

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENTERPRISE AND PLANNING STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE HELD AT LIMERICK RACECOURSE, PATRICKSWELL ON FRIDAY, 3RD JULY, 2020 AT 12 NOON.

PRESENT IN THE CHAIR: Councillor Eddie Ryan

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors: Daniel Butler, Bridie Collins, John Egan, Liam Galvin, Stephen Keary, Michael Murphy, Olivia O’Sullivan, Sasa Novak Uí Chonchúir

SECTORAL INTERESTS: Declan Hehir and Brian Thompson

OFFICIALS PRESENT:

V. Murray, Economic Development; P. Fitzgerald, Cecilia Larkin, Rory Corbett, Trade & Investment; M. Cantwell, Innovate; B. Moloney, LEO; B Burke, Economic Development.

Mr. John Moran, Chairman SME Recovery / Mr. Eddie Kelly

APOLOGIES: Cllrs. Martin Ryan and Olivia O’Sullivan
Dr. Catriona Cahill, Eoin Ryan and Brian Vandamme

Item 1

To consider a Notice of Motion from Cllr Bridie Collins

'That Limerick City & County Council supports 'The National Small Business Recovery Plan' in order to protect the thousands of jobs that SME's provide throughout County Limerick; and further that Limerick City and County Council requests the Government to fund and immediately implement the Actions of the National Small Business Recovery Plan using EU recovery schemes'

On the proposal of Cllr. B Collins, seconded by Cllr. L. Galvin, it was unanimously agreed that this Notice of Motion to support the National Small Business Recovery Plan (NSBRP) be forwarded to full Council Meeting for approval and it was also agreed that a letter be forwarded to Mr. Leo Varadkar, Minister for Enterprise, Trade & Employment, to fund and immediately implement the findings and recommendations of the NSBRP and that this Notice of Motion be circulated to all other Councils.

John Moran, Chairman SME Recovery, gave a presentation to members on the National Small Business Recovery Plan, which is supported by various bodies who represent small businesses. The plan focuses on key policy interventions that are required to stabilise and recapitalise the small business sector so that employment and economic activity can be restored post Covid-19.

He stated that SME’s provide vital employment at a local level and are key to the social fabric and functioning of communities. That 1.5m people rely on the SME sector, which accounts for 65% of all employment in the state. Over 1m people have become unemployed as a result of Covid-19, mainly young people on lower incomes and are currently receiving government support. While acknowledging the wage supports and liquidity measures which have served a purpose in keeping business alive during Covid-19 restrictions, Mr. Moran pointed out that they must be supplemented, along with further measures e.g. business stabilisation supports, business compensation funds, working capital loans with low interest rates and a range of stimulus measures to drive demand for products and services of firms.

He stated that Recovery Plans for SME's will vary greatly between city and county and not keeping businesses alive will have major consequences in rural towns/villages.

Extra measures will need to be put in place to support firms struggling due to changed COVID operating rules, which will assist with the viability of businesses in the future.

He stated that Limerick will have to approach it on a geographical and sector by sector basis and suggested supporting businesses to trade online as it will be a necessary part of the overall recovery.

It will be vital for Limerick to have a Post Covid Economic Plan to build confidence and create economic stimulus in Limerick and he welcomed the range of business supports provided by Limerick LEO and the Council and suggested requesting supplementary funding for these supports. He also pointed out that coherent Local Plans would encourage staycations and tourism in the Limerick area.

Members thanked Mr. Moran for the very comprehensive and informative presentation and acknowledged his optimism in putting this Recovery Plan in place. They expressed concern that the loan application process was very daunting with high interest rates and that a grant structure should be put in place for SME's. Other issues of concern expressed were Insurance cover/costs for SME's, payment method of commercial rates, and the implications for people re mortgage approvals /drawdowns having received COVID-19 payment.

Replying to queries from members, V. Murray stated that €1.5m had been recently allocated to address dereliction in rural villages. He also pointed out that the Council are in regular contact with businesses regarding Business Restart Grants, Rates Waiver Scheme and Deferral of Rates along with supports provided by the Limerick Enterprise Office.

Mr. Moran stated it was vital to know the losses incurred by SME's in Limerick and to have plans in place to spread funding throughout the county as quickly as possible.

With predicted population growth in Limerick of 100k in next 20 years and plans for 20-30k homes, he stated it was important to build on the success of the Economic Development Unit and Limerick 2030 projects to date. He suggested the following measures:

- Prepare plan for Recovery of Limerick Post Covid-19
- Prepare funding programme for SMEs
- Review unemployment rate and work it back to 3%
- Arrange apprenticeship training on a national scale
- Pursue plans for new University of Limerick Campus in Limerick City,

All of which will encourage major investment and business into Limerick City and County.

That concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____

**CLLR. EDDIE RYAN,
CHAIRMAN**