

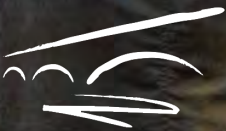
# Limerick City and County SME Action Plan 2026



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# Forewords

Limerick is a place of enormous potential – but potential alone is not enough. What matters is what we do with it.

The SME Action Plan is about delivery. It is about taking ideas, talent and ambition that already exist across our city and county embedded in our small and medium size businesses, many of them family businesses, and turning them into real businesses, real jobs and real opportunities for our people. Because if we are serious about building a more prosperous Limerick, resilient to external shocks, then we must be serious about backing our SMEs.

Small and medium enterprises are not just part of our economy – they are its backbone. They ensure that growth is felt in every town, village and neighbourhood. They are also the doors most likely to be knocked on when the local community group, sports club or charity is in need of a little funding or sponsorship.

But success is not guaranteed. We must be honest about the challenges standing in the way. Access to finance remains challenging for many SMEs. Finding or retaining enough talent in the face of competition is an everyday obstacle to fast growing businesses, and even those reaching a plateau of growth. And poor infrastructure or finding ways to access new markets are barriers we cannot accept – they like all the other challenges are problems to be solved.

Government and local authorities cannot do it all, but we can create an environment and an ecosystem which fosters collaboration and with it ways to solve problems and realise the potential of all of our businesses. For most businesses the need to find solutions is not an academic point, it is a business imperative.

That is why this plan is practical, targeted and ambitious. It brings together the insights of business owners, experts and public bodies to set out clear actions that we can deliver over the coming years.

Because with success first in delivering small things and finding solutions to current day problems, comes the extra confidence for all of us to climb higher mountains.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all who have laboured to bring this plan to the light of day. It is always risky to single out specific names but I will risk the wrath of the other amazing people who worked on this plan if they will permit me to give particular thanks and congratulations to my councillor colleague and co-chair of our SME Expert Working Group Cllr Peter Doyle and to my executive colleague Brendan Troy, ably directed by Director of Service Sean Lenihan. Without their drive and attention this plan would not have been delivered.

We know in our hearts how much Limerick has going for it. Now, together with renewed ambition, we can aim to deliver much more.

And who knows, maybe accolades like UNESCO City of Design for the work of our SMEs will soon be another badge of success we have earned the right to wear.

**John A Moran**

Mayor of Limerick



This SME Action Plan is about making it easier for businesses to succeed across our city and county. SMEs are at the heart of our local economy. They provide jobs, support families, and bring life to our communities, from the city centre to our towns and villages.

We know there are real obstacles—access to finance, rising costs, and the need for better infrastructure and facilities. But we also know the strengths we have: a strong work ethic, a supportive community, and a growing city with enormous potential.

This plan focuses on practical actions. It is about improving the business environment, supporting enterprise, and making Limerick a better place in which to start and do business. It is also about restoring confidence in our city centre and ensuring that all areas benefit from growth.

By working together—businesses, communities, and local government—we can build a stronger, more vibrant Limerick for everyone.

I would like to thank all the members of the SME task force for their involvement and commitment over the last eighteen months (names listed below). I also thank the officials of Limerick City and County Council who assisted us, particularly Brendan Troy, Head of Economic and Tourism Development, who gave his time and expertise to our taskforce and to this report. Finally, I would like to thank the Mayor for inviting me to Chair the SME task force that produced this report.

**Cllr Peter Doyle**  
Chairman of  
SME Task Force



## SME Task Force members

Name	Organisation
Cllr Peter Doyle (Chair)	Councillor, LCCC
Mayor John Moran (Chair)	Mayor of Limerick
Brendan Troy	Head of Economic and Tourism Investment, LCCC
Mike Cantwell	Head of LEO
Gerry Reynolds	Takumi
Eoin Silke	Limerick Retailers
Vincent Sheehan	Global Sauces
Briga Hynes	University of Limerick
Liam Brown	Technological University of the Shannon
Sean Golden	Limerick Chamber
Nell Stritch	Pressed Flowers by Nell
Dermot Scanlan	Serosep
John Gleeson	Digital Mid-west
Dennis Barry	CEO INNOVATE
Eimear Brophy	LCETB
Gillian Slattery	Enterprise Ireland
Christina Clancy (added 1/4/26)	Enterprise Ireland
Redmond McDonnell	Pro-Design, Rathkeale
Patrick Fitzgerald	GRID Finance
Pat Meade	The Galtee Group
Seamus Leahy	Leahy Farm Foods
Mary Flynn	An Siopa Milseán

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# Executive Summary

The Limerick SME Action Plan lays out an ambitious and forward-looking five-year strategy designed to elevate and accelerate the growth of small and medium enterprises across Limerick City and County. Commissioned by Limerick City and County Council and developed in partnership with Mayor John Moran's SME Task Force, the plan blends rigorous socio-economic analysis with extensive stakeholder engagement to create a practical, evidence-based roadmap for unlocking Limerick's full entrepreneurial potential. The SME Task Force and this plan are actions of the Mayoral Action Plan (PO1).

## Limerick's SME Landscape

SMEs are the backbone of Limerick's economy—making up over 99% of all businesses and providing 76% of private-sector employment<sup>1</sup>. They are the driving force behind local innovation, community vitality, and long-term economic resilience. While multinational enterprises (MNEs) play an important complementary role<sup>2</sup>, it is SMEs that provide the broad economic foundation on which sustainable and inclusive growth depends. Excluding farms, there are over 7,500 SMEs in the county.

Limerick enjoys a diverse and dynamic economic base, with notable strengths in manufacturing, engineering, life sciences, ICT, and professional services. This is supported by a strong network of enterprise enablers, including Limerick LEO, Innovate Limerick, UL's Nexus Centre, and TUS's Hartnett Centre—creating an environment where local businesses can grow, collaborate, and scale.

Although challenges remain—such as access to finance, talent shortages, rising costs, and varying rates of digital and AI adoption—Limerick's SMEs continue to demonstrate resilience and adaptability. Addressing these barriers presents a major opportunity. With the right strategic backing, Limerick's small and medium enterprises are well positioned to increase competitiveness, expand into new markets, and drive the county's next phase of economic success.

## Key Insights from Analysis

- **Socio-economic conditions:** Limerick's population is growing steadily (+8% since 2016)<sup>3</sup> with rising educational attainment and strong disposable incomes (€29,491 per person, third highest nationally)<sup>4</sup>. Yet, disadvantage persists in parts of the city and county.
- **Infrastructure:** Excellent motorway access to Dublin and Galway, a deepwater port, and an international airport with U.S. preclearance underpin strong connectivity. Nonetheless, water, housing, and transport capacity deficits constrain future growth.
- **Digital readiness:** Fibre and 5G coverage is very good overall, but gaps remain.
- **Labour market:** High employment and strong educational institutions provide a skilled workforce, though SMEs struggle to compete with multinationals for talent.
- **Commercial property:** Industrial and logistics spaces are in high demand. Retail vacancy remains elevated at 17.9%, reflecting a weak city centre economy<sup>5</sup>.

## Stakeholder Engagement

There were 54 separate engagement workshops and meetings held, during which 35 SME owners were met. An SME owner survey was also distributed.

- **Strengths:** supportive ecosystem, skilled graduates, staff costs are lower than in Dublin, strong quality of life, and collaborative local culture.
- **Weaknesses:** poor access to finance, regulatory burdens, skills shortages in management,

high business costs, limited workshop and warehousing space, low provision of housing, anti-social behaviour in urban areas and inadequate water infrastructure..

- **Opportunities:** AI adoption, innovation partnerships with universities, greater connections with MNEs and public sector buyers and city centre regeneration.
- **Threats:** over-reliance on FDI, talent drain, and uneven infrastructure investment

## What does winning look like for SME owners?

More opportunities to grow and increase profitability. Provision of good quality jobs. Being of benefit to their community. Building something they can be proud of.

## Strategic Vision

To make Limerick a leading county in Ireland for SMEs to thrive, innovate, and grow.

## Actions

The plan introduces a SEECER framework—actions grouped under Social Equity and Environment, Efficiency, Costs and Revenue—designed to enhance competitiveness, financial sustainability, and inclusion. There are 15 actions in total, categorised as being either high or medium priority.

### High priority

- 1.1 SME university business park
- 1.2 Rates scheme to encourage vibrant city, town and village centres
- 2.1 AI training and mentoring
- 2.2 First stop shop business advice clinics
- 3.1 Ex large company employee, new SME owner programme
- 3.2 High potential start-ups funding experts
- 3.3 Public procurement success for Limerick SMEs
- 4.1 Fund to address disadvantage by supporting social enterprises

### Medium priority

- 1.3 Minimising bureaucracy for SMEs
- 1.4 Co-working hub network
- 2.3 Company benchmarking
- 2.4 Telecoms unit to drive digital connectivity
- 3.4 Cracking the Common Market
- 3.5 Power of networking
- 4.2 Investing in nature and renewable energy

## Implementation and Governance

Delivery will be led by the SME Task Force in collaboration with Limerick City and County Council. Partnerships will be leveraged with LEO, Innovate Limerick, Enterprise Ireland, educational institutions, and others. Progress will be tracked annually using measurable indicators, such as lower commercial vacancy, growth in high-potential start-ups, and additional industrial space to permit growth.

## Conclusion

Limerick has the assets, ambition, and networks to become Ireland's most dynamic SME county. With focused investment, innovation-led growth, and cross-sector collaboration, this Action Plan positions the county to build a more resilient economy that empowers entrepreneurs and strengthens communities.



# 1.0 Introduction

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## Purpose of this plan

This action plan for Limerick's SMEs, commissioned by Limerick City and County Council, is all about driving growth and unlocking potential. Its goal is twofold: to deliver a dynamic economic appraisal of the SME sector across Limerick City and County, and to produce a forward-looking report—developed in collaboration with Mayor John Moran's SME Task Force—that sets out bold, practical recommendations to strengthen, support, and expand the SME sector over the next five years. Excluding farms, there are over 7,500 SMEs in the county. The SME Task Force and this plan are actions of the Mayoral Action Plan (PO1).

## Supporting Enterprise in Limerick

Limerick is a county that champions business. With a strong pro-enterprise spirit, the city and county are home to a powerful ecosystem of agencies, programmes, and innovation hubs dedicated to helping entrepreneurs and SMEs thrive. From start-up supports and mentoring, to collaborative workspaces and internationalisation pathways, Limerick provides the tools, networks, and expertise needed to turn ideas into successful businesses.

What follows is an overview of the key organisations leading this charge—from the Local Enterprise Office to Innovate Limerick, and from university-based innovation centres to enterprise acceleration programmes—all working together to fuel growth, create jobs, and strengthen Limerick's reputation as a dynamic centre for entrepreneurship.

### 1. Limerick Local Enterprise Office (LEO)

Limerick LEO is the first stop shop to provide support and services to help start, grow, and develop micro and small businesses. According to the 2024 Annual Employment Survey of LEO clients, Limerick is one of the top performing counties for job creation by LEO clients in the country<sup>6</sup>.

In addition to direct grant supports, LEO offers a wide range of soft measures, including:

- General Training Programmes
- Start Your Own Business Programmes
- Management Development Programmes
- Mentoring
- Microfinance Ireland assistance

Finally, LEO also facilitates several schemes:

- Digital for Business
- Grow Digital
- Market Explorer Grant
- The Energy Efficiency Grant

### 2. Innovate Limerick

Innovate Limerick was established by Limerick City and County Council to drive innovation and deliver on the objectives of the Limerick 2030 Plan, Limerick Regeneration Plan, the Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan, and others. To foster collaboration and growth in the business community, Innovate leads several key projects. These include: the Engine Hubs network, Film in Limerick, The Old Bank

Abbeyfeale, and the Rathkeale Enterprise Centre.

The flagship of the Engine Hubs network is Engine in the middle of Limerick City. As the only collaborative workspace and co-working venue in the city centre, it has become a central hub for fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and collaboration. The landmark building has capacity for 130 people working onsite.

### 3. Hartnett Centre

The Hartnett Enterprise Acceleration Centre is a business acceleration centre serving Ireland's Mid-West region located on the Moylish campus of the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS). Its mission is to deliver a unique business environment that stimulates innovation, research commercialisation, internationalisation, and entrepreneurship.

The Hartnett Centre facilitates the transition from education, research, and employment to startup success by assisting clients in a number of complementary areas, including research commercialisation, early-stage enterprise startup, and internationalisation. The centre provides business development services to clients via one-to-one mentoring and business plan reviews with a panel of subject matter experts.

### 4. Nexus Centre

Nexus is a purpose-built innovation centre at the heart of the University of Limerick (UL). It is a growing community of entrepreneurs which: leverages the university's knowledge base; enables accelerated business development; and makes connections with potential investors, experienced entrepreneurs and the wider community. Nexus enables the accelerated development of national and international start-ups with global reach, and the commercialisation of academic research resulting in the creation of new businesses and jobs. The centre aims to increase entrepreneurship with an international trading focus.

### 5. New Frontiers

Funded by Enterprise Ireland, New Frontiers is a national programme aimed at accelerating the development of sustainable new business that have a strong employment and growth potential and contribute to job creation and economic activity in the region. It is jointly run for the Mid-West Region by TUS and UL.

## What are SMEs?

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are businesses with less than 250 employees. The European Commission has broken down SMEs into various categories that will be used in this plan (see table below)<sup>7</sup>.

Company category	Staff headcount	Turnover Total	(or)	Balance Sheet
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m		≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m		≤ € 10 m
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 m		≤ € 2 m

## The importance of SMEs

The vast majority of people working in Ireland's business economy do so in SMEs. According to the CSO, in 2022 SMEs made up 99.8% of all enterprises and 68% of persons were employed in the business economy<sup>8</sup>. They also provided 43% of all commercial turnover. Micro-enterprises alone amount to 92.6% of all enterprises. By contrast, large enterprises made up just 0.2% of all businesses but provided 57% of total turnover in the business economy. They also provided 32% of total employment in the business economy.

The vast majority of SMEs are Irish owned. In 2022, foreign owned multinational enterprises (MNEs) amounted to 3.2% of all enterprises operating in Ireland<sup>9</sup>. In 2022, they employed 27% of people in the business economy. In 2021, 26.1% of foreign owned multi-nationals operating in Ireland were EU owned. The remainder were non-EU owned.

According to the IMF, MNEs play a dominant role in Ireland in the provision of high paying jobs and boosting income tax revenues<sup>10</sup>. This dominance leaves an open economy like Ireland vulnerable to the impact of tariffs and a row back of globalisation.

In 2019, the OECD published an assessment of Ireland's SME and entrepreneurship policies<sup>11</sup>. The analysis was so concerning that the government established an expert taskforce to create a strategy for SMEs (i.e. National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, 2021)<sup>12</sup>. The OECD report found that when compared to other member states:

- Business dynamism amongst Irish SMEs was low.
- The start-up rate was relatively low.
- Irish SMEs are not very active in international markets.
- SME productivity growth is stagnant.
- There were weaknesses in SME management skills.
- There were low capital investment levels.
- There was low new technology adoption.

Combined, this led to many SMEs having low productivity levels compared to frontier firms in their industry. While compiling this report, it was discovered that Limerick's SMEs fitted into the national pattern.

Increasing the strength of Limerick's SMEs and nurturing a strong entrepreneurship ecosystem is likely to have the following benefits:

1. Protect existing jobs.
2. Create new jobs.
3. Tie existing multi-national enterprises even more to Limerick by having better Irish SME partners in their supply chain.
4. Encourage the development of Irish firms to take the place of multi-national firms, should MNE related investment reduce.
5. Increase the resilience of Limerick to economic shocks.
6. Protect the corporate tax take.
7. Decrease commercial vacancy.
8. Increase of commercial rates collected.

## What is winning?

Understanding what success or winning looks like for people is a great way to ensure that any strategy is aligned with accomplishing the goals of the various stakeholders. Accordingly, informed by primary and secondary research, below are the proposed definitions of winning for several key stakeholders:

**SME owners:** More opportunities to grow and increase profitability. Provision of good quality jobs. Being of benefit to their community. Building something they can be proud of.

**County residents:** Good quality jobs. More diverse jobs that meet their expectations. Strong local companies that are dedicated to Limerick. More services. Economically vibrant city and towns.

**County Councillors:** That no matter where SMEs are located in the county that they feel that they are getting the same level of support. A strong city and set of towns. Excellent support from LEO and Engine.

**State economic agencies:** Thriving companies, providing well-paying jobs. Companies that are growing internationally where possible and adding resilience to the Irish economy.



## 2.0 Socio-economic profile

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## Population Trends

The 2022 Census indicated a continued upward trend in Ireland’s population, with the national population increasing by 8% since 2016. County Limerick reflects this growth, with its population rising by 8% over the same period, reaching a total of 209,536 residents<sup>13</sup>.

**Population density and urban centres:** Limerick City, the primary urban centre, had a population of 102,287 in 2022, making it the third-most populous urban area in Ireland. Population density is approximately 1,668 people per km<sup>2</sup> <sup>14</sup>.

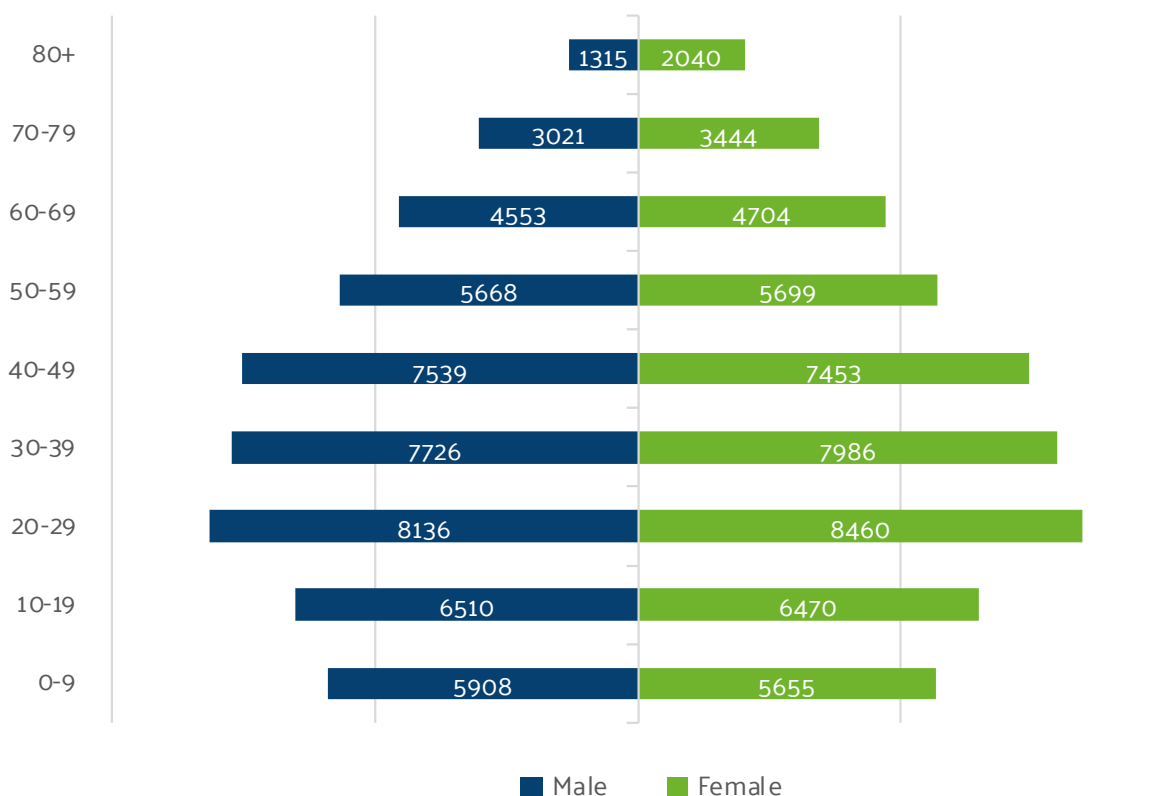
**Age distribution:** The average age in Limerick was 39.3 years in 2022, up from 37.7 years in 2016. This is slightly above the national average of 38.8 years. The number of residents aged 65 and over increased by 23% between 2016 and 2022<sup>15</sup>.

**Migration and birthplace:** In 2022, 69% of Limerick’s residents were born within the county, 14% were born elsewhere in Ireland, and 17% were born outside Ireland, up from 14% in 2016<sup>16</sup>.

**Ethnic and cultural diversity:** Over 159,700 people (77.7%) in Limerick identified as White Irish. Other ethnic groups included 14,352 identifying as ‘Any other White’, 4,156 as Asian or Asian Irish, and 2,318 as Black or Black Irish<sup>17</sup>.

**Nationality breakdown:** According to the Council of Europe, 90.3% of Limerick’s population indicated Irish nationality. Other nationalities included 3.0% Polish, 1.8% UK, 0.5% Lithuanian, 1.8% other EU, and 2.1% from the rest of the world<sup>18</sup>.

County Limerick - Population by Gender & Age Group 2022



## Socio-economic disadvantage and disposable income

The Pobal Deprivation Index is a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of counties and the electoral districts that make them up. County Limerick is categorised in the 2022 Index as being marginally below the national average<sup>19</sup>.

**The city:** There are notable concentrations of disadvantage on both the north and south sides of Limerick City. By contrast, much of the city's suburban electoral districts, especially southwest of the urban core towards Adare and east towards Annacotty are categorised as being 'above average' or 'affluent'. The typically higher paying multinational companies are concentrated on the edge of the city. By contrast, social housing is concentrated within 2.5km of the city centre.

**Limerick's towns:** Of the ten largest towns in the county (i.e. Newcastle West, Kilmallock, Abbeyfeale, Adare, Askeaton, Castleconnell, Croom, Foynes, Patrickswell, Rathkeale) only Adare and Castleconnell have electoral districts within them categorised as being 'affluent'<sup>20</sup>. Frequently, the cores of these settlements are more disadvantaged than the edges or wider hinterlands.

**Rural Limerick:** Generally, the rural electoral districts in the county east of Newcastle West are categorised as being 'marginally above average' and the electoral districts west of Newcastle West are mostly 'marginally below average'. This is likely down to the proximity of the economic opportunities in Limerick City and quality of the farmland.

**Disposable income:** County Limerick has the third highest level of disposable income in the State<sup>21</sup>. It is the highest in the Mid-West (i.e. counties Limerick, Clare and Tipperary). Much of this is connected with the strong presence of multinational companies in the county. Nationally, County Limerick was joint second after County Dublin for highest percentage of employee pay coming from foreign enterprises (i.e. 35%).

County	2023 CSO estimates of disposable income per person
Limerick	€29,491
Dublin	€32,393
Cork	€29,876
Galway	€28,971
Waterford	€27,330
Clare	€25,103
Tipperary	€29,209

## Education

**How Limerick compares:** Data from Census 2022 indicates that 30.1% of Limerick's population aged 15 and over had a third level qualification (defined as holding an ordinary degree or above)<sup>22</sup>. This compares well against Waterford (29.2%). However, Limerick lags both Cork (34.9%) and Galway (37.3%). The national average for 2022 was 34%.

