Centre First" plans for schedule towns like Graignamanagh, Callan, and Castlecomer to combat vacancy and create localized economic hubs.

**1.4.6 Digital Strategy 2024 to 2026** which is focused on digital infrastructure, skills and supporting local businesses in digital transformation.

**1.4.7 KCC Tourism Strategy** - Aimed at positioning Kilkenny as Ireland's best year-round destination by 2033.

LEO Kilkenny is firmly established within the local authority and the support services it provides are a very important function of KCC. Through the LEO, KCC takes a proactive role in helping small businesses to start, to develop and to grow. The Economic Development Unit helps to make it easier for people to do business in County Kilkenny through the following actions:

- The implementation of the economic actions of the Local Economic & Community Plan;
- Input in County Development Plan;
- Development of partnerships with relevant agencies, e.g. Kilkenny Leader Partnership; City Centre Task Force
- Promotion and marketing of the County as a location for investment in conjunction with the IDA and Enterprise Ireland through Invest Kilkenny;
- Identifying and developing projects and programmes, including leveraging resources to implement these programmes and those funded from non-core resources;
- Development of appropriate enterprise infrastructure at county/city level;
- Acting as an enhanced resource for Government to undertake one-off initiatives – e.g., ICOB
- Direct engagement with businesses in relation to commercial rates incentive schemes, e.g. Vacant Property Scheme.
- Creating awareness of local enterprise centres such as those in Piltown, Urlingford Castlecomer and Kilkenny City



Above: Industry Breakfast May 2025  
 Top Left: Launch of Kilkenny Ambassador Book  
 Bottom Left: Kilkenny Tourism Tradeshows and Networking

## 1.5 SWOT Analysis for Enterprise Development in Kilkenny

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central location of Kilkenny – excellent connectivity</li> <li>• LEO is the established first stop shop for business support enquires in Kilkenny with client focused delivery</li> <li>• The LEO is funded via Enterprise Ireland and has strong links with Enterprise Ireland</li> <li>• The LEO is a unit within the Local Authority with focused local decision making</li> <li>• Expansion of the LEO remit in include the availability of some service to locally traded services with up to 50 employees</li> <li>• Kilkenny has a strong base of indigenous businesses and legacy of entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Kilkenny is an excellent place to live, work and invest and attractive place to do business</li> <li>• Kilkenny is a popular tourism destination with established natural and built heritage treasures and hosts a year-round calendar of internationally recognised festivals.</li> <li>• Kilkenny is a designated World Crafts Council, Craft City and Region with a vibrant cultural and creative sector with a thriving eco-system of creative industries and education.</li> <li>• Kilkenny is an established centre for global financial services businesses, home to Tirlan, an Agri Foods world leader, and a newly established pharmaceutical sector.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring Kilkenny has an available enterprise infrastructure to meet future demand along with a strong educated labour force which attracts a variety of employers and workers including graduates to live and work in Kilkenny</li> <li>• Addressing the requirements of mitigation and adaptation for climate change.</li> <li>• Low rate of start up businesses</li> <li>• Co-ordination of housing delivery across all tenures to meet all housing demand including growing employment opportunities</li> <li>• Limited Staff Resources within the LEO</li> <li>• Staff turnover/churn</li> <li>• Performance could be affected by number driven metrics</li> <li>• Lack of centralised CRM for LEO</li> <li>• Annual budgeting</li> <li>• Seasonality characteristic of tourism</li> <li>• Aging Enterprise Centre infrastructure</li> </ul>

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investment in Technology to engage with client base, deliver services including the opportunities that can be afforded by developments in AI</li> <li>Shared Entrepreneurship research through the network LEOs</li> <li>Develop Sectoral expertise development within the LEO</li> <li>Further links with 3rd level and research in the South East Region</li> <li>Expand potential client base to firms with greater than 10 employees</li> <li>Emerging opportunities aligned with the offshore renewable energy sector at Belview in Kilkenny</li> <li>Growth in Craft and design sector in Kilkenny</li> <li>Environmental Sustainability, green tech opportunities</li> <li>Multi-Annual budgeting and planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rapid technological advancements may disrupt businesses that fail to adapt quickly including adoption of advances in AI</li> <li>Cyber security threats</li> <li>Slowdown in economy due global economic policies</li> <li>Uncertain client pipeline due to lowering levels of entrepreneurship</li> <li>High employment and consequent labour and skills shortage</li> <li>Staff retention and their knowledge within the LEO network</li> <li>Relevance of LEO supports to client base</li> <li>Increasing competition within the region, nationally and internationally for FDI projects</li> <li>Low engagement by LEO team with AI and its potential</li> <li>Increasing costs of doing business</li> </ul>



Productivity 25 – Group completing LEAN Certification (i.e. White Belt)

The following is a review of our activity for the period 2020 to 2025:

