

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENTERPRISE AND PLANNING STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE HELD REMOTELY ON WEDNESDAY, 18<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2020 at 2PM.**

**PRESENT IN THE CHAIR:** Councillor Eddie Ryan

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Councillors: Daniel Butler, Bridie Collins, James Collins, Liam Galvin, Stephen Keary, Jerry O’Dea, Martin Ryan, Jerome Scanlan, Catherine Slattery, Sasa Novak Uí Chonchúir

**SECTORAL INTERESTS/ PPN NOMINEES:** Declan Hehir, Brian Thompson.

**OFFICIALS PRESENT:**

Vincent Murray, Economic Development; Pat Fitzgerald, Cecilia Larkin, Rory Corbett, Trade & Investment; Maria Woods, Forward Planning; Mike Cantwell, Head of Innovate/LEO, Bernie Moloney, LEO, Paraic Rattigan, MW Regional Enterprise.

John Moran, Chair of SME Recovery Group

**APOLOGIES:** Aidan Gleeson and Dr. Catriona Cahill, Sectoral Interests.

**Item 1**

**To receive a presentation from Mr. John Moran on the following Report “Supporting Limerick’s SMEs through Challenging Times and Change”**

The Chairperson thanked all those who were involved in the preparation and drafting of the Report which sets out how the state and local government can support SME’s through the current crisis and how best to help them in a sustainable future.

The Chairperson called on Mr John Moran who compiled the report in association with other stakeholders to make a presentation to the meeting.

He outlined the scale of the crisis for Irish SME’s and local businesses. The success of local business is critical to the local economy as well the community fabric it supports. A Plan to support business in the immediate crisis and in the short/medium term is urgently required.

The Tánaiste has established a National SME Growth Task Force to set out the policy aspects of an SME recovery plan. A local implementation plan is also required to implement the national policies. The Supporting Limerick’s SMEs through Challenging Times and Change Report attempts to marry the national efforts with local actions.

The report sets out a five guiding principles in supporting the SME sector;

- Acknowledgement of the key role SMEs have in our social fabric
- Navigating the new normal is vital for SMEs
- Supports should be streamlined and easy to process
- Education and upskilling are vital to underpin a more robust future
- Successful SMEs need to be financially resilient

A number of recommendations with short and medium actions were laid out in the Report

1. *Make supporting SMEs a key priority for the local economy.* Actions include the mapping of all businesses across Limerick; regular reporting on SME performance to SPC; setting up of a local SME Recovery Task Force etc.
2. *Extra Support for SMEs to navigate the new post COVID Normal.* Actions include the appointment of a Digital Innovation Mentor; develop a hub and spoke model of co-working locations; seek out new markets; promote a network of local farmers markets
3. *Develop a Single Umbrella Government Support Agency for SMEs.* Actions include a National Policy Agency; Local implementation structures, one-stop shop SME support facilities.
4. *Enhance Training and Upskilling Opportunities and Support with SMEs in mind.* Actions include basic financial literacy training; greater use of the apprenticeship and scholarship models; schools/ colleges entrepreneurial programmes
5. *Establish an SME Culture of Long Term Planning and Financial Resilience.* Actions include the establishment of a COVID Support Team; enhanced business advisory and support network; local SME Finance Task Force

In relation to local governance the Local Task Force would report to the Mayor; the Chief Executive would Chair a group of State Agency Support bodies; and local thematic groups would be established e.g. hospitality, funding, training, etc. to support the Local Task Force. Mr Moran stated that if Limerick undertook these roles successfully there is no reason why Limerick and the Mid-West Region could not pilot the national approach to supporting SMEs.

The members spoke in support of the recommendations contained in the Plan. They spoke of the incredible contribution local businesses make to their communities and that they must be supported.

Members particularly welcomed the proposals for one-stop shops for SMEs and the marketing/branding of Limerick as a business location. Members strongly urged the public to support local businesses by shopping local.

Financial planning was seen as a key skill to be adopted by local business. Members stressed the importance of e-commerce to all types of businesses and the ability to use technology to their advantage.

Members welcomed the proposal to establish a Local Task Force to support SMEs. The provision of co-working hubs across Limerick was seen as very important to sustain local communities as well as giving employees the option of working locally.

There was a call to streamline the assistance programme to SMEs. Ease of access to supports will encourage more businesses to seek support.

Members stressed that the focus should now be on getting businesses re-opened. They were aware that there is a shortage of trained skilled workers in certain areas like construction, hospitality etc. training /upskilling courses need to be directed at these sectors to ensure that the local labour market can be satisfied by local people.

On the proposal of Cllr B Collins and seconded by Cllr J Scanlan it was agreed unanimously to accept the recommendations as set out in the plan. It was further agreed that the Limerick City & County

Council would forward their endorsement of the Plan to the National SME Growth Task Force for their consideration.

Mr V Murray thanked all those who had contributed to the drafting of the plan and all those who had contributed in today's discussion. He undertook that following full Council support of the Plan that a meeting would take place with the Mayor and the Chief Executive to progress those aspects of the plan that were in the direct control of the Council. He looked forward to the outcome of the National Task Force and assured members that Limerick was ready to play its role in supporting the SME sector

On the proposal of Cllr. B. Collins seconded by Cllr. Scanlan, it was unanimously agreed that Limerick City & County Council fully endorse the 'Supporting Limerick's SMEs through Challenging Times and Change' Report and that it be forwarded to the Minister for Enterprise Trade and Employment, and the SME Growth Task Force for their consideration.

That concluded the business of the meeting.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Councillor Eddie Ryan,**  
**Chairperson**