## Population aged 15 years and over by highest level of education completed

	Limerick City and County		Waterford City and County		Galway City and County		Cork City and County	
	Total people	% of total	Total people	% of total	Total people	% of total	Total people	% of total
No formal education	3,173	2.3	1,765	2.07	4,066	2.25	7,502	1.95
Primary education	11,080	8.01	6,945	8.15	12,882	7.12	25,034	6.49
Lower secondary	20,031	14.49	12,782	15	20,176	11.16	51,821	13.44
Upper secondary	25,463	18.42	16,008	18.78	31,347	17.34	69,294	17.98
Technical or vocational qualification	9,989	7.23	6,987	8.2	13,096	7.24	30,021	7.79
Advanced certificate/ Completed apprenticeship	7,947	5.75	5,220	6.13	9,801	5.42	23,766	6.17
Higher certificate	7,451	5.39	4,821	5.66	9,755	5.4	21,805	5.66
Ordinary bachelor degree or national diploma	10,147	7.34	6,209	7.29	15,793	8.73	32,423	8.41
Honours bachelor degree, professional qualification or both	17,260	12.48	10,395	12.2	25,550	14.13	53,233	13.81
Postgraduate diploma or degree	12,757	9.23	7,483	8.78	23,050	12.75	43,683	11.33
Doctorate(Ph.D) or higher	1,450	1.05	800	0.94	3,133	1.73	5,342	1.39
Not stated	11,502	8.32	5,804	6.81	12,164	6.73	21,535	5.59
<b>Totals</b>	<b>138,250</b>		<b>85,219</b>		<b>180,813</b>		<b>385,459</b>	

**Further education:** Operated by the Limerick and Clare Education Training Board (LCETB), the College of Further Education and Training has eight campuses in Limerick City and eight more spread across the county. In County Clare, there are eight campuses. In 2020, there were 7,557 learners at the College of Further Education and Training with Limerick addresses<sup>23</sup>. It currently offers or is developing 16 apprenticeship programs<sup>24</sup>. Since 2017, there has been strong growth in apprenticeship numbers in the Mid-West region, with an average annual growth of 14.5% to 2024<sup>25</sup>.

**Universities:** Limerick has two universities, both of which are located in the city. The University of Limerick (UL) has over 18,000 students<sup>26</sup>. Mary Immaculate College is academically linked with UL. Its c.5,000 students mostly study for teaching qualifications. There are over 7,000 students at the Moylish campus of the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)<sup>27</sup>. Finally, located not far from the county bounds is the Shannon College of Hotel Management. It is part of the University of Galway and has c.400 students<sup>28</sup>. Positioned opposite Shannon Airport, it offers world class training in hotel management.

**Rankings:** UL ranks well against other universities internationally. Despite this, the historic universities in both Cork and Galway perform better on the international rankings. TUS does not appear in either the QS or Times Higher Education rankings. QS ranks over 1,500 universities. Times Higher Education ranks over 2,000 research-intensive institutions. The only technological university from Ireland to appear in either of these two rankings is Technological University Dublin (Times Higher Education 2026 ranking 1201-1500)<sup>29</sup>. It is worth noting that technological universities have been assigned a more practical role than the historic universities by Government. This impacts their ability to climb the various university rankings. Furthermore, TUS is a new university. Despite this, it is a QS 5-star rated university. This places it among the top institutions globally for teaching, employability, internationalisation, facilities and innovation.

Universities	2026 QS World University Rankings <sup>30</sup>	2025 Times Higher Education World University Rankings <sup>31</sup>
<b>Limerick</b>		
University of Limerick	=401	501-600
Technological University of the Shannon	-	-
<b>Waterford</b>		
South East Technological University	-	-
<b>Galway</b>		
University of Galway	284	351-400
Atlantic Technological University	-	-
<b>Cork</b>		
University College Cork	246	351-400
Munster Technological University	-	-

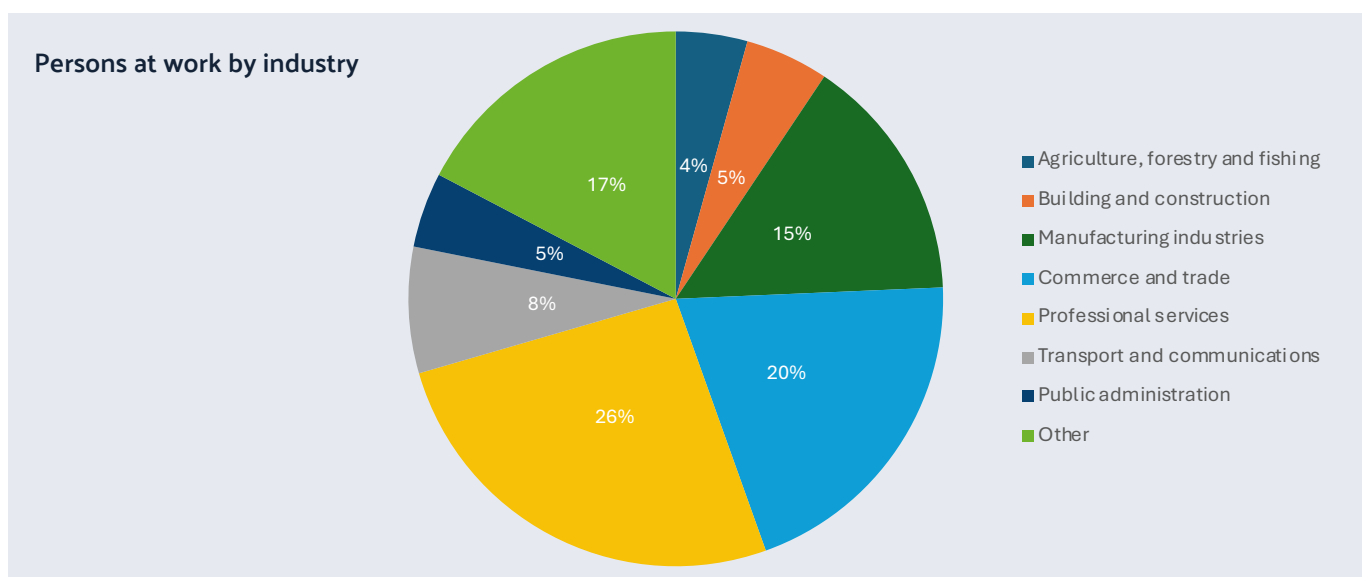
## Employment by sector

**Categories of employment:** Between 2016 and 2022 employment amongst Limerick residents grew by 17% to 90,623<sup>32</sup>. Over 61% of all roles were provided in the ‘professional services’ (26%), ‘commerce and trade’ (20%), and ‘manufacturing industries’ (15%) categories. In 2024, the average unemployment rate for the Mid-West region which includes Limerick was 3.9% (International Labour Organisation measure).

**Work permits:** The full employment and continued strength of the local economy resulted in Limerick having the fourth highest share of work permits nationally in 2024 (1,995 issued). This was an 19% increase from 2023<sup>33</sup>.

**Job growth:** Between Q3 2023 and Q3 2024 there was particularly strong job growth in the Mid-West region in ‘transportation and storage’ (+3,800 employees), ‘information and communication’ (+3,800 employees), and ‘public administration’ (+3,300 employees)<sup>34</sup>. Overall, job growth is strong across the Mid-West economy with only agriculture on a downward trend.

**State supported jobs:** In 2023, there were 44,406 state supported jobs across the Mid-West (i.e. under the remit of IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta). Almost 52% of these were in County Limerick. Within the county, the State supported jobs are heavily concentrated in or around Limerick City (e.g. Raheen Business Park, Anacotty Business Park, National Technology Park)<sup>35</sup>.



## Profile of jobs

**Level of entrepreneurship:** According to the CSO, in 2022 there were 13,223 active enterprises located in Limerick<sup>36</sup>. This was 431 more than in 2021 (i.e. 12,654). Despite this rise, Limerick has the lowest number of enterprises per 1,000 residents amongst counties in the Mid-West, and lags both Cork and Galway.

County	Number of enterprises by County 2022	Number of enterprises per 1,000 residents
Limerick	13,223	63
Dublin	131,652	90
Cork	40,869	70
Galway	20,510	74
Waterford	7,662	60
Clare	9,444	74
Tipperary	10,780	64

A large proportion of SMEs across the country – including in County Limerick – are farms. When these and the large companies are removed from the total number of enterprises in Limerick, the county total of SMEs is between 7,500 and 7,600.

**Employment by enterprise size:** In 2022, over 76% of the 74,895 people engaged by Limerick based enterprises (i.e. employed plus working proprietors) were working in SMEs<sup>37</sup>. Limerick’s micro-enterprises alone provided nearly 29% of employment. Large enterprises within the county – amounting to just 24 companies - employed 24% of people engaged in enterprises.

The average number of people engaged by a micro-enterprise in Limerick was just under two people. By contrast, the average number of people engaged in the county by the 24 large firms (i.e. 250 employees and over) was 738 people.

Employment size	Number of enterprises	% of total enterprises	Number of persons engaged (i.e. employees plus working proprietors)	% of total engaged
Under 10	12,071	91.29%	21,583	28.82%
10-19	579	4.38%	7,844	10.47%
20-49	381	2.88%	11,545	15.41%
50-249	168	1.41%	16,206	21.64%
250 and over	24	0.18%	17,717	23.66%

**Farms as enterprises:** The large number of micro-enterprises is at least partially attributable to the number of farms in the county. Farmers must register their farm enterprise as a sole trader, partner in a partnership, or limited company. In 2020, there were 5,630 farms in the county<sup>38</sup>. Of these, 61.4% specialised in beef production. A further 23.5% specialised in dairying. In 2016, nationally 99.7% of farms were classified as family farms<sup>39</sup>.

Farming is particularly important in supporting local economies across the county. In 2020, the average size of a farm in Limerick was 36.2 hectares<sup>40</sup>. This is just 0.2 hectares below the national farm size. There are various areas in which farms can diversify such as: rural tourism, organic farming, farm shops, food production, horticulture, forestry, renewable energy, equine, and the drinks industry. The level of farm diversification in Limerick is unknown. However, it is likely to be low.

**Employment by enterprise sector:** In 2022, the sectors in the table below provided over 72% of employment in County Limerick<sup>41</sup>. Manufacturing is the most important sector, with 15.6% of people engaged in such enterprises. This is significantly higher than the national figure of 11.52%.

Manufacturing – especially high technology manufacturing – tends to offer good pay. By contrast, pay levels in the retail and hospitality sectors which combined provide over 27% of employment in Limerick are typically substantially lower. Geographically, manufacturing is concentrated in and around Limerick City (e.g. Johnson and Johnson, Eli Lilly, Stryker, Regeneron). This allows firms to take advantage of infrastructure connectivity and proximity to the talent emerging from UL, TUS and LCETB. Conversely, retail and hospitality employment are more greatly dispersed across the county.

Sector	Number of persons engaged in Limerick enterprises	% of total persons engaged	Number of enterprises
Manufacturing	11,687	15.6%	718
Wholesale and retail trade	11,381	15.2%	1,863
Accommodation and food services activities	9,052	12.09%	829
Human health and social work activities	8,532	11.39%	969
Construction	7,334	9.79%	2,149
Professional, scientific and technical activities	6,251	8.35%	1,722

## Labour force costs

Data to compare labour force costs in County Limerick with elsewhere in Ireland was obtained by examining the published research from several recruitment websites and consultancies. Although the methodology is not always discussed, it appears that the data comes from the roles advertised with each company. There is no data on labour force costs comparing Limerick City to the rest of the county. Although, as noted previously, there is no comprehensive data available concerning labour costs, there is data on median gross income by household. This is discussed below.

**Irishjobs.ie:** According to IrishJobs.ie, in 2024 Limerick had the second highest annual average salary in the country (€46,011)<sup>42</sup>. The relatively high salary level was powered by manufacturing, life sciences, healthcare, and technology sectors.

County	Annual average salary 2024
Dublin	€48,343
Limerick	€46,011
Cork	€45,232
Galway	€43,679

**Jobs.ie:** Another recruitment website Jobs.ie has published several 2024 sectoral breakdowns where Limerick City is compared against the cities of Dublin, Cork and Galway. According to their data, Limerick City has the highest average salaries in the social care sector<sup>43</sup>. Salaries for social care roles in Limerick City ranged from €43,714-€47,296, compared to €39,248-€43,616 nationally. Limerick City also had the highest average salaries for the retail sector. Pay ranged from €38,637-€40,043 in Limerick City versus €37,023-€38,911 nationally. By contrast, salaries in Limerick City for the sales, hospitality and customer service sectors appeared to be the lowest of the four cities<sup>44</sup>.

**Hays:** Some 2024 salary data from the recruitment firm Hays is broken down accordingly to ‘Greater Dublin Area’, ‘Cork and region’, ‘Limerick and Mid-West’, and ‘Galway, Midlands and West’. In the construction and property sector the typical salaries for professionals in ‘Limerick and Mid-West’, and ‘Galway, Midlands and West’ were the same<sup>45</sup>. Both were behind comparable salaries in the ‘Greater Dublin Area’ and ‘Cork and region’. For business support salaries ‘Greater Dublin Region’ has the highest pay. Behind Dublin, the salaries in ‘Cork and region’, ‘Limerick and Mid-West’, and ‘Galway, Midlands and West’ are broadly similar. The situation for accountancy and finance salaries followed the same pattern.

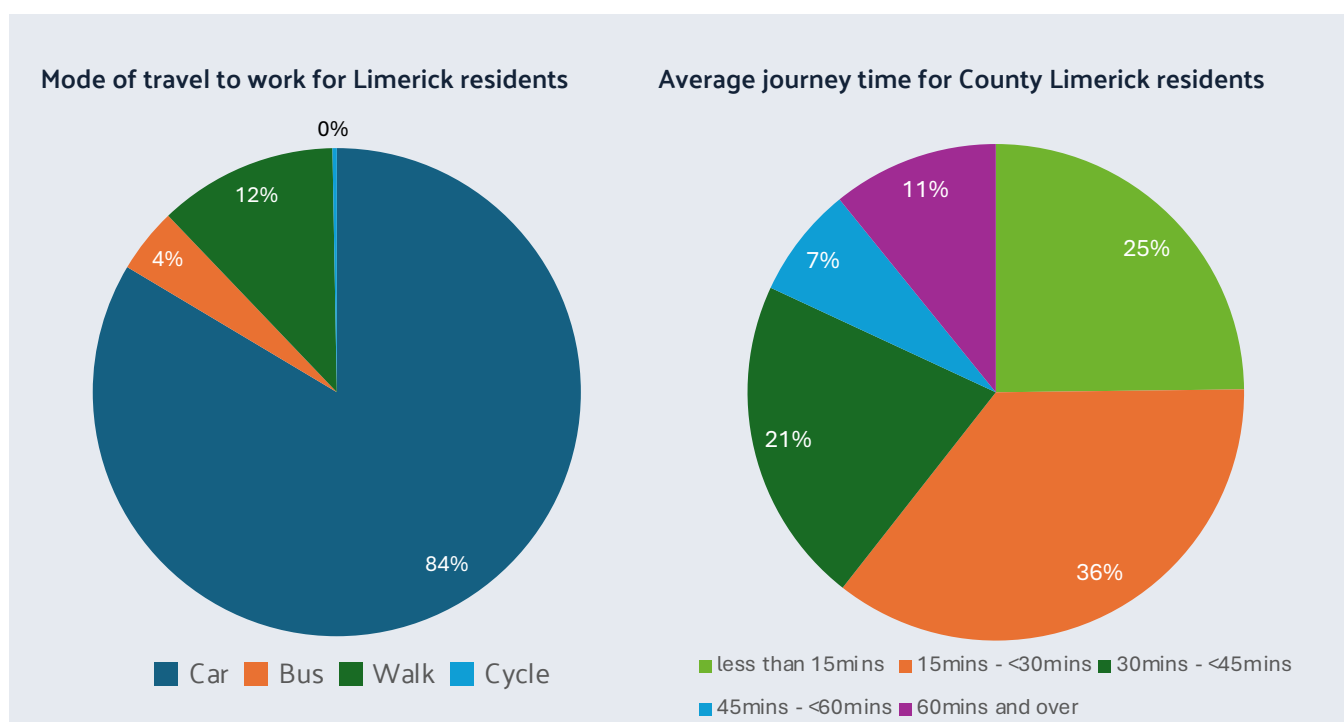
**Median Household Income:** Although, as noted previously, there is no comprehensive data available concerning labour costs, there is data on median income by household. In 2022, Limerick’s median gross household income of €55,952 was significantly above the national median of €46,999 but below the figures for Cork (€60,906) and Galway (€59,895)<sup>46</sup>. Within the county, median income by electoral district ranged widely from a low of €47,208 (CSO 2022) in Limerick City North to €63,754 in Adare Rathkeale.

### Commuting patterns

The commuting patterns affecting County Limerick are not limited to the county bounds. Available research from the NTA and CSO provides strong indication to the patterns of movement.

**Working from home:** On Census night 2022 there was 170,100 people living in the county over 15 years of age. Approximately 90,600 were at work<sup>47</sup>. Of these, over 52,000 never worked from home, while almost 25,000 worked from home at least some of the time.

**Mode of travel:** According to Census 2022, 80,665 people travelled to work in the county with travelling by car being the predominant mode of transport<sup>48</sup>. Commuting within the county via rail (i.e. between Colbert and Castleconnell train stations) for purposes of work was virtually non-existent<sup>49</sup>. There is no data available to the percentage of in-bound travellers to Colbert Train Station that are commuters arriving from outside the county, as opposed to visitors or non-regular business travellers.



**Commute time:** The average journey time in County Limerick of 25.4 minutes was significantly below the national average of 29.1 minutes<sup>50</sup>. The vast majority of commuters in Limerick have average journey times of under 45 minutes, with just 7.6% travelling more than one hour to work. Within the county, the percentage travelling more than an hour to work varied widely. In Abbeyfeale, the figure was almost 16%, whereas it was only 4% in Limerick City. The difference is likely a reflection on the economic significance of the two places.

**Commuting from outside the county:** Limerick City is the dominant job centre in the county. According to Census 2022, 25,455 workers commuted daily into the city and suburbs<sup>51</sup>. Its influence on commuting patterns goes beyond Limerick’s border. This was indicated in the NTA’s Cordon Survey which tracked the inbound movement of people into the city over November and December 2023<sup>52</sup>. Data was released on the traffic numbers from 13 sites around the core of Limerick City. Two of the top three car numbers crossing into the city centre were recorded at Sarsfield Bridge/Ennis Road and Thomond Bridge/High Road. Although much of this traffic is likely attributable to residents in Limerick City, it also indicates considerable commuting from County Clare. Data from Census 2022 showed that 1,140 people living in Ennis and 569 people living in Shannon were travelling into Limerick City and suburbs for work<sup>53</sup>.

## Road connectivity

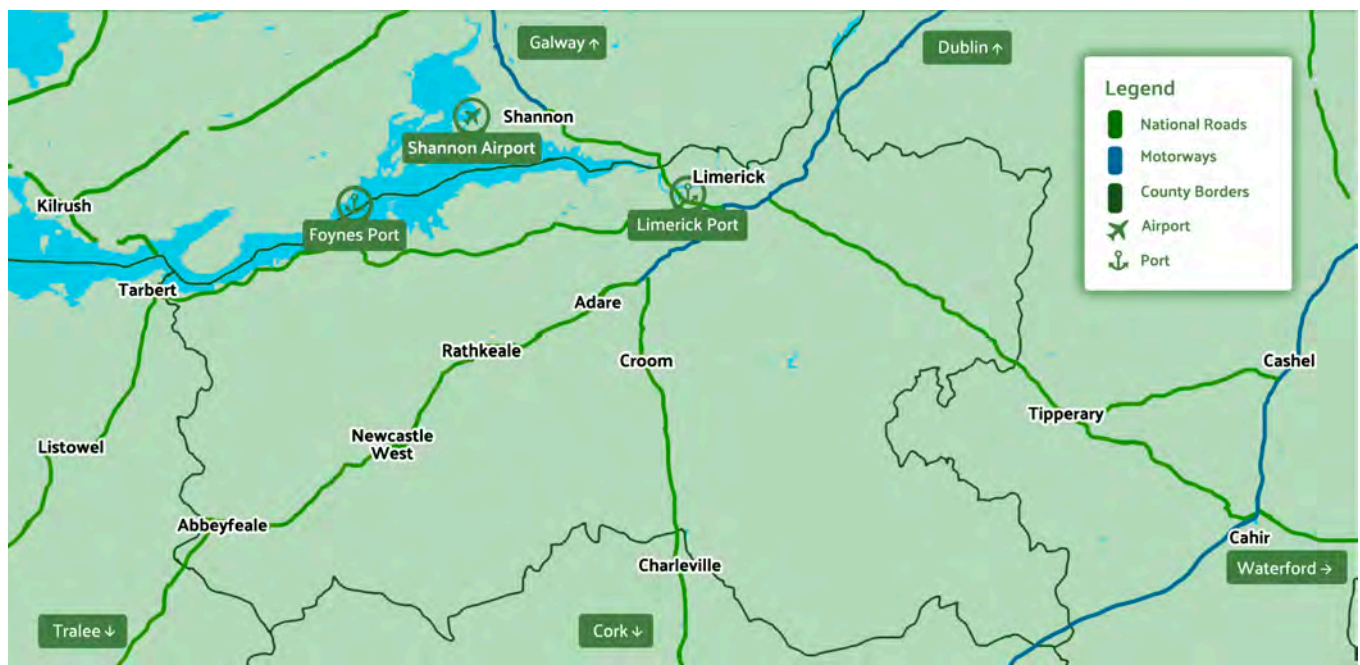
**Limerick City as the hub:** With the exception of a small portion of the M8 motorway, almost all the county’s motorways and dual carriageways are concentrated around Limerick City (i.e. N18, M7, M20). All the national (N) roads in the county radiate out from Limerick City.

**Quality of road connectivity:** The overall quality of the national roads in the county requires significant investment. Although the N21 to Kerry will soon bypass Adare, the towns of Abbeyfeale and Newcastle West remain without bypasses. The N69 to Foynes and Tarbert is a narrow and winding road. Much of the N24 to Waterford City is subject to similar road conditions, with several settlements along its route not bypassed. Finally, the N/M20 to Cork City, after a short section of motorway approaching Limerick City, deteriorates significantly in quality. It only returns to dual carriageway configuration outside Blarney, just north of Cork City.

### Road connectivity from Limerick City to other Irish cities

North to Galway City	South to Cork City	Southeast to Waterford City	Northeast to Dublin City
Excellent	Poor	Poor	Excellent

### Major roads



## Rail connectivity

**Limerick City's rail potential:** Aside from Dublin, Limerick City has the finest rail network in Ireland. Upon the reopening of the Foynes rail line in 2026, rail lines will enter the city from the northeast, northwest, east and west. Despite this, as of 2025 the only two stations in the county are Limerick Colbert and Castleconnell. There are firm plans for another station on the outskirts of the city at Moyross. Another station at Ballysimon with a Park and Ride facility is also likely. Within 20km of Limerick City there are four train stations (i.e. Limerick Colbert, Castleconnell, Birdhill and Sixmilebridge). Notwithstanding its nominally impressive rail connections, rail ridership in Limerick is low<sup>54</sup>.