### 1.6 Review LEO Kilkenny Activity of 2020 -2025

LEO Kilkenny – Key Statistics							
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
No of clients	188	179	182	188	190	192	
Total Jobs	1,058	1,059	1,077	1,100	1,081	1,119	
Gross Job Gains	200	217	193	168	174	172	
Gross Job Losses	237	136	90	115	104	124	
Net new Jobs	-37	81	103	53	70	48	318
Measure 1 & EI Payments	€415,672	€419,484	€439,497	€393,786	501,821	532,465	€2,702,725
No. of Projects Paid	41	38	41	39	36	61	256
Training Participants	1,676	1,022	472	1,026	1,244	1040	6,480
Mentoring Participants	1,133	761	559	554	485	423	3,915
MFI applications submitted	25	12	11	13	9	11	81
Trading Online Vouchers Approved (No of Projects Approved)	302	88	33	43	62	5	533
<b>No. of Clients Approved:</b>							
Lean for Micro	7	12	21	13	21	14	88
Green for Micro & Business	N/A	8	11	13	22	44	98
Digital for Business	N/A	N/A	4	5	13	31	53
Grow Digital Voucher	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	11	11
Energy Efficiency Grant	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	7	27	34

## 1.7 Customer Service

LEO Kilkenny operates under the guidance of the LEO customer charter and the Kilkenny County Council policies relating to customer service excellence.

### Our Service Commitment to Entrepreneurs and Businesses

Local Enterprise Office Kilkenny, Customer Service Charter outlines our commitment to delivering high quality, accessible and client focused services to entrepreneurs, startups and small businesses. It sets out what clients can expect when engaging with this LEO and defines the standards the LEO strives to meet in all interactions.

At its core, the Charter reinforces the LEO mission: to act as the first stop shop for anyone starting or growing a business locally, providing accessible, high quality supports that foster entrepreneurship, help businesses start, scale and become more competitive, and contribute to local economic development.

It details the essential services offered, including enterprise training, mentoring, funding supports, business networks, and referral pathways to Enterprise Ireland where appropriate.

Our Charter emphasises high standards of communication, committing to timely acknowledgements of phone, email and written enquiries and sets clear expectations for courteous, helpful and professional engagement. It also outlines our ongoing commitment to monitoring service quality through regular reviews, published performance indicators and annual client surveys, ensuring transparency and continuous improvement.

Our Customer Charter sets out key principles underpinning LEO service delivery, including accessibility, equality, privacy and confidentiality, and professionalism. It assures customers that services will be delivered without discrimination, that client information will be handled in strict confidence, and that facilities will be accessible in line with Disability legislation.

Finally, our Charter explains how customers can assist in maintaining service quality, and it provides a clear, structured process for lodging complaints should service fall short of expectations to ensure issues are dealt with promptly, fairly and transparently.



## 1.8 LEO Communications Strategy:

LEO Kilkenny's Communications Strategy is fully aligned with the national 'Making It Happen' 'All in Days Work' marketing and communications strategy for the LEOs, as set out by the LEO Communications Committee and LEO Communications Team in EI.

This strategy will focus on four key pillars:

- Promoting LEO-led programmes, supports and initiatives and those open to LEO clients from local authorities, EI, protocol partners and other stakeholders;
- Showcasing LEO and client announcements, regular profiling through case studies and thought leadership;
- Rolling-out brand communications campaigns locally
- Increasing the LEO's digital footprint online and enhancing social media presence and reach.
- LEO Kilkenny's Communications Strategy will continue to support National Initiatives such as those focused on All in a Day's work, Get exporting, Green, Productivity and Digitalisation



National Intermediate Award – National Student Enterprise Programme Immediate Award Winner

# Section 2: Vision/Mission

## 2.1 Vision for LEO Kilkenny

To develop and sustain a positive enterprise ecosystem at local level that will in particular drive new added-value start-ups, the further growth of small enterprises, increase exports and enhance the local economy

## 2.2 Mission Statement

LEO Kilkenny aims 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 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 mission is further supported by the LEO Policy Statement 2024-2030 which is anchored on four core pillars, with specific actions for implementation focusing on decarbonisation, digitalisation, increasing exports, supporting local businesses, and fostering innovation

This mission is supported under the overarching objectives as set out in the Service Level Agreement between Enterprise Ireland and Kilkenny County Council:

- Business Information and Advisory Services.
- Enterprise Support Services.
- Entrepreneurship Support Services; and
- Local Enterprise Development services.

## Information & Advisory Services

### 2.3.1 First Stop Enterprise & Business Support Solution

LEO Kilkennys provides a 'first stop shop' business information and advisory service for entrepreneurs and small business owners in County Kilkenny. We strive to provide a comprehensive and accessible service where entrepreneurs can access information from the LEO across the full spectrum of enterprise queries from starting-up and developing through to growing a business. This includes a referral service to other agencies in cases where the LEO cannot deal with a particular query.

We organise specialist information seminars at regular intervals throughout the year. The focus of the information seminars is on relevant issues such as Productivity, digitalisation, Innovation, accessing finance, public procurement, exporting among other topics. The seminars also offer an opportunity for entrepreneurs and small business owners to network.

LEO Kilkenny has a well-developed online presence via Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and the LEO website. LEO Kilkenny has the following numbers across our social media platforms: Facebook – 3,600 followers; Instagram - 971 followers; LinkedIn – 1,417 followers.

As part of our communication plan, we promote the services and supports we offer through monthly ezines, providing business advice and information on supports available, forthcoming seminars and workshops, enterprise training, case studies and a 'call to action' for nascent entrepreneurs and small business owners to engage with the LEO. LEO Kilkenny has 1,709 subscribers to our monthly Ezine.



Dr Pat Lynch SETU Li4 presenting clients with LEAN certificates

We proactively build relationships with all the frontline access points (including banks, accountant practices, Department of Social Protection, etc.), and ensure that they are all kept up-to-date about the supports and services we provide.

### 2.3.2 Make It Easier to do Business

The LEO has provided 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. The LEO work sinterdepartmentally within KCC to help make it easier for people to do business in Kilkenny through the provision of workspace, identification of suitable premises, access to advice on planning permissions, waste permits, rates.

## 2.4 Enterprise Support Services

Enterprise Support services as detailed below will be focused on:

- Integrating decarbonisation and net zero commitments.
- Placing digital transformation at the heart of enterprise policy.
- Strengthening the Irish-owned exporting sector.
- Enabling locally traded enterprises to thrive
- Stepping up enterprise innovation



Lean - Adman Sheds Tour

### 2.4.1 Maximise Business Potential

The LEO has delivered support services that equip entrepreneurs, owners and managers with the knowledge to plan, grow and sustain productivity, innovation and competitiveness through Lean and Green for Business programmes, Energy Efficiency grants, as well as encourage greater technology and digitalisation uptake through the implementation of the Digital for Business and Grow Digital Schemes.

The aim is to improve the management capability and sustainability of small businesses. In particular, we identify those businesses with growth potential.

LEO Kilkenny continues to provide **selective financial assistance** to eligible enterprises, which are identified as having the potential to grow, and within the policy guidelines set out by Enterprise Ireland. The financial instruments currently available from LEO Kilkenny include the following and in some limited cases are available to businesses with over 10 employees:

- **Feasibility Study:** to assist entrepreneurs assess the viability of project proposals. LEO Kilkenny is particularly interested in assisting innovative projects that have the potential to grow and/or enhance the local economy.
- **Priming Grants:** to assist entrepreneurs of eligible business start-ups trading less than 18 months.
- **Business Expansion Grants:** to assist entrepreneurs of eligible businesses in the growth phase after the initial 18-month start-up period.
- **Delivery of range of EI schemes** including Grad Start and RD&I Schemes to encourage innovation
- **Energy Efficiency Grant (EEG):** a financial support scheme designed to help small businesses in Ireland invest in energy-saving technologies and equipment
- **Market Explorer Grants:** to assist small businesses to develop their export capacity through development of an export plan

Subject to eligibility criteria, we prioritise manufacturing enterprises, internationally traded services and tourism enterprises aimed predominantly at overseas visitors.

An annual review of the Annual Employment and Development Survey (AE&DS) portfolio is undertaken annually.

LEO Kilkenny provides **Start Your Own Business (SYOB) training** for the pre-start-up and start-up entrepreneur. These training programmes give participants an introduction to all of the main issues encountered when starting up and running a business. We have developed a collaborative working relationship with the Department of Social Protection (DSP) in Kilkenny to target participants on the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, and to encourage these start-ups to participate in SYOB training.

As required we develop start-up initiatives aimed at identifying entrepreneurs such as a successful initiative “Start Exit 4” was organised by the LEO Kilkenny in conjunction with the South East Technological University (SETU) and the Urlingford Town Team. The competition involved a series of business workshops and one-to-one mentoring culminating to the finale, whereby finalists pitched their ideas towards an investment fund worth €10,000.

LEO Kilkenny delivers a broad range of **enterprise and capability development training** to small businesses to help them sustain and create jobs. This covers functional topics such as Sales & Marketing, Time Management, Financial Planning, Costing & Pricing, Book-keeping and Computerised Accounts, among other topics. We also provide high quality management development training to assist small business owners to adapt to modern business practices and to the challenges they face in a rapidly changing business environment. We continue to deliver programmes aimed at developing appropriate management practices and processes, concentrating on building the capability of local firms to engage in competitive strategies leading to greater innovation, sustainability and growth.

We realise the value of **business networking**, where members can tap into the support of fellow members who are likely to have had similar experiences and issues. Networking helps members to make new business connections and share best practice. It is also a platform from which small businesses can potentially gain exposure for their products and services and/or gather new business leads and create new business opportunities. We continue to support business networks in the County,



LEO Kilkenny Launch of Autumn Training Programme

in particular Network Ireland Kilkenny, a progressive, dynamic organisation supporting the professional and personal development of women.

We participate in ‘**Local Enterprise Week**’ aimed at anyone thinking of starting a business, new start-ups and growing small businesses. We organise a range of workshops, seminars, networking events and business advice clinics during Enterprise Week

We continue to operate a **Mentor Programme**, in particular to assist entrepreneurs overcome obstacles in developing their business. This service provides entrepreneurs with a temporary business advisor to help them identify and overcome obstacles in their development. We have access to an extensive panel of experienced business advisors. Mentors act as a confidential sounding board by listening, advising and suggesting solutions to problems encountered by entrepreneurs. The challenge for a growing business in particular, is often to make the transition from being operationally focused to being able to manage the business as it grows. We also provide mentoring support to assist clients prepare business cases for Micro Finance Ireland (MFI).

We provide **Market Explorer Grants** to assist small businesses to develop their export capacity through development of an export plan and funding to exhibit in overseas markets or develop appropriate market entry plans. LEO Kilkenny will engage with the Get Exporting and through Export Advisor funding to support businesses strengthen their export capacity.

**Placing digital transformation at the heart of enterprise policy** LEO Kilkenny continue to promote digital for business and grow digital schemes to enable businesses to adopt best practices digitalisation processes into their business and to integrate the use of AI into their businesses.