### 2022 daily boardings at each station within 20km of Limerick City

Station	Boardings
Limerick Colbert	1,581
Castleconnell	14
Birdhill	3
Sixmilebridge	97

### Daily direct services to and from Limerick Colbert to other Irish cities, June 2025<sup>55</sup>

Station	Direct services (arrivals and departures combined)	Rail quickest travel time	Car travel time (from station to station as calculated on AA route planner)
Galway City	9	2hrs	1hr 19mins
Cork City	0 (must change at Limerick Junction to travel to Cork)	1hr 33mins	1hr 32mins
Waterford City	0 (must change at Limerick Junction to travel to Waterford)	2hr 14min	2hrs 1min
Dublin City	7	1hr 58mins	2hrs 6mins

**Rail freight:** There is currently no facility able to handle rail freight in the county. However, this is expected to change soon. The future rail freight connection at Foynes Port is intended to be multimodal. In addition, Irish Rail's 2040 freight strategy has plans for a strategic freight terminal to be located at Limerick Junction, just over the county border in Tipperary<sup>56</sup>.

## Air connectivity

**Shannon Airport:** Although located in County Clare, Shannon Airport serves as Limerick's main airport. It is located less than 19kms west of Limerick's city centre. In 2024, Shannon was the third busiest airport in Ireland<sup>57</sup>. That year it welcomed 2.1 million passengers. This compares against 3.1 million passengers at Cork Airport and 34.6 million at Dublin Airport.

Shannon has full U.S. preclearance facilities. It is one of only two European airports with this capability, the other being Dublin Airport<sup>58</sup>.

Shannon Airport's connectivity with New York and London is excellent. Conversely, its connectivity with major continental airport hubs is poor.

## Connectivity with major European airport hubs, June 2025

Airport	Service
Paris Charles de Gaule	Summer only (two days a week)
Amsterdam Schiphol	No
Frankfurt Am Main	No
London Heathrow	Daily

## Connectivity with the economically most important UK cities, June 2025

City	Service
London	Daily
Manchester	Three days a week
Birmingham	Five days a week

## Connectivity with the economically most important US cities, June 2025

City	Service
New York	Daily
Chicago	Summer only (daily)
Los Angeles	No

**Air freight:** Air freight appears to be a minimal activity at Shannon Airport. In 2024, IAG Cargo shut its facility at the airport<sup>59</sup>. In the Shannon Airport Group’s annual report for 2024, air freight was not mentioned<sup>60</sup>.

## Port connectivity

**Capacity:** Shannon Foynes Port Company is situated on the deepest watercourse in Ireland, and one of the deepest estuaries in the world. It has capacity to handle over 10 million tonnes annually<sup>61</sup>. In Q4 2024, Shannon Foynes Port handled the second most tonnage of goods of any port in Ireland<sup>50</sup>. With the reinstatement of the Foynes rail line, Foynes Port will join Dublin and Waterford ports as having the capability to load and unload rail freight. At present, typical cargoes include biomass and bio-fuels, liquid fuels, chemicals, ores, coal, animal feedstuffs, fertilisers, molasses, recyclable materials, cement, steel, timber, and various project cargoes<sup>63</sup>.

Shannon Foynes does not have the capacity to handle roll-on/roll-off traffic. Only the ports at Cork, Rosslare and Dublin have this facility in the State.

## Q4 2024 Total tonnage of trade handled by the three busiest ports in Ireland according to region of trade<sup>64</sup>

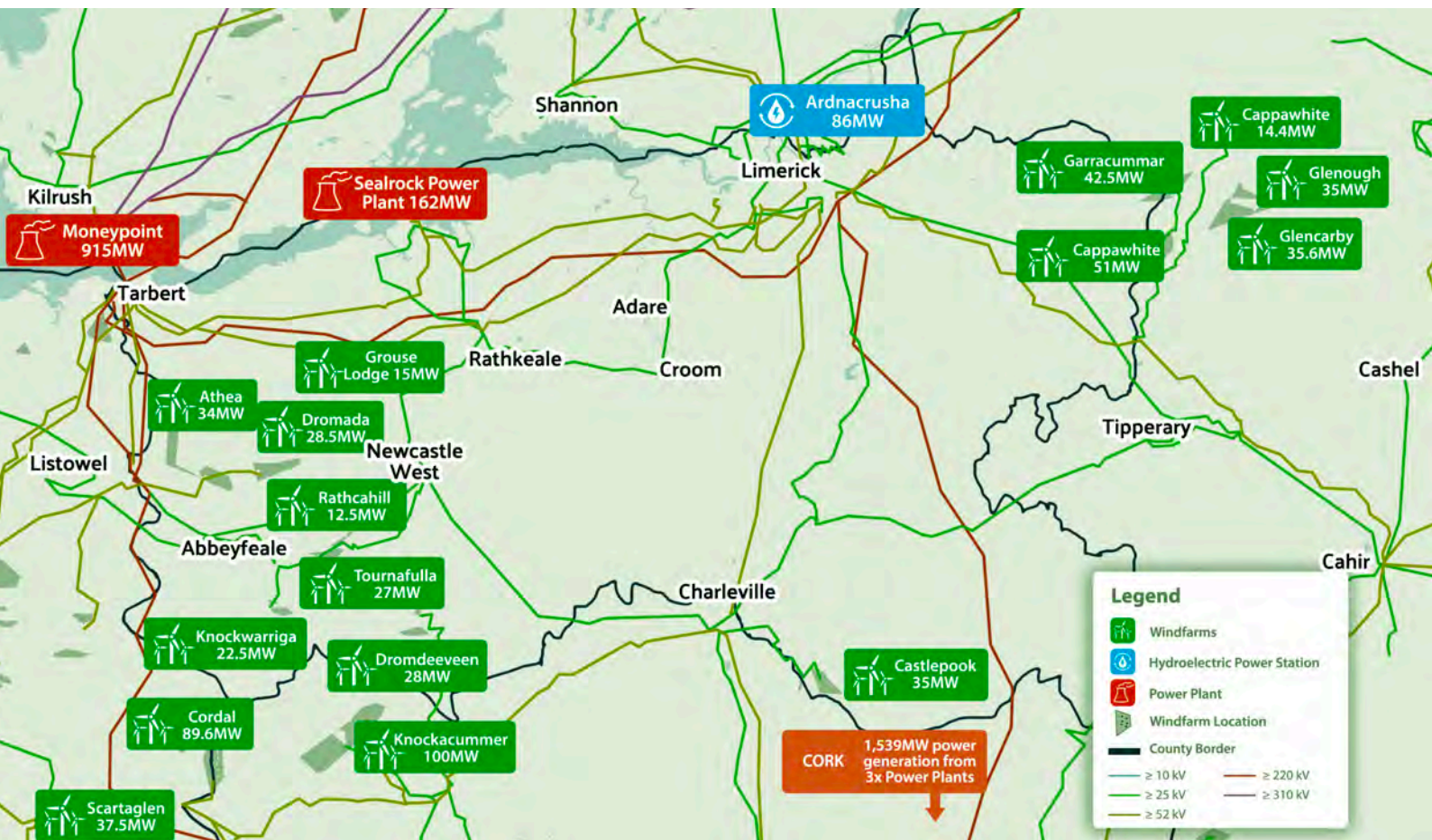
Port	UK	EU	Other European ports	Other ports	Coastal trade	Total
Dublin	2,938,000	2,799,000	11,000	110,000	213,000	6,071,000
Shannon Foynes	208,000	1,326,000	29,000	763,000	68,000	2,393,000
Cork	208,000	905,000	122,000	531,000	40,000	1,806,000

## Energy infrastructure

**Thermal power plants and grid connections:** Shannon Estuary has three thermal power plants powered by fossil fuels located on its shores (i.e. Tarbert, Moneypoint, Sealrock). Only Sealrock is located in County Limerick. Moneypoint, in County Clare, is the largest generating station in Ireland (915MW installed capacity)<sup>65</sup>. The ESB intends for Moneypoint to become a renewable energy hub for offshore wind generation<sup>66</sup>. Owing to the presence of such large thermal plants, County Limerick has good connections to the national transmission system. However, it must be noted that the grid nationally is under strain<sup>67</sup>.

**Renewable energy:** According to Wind Powered Ireland, as of May 2025 there is 220MW of wind energy capacity installed in County Limerick<sup>68</sup>. This amounts to 3.73% of Ireland's installed wind energy. In October 2024, the county's first utility scale solar farm was granted planning permission<sup>69</sup>. Once constructed, the solar farm will generate 79MWp. Located just 2km north of the county boundary in County Clare, the hydro power plant at Ardnacrusha has been in operation for almost a century, and has the capacity to generate 86MW<sup>70</sup>.

### Power plants and national transmission system<sup>71</sup>



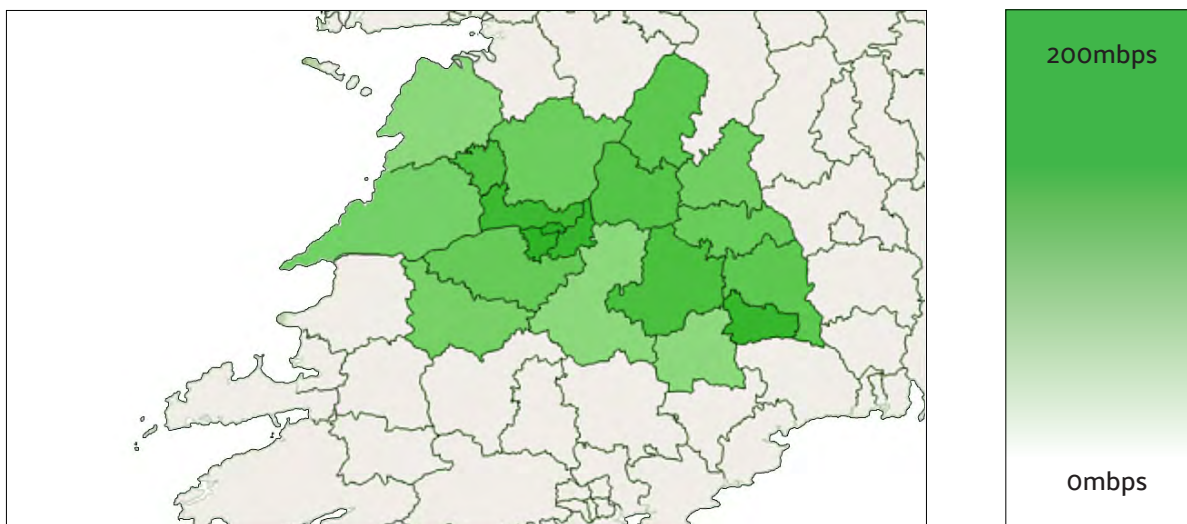
## Digital infrastructure

As Ireland embraces a digital-first future, high-speed broadband has become vital for work, education, and public services. By 2024, 96% of households had broadband access, with over 70% connected to full-fibre<sup>72</sup>. However, coverage does not equal quality of service everywhere – and some areas of Limerick still face connectivity challenges that need to be addressed.

**Mid-West situation:** In the Mid-West, urban centres like Limerick City have seen major improvements. Many premises now have full-fibre broadband with speeds of 500 Mbps to 1 Gbps available. However, not all areas in the county are at this standard, including many rural parts of the county still relying on older copper lines or 4G wireless, getting only 30–100 Mbps or less<sup>73</sup>. This has resulted in Limerick’s overall fixed broadband speeds remaining among the lower-ranked counties nationally. The National Broadband Plan is in motion to fix the majority of these deficits, but the last 1% is to be addressed. Until complete, a clear connectivity divide persists between well-served and under-served areas. In short, Limerick’s digital infrastructure has come a long way, but there is more to do to ensure everyone benefits.

Area	Average Broadband Speeds
National Average (2024)	~150–200 Mbps download speed
Dublin City	~300–800 Mbps download speed
Limerick City	~300–500 Mbps (in fibre-covered areas)
Suburban/Rural Limerick	~30–100 Mbps, depending on infrastructure
Clare and Tipperary (rural)	Often below 30 Mbps, though steadily improving

### Broadband speeds mbps<sup>74</sup>



**Leased line access:** Leased lines offer ultra-reliable, high-speed broadband, ideal for businesses that depend on strong connectivity. In Limerick City and its major business parks, they’re easy to access thanks to excellent fibre infrastructure and a wide choice of providers. These areas enjoy fast installation times and competitive pricing, making leased lines a popular choice for offices, tech firms, and service providers.

Outside the city, availability becomes more hit and miss. While leased lines can still be installed in towns and rural areas, the costs can rise sharply and installation can take longer, especially if fibre needs to be extended. However, the National Broadband Plan is looking to address the vast majority of this.

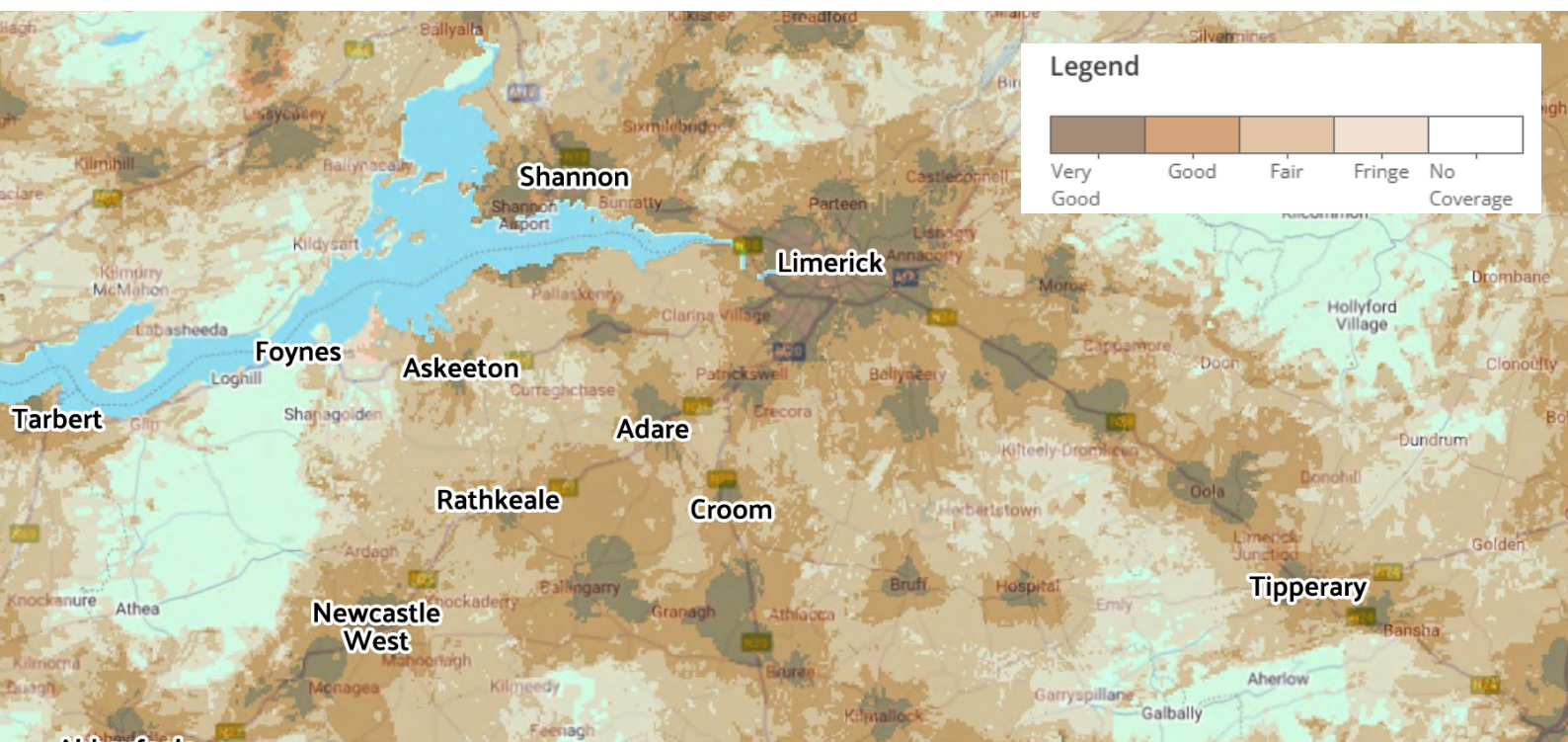
**5G in Limerick City and County:** Limerick City was among the first Irish cities to receive commercial 5G services, with Vodafone launching its 5G network there in August 2019. Since then, other major providers like Eir and Three have expanded their 5G coverage across the city and into surrounding areas<sup>75</sup>.

In County Limerick, towns such as Abbeyfeale, Caherconlish, Ballyneety, Caherdavin, and Raheen have been included in the 5G rollout, improving connectivity for residents and businesses<sup>76</sup>.

According to data from Ookla, Limerick ranks in the top three counties for mobile network performance (download speeds) and is in the top 10 for 5G coverage. However, 5G coverage is not 100% perfect. For example, there are some rural pockets still on weak signal (bottom 10% speeds in some areas, as per Ookla data). Furthermore, there are indoor coverage challenges: modern buildings with energy-efficient materials can block 4G/5G signals (the “Faraday cage” effect). Finally, Vodafone’s 3G shutdown earlier in 2025 caused some unexpected drops in coverage for certain users/devices.

Ensuring depth of coverage is now the challenge – e.g., making sure new buildings aren’t dead zones for mobile signal. Tackling these issues (through more indoor antennas, etc.) will be important going forward.

**Eir 5G Coverage Map<sup>77</sup>**



Map supplied by LCCC

**5G in the Mid-West Region:** Beyond Limerick, the Mid-West region, encompassing counties Clare and Tipperary, has also benefited from 5G expansions. While urban centres have seen quicker deployments, rural areas are gradually gaining access as providers continue to invest in infrastructure. This expansion is crucial for supporting remote work, education, and digital services in less populated areas.

**Ongoing investment:** Limerick’s digital development has accelerated in recent years. Public Wi-Fi zones, smart metering, and sensor-based traffic systems are being developed and are all dependent on strong broadband connectivity<sup>78</sup>.

**Challenges and outlook:** Despite strong progress, challenges remain as outlined above. Furthermore, the bar for ‘good connectivity’ keeps rising. As businesses adopt AI and cloud, and as more services go digital, Limerick will need even more bandwidth and reliability. Future-proofing Limerick’s infrastructure now is critical so that the county does not fall behind in five years. Limerick’s digital trajectory is very positive – the county is far better off than a decade ago, and major investments (like the NBP and 5G expansion) are bearing fruit. By recognising the remaining shortcomings and actively tackling them, Limerick can ensure it becomes a truly digitally inclusive, future-ready region.

## Water infrastructure

**Sectoral needs:** SMEs across different sectors have varied water usage and infrastructure demands. Understanding these differences helps tailor public water systems to support their specific needs effectively.

Sector	Usage Level	Public Infrastructure Needs
Retail	Low	Reliable potable water supply, basic sewage and stormwater drainage
Hospitality	High	High-capacity water supply with stable pressure, efficient wastewater collection, including grease management
Manufacturing	Very High	Large volume, high-pressure water supply, robust sewage system capable of handling industrial effluent, pre-treatment support or facilities
Warehousing	Low	Basic potable water supply, adequate stormwater drainage, fire hydrant access
Agriculture	High	Access to sufficient clean water sources (group schemes or rural supplies), robust drainage and runoff management to prevent pollution

Key notes:

- **Manufacturing** demands the most from public infrastructure in terms of capacity, pressure, and especially wastewater treatment because industrial effluent can be complex and regulated.
- **Hospitality** areas need the public system to handle grease and organic waste loads efficiently, which might require specialised sewer infrastructure.
- **Agriculture** are high water users but often less reliant on public water infrastructure, as they primarily use private water sources. However, they do require effective public drainage infrastructure.
- **Warehousing and retail** just need reliable access. Their water demand is much lower.

**Aging infrastructure:** Much of County Limerick’s water infrastructure was originally installed in the mid-20th century, with parts dating back even further to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, especially in older urban centres like Limerick City.

**Water mains:**

- **Urban areas (e.g., Limerick City):** Many cast iron water mains were laid between the 1880s and 1950s. These older pipes were durable for their time but are now prone to leaks, corrosion, pressure loss, and water quality issues<sup>79</sup>.
- **Rural networks:** Much of the rural infrastructure was developed during the mid to late 20th century, through state-driven rural water supply schemes in the 1960s–1980s. Much of this infrastructure did not anticipate current population levels and is now at capacity<sup>80</sup>.
- **Lead pipes:** In older housing areas, especially those built before the 1970s, lead service pipes were common and are more recently being targeted as a priority for replacement due to health concerns<sup>81</sup>.

**Wastewater infrastructure:** In some areas, outdated or overloaded wastewater treatment plants from the 1970s–1990s are still in use and do not meet EU environmental standards. As recently as mid-2024, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reported that two areas, Foynes and Glin, were discharging untreated wastewater into the Shannon Estuary, posing environmental and public health risks. Plans are in place to build new water treatment plants by 2028 to address these issues<sup>82</sup>.

Mayor John Moran has described Limerick’s water infrastructure as “woefully inadequate,” highlighting that deficiencies in wastewater systems are hindering housing development and economic progress<sup>83</sup>.

**Current state:** The age and fragmentation of water infrastructure mean Limerick suffers from:

- High water leakage rates (over 40% in some zones).
- Frequent pipe bursts and pressure issues.
- Non-compliant or inadequate wastewater treatment in several areas.

According to Uisce Éireann, only 15 of 45 settlements in the county have the available freshwater capacity to support 2033 population targets. All of the city centre and wider suburban areas of Limerick City have capacity. By contrast, of the ten largest towns in the county (i.e. Newcastle West, Kilmallock, Abbeyfeale, Adare, Askeaton, Castleconnell, Croom, Foynes, Patrickswell, Rathkeale) only Adare, Castleconnell, Croom, Rathkeale, and Patrickswell have capacity<sup>84</sup>.

Of the 53 settlements in Limerick used by Uisce Éireann to assess wastewater capacity, 35 areas had spare capacity (Green Status), 6 had potential spare capacity (Amber Status), and 12 had no capacity (Red Status). The city and its suburbs have spare capacity. Of the ten largest towns in the county, six have spare capacity<sup>85</sup>.