**Integrating decarbonisation and net zero commitments** will be delivered via the Green for Business and Energy Efficiency grant scheme in conjunction with seminars, training and collaboration with other support agencies. For example - Going Green 2025 Conference was organised by the LEO Kilkenny in partnership with Kilkenny County Council Climate Action Team and Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce showcasing the green supports and funding opportunities for businesses in Kilkenny at Hotel Kilkenny in September. Small businesses with up to and including 50 employees in almost all sectors will be eligible for productivity and competitiveness funding. 44 Green for Business supports were awarded with 26 businesses availing of the Energy Efficiency Grant. These schemes support businesses to become more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

We provide access to the **Lean for Business** programme to allow businesses to look at processes within their business to ensure they are more competitive and innovative.

We continue to communicate with EI 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.

We foster ongoing relationships with clients on the AES portfolio, to assess their growth and development potential and needs. In particular, shift the balance of activity in the client portfolio and strive to identify client companies that are 'ripe' for transfer to Enterprise Ireland (EI). In some cases, clients may need specialist support to make the transition to EI. In such cases we will engage the services of the Propelor BIC to work with clients to assist them meet the requirements of EI. We actively engage with the New Frontiers programmes delivered by SETU in Carlow and Waterford.

## 2.5 Entrepreneurship Support Services

### 2.5.1 Promote a Best Practice Enterprise Culture

We continue to deliver the **Student Enterprise Programme** in second level schools in the County. The Student Enterprise Programme (SEP) is a national enterprise education programme for second level students aimed at fostering an entrepreneurial spirit, through the practical experience of setting up and running a mini-business. The SEP is now well established, particularly with transition year students. We continue to contract a Project Worker to help deliver the SEP.

We continue to profile entrepreneurs in the local media. The role of the local media in communicating information to the general public about the supports available for aspiring and established entrepreneurs is crucial and advertisements in the local media have been a key tool in alerting potential participants to planned LEO initiatives. The local media also plays an important role in fostering positive cultural and social



Hi Tec Medicare National Enterprise Awards Finalist

norms about entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship through the manner and frequency with which they feature stories about successful entrepreneurs. We continue to work with the local media to promote business and enterprise topics and local success stories. We also facilitate the local media in learning about the successes of local entrepreneurs by continuing to champion the achievements of clients through case studies. These local success stories raise awareness of enterprise, as well as encourage and inspire potential entrepreneurs (particularly young people), when they see that success can be achieved by people in their own communities.

We promote enterprise competitions including the National Enterprise Awards and the Kilkenny Chamber Business Awards. These are important initiatives to celebrate the achievements of local entrepreneurs. We continue to identify clients most suitable for participation in the Awards and seek to maximise the local publicity attaching to their participation as role models of successful local enterprises that may inspire others.

While there are many well-known craft producers in the county, the sector is primarily made up of micro-enterprises and along with the artisan food and tourism sectors, they form an integral part of the local economy. We continue to support craft makers to set-up and grow their businesses in the county through the Kilkenny Craft Strategy.

Given the importance of tourism to the County, we work with KCC and Kilkenny Tourism and other key stakeholders to deliver a strategy to improve the visitor experience, to include in particular the development of quality international stand-out attractions (e.g. The Kilkenny Greenway, the Museum of Medieval Kilkenny), which will form part of the Ireland Ancient East brand. The strategy will also include proposals for building on the success of the existing programme of festivals in the County as an economic driver.

We also promote greater business links between the tourism and food sectors, in particular promoting use of local produce by the local hospitality sector through our #tastekilkenny brand.





National Women's Enterprise Day 2025

## 2.6 Local Economic Development Services

### 2.6.1 Environment for Start-Ups

LEO Kilkennys works to promote Kilkenny as a place to locate business through the #investkilkenny, #belongkilkenny, #screenkilkenny brands. We work closely with Enterprise Ireland and the IDA to promote Kilkenny to businesses interested in relocating within Ireland and those considering Ireland as an investment location.

We leverage the full range of enterprise supports across the Local Authority economic development remit. We manage the economic actions of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) and report on same to the Strategic Policy Committee for Economic, Enterprise, Tourism and Planning Development on a quarterly basis.

### 2.7 National LEO Programmes

LEO Kilkenny is committed to engaging with national LEO Network initiatives as they arise nationally including:

- **Enterprise Week** is an annual initiative led by the Local Enterprise Offices to celebrate and promote entrepreneurship across Ireland. Running over the first week in March it typically features a packed schedule of events, including workshops, seminars, networking sessions, and expert panels designed to support start-ups and small businesses. The week provides practical advice on areas such as digital transformation, sustainability, finance, and innovation,

while also showcasing success stories from local enterprises. Its core aim is to foster business growth, encourage collaboration, and highlight the vital role small businesses play in regional economic development.