Settlement	Available freshwater capacity to support 2033 population targets	Wastewater treatment available capacity	Wastewater project planned/underway
Limerick City and Suburbs	Yes	Yes (Green Status)	Yes
Newcastle West	No	No (Red Status)	Yes
Kilmallock	No	Yes (Green Status)	No
Abbeyfeale	No	Yes (Green Status)	No
Adare	Yes	Potential spare capacity (Amber Status)	Yes
Askeaton	No	No (Red Status)	Yes
Castleconnell*	Yes	Yes (Green Status)	Yes
Croom	Yes	Potential spare capacity (Amber Status)	No
Foynes	No	No (Red Status)	Yes
Patrickswell**	Yes	Yes (Green Status)	Yes
Rathkeale	No	Yes (Green Status)	No

\* Castleconnell wastewater is treated at the Castletroy wastewater treatment plant

\*\* Patrickswell wastewater is treated at the Limerick wastewater treatment plant

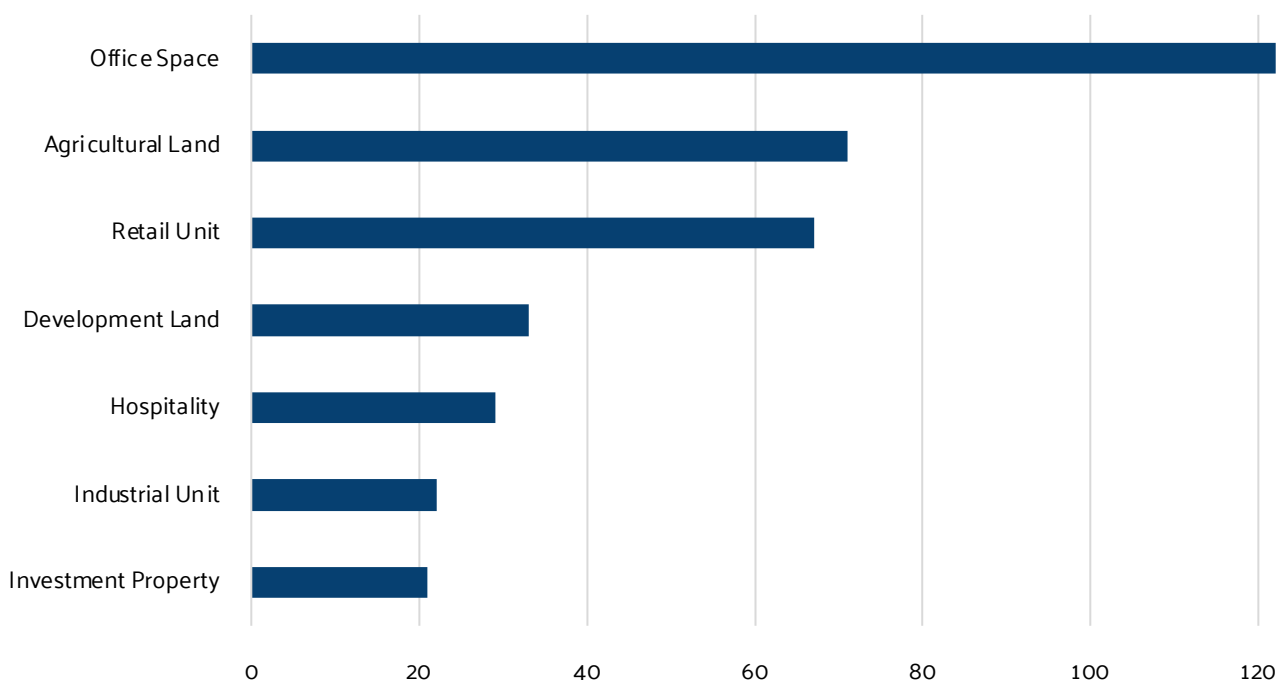
**Planned upgrades and investments:** In response to these challenges, Uisce Éireann is undertaking several initiatives:

- **€2.5 million investment:** Upgrades are planned for wastewater treatment plants in Adare, Ballingarry, Oola, Pallasgreen, Pallaskenry, Croom, Murroe, and Hospital. These improvements aim to enhance inlet works, stormwater management, and sludge treatment facilities<sup>86</sup>.
- **Foynes and Glin projects:** New wastewater treatment plants are scheduled for construction by 2028 to eliminate the discharge of untreated sewage into the Shannon Estuary<sup>87</sup>.
- **Castletroy and Bunlicky upgrades:** Plans are in place to upgrade the Castletroy and Bunlicky wastewater treatment plants to address capacity issues and improve treatment standards<sup>88</sup>.

## Commercial property market

Limerick’s commercial property market presents a varied landscape, with availability and demand differing significantly across office, retail, industrial, and hospitality spaces<sup>89</sup>.

### Number of Vacant Units by Type



**Office space:** Limerick’s office market is performing strongly. In Q1 2024, approximately 4,900 sqm of office space was taken up across seven deals. The availability rate was 6.7%, considerably lower than Dublin’s 14.8%. This reflects tight supply and strong demand in the region. Prime rents in Limerick are also competitive, ranging from €296/sqm for second-hand offices to €431/sqm for new builds, versus €673/sqm in Dublin<sup>90</sup>.

The picture concerning Limerick’s office market is nuanced. Much depends on the quality of the space, its location, and cost. Grade A office space is coming online at One Opera Square in the city centre and more is planned at the Cleeves site. The new space would likely service more prestigious, well capitalised firms, able to pay the higher rents and are unlikely to be economic for the vast majority of SMEs. As of June 2025, there is a 28k sq ft vacant office space in Raheen Business Park which is unlikely to meet modern expectations for many firms<sup>91</sup>. In Raheen, the focus has been on supplying the MNE sector rather than focusing on SME office needs. Outside of the business parks, there is a danger that sub-standard office space in the city will become a stranded asset. This may lead to long term vacancy or conversion to other uses such as accommodation.

**Agricultural land:** Agricultural land in Limerick County continues to attract consistent interest, especially for grassland and mixed-use farming. According to the latest reports from the Irish Farmers Journal, average land prices in Limerick range from €11,000 to €13,000 per acre, depending on location, access, and quality. Availability remains moderate, with most transactions involving small to mid-sized holdings. Compared to eastern counties like Meath or Kildare, where top land can exceed €20,000 per acre, Limerick offers relatively accessible entry points for both farming and agri-investment purposes<sup>92</sup>.

**Retail space:** Retail remains challenged particularly in Limerick City. This follows a national trend shifting towards online retail over brick-and-mortar stores. The city centre has historically suffered from edge of town shopping. County Limerick’s commercial vacancy rate of 17.9% in Q4 2024 was notably higher than the national average of 14.5%. These figures point to oversupply or under-utilised space. However, local auctioneers have noted an increase in enquiries as regeneration projects and footfall improvements gain momentum<sup>93</sup>.

**Hospitality space:** There is no direct vacancy percentage available for bars, cafés, restaurants, but it is broadly influenced by the overall commercial vacancy rate of 17.9% in Limerick. Many hospitality businesses are in city centre units, so trends in retail and office performance offer useful proxies. Between 2005 and 2023, 153 pubs closed in County Limerick<sup>94</sup>.

Hotels in the county do appear to be performing strongly. In August 2024, room occupancy in Limerick hotels was 93%<sup>95</sup>. This was the joint second highest county figure nationally. The revenue per available room was €204.58. This was the third highest in the country. The hotel sector is heavily dependent on the domestic market<sup>96</sup>.

**Industrial/warehouse space:** Across Ireland industrial/warehouse space is in high demand, with Limerick’s market one of the tightest. As of Q3 2024, the availability rate for industrial space was just 2.3%, indicating extremely strong demand and limited supply<sup>97</sup>. Around 3,500 sqm of space was taken up during that quarter, largely driven by the logistics and manufacturing sectors.

Industrial/warehouse rental rates are generally more affordable compared to other major urban centres like Dublin and Cork offering opportunity for businesses looking to optimise operational costs while maintaining a central location with strong transport links<sup>98</sup>.

**Limerick:** €80 - €100 per sqm. **Cork:** €115 - €135 per sqm. **Dublin:** €140 - €180 per sqm.

**Industrial Space Availability Q3 2014 - Q3 2024**

Availability (Sq M) and Availability Ratio (%)

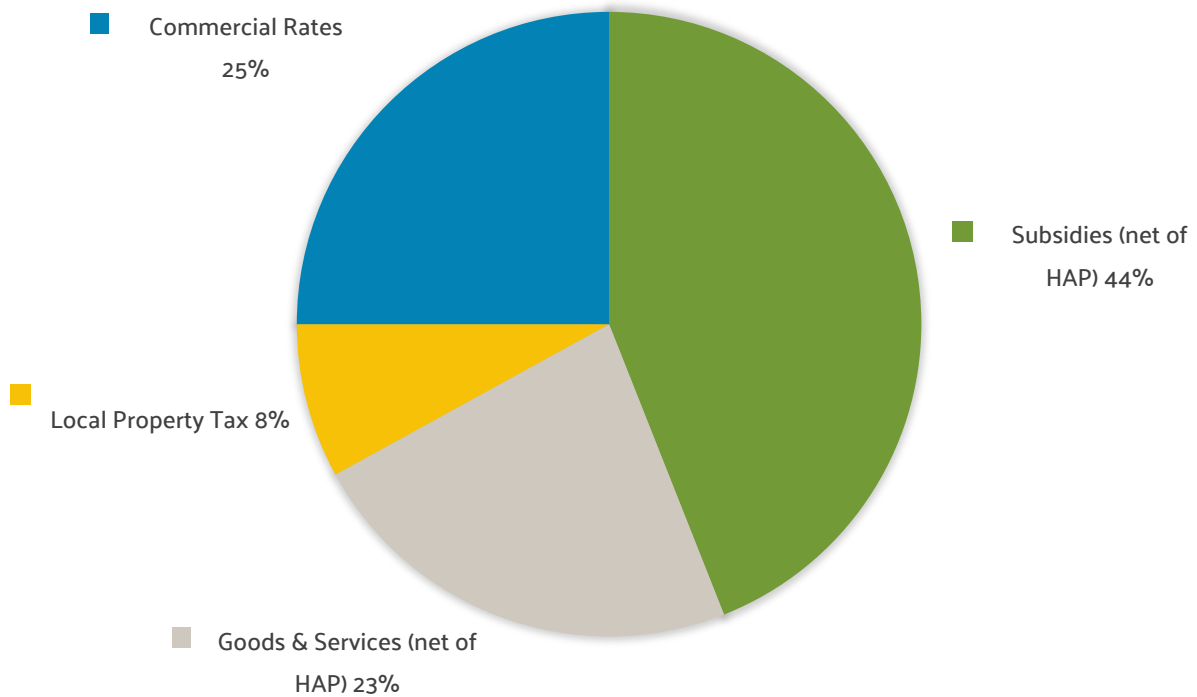


## Revenue contributions

**What are commercial rates?:** Commercial rates are a tax on non-domestic property calculated using 2012 property valuations multiplied by the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV), which was €0.2797 for 2024<sup>99</sup>. County Limerick is due to be revalued soon.

Commercial rates are a primary income stream for Limerick City and County Council. It is expected to bring in €69.1m in the 2025 budget<sup>100</sup>. This is 25% of the council’s income, excluding HAP (Housing Assistance Payment).

### Analysis of Income (excluding HAP)



**Who pays the rates?** Limerick City and County Council define companies with property paying greater than €31,201 in rates to be large companies. In 2024, only 6% of companies fall into this category (this includes public utilities). Despite this, they contributed €43.2m or 67% of all commercial rates income to the council. SMEs account for the remaining 94% of companies but contributed a much lower €21.1m or 33% of rates income<sup>101</sup>.

### Top 5 categories for rates income

Category description	2025 Rates income	% Rates income
Industrial uses	17,036,591	26%
Public utilities (electricity, gas, telecommunications, etc.)	12,298,005	19%
Retail (shops)	11,395,498	17%
Office	7,662,157	12%
Hospitality	5,737,766	9%

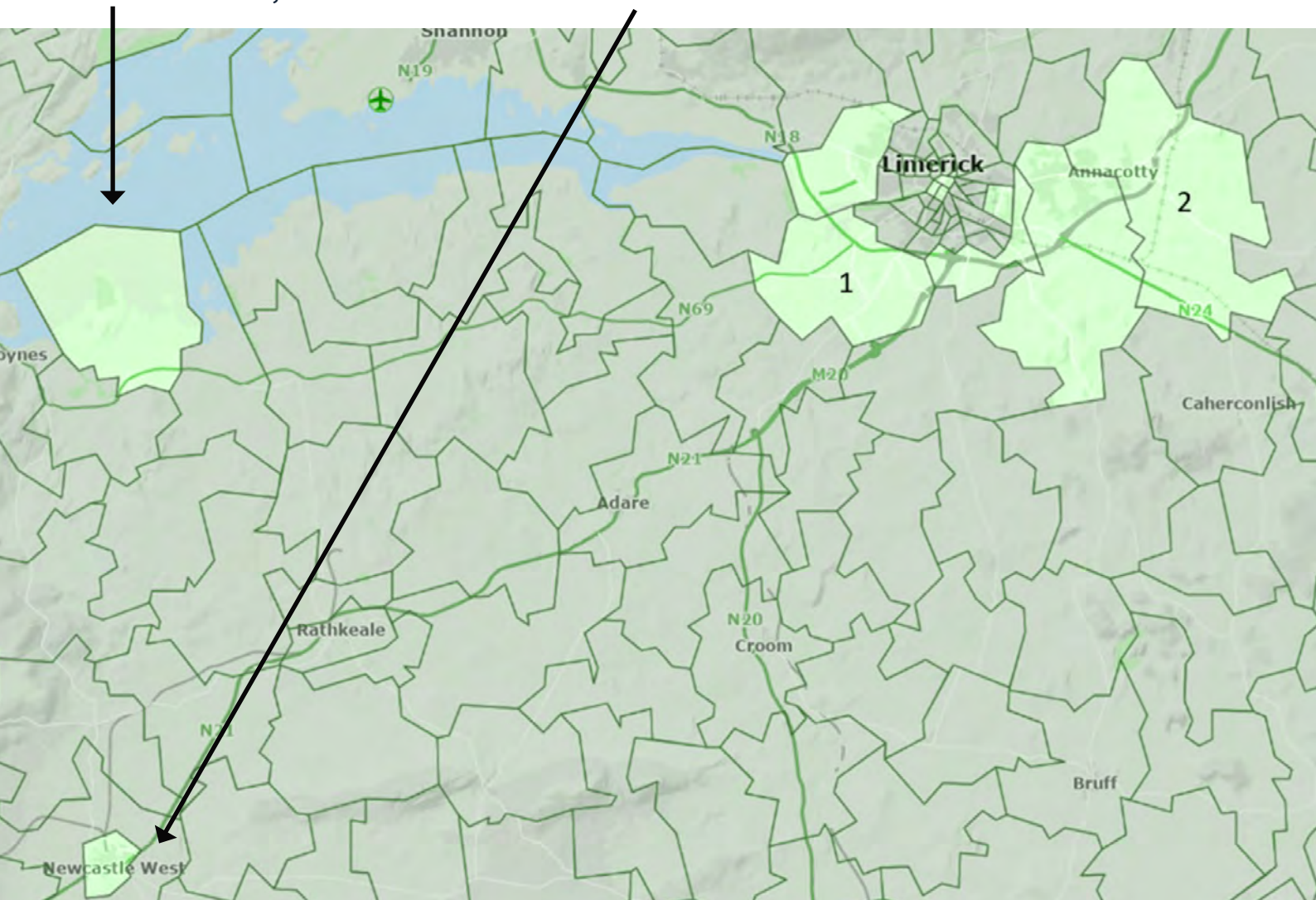
Industrial uses top the list, contributing €17 million, or 26% of total rates income, reflecting the strong manufacturing and logistics presence in the region.

**Geography of payments:** Businesses in just 11 of Limerick’s 166 electoral divisions (ED) account for 50.5% of the county’s commercial rates income<sup>102</sup>. The top 2 alone contribute 20.3%. The variance in payments offer a clear picture of where economic activity is concentrated in the county.

1. **Ballycummin ED (14.3%)** – Home to IDA’s Raheen Business Park, which hosts global firms including Regeneron, Analog Devices, Eli Lilly, and Dell.
2. **Ballyvarra ED (6.0%)** – Location of IDA’s National Technology Park, featuring Cook Medical and Johnson & Johnson, as well as Annacotty Business Park. Annacotty Business Park itself contains logistic companies and Serosep Ltd.

The data and map below support the ‘donut city’ phenomenon in Limerick, highlighting how much of the economic activity is concentrated in business parks on the outskirts rather than in the city centre.

Among the top 11 areas, the two most notable outside the city are the locations of the Aughinish Alumina refinery ED 4.3% (6th) and Newcastle Urban ED 2.1% (9th).





# 3.0 Analysis

# 3.0 Analysis

## Interacting with stakeholders

While creating this action plan 48 meetings and focus groups were undertaken with a wide variety of stakeholders during phase one of the stakeholder engagement programme (learning and gaining empathy phase). These included SME owners and senior managers, business representative bodies, representatives from further and third level education institutes, various departments within Limerick County Council, government agencies, the banks, and others. Importantly, 35 owners or senior managers from Limerick SMEs were met. Overall, aside from the Economic Development, Enterprise, Tourism and Planning SPC and SME Task Force meetings, 73 people took part in interviews and focus groups during phase 1 of the engagement programme.

In all the meetings a standard set of topics was discussed in a semi-structured approach. Those six topics form the structure for the stakeholder feedback section. The engagements also informed the report's SCOT, PESTLE, SME ecosystem health map, and competitive advantages analyses.

An online survey for SME owners was undertaken to complement the meetings and focus groups. Unfortunately, only 88 responses were received. Although the survey provides some interesting insights, the small sample size means that wider conclusions that rely heavily on the questionnaire are not tenable.

## Stakeholder feedback analysis

### Overview

Phase one of the stakeholder engagement process gathered extensive qualitative feedback from over seventy participants, including SME owners, business associations, educators, financial institutions, and public agencies. The evidence presents a dual narrative: Limerick possesses exceptional economic fundamentals—talent, infrastructure, and location—but systemic challenges persist around finance, innovation, and city centre vitality. These issues collectively constrain SME competitiveness, growth, and resilience.

#### 1. Talent and education: strong foundations, uneven absorption

All stakeholders highlighted education and skills as one of Limerick's defining strengths. The presence of UL, TUS, and LCETB provides a strong talent pipeline, supported by responsive curricula, high-quality apprenticeships, and close industry collaboration. Graduates are regarded as "industry ready", and institutions actively co-create programmes with employers. However, it must be noted that only a small number of SMEs engaged directly with universities. Employees are also seen as being loyal. The cost of employment by SMEs is perceived favourably against Dublin and competitive with Cork and Galway.

While supply of talent is strong, absorption into the SME sector is weak when compared to multinationals. These large organisations capture much of the highest-calibre talent, particularly in managerial and technical roles, leaving smaller firms struggling to recruit specialists and senior staff such as CFOs and operations managers. SMEs also lag behind in promoting continuous learning, often due to cost, time, and a lack of paid training leave. This imbalance limits innovation diffusion and productivity growth across the SME base.

#### 2. Infrastructure and accessibility: strategic strengths, operational gaps

Limerick's economic geography and physical infrastructure are major assets. The city benefits from proximity to Cork, Galway, and Dublin, excellent motorway links, Shannon Foynes Port, and an international airport with U.S. preclearance. Broadband access and digital readiness are strong, and the Engine Hub provides a focal point for collaboration and entrepreneurship.

However, local connectivity and utilities remain critical bottlenecks. Public transport is uneven. This

is a particular issue for city centre retail and hospitality businesses trying to bring customers into the core and compete against more car friendly offerings on the edge of the city. Bus services lack frequency and coverage, there are no night routes or park-and-ride facilities, and intercity rail links are underdeveloped.

Water and wastewater constraints are acute, limiting housing and commercial development across several key towns. It is worth noting that housing provision consistently emerged as one of the key issues for SMEs. More housing is needed to attract and keep employees which will allow businesses to grow. Energy infrastructure, including grid connection delays further restricts economic expansion.

Finally, there are constraints concerning the supply of small manufacturing enterprise spaces and warehousing for SMEs.

### **3. Business growth and competitiveness: conservative models in a dynamic economy**

Non-SME stakeholders described a risk-averse SME culture. Compared with peer regions, Limerick produces fewer high-potential start-ups and sees limited internationalisation. Entrepreneurs are often reluctant to borrow or relinquish equity, which inhibits scaling.

Integration with multinational supply chains remains weak. SMEs who wish to do so are largely unaware of how to accomplish this. A related issue is the poor ability/knowledge evident during engagements amongst many SMEs about how to win public sector contracts.

Local retail and hospitality sectors face structural challenges: increasing costs and regulation, suburban retail strength, limited evening footfall, and underdeveloped tourism offerings. City centre regeneration was repeatedly cited as essential for long-term economic revitalisation by all categories of SMEs engaged with, even those with no presence in the city core. During conversations around the city, anti-social behaviour and the need for more quality of life initiatives frequently arose.

### **4. Financing and grant support: fragmented ecosystem, low awareness**

A consistent message from SMEs was that finance remains a significant constraint to SME growth. The local ecosystem lacks angel investors and venture capital networks, while banks remain conservative and slow to lend to early-stage firms. Finally, awareness of the ability of the Credit Union and Enterprise Ireland to support SMEs was low. The result is an overreliance on self-funding and short-term borrowing at a high interest rate.

While the LEO and Enterprise Ireland are well regarded, the grant landscape is viewed as complex, slow, and poorly communicated. Many SMEs are unaware of available supports or lack the administrative capacity to apply. This is despite the energetic efforts of the LEO. However, given that SME owners are typically time poor, their lack of knowledge concerning supports is unsurprising.

### **5. Research, innovation, and digitalisation: untapped potential**

Although Limerick hosts top quality research assets, SMEs remain slow to innovate. Most firms adopt a follower rather than leader approach to technology adoption, waiting until benefits are proven. AI, automation, and digital marketing remain underused, especially among smaller service and retail firms. Direct engagement from SMEs with universities is low. Barriers include time constraints, limited awareness, cost concerns, and a lack of R&D expertise.

## 6. Community, collaboration, and governance: a collegial environment

Despite operational challenges, Limerick's business culture is cooperative and optimistic. Stakeholders – both SMEs and non-SMEs – praised the city's loyalty, collegiality, and sense of shared purpose. Programmes delivered by LEO, Enterprise Ireland, and Innovate Limerick are trusted and valued. However, SMEs feel underrepresented in policymaking relative to multinational stakeholders, and communication between city retailers, hospitality firms, and the Council is perceived as being weak.

## 7. Summary

Limerick's SME ecosystem structural strengths—talent, infrastructure, and community—are significant. However, its weaknesses—finance, innovation, and urban vitality—limit its full potential. Stakeholders perceive Limerick as a place of “unrealised opportunity”: competitive costs and strong institutions coexist with administrative friction and cultural risk aversion. If the necessary actions are implemented Limerick can transition from a solid SME base to a high-performance, innovation-driven regional economy, positioning itself as Ireland's model county for SME resilience and sustainable growth.

## Limerick SME Ecosystem SCOT (Strengths, Constraints, Opportunities, Threats)

The SCOT below is based on the findings of the socio-economic analysis in section 2 and stakeholder feedback.

### Strengths

- **Strategic Location** – Crossroads when travelling from Cork to Galway or Galway to Waterford. Located along Atlantic Economic Corridor.
- **Strong connectivity** – Excellent road connections to Dublin and Galway. Direct rail connections to Dublin and Galway. Foynes Port with connection to rail network under construction. Shannon Airport with U.S. pre-clearance.
- **Internet connectivity** – Overall, high speed fibre internet connectivity is very good, even in rural areas.
- **Universities** – Large student populations. UL is a top 500 university globally with 18k students. TUS Moylish has 7k. Shannon College of Management is located close to Limerick. Very good relationship with industry.
- **Further education and training** – LCETB has a broad geographic range across the county. A wide range of industry focused courses are available. Very good relationship with industry.
- **Rent and labour costs** – More affordable than Dublin. Costs are competitive with Cork and Galway.
- **Economic base** – Strong engineering, bioscience, and ICT industries. Home to major employers: Dell, Johnson & Johnson, Analog Devices, Northern Trust. Attractive location for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).
- **Networking** – Strong willingness to collaborate amongst stakeholders.
- **River Shannon** – Adds beauty and character to the city and northern edge of the county.
- **Built and cultural heritage** – The county has some notable built and cultural heritage sites of national importance, including Lough Gur, Medieval Kilmallock, Hunt Museum, and King John's Castle.
- **Sport** – Limerick City has two modern stadia (Gaelic Park, Thomond Park). UL has state of the art sports facilities. Adare Manor will host the 2027 Ryder Cup.
- **Traffic** – Limerick has lower levels of traffic congestion than found in Dublin, Galway, and Cork.

## Challenges

- **Housing** – Insufficient housing to meet demand. Rent levels have increased significantly.
- **Socio-economic disparities** – High concentrations of disadvantage in the city and elsewhere in the county.
- **Education disparities** – There are significant numbers of adults with a low education attainment level.
- **Retail on the city edge** – The strongest provision of retail is in the suburbs and not the city centre. This draws footfall and economic activity away from the core.
- **Crime and anti-social behaviour** – Substance misuse, associated crime, and anti-social behaviour is a problem in the city centre and in other areas of the city and county.
- **Vacancy and dereliction** – Commercial vacancy is high in the county.
- **Reputation around crime** – Although serious violent crime is now at or below national averages, the reputation unfortunately persists.
- **Brain drain** – UL and TUS international students leaving after graduation. The draw of Dublin and multinationals often pulls local graduates away from Limerick's SMEs.
- **Language skills** – Poor language skills are deterring SMEs from engaging with the German, French, and other continental economies.
- **Car dependency** – Inadequate bus and rail services. Rural areas are especially dependent on cars. This has an impact on shopping patterns, with small, local shops under pressure.
- **Online shopping** – Both a challenge and an opportunity. For most small retailers and makers, given the margins, it is an ongoing challenge that grows each year.
- **Manufacturing and industrial space** – Construction has not kept up with demand and there is a shortage of available warehousing and small enterprise manufacturing space.
- **Airport** – There is a need to develop more connections with economically important hub airports on the continent.
- **Congestion** – There are concentrations of congestion at certain times in the city, especially around the business parks.
- **Connectivity with Munster** – Aside from Ennis, poor road and rail connectivity with the main economic centres of Munster: Cork City, Waterford City, Clonmel, Killarney, and Tralee.

## Opportunities

- **Energy infrastructure** – Strong potential for offshore wind in the Atlantic served from facilities in the Shannon Estuary.
- **Tourism** – Relatively low levels of foreign visitors. Opportunities for additional products associated with outdoor activities, sports tourism, and cultural heritage.
- **Emerging development projects** – Opera Site, Worldclass Waterfront, Cleeves Riverside Quarter, potential for IDA to develop another industrial park site.
- **Rail** – Limerick has an incredible amount of commuter rail potential. A lot of the network is underused or completely disused. Foynes line being rebuilt, initially for freight. Potential for a Limerick City to Shannon Airport connection.
- **Leveraging universities** – Strengthen collaboration with local universities to boost innovation, support startups, attract research funding, and develop a skilled workforce.
- **City Centre repurposing** – Transform the city centre into a vibrant, social destination with a strong retail offering.
- **Nighttime economy** – Limerick City has a fine historic built form and is located on a stunning river. Growing the nighttime economy will support the retail and hospitality sectors.
- **Waterways** – The Shannon riverfront offers development potential, especially where light industry activity dominates. The Shannon's associated channels and canals offer recreational opportunities.

- **Ryder Cup** – Build on the moment when international media and high value visitors will be in the county.

### Threats

- **AI** – Failure of Limerick SMEs to adopt AI early into operations will likely lead to AI integrated competitors taking customers and market share.
- **Emigration and population decline** – Risk of skilled, educated, and young populations migrating to competitor cities or Dublin for work/educational opportunities, threatening demographic balance.
- **Economic inequality** – As the city develops, disadvantaged areas could fall further behind leading to increased insecurity and a decline in social cohesion.
- **Crime** – A significant increase in serious crime would be detrimental to Limerick’s reputation.
- **Overly FDI dependent economy** – Double edged sword, FDIs bring employment and prosperity to the region, but create vulnerabilities; higher risk of economic shocks, EU/US regulatory changes, FDI relocations. Impact of skilled staff concentrating in FDIs on local SMEs talent pool and levels of entrepreneurship.
- **Infrastructure deficits** – Housing shortages, water problems and under-used/outdated infrastructure (particularly rail) could hold the city and county back if not addressed.
- **Flooding** – Some areas of the city and county close to the Shannon estuary are particularly vulnerable to flooding. This will worsen with climate change.

### PESTLE

A PESTLE analysis is a tool to assess macroeconomic factors that may impact operations.

**Political:** Trump tariffs. Erosion of international rules-based system. Emergence of populism across Europe. Aggression from Russia. Good levels of funding available for urban and rural regeneration. This funding may now be under threat due to external forces. Tax burden.

**Economic:** Full employment. Challenge of attracting and retaining staff. Skills shortage. Need to open new markets within the EU.

**Social:** Areas of stubborn social disadvantage in the city and county. Cost of living. Cost of housing and the lack of sufficient housing stock. Ireland as a destination for migrants. Assimilation of migrants.

**Technological:** The importance of AI. Continued growth in online shopping.

**Legal:** Impact of new planning act on housing and economic development. Impact of regulation on business. EU CSRD obligations.

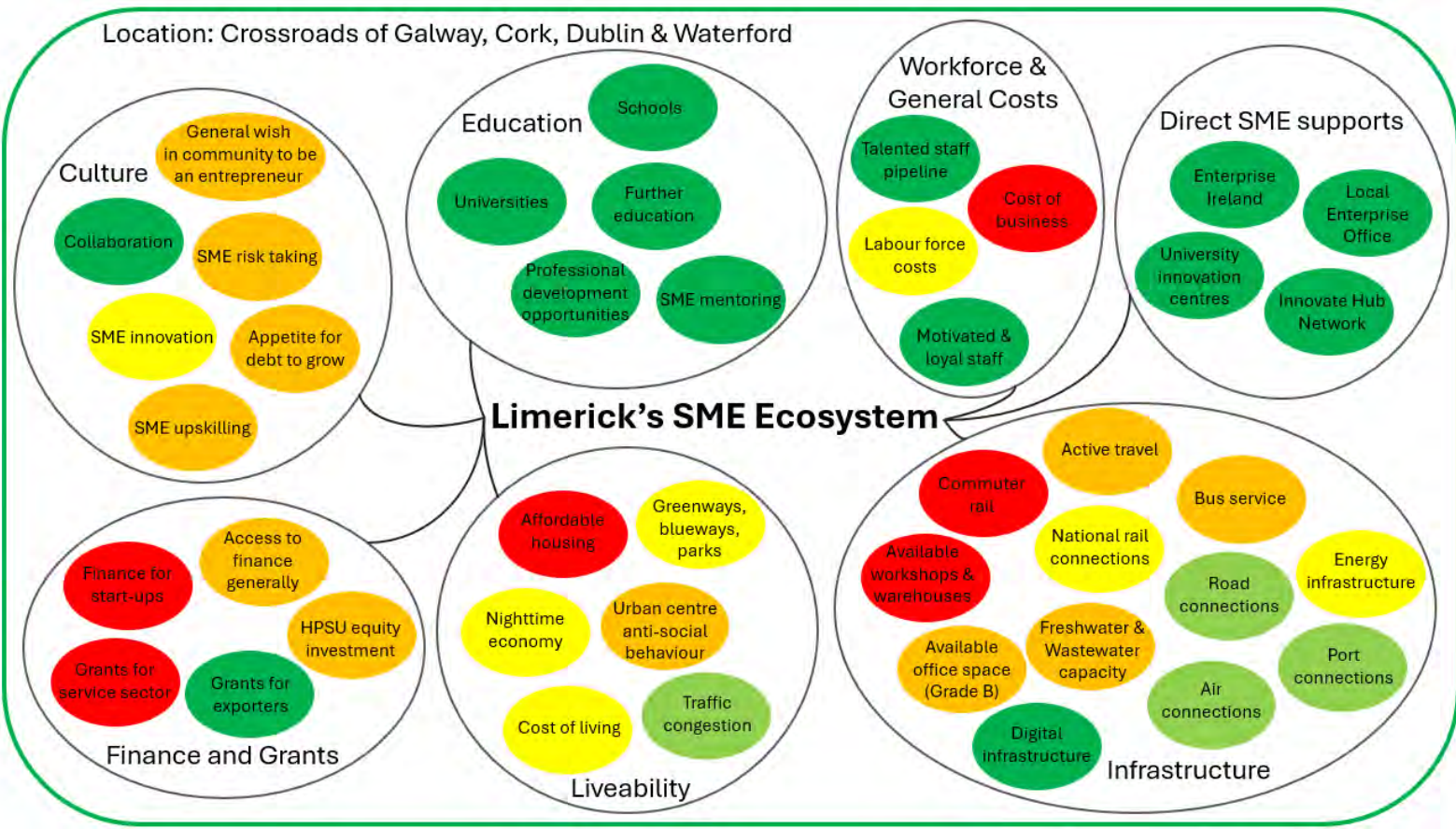
**Environmental:** Climate change and associated increased incidents of severe flooding and droughts. Also impact of climate action (e.g. CSRD).

## Limerick's SME ecosystem health map

The following map is a visual interpretation of what the qualitative and quantitative data indicates as being the health of the various elements that make up Limerick's SME ecosystem. Each element within the map is an overall aggregate that excludes sectoral differences (e.g. tourism, manufacturing, hospitality) which can be significant. Nonetheless, it offers an immediate snapshot of the current situation.

Key:

- Very good health
- Good health
- Fair health
- Poor health
- Very poor health



## Limerick's Competitive Advantages

A sustainable competitive advantage is a characteristic that allows a company or place to outperform its rivals that is difficult for those rivals to replicate. Below are Limerick's sustainable competitive advantages as they relate to the creation of a SME ecosystem conducive to success.

### Primary

- **Location** – Limerick has the best economic geography in the country outside of Dublin.

### Secondary

- **Business costs** – Limerick is cheaper than Dublin and competitive with Cork and Galway.
- **Educated, well-motivated workforce** – Strong pipeline of adaptive talent coming from well-regarded educational institutes that are responsive to industry needs.
- **Rail** – Limerick has the best rail network in the country outside of Dublin. However, it is seriously underutilised. Sustainable transport and housing development potential.
- **River Shannon** – Located on Ireland's longest river at its most spectacular location. Quality of life and waterfront development potential.



# 4.0 Actions

# 4.0 Actions

## Proposed vision

To make Limerick a leading county in Ireland for SMEs to thrive, innovate, and grow.

## SEECER (Social Equity and Environment, Efficiency, Costs and Revenue) Actions

All actions to be in keeping with the proposed vision. There are 15 actions outlined below, each organised under four themes. There are three action themes that reflect the core concerns of SMEs:

1. **Costs**
2. **Efficiency**
3. **Revenue**

An additional theme has been added due to the impact of Climate Action, CSRD, and Public Sector Duty:

4. **Social Equity and the Environment**

### Note concerning action cost estimates:

1. Where possible, all estimates based on similar previous programmes.
2. Adjustments as necessary have been made for inflation and currency.
3. All estimates are ex VAT.
4. As the actions are implemented, inflation should be factored in as appropriate from the July 2025 baseline.

## 1. Costs

### 1.1 SME university business park

New SME business park designed along meta city principles. Designed to encourage economies of agglomeration, collaboration, and innovation. Located on appropriate zoned land, close to one of the universities and good transport infrastructure. A possible location could be Moyross. The project to be delivered in collaboration with UL and/or TUS. It is to be a teaching business park akin to a university hospital where students (undergrad and postgrad) and researchers are connected with relevant businesses. Examples to learn from include the recently announced SETU Glassworks enterprise park in Waterford, Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park, and the University of Oxford's Begbroke Science Park.

Located in Paris, Station F is the world's biggest start-up campus. Could a version of that form the core of the new SME business park?

The park must have adequate warehousing and office space of required quality and have good road accessibility.

The park should be designed to support sustainability goals:

- Good public transport connectivity, preferably with a train station nearby.
- Safe to cycle to and within.
- Highly energy efficient buildings, preferably with a high amount of natural and recycled materials used in their construction.
- Considerable renewable energy generated on site.
- Landscape managed for biodiversity.

**Issues identified:** Need to support greater levels of innovation. Lack of warehouse space, workshops and office space of sufficient quality at the right price point.

**Benefits:** Drives innovation and collaboration. Attracts more SMEs to Limerick. Facilitates growth.

**Proposed lead:** Limerick City and County Council

Estimated Cost	Possible financing
€3.25m per acre of enterprise park. Ultimate cost €100m-€300m depending on size and scope of park.	URDF, Thrive, Joint venture with the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund and private developer, development contributions.

### 1.2 Rates scheme to encourage vibrant city and town centres

Informed by research undertaken for this plan, the SME Task Force advocated for a rates incentive scheme. This was adopted for the 2026 budget of Limerick City and County Council. The rates incentive scheme is designed to encourage the use of vacant premises in the city centre and level 2 and 3 towns as set out in the Limerick Development Plan. The capped scheme provides rebates of decreasing amounts as follows:

- Year 1 – 100% reduction, subject to a maximum of €12,000
- Year 2 – 75% reduction, subject to a maximum of €9,000
- Year 3 – 50% reduction, subject to a maximum of €6,000
- Year 4 – 25% reduction, subject to a maximum of €3,000

The scheme is confined to the urban cores and does not act to displace existing businesses. It is the most attractive scheme of its type in the country. The scheme is to be delivered as a grant.

The scheme is not open to fast food outlets, bookmakers/gambling, arcades, charity shops, vape shops, head shops, private members clubs, money lenders (except recognised financial institutions) etc.

Given its adoption, the role of the SME Task Force is to assist in this action’s implementation and monitor its impact to enable future refinements.

A small complementary action could involve the council thanking the business for the previous year’s payment when the request to pay rates is issued by the council and provide a breakdown of where the rates revenue has been allocated (e.g. x% on festivals, y% on street cleaning, etc).

**Issues identified:** Dereliction and vacancy in settlement cores. Low footfall leading to business closure and even lower footfall afterwards, creating a vicious cycle.

**Benefits:** More vibrant settlements. Higher footfall. More businesses. Improved community pride.

**Proposed Lead:** Limerick City and County Council

Estimated Cost	Possible financing
Low/neutral	Limerick City and County Council own budget for administration

### 1.3 Minimising bureaucracy for SMEs

Regulations and bureaucracy experienced by SMEs should be as much as necessary and as little as possible! Similarly, SME associated processes within Limerick City and County Council and LEO should be as lean as possible.

Led by an expert in Lean, run an annual Council/LEO/ SME Task Force/Chamber regulations workshop to identify how things can be improved as regards the admin load for SMEs (e.g. applying for grants, rates, looking for planning permission, accessing company based training). Use a business survey to ask what are the specific frustrating elements of regulations/bureaucracy. Follow-on advice to be provided by the Lean expert.

A key partner in implementing this action will be the Business Improvement Department within Limerick City and County Council.

There is also the possibility of working with the Limerick School of Art and Design TUS to integrate design thinking into the council’s departments that deal directly or indirectly with SMEs.

**Issues identified:** Unnecessary red tape and sub-optimal processes for approvals.

**Benefits:** Greater understanding by council departments of the issues SMEs have. Less time burden for SMEs. Likely to increase take-up of grants, training and other supports. More SMEs likely to set up in Limerick.

**Proposed Lead:** Limerick City and County Council

Estimated Cost	Possible financing
€10k per annum	Limerick City and County Council own budget

## 1.4 Co-working hub network

Continue to support the development of a network of low cost to business but high spec work hubs where needed throughout the county. The number and distribution must ensure one hub does not undermine another. Any hubs outside of the city should be located within the town centre. Each hub should be tailored for the needs and strengths of the area in which it is located (e.g. food start-up, eco-tourism).

Work to better connect the various hubs in the county with the universities and LCETB.

Develop a programme with UL and TUS where ex-Nexus and Hartnett Centre start-ups receive low cost/no cost space in Engine for up to two years. Additional mentoring could also be part of the programme.

Continue to develop flagship projects that drive innovation through collaboration, technology and design.

**Issues identified:** Lack of affordable, high spec offices in towns. Occupancy level in the Engine Collaboration Centre.

**Benefits:** Drives innovation and collaboration. Brings activity to town centres and Limerick City Centre.

**Proposed Lead:** Innovate

Estimated Cost	Possible financing
Dependent on specific project	URDF, RRDF, Thrive, Innovate, Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht

## 2. Efficiency

### 2.1 AI training and mentoring

Assist companies to fundamentally adopt and integrate AI into their operations. Possible actions include:

1. Regularly reviewing the rapidly shifting abilities of AI (i.e. artificial narrow to general to super) and its usefulness for SMEs and modifying as necessary the county's approach to AI training, advice and adoption.
2. Awareness building on how AI can be integrated into the core of operations.
3. Pilot programme where relevant staff from local MNEs work directly with SMEs on the adoption and integration of AI.

The training and support should integrate with and where necessary build upon the Pathway to Innovate programme launched in September 2025 (see appendix E).

**Issue identified:** Inefficient operations. Lack of implementation of a paradigm shifting approach to business.

**Benefits:** Greater efficiency. More aligned with operations in MNEs. Greater relationships between MNEs and SMEs. Enhanced cyber security practices in SMEs.

**Proposed lead:** LEO

Estimated Cost	Possible financing
€40k per annum. Look to grow funding levels where possible over years 2-5 to support the successful action elements uncovered during implementation.	Skillnet Ireland, LEO, Enterprise Ireland

## 2.2 First stop shop business advice clinics

Once a quarter, conduct a first stop shop business advice clinic providing SMEs with wide ranging advice on grants (including SEAI energy grants), training, digital connectivity, and other supports to starting and growing a business. Three are planned for the Engine Collaboration Centre in Limerick City. The fourth is planned for Newcastle West. Scale up and modify the first stop shop clinics as needed. The clinics are to build upon and support the National Enterprise Hub (see appendix f) and existing work of LEO.

At each clinic there should be:

1 x LEO representative providing information about business supports and grants

1 x Training and skills officer providing information about various upskilling opportunities

**Issues identified:** Lack of awareness of support schemes and training opportunities. Underutilisation of Engine Collaboration Centre.

**Benefits:** Greater take-up of support schemes and training. Increased commercial viability of SMEs. Networking.

**Proposed lead:** LEO, Innovate

Estimated Cost	Possible Financing
Existing LEO budget. Look to grow funding levels where possible over years 2-5 to support the successful action elements uncovered during implementation.	Skillnet, LEO, Enterprise Ireland

## 2.3 Company benchmarking

Create a pilot whereby companies can request consultants to benchmark/audit operations, finances, marketing and sales strategy against comparable, well performing competitors, and provide bespoke advice where they can cut costs and grow revenue. Build upon supports already being provided to companies on adopting Lean. The scheme is to be limited to companies with 10 or more employees that are looking to grow nationally and/or internationally. Informal benchmarking can also be facilitated by encouraging companies to collaborate in clusters.

**Issues identified:** Companies with a good product/service but with poor operations and/or sales strategy are still likely to go out of business.

**Benefits:** Increased viability of SMEs.

**Proposed Lead:** LEO

Estimated Cost	Possible Financing
Existing LEO budget year 1. Look to grow funding levels where possible over years 2-5 to support the successful action elements uncovered during implementation.	LEO budget with nominal contribution from companies

## 2.4 Telecoms unit to drive digital connectivity

Establish a Telecoms Unit in Limerick and City Council to coordinate with industry. This would help accelerate addressing current gaps and help ensure Limerick's digital infrastructure is future proofed.

**Issues identified:** Although overall high-speed broadband and 5G coverage is good, there are

areas within the county that continue to experience challenges. Furthermore, the bar for ‘good connectivity’ keeps rising – as businesses adopt AI and cloud, and as more services go digital, Limerick will need even more bandwidth and reliability.

**Benefits:** More efficient operations. Hubs and business parks more attractive to SMEs.

**Proposed Lead:** Limerick City and County Council

Estimated Cost	Possible Financing
€100k per annum	Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht

### 3. Revenue

#### 3.1 Ex large company employee, new SME owner programme

Develop a programme to encourage employees of large companies to establish SMEs. The objective is to significantly reduce the financial risk caused by leaving a large company and establishing a new enterprise. Build upon the Start-Up Relief for Entrepreneurs scheme (SURE) (see appendix g) and other applicable supports.

This could be done by:

- Collaborating with large companies on creating a mechanism where they can directly support start-ups by ex-employees in exchange for equity.
- Work with Enterprise Ireland to develop a scheme to allow for employment grants of up to €30k for the promotor of business. €15k for recruiting new employees.
- Mayoral prize contribution.
- Support the cost of having a necessary premises to start or grow a business (e.g. rates supports, LEO support, Innovate space).

The number of candidates is to be initially limited to between three and five per annum, in order to manage costs.

**Issues identified:** Low number of high potential start-ups in Limerick and the need to improve the quality of applicants in university entrepreneurship programmes.

**Benefits:** Improved quantity of high potential start-ups. Improved quantity and quality of local suppliers for Limerick located large companies.

**Proposed Lead:** LEO

Estimated Cost	Possible Financing
€30k for eligible business promoters. €15k for employees.	Mayoral fund, Enterprise Ireland, LEO, MNEs

### 3.2 High Potential Start-Ups funding experts

Create a three-year Local Authority pilot between Limerick City and County Council and Clare County Council supporting a part time (3 days a week) funding expert for High Potential Start-Ups to help them devise and execute funding strategies. They will have a real finger on the pulse and make connections with early stage equity investment ecosystem (e.g. syndicates, private equity) open to invest. This will build upon the support already provided by AxisBIC in Limerick and Clare that is covered under a Service Level Agreement with Enterprise Ireland.

**Issues identified:** Low number of high potential start-ups in Limerick. The lack of private equity finance to grow aggressively.

**Benefits:** Improved quantity of high potential start-ups. Stronger growth. Creation of large companies in Limerick and less dependence on MNEs. Greater resilience in the local economy.

**Proposed Lead:** AxisBIC

Estimated Cost	Possible Financing
€80k per annum on basis of p/t funding expert (i.e. €40k per local authority)	Cost split between Limerick City and County Council and Clare County Council

### 3.3 Public procurement success for Limerick SMEs

Many Limerick SMEs have a poor understanding of the public procurement process, including the thresholds through which tenders are issued. To address this, the following could be done:

1. Masterclass led by LEO on understanding the public procurement process and how to bid effectively.
2. Themed meet the buyer event(s), where Limerick SMEs can meet representatives from Limerick City and County Council departments and other public sector agencies looking to procure goods and services under the €50k threshold.
3. Greater promotion of Intertrade Ireland's Go-2-Tender programme.

**Issues identified:** Limerick SMEs in general are underperforming in the winning of public contracts.

**Benefits:** Greater understanding by Limerick SMEs of the public procurement process. More success for Limerick SMEs in winning public contracts in Limerick and outside the county. Greater understanding by Limerick City and County Council staff of local SME experiences engaging with the public procurement process.

**Proposed Lead:** Limerick City and County Council

Estimated Cost	Possible Financing
€10k-€15k for year 1. Look to grow funding levels where possible over years 2-5 to support the successful action elements uncovered during implementation.	LEO, Limerick Chamber

### 3.4 Cracking the Common Market

There appears to be low use of the common market by export orientated SMEs. Language is likely a barrier. There is a need to tackle this issue with Enterprise Ireland and the universities.