- **The Local Enterprise Village** at the National Ploughing Championships is a flagship showcase for Ireland's small businesses, hosted by the Local Enterprise Offices. It brings together over 30 innovative companies from across the country, giving them a unique platform to exhibit their products and services to more than 200,000 visitors. The Village highlights the diversity and creativity of Irish enterprise, from food producers and craft makers to tech innovators, while promoting the importance of supporting local businesses. This initiative not only drives brand visibility and sales for participating companies but also reinforces the role of LEOs in fostering entrepreneurship and regional economic growth.
- **National Women's Enterprise Day (NWED)** is a flagship initiative of the Local Enterprise Offices, dedicated to celebrating and empowering women in business across Ireland. Held annually, it features a nationwide series of events including networking sessions, expert-led workshops, and inspirational talks from successful female entrepreneurs. The day aims to encourage more women to start and grow businesses, providing practical advice, mentoring opportunities, and access to resources that support enterprise development. NWED also highlights the vital contribution of women-led businesses to the economy and promotes diversity and inclusion within the entrepreneurial landscape.
- **The Student Enterprise Programme** is Ireland's largest student business programme, run by the Local Enterprise Offices to foster entrepreneurship among second-level students. Each year, thousands of students create and manage real businesses as part of the initiative, developing skills in innovation, marketing, finance, and teamwork. The programme culminates in the National Final, where regional winners showcase their enterprises and compete for top awards. Beyond the competition, the initiative aims to inspire a new generation of entrepreneurs, equipping young people with practical experience and confidence to pursue future business ventures.
- **The National Enterprise Awards** is the premier event celebrating Ireland's most successful small businesses, organized annually by the Local Enterprise Offices. The awards recognize outstanding achievement in entrepreneurship, innovation, and growth across multiple sectors, showcasing the best of Ireland's indigenous enterprise. Regional winners from all 31 LEO areas compete for national titles, with categories highlighting excellence in areas such as sustainability, digital transformation, and export potential. This prestigious event not only honours business success but also promotes the vital role of small enterprises in driving economic development and job creation nationwide.

- **The Local Enterprise Area at Showcase** plays a pivotal role in promoting Irish design and craft businesses on an international stage. Showcase, Ireland's premier trade event for creative industries, attracts thousands of buyers from around the world, offering LEO-supported companies a unique opportunity to secure export orders and grow their brand presence. Through dedicated stands and mentoring support, LEOs help small enterprises present their products professionally, connect with global retailers, and build long-term commercial relationships. This initiative underscores LEOs' commitment to driving innovation, supporting local talent, and boosting Ireland's reputation for quality design and craftsmanship.
- **Food Academy and Start-Up Programmes** are cornerstone initiatives of the Local Enterprise Offices, designed to nurture early-stage businesses and food producers. The *Food Academy*, delivered in partnership with SuperValu, equips emerging food entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge to scale their products for retail, focusing on branding, marketing, and distribution. Similarly, the *Food Starter* provides intensive training and mentoring for new business owners, covering critical areas such as financial planning, market research, and growth strategies. Both programmes aim to build sustainable enterprises, foster innovation, and strengthen Ireland's local economy by supporting businesses from concept to market success.



Marketing Overview 2025

## Section 3: Strategic Priorities & Actions

### Strategic Priorities for LEO Kilkenny 2026 & 2027

The uncertainty and negative impacts on SMEs created by external influences such as geo political and global trade threats are a reminder that some areas of LEO activity can change radically and very quickly in the short term.

However, we will continue to deliver and build on a range of complimentary and reinforcing actions focused on achieving our strategic priorities.

#### 3.1.1 Entrepreneurship & Enabling Local Services to Thrive

LEO Kilkenny will foster, promote and support local entrepreneurship through the creation of a strong local enterprise support ecosystem:

- Support new business start-ups through new approaches to promoting local entrepreneurship and piloting new models for engaging new promoters in start-ups;
- Run Start or Ideas Kilkenny initiatives to generate interest as needs be in entrepreneurship;
- Increase conversion of the Start Your Own Business participants to M1 project proposals;
- Work with larger EI/IDA businesses in the County to harness opportunity for spinouts, sub-supply etc.;
- Consider opportunities which digitalisation, remote working and the green economy may afford to entrepreneurs;
- Promotion of all suitable supports to all locally traded businesses;
- Continue to support of EIs New Frontiers Programme in collaboration with SETU;
- Engaging in collaboration on awards;
- Supporting the implementation of the Kilkenny City Night Time Economy action plan.

#### 3.1.2 Competitiveness and Digitalisation

LEO Kilkenny will aim to improve the competitiveness and productivity of small and micro enterprises through enhancing LEO client management capability:

- Promote, introduce, engage and increase the number of companies undertaking Lean for Business;
- Deliver Create Kilkenny, a management development programme targeting at emerging craft businesses in Kilkenny;

- Ensure Management Development Programmes include Competitiveness and Digitalisation modules;
- Provide expertise to LEO clients in respect of productivity that are available to grow their businesses;
- Promote the Grow Digital and Digital for Business schemes to drive the digital economy through a range of training programmes and seminars including delivering modules on adaptation to AI.

### 3.1.3 Integrating decarbonisation and net zero commitments

Develop a suite of services to enable small businesses to future-proof their businesses from an environmental perspective:

- Promote and deliver the 'Green for Business' and Energy Efficiency Grant scheme Programme;
- Develop and deliver a range of training programmes to support businesses to meet their obligations under the Green/Sustainability Agenda;
- Work closely with the Local Authority regarding its green/sustainability agenda and its promotion locally;
- Promote the Remote Working Agenda to assist the stimulation of balanced regional development;
- Assist and support the identification of new Green opportunities for start-up and existing businesses;
- Support local businesses engage and prepare for the opportunities afforded by off shore renewable energy.

### 3.1.4 Stepping Up Innovation

Increase the level of innovation, technology-adoption and digitisation within the LEO client base:

- Increase LEO staff one-to-one client engagement to identify innovation and technology challenges within LEO businesses;
- Encourage LEO clients to embrace the Innovation agenda to ensure a step change within their business;
- Enable more LEO clients to develop internal innovation management processes by delivering innovation modules on Management Development Programmes suitable for micro enterprises;
- Promote the opportunities arising from Enterprise Ireland RD&I funding available to small businesses;
- Develop and drive connections between client firms and the local innovation ecosystem;
- Through the development of new engagement models, drive greater interaction between local FDI, larger firms, the third level and LEO clients to transfer knowledge and skills and to create local synergies.

### 3.1.5 Exporting/Internationalisation – Strengthening the Irish Owner Export Sector

Increase the export capabilities of small and micro enterprises:

- Increase LEO staff one-to-one interaction with suitable LEO clients with export capability to build their export capacity and capability;
- Develop early-stage export capability development programmes and one to one supports for LEO clients, measure outputs through annual employment survey and integrate with the services of Enterprise Ireland and support the Get Exporting programme;
- Assist businesses engage in market entry visits to increase market knowledge and identified new market opportunities and engagement with the Market Explorer grant;
- Integrate the LEO export supports with those of EI, in particular through increased engagement with Enterprise Ireland overseas offices;
- Support clients to effectively respond to global tariffs or other threats as they arise;
- Ensure Management Development Programmes include Exporting/Internationalisation modules;
- Work with businesses with digital export capability to be developed;
- Continue to work with LEO clients with export capability to transfer to Enterprise Ireland.

### Capacity and Capability Development

LEO Kilkenny will aim to enhance the confidence, ambition and leadership skills of small Deliver client-focused, needs-based, management development programmes targeted at the

- LEO clients to drive the strategic priorities – entrepreneurship, competitiveness and digitalisation, green/sustainability, exporting/internationalisation, innovation, clustering and networking;
- Maximise the LEO mentoring programme to increase ambition and capabilities;
- Increase LEO staff one-to-one client engagement to identify export ready clients;
- Facilitate local business networks with a particular focus on peer learning and enhancing capabilities;
- Deliver International Leadership programmes to identified portfolio of clients;
- Implement individual coaching to selected entrepreneurs in order to develop confidence, ambition and leadership skills.

# Section 4: Associated Actions and Activities

LEO Kilkenny will lead in so far as possible collaborations on the county enterprise ecosystem involving LEO service, Community Enterprise Centres, related Local Authority supports, Leader.

LEO Kilkenny aims to collaborate and work with all relevant agencies with the ecosystem and actively sign posts clients to supports that best suit their requirements including:

## 4.1.1 Department of Social Protection

LEO Kilkenny works with the Department in relation to all start-up show case events, information seminars and in relation to the back to work enterprise allowance.

## 4.1.2 Credit Review Office

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. LEO Kilkenny actively advised and refers clients as appropriate.

## 4.1.3 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. Locally KCC and LEO Kilkenny work closely with Fáilte Ireland to implement the Kilkenny Craft Strategy and the Destination Experience Development Plan.

## 4.1.4 Microfinance 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. 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.

## 4.1.5 Skillnets

Carlow Kilkenny 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.

## 4.1.6 Education & Training Boards (ETBs)

The ETBs are statutory authorities which have responsibility for education and training, and some services to business including apprenticeships and employee training supports.

## 4.1.7 Revenue

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.

## 4.1.8 National Association of Community Enterprise Centres (NACEC)

Agreed between EI and NACEC, which 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.

## 4.1.9 County Kilkenny LEADER Partnership

LEO Kilkenny works with CKLP to ensure enterprise supports are complementary, are configured to meet local needs and ultimately, maximise the impact of both development bodies in their local areas. We collaborate on the delivery of strategies for local business sectors.

## 4.1.10 Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce

Engagement is ongoing around collaboration on events and awards schemes for businesses in Kilkenny.

## 4.1.11 Kilkenny Tourism CLG

LEO Kilkenny supports networking and training for tourism businesses based in Kilkenny through ongoing collaboration with Kilkenny Tourism.



LEO Supports Showcase Event



Launch of Retail Accelerator Programme

## 4.2 Other Initiatives

LEO Kilkenny will collaborate with other stakeholders on a range of other initiatives, in addition to our core support services aimed at exploiting the potential of the sectoral strengths of the County. These will include:

- Retail – working closely with Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce and Kilkenny City Centre Task Force to develop programmes and initiatives to support the retail community and to encourage shopping locally through our **#shopkilkenny** initiative – a call to action to consider shopping in their local retail stores and local online facilities in order to support local jobs;
- Tourism & Hospitality - delivering in conjunction with Kilkenny County Council and Kilkenny Tourism on the Tourism Statement of Strategy and Work Programme 2023 to 2028;
- Food – enhancement and support of the **#tastekilkenny** brand in order to ensure Kilkenny is recognised as a food tourism destination and encourage the use of local food on local menus and further promoting local food for consumption by the local community;
- The Craft Sector – we will work closely with the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland to. We will support the Made in Kilkenny and Kilkenny Craft Guild craft producers to showcase the best of Irish Craft and grow their businesses;
- Business Location - continue to support the **#investkilkenny and belong Kilkenny** brands to promote Kilkenny as a place live and work and encourage businesses to consider Kilkenny as a location for their business; Promote Strategic Investment locations such as the Abbey Quarter Development, the former Smithwick's Brewery site and a city centre site which will be a transformative development for the city in providing the required infrastructure to attract business of scale to Kilkenny and Belview Port, in the South of the County. In relation to Belview particular focus for the period will be on the opportunities presented by offshore renewable energy;
- Regional & Local Stakeholders - we will engage with relevant stakeholders to deliver the actions identified in the **Local Economic and Community Plan** and **Regional Enterprise Plan**. We will proactively engage with the SPC for Economic Development, Enterprise Supports and Tourism and Planning Development and the South East Regional Development Office to progress economic actions contained in both plans respectively.



LEO Supports LEO Kilkenny Start Exit 4 Competition Winner Huwmo Ltd Showcase Event

# Section 5: Risks and New Initiatives

## Identified Risks:

Risks that can adversely affect the achievement of the objectives outlined above.	Actions to mitigate this risk
<b>Slowdown in Economy global political uncertainty and tariffs.</b>	Ensure that relevant interventions are designed delivered to support businesses who have been impacted by global economic uncertainty. Furthermore, ensure that there is an awareness of the relevant government supports through promotion and marketing of same through social and traditional media.
<b>Reduction in Start-up Numbers</b>	Create an awareness of entrepreneurship as an alternative. Focus on opportunities that may become available through the transition to a low carbon economy and remote working opportunities.
<b>Reduced Funding available for supports</b>	<p>The LEO will work closely with EI to develop a range of proposals for further funding in order to provide the supports that will be required to develop businesses over the period of the plan.</p> <p>With the majority of businesses in the County being micro enterprises, there is a need to make a reasonable budget available to help develop and grow the productivity of the sector and to maximise its impact at local level.</p>
<b>Staff Retention within the LEO</b>	<p>Critical to achieving the aims, objectives, actions and outcomes of the plan will be adequate and appropriate resourcing of the LEO.</p> <p>Ensure recommendations in relation to the staffing of the LEO per the Service Level Agreement between Enterprise Ireland and the CCMA are adhered to in all recruitment processes.</p>
<b>Relevance of LEO supports to client base</b>	As the nature of work changes, so too will the supports which will be required to support future working practices. The LEO will work with businesses and EI to ensure that the supports required are relevant and provided in a timely manner.
<b>Rate of technology change/ Rapid technological advancements may disrupt businesses that fail to adapt quickly including adoption of advances in AI</b>	Due to the increasing complexity of client needs and the rate of change in technology and market, the LEO will provide suitably qualified experienced staff and mentors to provide added value advice and support to clients.

## APPENDIX 1: LEO Kilkenny

<b>Jobs:</b>	<b>Output 2025</b>	<b>Target 2026</b>
LEO Client Portfolio	192	195
Total Portfolio Employment (All Jobs, both FT & PT)	1,119	1,222
Gross Jobs Created (All Jobs both FT & PT)	172	188
Net Jobs Increase (All Jobs created minus all Job Losses)	48	105

<b>Progression Pathway:</b>	<b>Output 2020 – 2025</b>	<b>Target 2026</b>
Number of Clients transferred to Enterprise Ireland	48	5

<b>Measure 1 (including supports to Over 10)</b>	<b>Output 2020 – 2025</b>	<b>Target 2026</b>
<b>Number of Clients Approved Funding:</b>	256	33
No. of projected potential new jobs associated with Approvals (Priming & Business Expansion)	N/a	84
Costs per job calculation associated with approvals (Average Cost calculated on new jobs over three years)		

<b>Digital Supports:</b>	<b>Output 2022 – 2025</b>	<b>Target 2026</b>
Digital for Business	53	27
Financial Supports (Trading Online Vouchers & Grow Digital Vouchers)	631	18

<b>Green Supports:</b>	<b>Output 2021 – 2025</b>	<b>Target 2026</b>
Green for Business	98	27
Financial Supports (Energy Efficiency Grants)	34	18

<b>Competitiveness Supports:</b>	<b>Output 2020 – 2025</b>	<b>Target 2026</b>
Lean for Business	88	15

<b>Innovation Supports</b>	<b>Output 2020 – 2025</b>	<b>Target 2026</b>
No. of Companies approved Financial Supports (Agile, IPP, RD&I)	3	1
Intellectual Property Support (IP Start)	5	1

<b>EI Grant Support Measure administered through the LEO (e.g. Grad Start, etc.)</b>	<b>Output 2020 – 2025</b>	<b>Target 2026</b>
No. of Companies supported	8	1

<b>Measure 2</b>	<b>Output 2020 – 2025</b>	<b>Target 2026</b>
<b>Training/Development Programmes (All Training and Networking events)</b>		
Total No. of All Programmes (Training/Networking/Events/Seminars)	417	
Total No. of all Participants participating in above Programmes	6,480	900
No. of SYOB Programmes	66	6
No. of Participants attending SYOB Programmes	1083	90
No. of Management Development Programmes	25	3
No. of Participants attending Management Development Programmes	315	90