One possible idea is to create Limerick based microcred courses on:

- Breaking into the German and French markets (understanding local business culture and route to market)
- Growing in Poland and beyond
- MNE processes for SMEs

Through those courses attendees are to be made aware of various Enterprise Ireland and LEO supports.

**Issues identified:** Low penetration of export orientated SMEs into the common market.

**Benefits:** More markets. Higher sales. Greater profit. Creation of large companies in Limerick and less dependence on MNEs. Greater resilience in the local economy.

**Proposed Lead:** TUS, UL, LCETB, Limerick City and County Council, LEO

Estimated Cost	Possible Financing
€15k-30k per annum. Look to grow funding levels where possible over later years of the plan and beyond to support the successful action elements uncovered during implementation.	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science's Human Capital Initiative Pillar 3 Innovation and Agility. Student fees

### 3.5 Power of networking

Run a limited series of high-quality networking events with excellent speakers in the Engine Collaboration Centre. It should become the place to be.

**Issues identified:** Need for more collaboration between businesses and for SMEs to have greater awareness of best practice in operations, sales, marketing, adoption of tech, etc. Encourage greater collaboration between Limerick SMEs to win more contracts.

**Benefits:** More Limerick SMEs working together. More innovation. Improved business practices.

**Proposed Lead:** Innovate

Estimated Cost	Possible Financing
€20k for year 1. Look to grow funding levels where possible over years 2-5 to support the successful action elements uncovered during implementation.	Limerick City and County Council, Innovate

## 4. Social Equity and the Environment

### 4.1 Fund to address disadvantage by supporting social enterprises

Work with Rethink Ireland to ensure that it is easy for SMEs to contribute to the More for Limerick Social Enterprise Fund. Recommended that companies contribute 1% of annual net operating profit after tax (NOPAT).

**Issues identified:** Persistent intergenerational disadvantage concentrated in certain areas of the city and county.

**Benefits:** More being done to address disadvantage. Ability for companies to use financial contribution as part of their CSR/ESG efforts.

**Proposed Lead:** Limerick City and County Council and Rethink Ireland

Estimated Cost	Possible Financing
5%-10% of overall fund for administration	Limerick companies, Mayoral fund

### 4.2 Investing in nature and renewable energy

Three possible options:

1. Work with appropriate partners (e.g. Burrenbeo, Hometree) to facilitate charitable donations for the planting of native trees and the restoration of denuded landscapes (if possible, in County Limerick). Recommended that companies contribute 1% of annual net operating profit after tax (NOPAT).
2. Work with appropriate partners to facilitate green investment by Limerick SMEs in closed canopy forest schemes, solar farms, wind power, anaerobic digester plant, circular economy, etc. All in are to be located in the county.
3. Develop an innovative Green Bond for Limerick SMEs that supports their ESG/CSR efforts and marks the county out as a place for sustainable investment. Recommended that companies contribute 1% of annual net operating profit after tax (NOPAT). Incentives could be created to support the scheme.

**Issues identified:** Climate change. Lowering biodiversity levels. CSR obligations on large companies which impacts on their supply chains (i.e. SMEs).

**Benefits:** Carbon sequestration. Increased biodiversity levels. Recreation opportunities in forests. Improved air quality. Production of renewable energy which reduces need for thermal power plants. More energy overall. Ability for companies to use financial contribution as part of CSR/ESG efforts.

Estimated Cost	Possible Financing
None to Limerick City and County Council beyond administration of selecting partners and adherence to good governance.	Limerick businesses



# 5.0 Implementation

# 5.0 Implementation

## 5.1 Action prioritisation

A second round of stakeholder engagement was held to sense check, refine, prioritise and prototype actions. The main element of this was a large multi-stakeholder workshop on September 16th, 2025. This was complemented by meetings with Council staff and others. During the second round of engagement, one action was removed due to it being substantially addressed by another Council working group. Finally, one action focusing on public procurement was added. There are 15 actions in total.

As seen below, each action has been categorised as either high (eight) or medium priority (seven). Suggested lead organisations and key performance indicators (KPIs) are also provided.

Note: the KPIs are designed for a timeline of five years from publishing of this report.

### High Priority

Action	Lead	KPIs
<b>1.1 SME university business park</b>	Limerick City and County Council	Appropriate site identified. Masterplan created. Detailed design completed. Planning gained.
<b>1.2 Rates scheme to encourage vibrant city, town and village centres</b>	Limerick City and County Council	Rate scheme delivered. High take-up. Lower commercial vacancy in city and towns.
<b>2.1 AI training and mentoring</b>	LEO	Number of SMEs that have taken part in training. Training regularly adjusted to meet demands.
<b>2.2 First stop shop business advice clinics</b>	LEO & Innovate	Number of companies that have attended First stop shop business advice clinics. Over time, demand becomes higher and First stop shop business advice clinic provision grows and adapts.
<b>3.1 Ex large company employee, new SME owner programme</b>	LEO	Increase in number of start-ups created by ex-employees of large companies. Gap in the number of high potential start-ups with Cork and Galway is significantly reduced.
<b>3.2 High potential start-ups funding experts</b>	AxisBIC	Number of companies and entrepreneurs engaged. Gap in the number of high potential start-ups with Cork and Galway is significantly reduced.
<b>3.3 Public procurement success for Limerick SMEs</b>	Limerick City and County Council	Events held. Greater understanding by Limerick SMEs of the public procurement process. More success for Limerick SMEs in winning public contracts in Limerick and outside the county.
<b>4.1 Fund to address disadvantage by supporting social enterprises</b>	Limerick City and County Council & Rethink Ireland	Fund created and grows. Number of social enterprises supported. Positive social and economic impact measured.

## Medium Priority

Action	Lead	KPIs
<b>1.3 Minimising bureaucracy for SMEs</b>	Limerick City and County Council	Workshops held. Number of actions undertaken to reduce admin burden. Admin burden benchmarked against Cork, Galway and Dublin.
<b>1.4 Co-working hub network</b>	Innovate	Demand matches supply. High quality hubs maintained to meet market expectations. Specialist hubs delivered as required.
<b>2.3 Company benchmarking</b>	LEO	Number of companies that undertake benchmarking process. High percentage of companies that undertake benchmarking that state it improved operations and viability of company. Lower number of business failures.
<b>2.4 Telecoms unit to drive digital connectivity</b>	Limerick City and County Council	Telecom unit established. Continued provision of high-quality digital infrastructure that meets SME demands. Limerick digital connectivity benchmarked against Cork, Galway, Dublin, and economically significant international secondary cities (e.g. Manchester, Edinburgh, Lyon).
<b>3.4 Cracking the Common Market</b>	LCETB, LEO, TUS, UL, Limerick City and County Council	Courses delivered with strong attendance from Limerick SMEs. Increase in number of Limerick SMEs operating on the continent.
<b>3.5 Power of networking</b>	Innovate	High quality events delivered. Greater commercial collaboration between Limerick SMEs. Attendees surveyed to ascertain usefulness of events and how they can be continuously improved.
<b>4.2 Investing in nature and renewable energy</b>	Limerick City and County Council	More land managed for nature. Greater level of renewable energy produced in Limerick. Improved ESG/CSRD scores for Limerick SMEs.

## 5.2 Governance

Implementation of this report will be led by the SME Task Force.

To aid implementation, the following is recommended:

1. High priority actions are the clear focus of the SME Task Force. Medium priority actions are only worked on once high priority actions are well progressed or a clear funding opportunity arises that may be discontinued.
2. The SME Task Force are to decide the sequence of high priority actions to pursue. It is unlikely that all actions can be pursued simultaneously. As implementation progresses, the Expert Group will decide which remaining high priority and medium priority actions are implemented.
3. Clear responsibility to lead each action selected for implementation is to be ascribed. The action holder is to report back on progress at each meeting. Progress should be measured at least quarterly, preferably every two months.

4. A master Gantt chart is to be used to track overall progress. This will form the core of meeting minutes.
5. It is not enough to simply implement the actions. Their impact must be measured at appropriate times. This will aid in conducting adjustments.
6. Subject to resources, an annual report on the implementation of the SME Action Plan should be published and made available online. At this point a review can be undertaken as to the emerging impact of actions and adjustments made as necessary by the SME Task Force.

The approach outlined above aligns with the MIT Sloan School of Management FAST approach to goal setting.

- **Frequent** discussions about the project.
- **Appropriately ambitious** in scope.
- Measured by **specific** achievements and impacts.
- **Transparent** for everyone inside and outside the Council and SME Task Force to see.

### 5.3 Enabling infrastructure

During stakeholder engagement several issues of fundamental importance to the creation of thriving SME ecosystem were regularly raised by SMEs and other stakeholders during engagements. These were:

1. Affordable housing
2. Bus connects and commuter rail
3. Quality of life, especially the provision of areas to exercise, play and socialise
4. City centre management for the benefit of retail and hospitality businesses

Although specific actions addressing these issues are outside the scope of this Action Plan, the SME Task Force may wish to engage relevant stakeholders on these matters should it see fit.



# Appendices

# Appendix A: Methodology

## Overall approach

A design thinking approach was used to create the plan. Complementing this was the use of several corporate strategy tools. The following broad steps were taken:

1. **Empathising:** the consultancy team learnt what the issues, challenges and aspirations were amongst key stakeholders – especially Limerick’s SMEs – and how LCCC can help create an improved business ecosystem conducive to long term success. A strong stakeholder engagement programme enabled this.
2. **Defining:** By conducting secondary research and an extensive programme of stakeholder engagement (including managers and owners of 35 SMEs), the team were able to distil down the key challenges and scope for change.
3. **Ideating:** Armed with quantitative and qualitative data a set of possible solutions was created. All actions were screened through the:
  - a. cascade of choices model (i.e. what is winning, where to play, how will we win, capabilities needed, management systems needed); and the
  - b. feasibility, viability, desirability framework.
4. **Prototyping:** The team worked with LCCC and other stakeholders to prioritise the screened actions and establish how these could be implemented.
5. **Testing:** Recommendations concerning the creation of a robust, yet agile implementation strategy were developed. This will permit the effective roll out of impactful solutions and their refinement as needed.

## Stakeholder engagement

To ensure the action plan is the right fit for Limerick, a strong programme of stakeholder consultation was deemed essential. Engagement was split into two phases. Phase one involved learning and gaining empathy. Phase two was about validation and prototyping. Accordingly, the following actions were undertaken:

### Phase One

- 15 x Meetings and focus groups with the owners and managers of 35 Limerick SMEs
- 2 x Meetings with large companies (1 large Irish company, 1 MNE)
- 2 x Meetings with the Mayor’s SME Task Force
- 1 x Briefing to City and County Councillors
- 8 x Meetings with various departments within Limerick City and County Council and associated DACs
- 8 x Meetings with business representative bodies, including two with Limerick Chamber
- 1 x Meeting with Limerick Web Summit
- 3 x Meetings with relevant government agencies
- 1 x Meeting with AxisBIC
- 2 x Meetings with commercial bank representatives
- 3 x Meetings with further and third level education providers
- 1 x Meeting with Mid-West Regional Skills Forum
- 1 x Online SME owner survey with 88 respondents (see appendix d)

A semi structured approach was used for the various focus groups and meetings in phase 1. This allowed flexibility for deeper insights to be collected than would otherwise be the case by using a more structured approach.

## **Phase Two**

1 x Multi-stakeholder workshop

1 x Briefing to City and County Councillors

1 x Meeting with the Mayor

3 x Meetings with various departments within Limerick City and County Council and associated DACs

1 x Meeting with AxisBIC

## **Acknowledgements**

We wish to thank all those who gave their time during the course of the project. We especially want to thank all the SME owners and managers who met us for providing their insights. Images provided courtesy of Fáilte Ireland's content pool.

# Appendix B: What are the issues? Evidence from the literature

‘With very few exceptions, domestic small and medium enterprises are neither scaling nor listing, and those few which do scale are most regularly purchased by non-Irish entities.’<sup>103</sup>

ISME Enterprise White Paper Submission

## OECD report

Outwardly, Ireland has very strong business profitability and productivity figures when compared to other EU states. Ireland ranks second in the EU in terms of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita (€79,300) only behind Luxembourg. Despite only being 1.2% of the EU’s population, Ireland accounts for 3% of the EU’s GDP<sup>104</sup>. This apparently strong economic situation obscures a truer picture where large foreign owned MNEs are impacting these GDP figures to such an extent that the CSO now uses Gross National Income (GNI) to measure the size of the Irish economy. GNI excludes globalisation effects. It is also the foreign owned MNEs that are driving the Ireland’s impressive business profitability and productivity figures.

In 2019, the OECD published an assessment of Ireland’s SME and entrepreneurship policies<sup>105</sup>. The analysis was so concerning that the government established an expert taskforce to create a strategy for SMEs (i.e. National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, 2021)<sup>106</sup>. The OECD report found that when compared to other member states<sup>107</sup>:

- Business dynamism amongst Irish SMEs was low.
- The start-up rate was relatively low.
- Irish SMEs are not very active in international markets.
- SME productivity growth is stagnant.
- There were weaknesses in SME management skills.
- There were low capital investment levels.
- There was low new technology adoption.

Combined, this led to many SMEs have low productivity levels compared to frontier firms in their industry.

There were some positives noted about Ireland’s SME ecosystem:

- There is good coordination of SME and entrepreneurial policies across government. However, there was a need for a unified policy.
- There is a strong set of supports for SMEs. However, there is a risk of some SMEs falling between supports. It was also noted that programmes could be strengthened on micro-finance, financial literacy, innovation, digitisation, R&D, internationalisation, and migrant entrepreneurship.

## What do others think?

To gain a fuller understanding of the issues slowing the growth of Irish SMEs, a review was undertaken of publications from the European Commission, state agencies, and business sector advocacy/representative groups. In total, 23 issues were identified. As illustrated in the table below, almost each issue was recognised by at least two organisations. Some of the key issues that frequently arose were the cost of doing business, accessing finance, low productivity, and skills.

Issue identified	European Commission (EU) <sup>108</sup>	ESRI (Gov) <sup>109 110</sup>	Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (Gov) <sup>111</sup>	Small Firms Association (part of IBEC) <sup>112 113 114</sup>	Irish SME Association (ISME) <sup>115 116 117 118</sup>	Banks and Payments Federation Ireland <sup>119</sup>	Chartered Accountants Ireland <sup>120</sup>
The number of SMEs exporting to other EU Member States could be much higher	x						
SMEs do not yet fully benefit from data and digitisation	x	x			x		
Ireland has a long tail of low productivity SMEs and this is driven in part by the continued usage of low-productivity techniques and management practises		x		x	x		x
Need to invest in new technologies, including cyber security		x		x			x
Need to invest in research and development				x			x
Need to improve supply chain linkages between SMEs and MNEs. This will drive better work practices in SMEs and create commercial opportunities		x		x	x		
Reluctance by many SMEs for external borrowing, especially in return for equity. Fear of debt. General risk aversion		x	x				x
Cost of credit too high and the availability of credit to SMEs is constrained. Giving credit to SMEs seen as risky				x	x		x
Inadequate collateral from SMEs to access finance			x				
Tax burden on SMEs				x	x		x

Cost of doing business, including staff wages and inflation			x	x	x	x	x
Regulatory burden on SMEs				x	x	x	x
Accessibility and suitability of business supports for SMEs				x			x
Availability of skilled staff or experienced managers			x		x	x	x
Availability of customers						x	
Need to grow revenue			x		x		
Financial literacy often low amongst SME owners			x				
Slow to enact ESG policies and take up the opportunities in the green economy			x	x			x
Need to develop infrastructure				x	x		x
Access to adequate broadband (especially in rural areas)				x	x		
Need for more housing				x	x		x
Need for an agency dedicated exclusively to steward the needs of SMEs					x		
Inefficient legal system					x		

### Self-employment participation

Overall, the rate of self-employment in Ireland is below the EU average. Ireland does not compare well in the activity rate of women in entrepreneurship (24.8% versus 32.6% EU)<sup>121</sup>. Conversely, the share of entrepreneurship amongst immigrants is significantly above the EU average

# Appendix C: Policy context

## European policy

### European Commission's SME strategy: an SME strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe

Published in 2020, the European Commission's objective for the strategy was to support and empower SMEs of all sizes and sectors<sup>122</sup>. The 32 actions are mostly organised under three pillars:

1. Capacity-building and support for the transition to sustainability and digitalisation (6 actions);
2. Reducing regulatory burden and improving market access (15 actions); and
3. Improving access to financing (7 actions).

To encourage the strategy's implementation four actions are also provided on governance.

## National policy

### 2025 Programme for Government

The programme for government lays out the plans and policies for every government department until early 2030. There are 15 commitments in the programme that specifically mention SMEs<sup>123</sup>. The commitments cover areas such as regulatory burden, workforce supply, supporting greater access to the supply chains of MNEs, and public procurement.

### National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan 2021

The SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan is a strategic blueprint for SMEs and entrepreneurs. It was devised by an expert taskforce appointed by the Tánaiste. The plan sets out a wide range of recommendations with long-term strategic relevance. These include measures to assist companies to start up, scale up, enhance their digital capabilities, and increase export activity. There are 11 priority areas<sup>124</sup>:

1. Access to finance
2. Digital transformation
3. Increasing first time exporters
4. Enhanced assistance for high-potential businesses
5. Clustering and networks
6. SME management skills
7. Reducing the regulatory burden on SMEs
8. Delivery of a single portal for business information and assistance
9. Ensuring comprehensive enterprise agency coverage for SMEs
10. Promoting SME participation in public procurement
11. Ireland's climate ambitions

The taskforce continues to meet and issue progress reports. The most recent progress report is for 2023. It lays out the progress being made across all 11 priority areas.

## Regional policy

### Southern Region Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2030

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides Regional Policy Objectives. Limerick sits within the Southern Region. The

policies in the Southern Region RSES are structured under Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) Objectives. Although the report recognises that SMEs are the backbone of local communities, there are no RPOs or MASP Objectives specifically targeted at supporting SMEs. Regardless, many of the 47 RPOs in section 4 ‘a strong economy – innovative and smart’, if realised, will lead to a better business ecosystem for SMEs<sup>125</sup>.

### **Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 – Mid-West**

Together with Clare and Tipperary, County Limerick is part of the Mid-West region. The regional enterprise plans are an initiative from the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment. They are developed by regional stakeholders and focus on undertaking collaborative initiatives that can help deliver enterprise growth.

The Mid-West’s plan to 2024 is still in use until a replacement has been completed (expected later in 2026). The plan is centred around five priorities including<sup>126</sup>:

1. To enable innovation across the region.
2. To contribute to the region’s ambition to lead on sustainability and low carbon.
3. To create a balanced region, where both urban and rural communities can work together.
4. Growing new and existing small business.
5. Assisting enterprise growth in more rural areas and areas of high unemployment.

There are 30 actions in place covering issues such as remote work and food hubs, expanding the numbers of talented staff, enhancing the region’s strength in advanced manufacturing, the green economy, and supporting social enterprises.

### **County Limerick policy**

#### **Limerick Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2028**

Following the enactment of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, every local authority area is required to have a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). The purpose of LECPs is to set out the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the relevant local authority area. Limerick’s LECP has eight Sustainable Economic Development Objectives (SEDO). Two of these specifically mention SMEs<sup>127</sup>.

SEDO E2. Entrepreneurship & micro- & Small & Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs): Encourage and support entrepreneurship for people of all ages and backgrounds as a route to job creation and support the start-up and business performance of micro- and small enterprises and social enterprises.

SEDO E3. Infrastructure & supportive business environment for SMEs: Develop the physical infrastructure including workspace, ICT Hubs and technologies and build the business ecosystem (including cooperation networks) to create an excellent environment for business and innovation in Limerick.

#### **Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028**

County development plans set out the relevant local authority’s policies for land use and development control in the area. It also sets out objectives for the use of particular areas. In the current development plan for Limerick there are 318 overall objectives<sup>128</sup>. However, only two explicitly focus on SME (see below). In section 5 ‘a strong economy’ there are 59 total ECON objectives. Here, only one objective is focused on SMEs (ECON 033). No policy specifically mentions SMEs. The economic focus is overwhelmingly on attracting foreign direct investment (FDI).

### Objective LEDP O1 Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership

It is an objective of the Council to: a) Support and facilitate expansion of the existing employment uses and training facilities, enhancing the broad range of employment opportunities for the local community. b) Facilitate the reuse of the vacant Innovation Hub for employment uses such as a multi-functional Creative and Innovative Industries Centre. c) Facilitate and encourage employment creation by SMEs.

### Objective ECON O33 Enterprise Incubator Units

It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the development and growth of incubator/innovation facilities in the City and County, to support the growth and development of SMEs and the creation of a sustainable start-up ecosystem. This will be achieved in conjunction with the Local Enterprise Office and Innovate Limerick, to ensure the long-term resilience of SMEs in Limerick.

### **Mayoral Programme: More for Limerick 2024-2029**

In 2024, the State's first directly elected mayor was chosen by the people of Limerick. Following this, the new mayor unveiled an ambitious vision for the future of Limerick City and County with the publication of the Limerick Mayoral Programme 2024-2029.

One of the key pillars of the vision is creating a more prosperous Limerick<sup>129</sup>. There is a whole set of actions within section 4 of the document that are specifically targeted at assisting SMEs. The actions address the profile of SMEs, creating a SME business support one-stop-shop, branding, improving connections between businesses and third level institutes, embracing digital innovations, skills, and environmental sustainability. There are other actions in the document that also support SMEs in sectors such as food and creative industries.

The actions are heavily influenced by a report the mayor previously wrote for the council (*Supporting Limerick's SMEs through challenging times and change 2020*, overview provided below).

### **Supporting Limerick's SMEs through challenging times and change 2020**

The report was commissioned by Limerick City and County Council in 2020 to provide guidance on how Limerick's SMEs could be supported during a time of considerable disruption caused by the outbreak of Covid-19. The various recommendations are framed by five key principals<sup>130</sup>:

1. SMEs are vital to our social fabric.
2. Navigating the new normal is vital for SMEs.
3. Supports should be streamlined and easy to access.
4. Education and upskilling are vital to underpin a more robust future.
5. Successful SMEs need to be financially resilient.

There are five key recommendations. Each has a set of short term and medium-term actions associated with them:

1. Make supporting SMEs a key priority for the local economy. (7 actions)
2. Extra support for SMEs to navigate the new post COVID normal. (8 actions)
3. Develop a single umbrella government support agency for SMEs. (5 actions)
4. Enhance training and upskilling opportunities and support with SMEs in mind. (5 actions)
5. Establish an SME culture of long-term planning and financial resilience. (7 actions)

# Appendix D: Survey

## Limerick SME Business Owner Survey

Page title

Limerick City and County Council are creating a new SME Action Plan for the city and county. Its purpose is to provide a framework which would lead to a stronger business ecosystem, conducive to sustained commercial success by SMEs.

Research and Dig together with Fitzgerald Power have been commissioned by Limerick City and County Council to assist with the plan's creation.

Stakeholder engagement is at the heart of the approach being taken. Towards those ends, we would very much like to hear the views of Limerick's SME owners. Completing this survey is one opportunity to do. Aside from the survey, a series of workshops have also been conducted with SME owners.

We would love to see as many SME owners as possible complete the survey. It should take less than 5 minutes to complete. You can skip any question and it's anonymous.

Thank you!

1. What is the primary industry of your business?

- Manufacturing
- Retail
- Technology
- Healthcare
- Finance
- Education
- Hospitality
- Professional services
- Other (please specify)

2. Please describe the main products or services your business offers.

3. How many employees does your business have?

- 1-10
- 11-50
- 51-100
- 101-250
- 251+

4. Does your business export products or services?

- Yes
- No

5. If yes, which regions do you export to? (Select all that apply)

- UK
- Continental Europe
- North America
- South America
- Asia
- Africa
- Australia

6. Does your company have competence to do business in any of the following languages? (please tick all applicable)

- German
- French
- Spanish
- Italian
- Dutch
- Chinese
- Other

7. What is the biggest frustration your business faces?

- Regulatory Issues
- Access to Finance
- Market Competition
- Skilled Workforce Shortage
- Technology Adoption
- Rising Operation Costs And Inflation
- Lack Of Appropriate Vacant Workspace
- Other (please specify)

8. Please provide more details on the biggest frustration your business faces.

9. If there was one regulatory issue you would like changed or made easier what would it be?

10. How satisfied are you with the support available to SMEs in Limerick?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied
- Unsure, I Have A Low Level Of Understanding Of Available Supports

11. Rank the types of support that would be most beneficial to your business? (top is most beneficial)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Grants or Funding
<input type="checkbox"/>	Training and Upskilling
<input type="checkbox"/>	Business Mentoring/Advice
<input type="checkbox"/>	Networking Opportunities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Help with Adopting Digital Tools
<input type="checkbox"/>	Help with Marketing
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reduced Administrative Burden

12. Please provide more details on the supports you would like to see in place for your business.

13. What additional space needs do you have, if any?

- Office
- Warehouse
- Workshop
- Retail
- None
- Other (please specify)

14. How has inflation or the cost of doing business impacted your operations?

- Significantly
- Moderately
- Minimally
- Not at all
- Not sure

# Appendix E: Pathway to innovate programme

Launched in 2025 by Skillnet Ireland, Pathway to Innovate focuses on embedding innovation and entrepreneurship practices in SMEs across Ireland through targeted upskilling and regional clinics<sup>131</sup>. It provides SMEs with practical tools, actionable insights, and strategies to drive measurable success. From funding, training, mentoring, and more, there is a whole host of supports available to help regional SMEs innovate. The challenge is identifying which resources are right for individual businesses.

Pathway to Innovate is designed to help SMEs not only navigate the route to innovation, but convert it into business growth through a range of integrated supports:

- In-depth online business diagnostic
- Unlimited access to Pathway to Innovate workshops/clinics
- Targeted upskilling and training

Each Pathway to Innovate event features<sup>132</sup>:

- Keynotes
- Case studies
- Interactive workshops
- Networking with regional business leaders and peers
- Diagnostic reflection
- Ecosystem support

The events in Limerick are held in Engine.

Business owners can register their interest by visiting <https://www.pathwaytoinnovate.ie/>

# Appendix F: National Enterprise Hub

Launched in 2025, the National Enterprise Hub is a single source where entrepreneurs can easily find and learn about the range of government support programs available to Irish businesses. It is a free service. There are three main ways in which the Hub can help Irish businesses:

1. Centralised information  
Easily search for grants and funding, loans, training programs, and expert advice from various government agencies.
2. Streamlined search  
Find the right support programs based on specific needs and size, with user-friendly search tools.
3. Expert guidance  
There is a dedicated Hub team available online or by phone to help businesses discover which supports that are the right fit for them.

The National Enterprise Hub is provided by Enterprise Ireland.

To learn more visit <https://www.neh.gov.ie/>

# Appendix G: Start-Up Relief for Entrepreneurs (SURE)

SURE is an Income Tax refund for people who leave employment to become entrepreneurs and start up their own company. It provides a refund of Income Tax paid in previous years. A person can claim the relief if they are starting their own business and are<sup>133</sup>:

- an employee
- an unemployed person
- a person who has recently been made redundant.

The general conditions for SURE are that individuals must:

- establish a new company carrying on a new qualifying trading activity
- have mainly Pay As You Earn (PAYE) income in the previous four years
- take up full-time employment in the new company as a director or an employee
- invest cash in the new company by purchasing new shares
- keep the purchased shares for at least four years.

A successful applicant can receive an Income Tax refund in the year of investment and the previous six years to help establish the new company. This refund depends on gross pay and the tax paid over the previous years.

The minimum investment that can be made is €250 and the maximum investment is €140,000, per year of assessment under SURE<sup>134</sup>. It is possible to claim relief for a SURE investment over a period of seven years, which means the maximum investment for which SURE is available is €980,000, and unused relief may be carried forward.

The refund must be used to setup the new company which must be an SME. The investment must be based on a business plan. The new company must demonstrate that the investment will contribute directly to the creation or maintenance of employment in the company or if not yet trading that the company will use the investment for research and development activities.

There are a number of specific conditions that the individual and the company must meet in order to qualify for this relief.

Further information can be found at [www.revenue.ie/en/personal-tax-credits-reliefs-and-exemptions/investment/relief-corporate/start-up-relief-for-entrepreneurs.aspx](http://www.revenue.ie/en/personal-tax-credits-reliefs-and-exemptions/investment/relief-corporate/start-up-relief-for-entrepreneurs.aspx)

# Appendix H: Local Enterprise Development Plan 2026-2027

# Limerick City and County Local Enterprise Office

Local Enterprise Development Plan 2026-2027



Oifig Fiontair Áitiúil  
Local Enterprise Office



Comhairle Cathrach  
& Contae **Luimnigh**  
Limerick City  
& County Council



Ireland's European Structural and  
Investment Funds Programmes  
2014-2020

Co-funded by the Irish Government  
and the European Union



**European Union**  
European Regional  
Development Fund

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# Executive Summary

Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Limerick is a unit of Limerick City and County Council. As an integral part of the Economic Development Directorate, LEO acts as the “First Stop Shop” for anyone seeking information and support on starting or growing a business in Limerick City and County. The role of LEO Limerick is to drive the development of local enterprise, putting local micro and small business at the heart of job creation. We support business start-ups and expansion of existing businesses and work to increase the job potential of new and existing micro and small businesses with information, advice, training, mentoring, seminars and selective financial support.

Despite the challenges of Covid, Brexit, War in Ukraine and tariff increases, 2020-2025 was a very productive period for LEO Limerick. 863 net new jobs were created as a direct result of grants approved. Enquiries were dealt with in Limerick on a daily basis and 2020-2025 saw high numbers of participants in training courses, while mentoring assignments and business advice clinics had increased demand. All of these supports were promoted to, made available for, and tailored specifically towards the needs of small, micro and start-up businesses in Limerick. Dedicated programmes were designed and run to support target groups such as the creative industries, the food sector, and women in business, etc.

Key priorities for LEO Limerick in 2026 and 2027 are to further develop the first stop shop information service; to facilitate greater innovation and adoption of digital tools by SMEs; to create a great environment for start-ups in Limerick; to assist enterprises to understand and mitigate the effects of macro-economic shocks; to help SMEs on their journey to greater environmental sustainability; and to target growth and exporting potential in order to maximise job creation. LEO Limerick will invest or facilitate the investment of €2.7m in the small business sector in Limerick and the target is to assist the creation, directly and indirectly of a further 126 net new jobs in the sector in 2026.

LEO Limerick has a dedicated team of 10 staff in the Enterprise Office and with the addition of its expert mentor panel is in a position to advise, assist and guide all sectors of micro enterprise. Business ideas, business planning, start-ups are assisted with tried and trusted programmes to help them to get off the ground. Support is available to ensure that start up business survive the first 2/3 year period, and business with growth potential are nurtured to develop and grow.

The key upgrade goals, objectives and actions proposed by LEO Limerick for the period of this Local Enterprise Development Plan 2026-2027 are set out in this plan, are measurable and achievable during the period.



# 1.0 Context

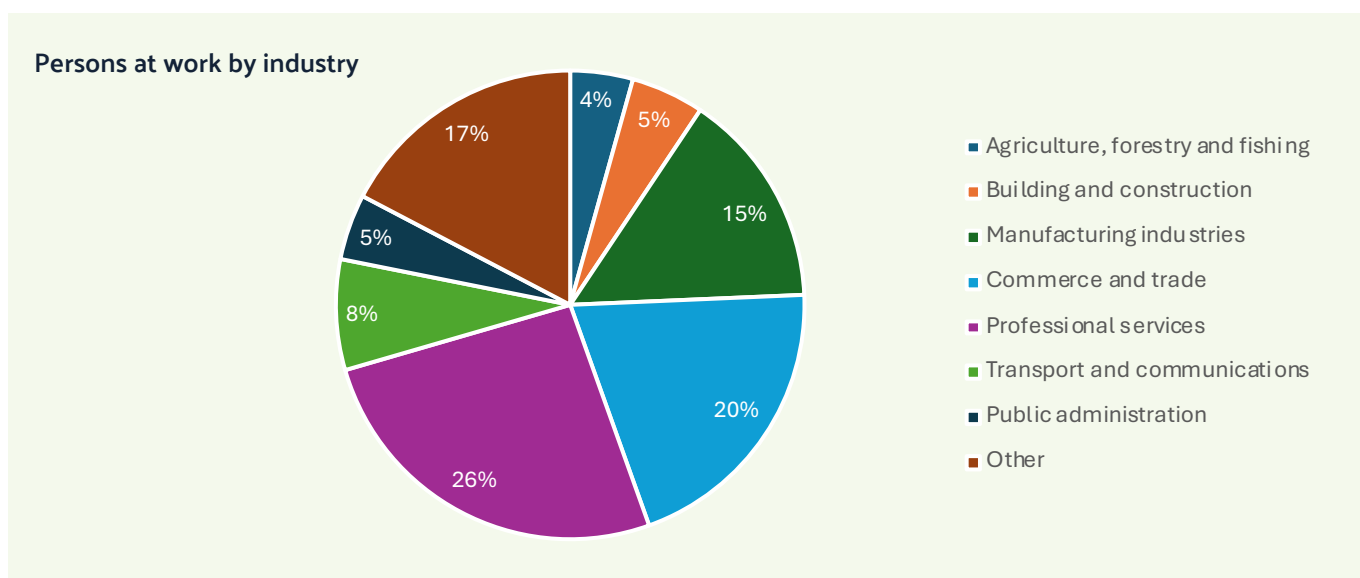
# 1.1 Limerick – a brief socio-economic review

## Jobs & Investment 2020 – 2025

Between 2020 and 2025, County Limerick experienced notable job growth and investment momentum. Foreign direct investment surged: between 2023 and 2025 Limerick was ranked #1 for FDI Strategy by fDi Intelligence, reflecting its strength in med tech, film tech and fintech. Over 72 IDA client multinationals now employ more than 16,000 people in the region

## Labour Market Performance

Between 2016 and 2022 employment amongst Limerick residents grew by 17% to 90,623<sup>i</sup>. Over 61% of all roles were provided in the ‘professional services’ (26%), ‘commerce and trade’ (20%), and ‘manufacturing industries’ (15%) categories. In 2024, the average unemployment rate for the Mid-West



## Population Growth 2016 - 2022

The 2022 Census indicated a continued upward trend in Ireland’s population, with the national population increasing by 8% since 2016. County Limerick reflects this growth, with its population rising by 8% over the same period, reaching a total of 209,536 residents<sup>ii</sup>. The average age in Limerick was 39.3 years in 2022, up from 37.7 years in 2016. This is slightly above the national average of 38.8 years. The number of residents aged 65 and over increased by 23% between 2016 and 2022<sup>iii</sup>.

## Disposable Income & Gross Value Added

County Limerick has the third highest level of disposable income in the State<sup>iv</sup>. It is the highest in the Mid-West (i.e. counties Limerick, Clare and Tipperary). Much of this is connected with the strong presence of multinational companies in the county. Nationally, County Limerick was joint second after County Dublin for highest percentage of employee pay coming from foreign enterprises (i.e. 35%).

County	2023 CSO estimates of disposable income per person
Limerick	€29,491
Dublin	€32,393
Cork	€29,876
Galway	€28,971
Waterford	€27,330
Clare	€25,103
Tipperary	€29,209

In 2022, over 76% of the 74,895 people engaged by Limerick based enterprises (i.e. employed plus working proprietors) were working in SMEs<sup>v</sup>. Limerick's micro enterprises alone provided nearly 29% of employment. Large enterprises within the county – amounting to just 24 companies – employed 24% of people engaged in enterprises. The average number of people engaged by a micro-enterprise in Limerick was just under two people. A large proportion of SMEs across the country – including in County Limerick – are farms. When these and the large companies are removed from the total number of enterprises in Limerick, the county total of SMEs is between 7,500 and 7,600.

Employment size	Number of enterprises	% of total enterprises	Number of persons engaged (i.e. employees plus working proprietors)	% of total engaged
Under 10	12,071	91.29%	21,583	28.82%
10-19	579	4.38%	7,844	10.47%
20-49	381	2.88%	11,545	15.41%
50-249	168	1.41%	16,206	21.64%
250 and over	24	0.18%	17,717	23.66%

## 1.2 Policy Context

LEO Limerick works in an environment which is guided by a number of National Regional and Local Strategies. Listed hereunder are the main plans and strategies which guide the LEO in its objectives for Limerick:

- » Ireland 2040 – National Development Plan
- » National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan 2021
- » Southern Region Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2030
- » Regional Enterprise Plan – Mid West
- » Limerick Development Plan 2022-2038
- » Mayoral Programme: More for Limerick 2024-2029
- » Limerick Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2028
- » Limerick City and County SME Action Plan
- » Limerick 2030
- » Retail Strategy
- » Local Area Plans

## Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028

County development plans set out the relevant local authority's policies for land use and development control in the area. They also set out objectives for the use of particular areas. In Limerick's current development plan there are two objectives that explicitly focus on SMEs. Both are relevant for LEO:

### Objective LEDP O1 Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership

It is an objective of the Council to: a) Support and facilitate expansion of the existing employment uses and training facilities, enhancing the broad range of employment opportunities for the local community. b) Facilitate the reuse of the vacant Innovation Hub for employment uses such as a multi-functional Creative and Innovative Industries Centre. c) Facilitate and encourage employment creation by SMEs.

### Objective ECON O33 Enterprise Incubator Units

It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the development and growth of incubator/innovation facilities in the City and County, to support the growth and development of SMEs and the creation of a sustainable start-up ecosystem. This will be achieved in conjunction with the Local Enterprise Office and Innovate Limerick, to ensure the long-term resilience of SMEs in Limerick.

## Limerick Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2028

Following the enactment of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, every local authority area is required to have a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). The purpose of LECPs is to set out the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the relevant local authority area. Limerick's LECP has eight Sustainable Economic Development Objectives (SEDO). All are of relevance to LEO.

## Mayoral Programme: More for Limerick 2024-2029

In 2024, the State's first directly elected mayor was chosen by the people of Limerick. Following this, the new mayor unveiled an ambitious vision for the future of Limerick City and County with the publication of the Limerick Mayoral Programme 2024-2029. It has multiple actions (e.g. MP37-MP42) specifically dealing with SMEs. In two actions, LEO is mentioned specifically:

**MP37** Create a Limerick SME Hub that acts as a one-stop-shop for business support, offering advice, financing options and networking opportunities specifically tailored to SMEs and indigenous businesses and bridge the gap between LEO and EI supports and enhancing the supports otherwise offered by those agencies.

**MP 77** Support the Local Enterprise Office and Enterprise Ireland to advise firms about EU and national incentive schemes for manufacturing and engineering firms who invest in sustainability. We must reward environmentally friendly technologies and accompany firms on that journey, ensuring that Limerick is a European leader in this respect.

At the core of the Mayor's efforts to support SMEs is the creation of a SME Action Plan. The plan's implementation is to be led by a SME Expert Group. LEO was a core partner in the formation of the plan and are members of the Expert Group.

## Regional Enterprise Plan – Mid West

Together with Clare and Tipperary, County Limerick is part of the Mid-West region. The regional enterprise plans are an initiative from the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment. They are developed by regional stakeholders and focus on undertaking collaborative initiatives that can help deliver enterprise growth.

# 1.3 Limerick SWOT Analysis

## Strengths

- Strategic location. Crossroads when travelling from Cork to Galway or Galway to Waterford. Located along Atlantic Economic Corridor.
- Strong infrastructure. Improved road links to Dublin and other Irish cities, Shannon International airport nearby with US preclearance, and Shannon Foynes Port Company.
- Overall, high speed fibre internet connectivity is very good, even in rural areas.
- Strong education assets. Large student populations. UL is a top 500 university globally with 18k students. TUS Moylish has 7k. LCETB very active county wide. Responsive to business needs.
- Adaptive, motivated and skilled workforce.
- Sector specific research capacity including ICT, Life Science and Digital Media.
- 3rd highest disposable income in Ireland.
- Business and science parks and research centres.
- Lower cost of living than Dublin. Competitive with Cork and Galway. Excellent quality of life.
- Established incubators and start-up and mentoring support programmes.

## Weaknesses

- Insufficient housing to meet demand. Rental costs have increased significantly.
- Aside from Ennis, poor road and rail connectivity with the main economic centres of Munster: Cork City, Waterford City, Clonmel, Killarney and Tralee.
- Low retention of graduates in Limerick.
- Perceived poor image of Limerick City.
- Commercial vacancy is high in the county.
- Educational underperformance - the proportion of population with a 3rd level degree is lower than Cork, Galway and Dublin.
- Long term unemployment rate still higher than National average.
- High pockets of deprivation within City and some towns.
- Low tolerance by many entrepreneurs to take on debt or give up equity to enable growth.
- Entrepreneurs often reluctant to be an early adopters of emerging technology.
- Inadequate supply of warehousing and workshops.

### Limerick SWOT Analysis

## Opportunities

- Limerick 2030 Plan and the development of strategic sites for a variety of uses including as enterprise space, throughout the city and county, e.g. the Opera Centre, Cleaves, Colbert Station, etc.
- Ensure that skills meets industry needs, e.g. Limerick for IT Engineering Initiatives.
- Increase linkages between the HEIs, Industry and increase innovation.
- Develop various industries including the National Sports Cluster and creative industries.
- Attract and grow start-ups at the Engine Hub and in other hubs throughout the county.
- Strong potential for offshore wind in the Atlantic served from facilities in the Shannon Estuary.
- Build upon the commercial and promotional opportunities presented by the 2027 Ryder Cup taking place in Adare Manor.
- Deepen economic and social connections with major European markets (e.g. Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland) to provide commercial opportunities for Limerick companies.
- Develop strengths in agritech and manufacturing sectors.

## Threats

- Loss of skills with graduate migration from the county and preference to join MNEs rather than SMEs.
- Failure of Limerick SMEs to adopt AI early into operations.
- Trade tariffs and other international tax policy changes.
- Water infrastructure not keeping up with social and economic demands.
- Potential labour shortages and skills gap in market.

## 1.4 Limerick City and County Council Schemes

Limerick City and County Council has a number of schemes which are designed to support small business to set up and operate in Limerick. The main schemes are as follows:

### Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Support Scheme

Limerick City and County Council have agreed to allocate funding to support small and medium businesses operating in Limerick City and County. The rebate will be paid as a financial support to occupiers of commercial properties with total annual Commercial Rates bills of up to and including €30,000 in 2025, subject to terms and conditions. The support payment, aimed specifically at small and medium-sized enterprises, is set at 13.5% of the annual cost of commercial rates for the rated occupier up to a maximum of €1,500.

### Night-Time Economy (NTE)

Limerick City is one of nine locations selected to participate in the national Night-Time Economy pilot programme which is supported and funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. The programme is designed to stimulate night-time economy activity through the development of enhanced collaborative structures supported by a Night-Time Economy Advisor.

To bring the NTE vision to life, the council is offering:

- » Promotional support to highlight participating venues and events
- » Funding opportunities for events and businesses wherever possible
- » Collaboration with Gardaí and council departments to improve safety and visibility
- » Partnerships with transport services to enhance late-night access

### Rates scheme to encourage vibrant city and town centres

A rates incentive scheme was adopted for the 2026 budget of Limerick City and County Council. The scheme is designed to encourage the use of vacant premises in the city centre and level 2 and 3 towns as set out in the Limerick Development Plan. The capped scheme provides rebates of decreasing amounts as follows:

- » Year 1 – 100% reduction, subject to a maximum of €12,000
- » Year 2 – 75% reduction, subject to a maximum of €9,000
- » Year 3 – 50% reduction, subject to a maximum of €6,000
- » Year 4 – 25% reduction, subject to a maximum of €3,000

The scheme is confined to the urban cores and does not act to displace existing businesses. It is the most attractive scheme of its type in the country. The scheme is to be delivered as a grant.

## 1.5 Review of 2021-2025

### Impact on Employment

As of the end of 2024, Limerick LEO has the second highest number of clients (313) in any county after Dublin. Likewise, Limerick LEO supported the second highest county figure for the number of people employed in business that received financial assistance from a LEO (2,183). Finally, in 2024 Limerick experienced the joint second highest growth in county employment amongst LEO clients (178). The employment figures for 2021 to 2025 are laid out in the following table:

Year	No. of LEO Clients	All Jobs (FT & PT)	Net job gain/loss	Average jobs per company
2021	298	1,825	179	6.1
2022	305	1,815	177	6
2023	313	2,049	238	6.5
2024	313	2,183	178	7
2025	310	2,289	531	7

## Student Enterprise Awards

Year	No. of Limerick students participating	No. of Limerick schools participating	National results by Limerick schools
2021	750	19	
2022	919	26	Special Merit Top 5 Senior Category Special Merit Top 5 Intermediate Category
2023	992	22	
2024	718	18	
2025	814	17	Shining Star Award 2nd prize in Junior Category

The winning schools for the County 2023/2024 SEA Finals were as follows:

- » Senior category – Des Tech, Desmond College, Newcastle West
- » Intermediate category – TP Decals, Coláiste Chiaráin, Croom
- » Junior category – Baile Do Bheacha, Gaelcholáiste Uí Chonbá, Newcastle West

The winning schools for the County 2024/2025 SEA Finals were as follows:

- » Senior category – The Pole Plucker, Hazelwood College, Dromcollogher
- » Intermediate category – Sea Tan Gone, Desmond College, Newcastle West
- » Junior category – Grip Geenie, Desmond College, Newcastle West

## National Enterprise Awards

Each year, the Limerick winners have represented the county at the National Enterprise Awards in Dublin. Below are the county winners from 2021-2025:

- » 2021 – Odyssey Studios
- » 2022 – KDI Limited
- » 2023 – Cotter Agritech
- » 2024 – Monaru
- » 2025 – SOS Cookies

## Local Enterprise Week

Each March, Limerick Business Week was held. In 2025, 17 events took place from March 3rd to 7th March. It was a huge success with various programme and events held online and in person.

Number of events:

- » 2021 – 19
- » 2022 – 21
- » 2023 – 17
- » 2024 – 11
- » 2025 – 17

## Training and Development

Every year, two very successful training and development programmes are completed (Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter). The events that take place range from training/seminars/clinics to networking. Courses/events included:

- » Starting and running your own business
- » eBusiness and digital marketing
- » Business and management development
- » Women in business
- » Business advice clinics

Programmes for start-ups were also delivered by the three Local Development Companies on behalf of the LEO (Limerick City Partnership, West Limerick Resources, Ballyhoura Development).