<b>Mentoring:</b>		
Total Number of individual mentoring – (participants availing of one-to-one mentoring – one to one engagement by a Mentor with one client)	3,909	270
Total Number of group mentoring participants – (are all group mentoring engagements or clinics where a mentor engages with a group of clients.	1,793	
Total Number of Mentoring Participants (both one to one and group)	2,116	

<b>Schools Entrepreneurship:</b>	<b>Output 2020 – 2025</b>	<b>Target 2026</b>
Number of Schools Participating (Secondary schools only engaged in school enterprise programmes)	14	14
Number of Students Participating	5,027	

<b>First Time Exporters</b>	<b>Output 2020 – 2025</b>	<b>Target 2026</b>
No. of First Time Exporters	15	3
No. Clients on Export Accelerator Programmes	10	3
No of Over 10 Clients supported with Financial Assistance to internationalise	4	1
No of Clients supported through other initiatives such as EEN, Intertrade Ireland.	5	1

<b>MFI:</b>	<b>Output 2020 – 2025</b>	<b>Target 2026</b>
Number of Applications submitted	81	

# CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER



Putting the customer  
at the centre of our work...



## 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.

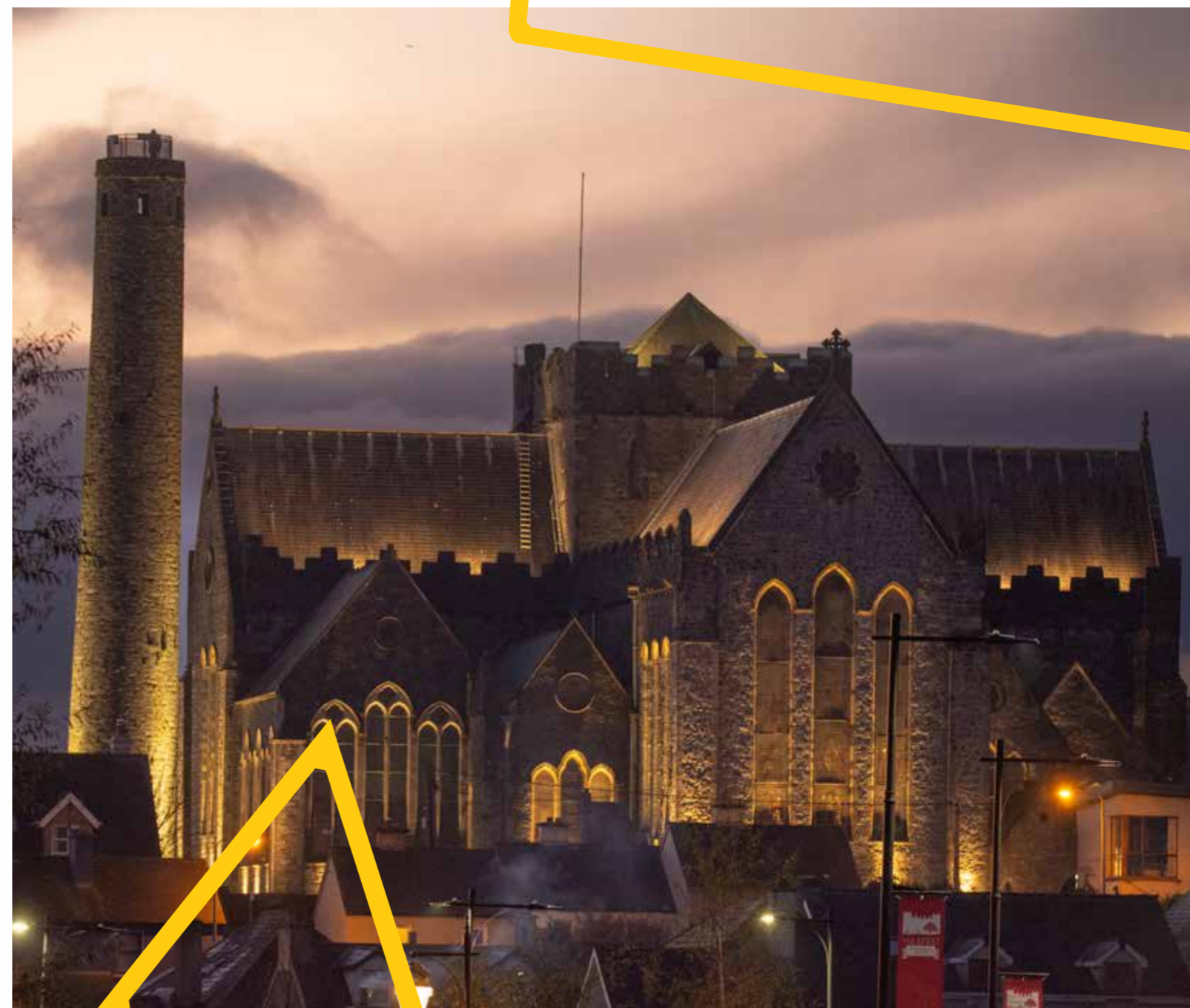
Your LEO is committed to providing quality client services. To ensure that our clients are satisfied with our service delivery standard we commit to undertaking regular reviews and to publish indicators of customer service, in particular, application processing times, referral of cases to other agencies 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.





Oifig Fiontair Áitiúil  
Local Enterprise Office



Comhairle Chontae Chill Chainnigh  
Kilkenny County Council