In total, 1,286 people attended 80 events in 2025 organised by LEO. The table below provides more details on activity over recent years

Year	No. of events	No. of participants
2021	185	2,270
2022	112	1,578
2023	99	1,608
2024	106	1,860
2025	80	1,286

## Mentoring

As shown by the below table, LEO Limerick has successfully grown the level of mentoring provided to clients over recent years.

Year	No. of individuals who availed of mentoring programme
2021	230
2022	200+
2023	402
2024	502
2025	566

## Lean for Business Programme

The Lean for Business programme involves an in-company assignment by an external ‘Lean’ consultant who will introduce Lean principles and complete a specific cost reduction project. The table below shows the number of individuals who have availed of the programme from 2021-2025:

Year	No. of individuals who availed of programme
2021	18
2022	25
2023	19
2024	26
2025	21

## Green for Business Programme

This programme is designed to provide businesses with tailored expert advice on how to drive sustainability. Below are the figures for SME uptake since 2021:

Year	No. of SMEs that availed of programme
2021	5
2022	8
2023	14
2024	14
2025	42

## Grow Digital Voucher

The Grow Digital Voucher offers small and medium businesses with up to 50 employees financial support to embrace digital technology. In 2025, 10 SMEs availed of the programme.

## Digital Start

Digital Start provides support to obtain digital strategy, technical and/or advisory services for eligible businesses. In 2025, 46 LEO clients availed of the programme.

## Microfinance Ireland

The LEO processes loan applications for Microfinance Ireland (MFI). Below are some key figures concerning MFI loan applications from Limerick:

Year	Application submitted	Applications approved by MFI	Value of applications approved	Applications refused by MFI	Average MFI loan
2021	42	20	€294k	22	€14.7k
2022	31	17	€251k	15	€14.8k
2023	19	13	€212k	6	€11.2k
2024	31	16	€342k	15	€21.4k

## 1.6 Customer Care Strategy/Plan

### Our Service Commitment to Entrepreneurs and Businesses

The elements outlined below illustrate how LEO Limerick will engage with entrepreneurs, startups and small businesses. These are in keeping with the Local Enterprise Office Customer Service Charter.

#### Information

Good quality and timely information have been highlighted as one of the most consistently important areas for most customers. LEO Limerick has taken a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate and that it is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs. We also ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully availed of and that the information available on public services websites follows the guidelines on web publication. We continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures.

#### Timeliness and Courtesy

The LEO during 2025 has tried to ensure that we deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer. Also, we ensure that contact names are used in all communications to ensure ease of ongoing transactions. We will at all times treat our customers with courtesy, respect and privacy and make every attempt to accommodate any specific needs. Likewise, we expect the same courtesy to be extended to our staff.

#### Consultation and Evaluation

LEO Limerick will provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services and will ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery. Consultation mechanisms currently in place will be further developed over the next couple of years.

#### Privacy and Confidentiality

It is the policy of LEO Limerick to have all information, both personal and business provided by clients dealt with in total confidence, in keeping with the GDPR, and in a manner that respects client dignity.

#### Customer Satisfaction

In 2025, an online survey was undertaken with local SMEs owners for the emerging Limerick City and County SME Action Plan. There were 88 responses. One of the questions asked was 'how satisfied are you with the support available to SMEs in Limerick?' Although this question is broader than simply appraising satisfaction levels with LEO, given LEO's importance to the level of local supports, the results likely indicate general opinions of LEO itself. Overall, 42.5% of SME owners were either satisfied or very satisfied with support. 17.2% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. 34.5% had a neutral opinion.

#### LEO Limerick Communications Strategy/Plan

Our communication strategy is guided by the Communications Section of the Central Coordination Unit at EI, which operates under the direction of the National Communications Committee and includes initiatives such as "All in a Day's Work." At a local level, we work closely with the Communications Section of Limerick City and County Council, whose office maintains a direct link to the Mayor's Office. Communication is delivered through a mix of channels, including print media, social media, and radio, ensuring broad and effective engagement with our audiences.



## 2.0 Vision/Mission and Strategic Objectives

## 2.1 Vision and Mission

In keeping with the LEO Policy Statement 2024-2030, LEO Limerick's aim is to promote entrepreneurship, foster business start-ups and develop existing micro and small businesses to drive job creation and to provide accessible high-quality supports for business ideas.

## 2.2 Strategic Objectives

During the period 2026 – 2027 LEO Limerick aims to achieve this through the following services:

### **Business Information & Advisory Services:**

#### » First Stop Enterprise & Business Support Solutions

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

#### » Make It Easier to do Business

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

### **Enterprise Support Services:**

#### » Maximise Business Potential

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

#### » Collaborate with Enterprise Ireland (EI)

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

### **Entrepreneurship Support Services:**

#### » Promote a Best Practice Enterprise Culture

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

### **Local Economic Development Services:**

#### » Environment for Start-Ups

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



# 3.0 Strategic Priorities

## 3.1 Strategic Overarching Priorities for LEO Limerick for 2026 - 2027

The five main overarching strategic priorities of LEO Limerick for the period are as follows:

- » **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**

The key actions to address these are below:

### Priority 1: Integrating decarbonisation and net zero commitments

#### Actions:

- » Green for business  
Free consultancy programme designed to help small businesses become more sustainable. Through up to two days of expert consultancy, the SME will work with a specialist Green Consultant who will identify practical, impactful changes tailored to the individual business.
- » Energy Efficiency Grant Aid  
The Energy Efficiency Grant supports the investment in technologies and equipment of enterprises following on from a Green for Business Report, GreenStart Report or a SEAI Energy Audit with 75% of eligible costs from a minimum grant of €750 to a maximum of €10,000.
- » Working with Sustainable Tourism Ireland, Climate Action and Environmental Dept LCCC. Regional Green Clinics Quarterly.
- » General advice and educational programmes
- » Advice on grant support

Meets Mayoral Objectives MP11, MP77, MP91, MP139

### Priority 2: Placing digital transformation at the heart of enterprise policy

#### Actions:

- » Development of web-enabled services with a focus of trading online
- » Grant advice and educational programmes
- » Digital for Business Programme  
The Digital for Business support is an initiative designed to give LEO clients a digital edge, with analysis of existing digital systems in the business to identify potential gaps in meeting business needs.
- » Grow Digital  
The Grow Digital Voucher offers SMEs with up to 50 employees financial support to embrace digital technology. A digital for business project report must be completed within the previous two years. The grant aid will be 50% of eligible costs with minimum grant aid of €500 up to a maximum grant of €5,000 per application.

Meets Mayoral Objectives MP91, MP139

### Priority 3: Strengthening the Irish-owned exporting sector

#### Actions:

- » National Export Programme
- » Dedicated Export Business Advisor
- » Get Exporting Programme

Get Exporting is designed to support companies at every stage of their journey to achieving new export sales. Through the Export Development Pathway, the aim is to simplify the export journey and help build the knowledge, confidence, and strategies needed to succeed in international markets.

- » Market Explorer Grant Aid

The Market Explorer Grant is open to small enterprises, to support first time and small-scale exporters to undertake essential market research and to support the development of viable and sustainable market entry strategies in new geographic markets for businesses.

Meets Mayoral Objectives MP26, MP48, MP139

### Priority 4: Enabling locally traded enterprises to thrive

#### Actions:

- » Promote the development of new manufacturing and warehousing as needed
- » Business Expansion / Priming grants
- » Support Micro Finance Ireland applications
- » Lean programme
- » Quarterly network event
- » Roadshow clinics
- » Energy efficiency grants
- » Business advice clinics
- » Ensure coherent communication with local businesses, so they are fully aware of the supports available through LEO and partner organisations
- » Working with Limerick Chamber, Dept. of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, Teagasc
- » Work with LCCC and the Night-Time Economy Team to support initiatives such as Twilight Thursdays and the Limerick gift card
- » Liaise with LEADER, Limerick City Partnership, Ballyhoura Development, and West Limerick Resources in a coordinated manner to ensure alignment and maximize impact

Meets Mayoral Objectives MP26, MP30, MP48, MP77, MP91, MP139

### Priority 5: Stepping up enterprise innovation

#### Actions:

- » Work closely with AxisBIC to foster entrepreneurship and innovation
- » Participate in the Enterprise Task Force 2026/2027
- » Contribute to and support initiatives including:
  - Innovation 4 Growth Programme
  - Farm Diversification Programme in partnership with Teagasc
  - Pathways to Innovate (Innovate Limerick)
  - Limerick IT summit
  - New Frontiers
  - Women in Film & Television International (WIFTI) 2026 Summit – Adare, Co. Limerick

- Film in Limerick
- Student Inc. programme (University of Limerick)
- Student Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Bootcamp (University of Limerick)
- Dogpatch Labs startup hub and innovation space

Meets Mayoral Objectives MP02, MP41, MP91, MP139

## 3.2 National LEO Programmes

Below is a summary of the actions being carried out by LEO Limerick, demonstrating the involvement in National LEO Programmes and Policies:

### » Student Enterprise Awards

The Student Enterprise Awards (SEAs) is the biggest enterprise competition for students in Ireland. It helps students to grasp real life skills associated with running an enterprise, including working as part of a team, managing production and finances, organising a sales and marketing campaign, and liaising directly with customers, judges and the media. Each year over 30,000 students all over Ireland get to find out what it's like to run their own business by taking part in the Student Enterprise Awards Programme.

The annual county awards are one of the most important events run by Limerick LEO. Categories include: Innovation, Best Marketing, Best Business Plan, Sustainability, Best Display and a Teachers Award. In 2025, teenage entrepreneurs from Hazelwood College and Desmond College were selected to represent Limerick at the Student Enterprise Programme National Finals.

### » National Enterprise Awards

The Enterprise Awards Competition is designed to recognise and reward the commitment, dedication and entrepreneurial spirit of small businesses at local and national level. The competition for the awards involves two stages. First there is a local competition at county level. Following that, the winner then represents the county at a National Final. The competition is open to businesses that have received direct financial support since its inception.

In 2025, SOS Cookies was named as Entrepreneur of the Year in the Limerick final and went on to represent the county at the National Enterprise Awards.

### » Showcase

Showcase at the RDS is the first major trade event of each year, organised by the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland and promoted internationally by EI. The dedicated Enterprise Zone on the balcony area, co-ordinated by the Local Enterprise Offices, has become known as the home for emerging designers and craftspeople in recent years. A wide range of creative sectors are represented within the Enterprise Zone, such as ceramics, knitwear, jewellery, interiors, skincare and giftware.

### » Food Academy

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

### » National Ploughing Championships

The National Ploughing Championships are held in September each year. As part of its National Programme, the Local Enterprise Offices host a Local Enterprise Village to provide an opportunity for clients to take full advantage of this unique consumer event. This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the quality and high standard of goods and services supported by the LEO.

### » **Local Enterprise Week**

A Local Enterprise Week is held annually in March. During the week the county hosts a series of events aimed at stimulating business growth and new business creation to drive economic prosperity. The programme offers something for everyone, regardless of whether you want to develop a business idea, start a business or grow your existing enterprise.

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

Ireland's largest female enterprise event promotes, encourages and stimulates female entrepreneurship across Ireland. It is designed and led by women and is an annual high point in promoting entrepreneurship to women in Ireland. Limerick LEO collaborates with other neighbouring LEOs on running a high-profile event that celebrates and supports female entrepreneurship.

### » **Get Exporting**

The Get Exporting Programme is a collaborative inter-agency approach to the strategic development of first-time exporters, supporting their market entry capability to become sustainable long-term exporters, and increasing Ireland's internationalisation performance. Get Exporting is for Irish manufacturing and internationally traded services companies looking to succeed in international markets.

## 3.3 LEO Objectives and Action Plan for 2026-2027

In achieving the objectives of the LEO it is necessary for the LEO to leverage additional resources to complement its own budgets in order to fully deliver on the program. This is done by working in partnership and close collaboration with other sections of the City and County Council, various State Agencies and other bodies involved in enterprise creation in the City and County.

The LEO Limerick has adopted four strategic areas for the period 2026 – 2027 as outlined below:

- » **Key Strategy No 1: Sustainability**
- » **Key Strategy No 2: Digitisation**
- » **Key Strategy No 3: Exporting**
- » **Key Strategy No 4: Innovation**

The LEO Supports/Services as contained in Appendix 2 of the SLA are aligned below with their respective key strategy:

### **Key Strategy No. 1: Sustainability**

Sustainability is a key requirement for grant applications, with applicants expected to demonstrate environmentally responsible practices. Procurement decisions increasingly prioritise suppliers who adopt sustainable methods.

LEO will undertake the following actions:

- » Promote and Administer Green for Business and Energy Efficiency supports
- » Maximise the impact of community enterprise centres
- » Work to increase demand for the City centre and economic activity in the City
- » Work in partnership with Limerick Regeneration to achieve the economic development objectives from the Framework Implementation Plan. Collaborate with the Limerick Regeneration and Community Groups.

- » Provide input into the City and County Development Plan
- » Promote SEAI initiatives
- » Collaborate with LCCC Climate Action Team and MyWaste to deliver seminars and practical guidance

Meets Mayoral Objectives MP11, MP26, MP77

### **Key Strategy No. 2: Digitalisation**

LEO will undertake the following actions:

- » Engage with clients to assess their current digital systems and identify gaps where the Digital for Business Support initiative can strengthen their digital capabilities
- » Support media and promotion activity and the use of social media
- » Contribute to positioning Limerick as a competitive knowledge economy in partnership with all key stakeholders
- » Work in partnership with third level partners in the development of the knowledge economy
- » Engage with EI in the creation and adoption of a new CRMS

Meets Mayoral Objective MP26

### **Key Strategy No. 3: Exporting**

LEO will undertake the following actions:

- » Chair new National Exporting Committee for LEOs in conjunction with EI
- » Provide grant aid through Market Explorer
- » Facilitate access to the Microfinance Ireland Loan Fund
- » Support exporting and internationalisation (Get Exporting Programme)
- » Support product and service development
- » Support the development of clusters
- » Participate in the European Employment Network (EEN)
- » Provide quality advice through the export business advisor
- » Provide mentoring
- » Provide and support training programmes
- » Provide and support business development programmes
- » Provide marketing and access to promotional space/international trade fairs
- » Liaise with Innovate Limerick and IDA to provide access to commercial/enterprise space
- » Nurture the progression pathway for high potential start-ups and high growth companies to EI
- » Develop partnerships with relevant agencies for the benefit of Limerick (e.g. Bord Bia, Design and Crafts Council of Ireland, Inter Trade Ireland, EEN, Irish Export Association)
- » Support the promotion and marketing of local areas within the county as locations for investment in conjunction with the appropriate national body (i.e. IDA)

Meets Mayoral Objective MP02

### **Key Strategy No. 4: Innovation**

LEO will undertake the following actions:

- » Provide enterprise information and First Stop Shop
- » Support innovation and research and development (e.g. feasibility grant aid, RD&I)

- » Provide enterprise advice clinics and roadshows in Limerick City and County
- » Provide information and access to other government services
- » Assist with business planning
- » Deliver Start Your Own Business training
- » Conduct National Enterprise Hub referrals
- » Participate in Supporting Women in Enterprise
- » Participate in the National Enterprise Awards
- » Facilitate innovation through networking
- » Participate in the Student Entrepreneur/Innovation programme
- » Conduct ideas generation workshops
- » Participate in Local Enterprise Week
- » Assist clients in leveraging banks and financial institutions
- » Assist in the development of County/City Economic Strategies as proposed in the Local Government Reform Programme
- » Work in collaboration with the Mayor's SME Expert group in the implementation of the City and County SME Action Plan
- » Provide sector specific training and supports in retail and service industry to support the positioning of the City and Limerick's towns as leading destinations
- » Identify and develop projects and programmes, including leveraging resources to implement these (e.g. Education and Training Board)
- » Contribute to the development of appropriate enterprise infrastructure
- » Act as a resource for Government to undertake one-off initiatives
- » Deliver best practice industry briefings and continuous client insights through ongoing engagement with the EI Centre of Excellence

Meets Mayoral Objectives MPO2 MP11

### LEO Objectives and Action Plan for 2026 and 2027

Linked to the four strategic areas set out in the SLA between EI and the Local Authority, the following tables outline the key objectives, activities and events that are proposed for 2026 and 2027, with the anticipated outcomes and the timeframe for action/delivery. The table also includes delivery of National level LEO programmes such as IBYE, MFI, etc.

#### Key Strategy No. 1: Sustainability

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	2026-2027 ACTION	TARGETS/OUTPUTS	OUTCOME	TIMESCALE
Green for business delivered	Programme rolled out and publicised well	32 clients per annum to have gone through the programme	Reduced carbon emissions Reduced waste Stronger CSRD/ESG credentials	Completed by end of Q4 2026 & 2027
Sustainability kickstarter workshops promoted	Promote availability	10 clients per annum to attend a workshop	Greater awareness as to the benefits of embracing sustainability and how to accomplish this	Completed by end of Q4 2026 & 2027
Limerick specific event	Deliver 'The Green Edge: growing revenue and saving costs while saving the environment'	Event delivered. 50 attendees	Greater awareness of sustainability challenges and how to address these Cost savings and revenue opportunities identified by SME leaders. Greater awareness of the importance of CSRD/ESG in MNE supply chains.	Completed by end of Q4 2026

Energy efficiency grant promoted	Assist clients in accessing support	Communications issued as needed	22 applications approved per annum	Q1 – Q4 in 2026 & 2027
Advice provided on energy efficiency, sustainable development and alternative renewable energy sources	Availability of staff to provide useful information, including on possible grants and sources of further information.  Ability of LEO advisors to provide information on sustainability promoted	To meet all clients that request 1 to 1 advice on sustainability issues and to ensure that business advisors are up to date with information and details of programmes	Greater uptake of Green for Business and Sustainability Kickstarter Workshops	Completed by end of Q4 2026 & 2027
To support economic growth and development of Limerick City and County	To contribute to the economic growth of Limerick by assisting small business to grow and contribute jobs and wealth to the City and County	An increase in the contribution from small business to the Limerick economy in terms of investment, jobs and outputs	Small business contributing to the economic development of Limerick	Q1 – Q4 in 2026 & 2027

## Key Strategy No. 2: Digitalisation

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	2026-2027 ACTION	TARGETS/OUTPUTS	OUTCOME	TIMESCALE
AI training and mentoring	Awareness building on the importance of AI adoption and integration. This includes cyber security. As a way of learning how to do this effectively, SMEs in a pilot town may be taken as a testbed (e.g. Abbeyfeale Town of the Future).  In collaboration with relevant agencies, greater training on how AI can be integrated into the core of SME operations  Pilot programme where relevant staff from local MNEs work directly with SMEs on the adoption and integration of AI	3 x AI events/ programmes held annually, either independently or in conjunction with a relevant partner  2 x cyber security events/offers of mentoring annually  Pilot programme delivered on connecting relevant staff from local MNEs to work directly with SMEs on the adoption and integration of AI	Greater adoption of AI in day-to-day operations by 50 clients per annum  More awareness of cybersecurity issues and how to address these by 50 clients per annum	Q1 – Q4 in 2026 & 2027
Digital for Business	Assist clients in accessing support	Communications issued as needed	32 applications approved per annum	Q1 – Q4 in 2026 & 2027
Grow digital vouchers	Assist clients in accessing vouchers	Communications issued as needed	22 applications approved per annum	Q1 – Q4 in 2026 & 2027
Website development and search engine optimisation	Deliver relevant training	4 x events held annually	20 clients per annum with improved online proposition	Q1 – Q4 in 2026 & 2027

Social media training	Deliver relevant training	3 x social media clinics delivered	20 clients with improved social media marketing	Q1 – Q4 in 2026 & 2027
To be more proactive with the media and the promotion of LEO services	Public awareness campaign To ensure that www.localenterprise.ie/limerick website is up to date and relevant To promote enterprise and entrepreneurs on an ongoing basis Case studies carried out	1 x campaign per quarter  Review each quarter as well as weekly updating  Press releases as necessary  2 x case studies to be done each quarter	To keep the public informed of programmes, training etc.  To ensure that the website is regularly updated and relevant  To ensure that LEO Limerick is in the media  To have material available when requested	1 campaign each quarter  Weekly  Monthly  Q1 – Q4
Enterprise workspace	To provide information on available/suitable workspace for start ups	Register of available workspace in Limerick, suitable for start-ups to be available on the LEO Website	Clients better informed of options in this area	Q1 – Q4

### Key Strategy No. 3: Exporting

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	2026-2027 ACTION	TARGETS/OUTPUTS	OUTCOME	TIMESCALE
Exporting and internationalisation	Collaborate with EI to deliver information and workshops	2 x workshops per annum	Increase in the number of companies exporting	Q1 – Q4
	To promote and actively use the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) Programme	Business to be aware of the EEN network	Increase the use of the EEN programme	Q2 and Q4
Export assistance grant aid	To assist business who are export ready to get a foothold in selected export markets and to assist them to establish a presence in such markets	Target is to assist 10 businesses to access export markets per annum	Increase in exports	Q2 – Q4

### Key Strategy No. 4: Innovation

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	2026-2027 ACTION	TARGETS/OUTPUTS	OUTCOME	TIMESCALE
Innovation 4 Growth programme	Programme publicised and assistance provided in its delivery	10 companies per annum avail of programme	Greater productivity Greater product development and sales success	Q1 – Q4 in 2026 & 2027
Lean for business delivered	Programme delivered	18 companies per annum avail of programme	More efficient operations Greater alignment with MNE supply chains and eventual integration	Q1 – Q4 in 2026 & 2027

Networking	Deliver networking to general and sectoral groups in the established business categories, including Women in Business, Childcare and Engineering Clusters. Focus on driving innovation.	3 networks active	More opportunities to network for these selected groups	Q1 – Q4 in 2026 & 2027
To provide quality enterprise information and to set up first stop shop information points throughout Limerick	First stop shop information points in customer service centres and in the main library branches  Availability of quality materials – work with protocol partners to ensure that information is available and up to date.  Implementation of Agency Protocols  Taking Care of Business	12 centres  Suitable materials available at all times  Implement each protocol as appropriate  1 event in Limerick	Enterprise information to be available in all customer service centres and main library branches in City and County  Quality information available throughout the City and County  Good interaction with appropriate agencies and good quality information available  Taking care of business event run successfully	Completed by end of Q2 2027  Completed by end Q2 2027  Completed by Q3 2027  Before end of 2027
Enterprise Education Programme to be delivered	Secondary Schools – to deliver the Student Enterprise Programme  3rd Level – Strategic Alliances	20 Second level schools in 2026 and 2027  All 3rd level colleges	2026/2027 programme successfully completed  2027/2028 programme launched and progressed to market days  To have a LEO enterprise information session as part of all 3rd Level business courses	Q1 2027  Q4 2027  Q4 2027
Research and evaluation	To carry out ongoing research into the needs of clients and the services/products offered by LEO	Annual feedback from programmes and specific research as required to keep LEO up to date with enterprise sector information	Up to date information and services available to clients	Q1 – Q4
Business advice	Deliver specialist mentor programme  To organise Advice clinics	To provide 1:1 mentor support to 324 participants  12 clinics organised	Needs of companies for mentoring met  Specialist advice available as demanded	Q1 – Q4  1 clinic each quarter
Strategic plan	To complete the Local Enterprise Development Plan  Review plan annually	Carry out a review of plan on an annual basis	Plan to be completed and adopted  To ensure that actions in the plan are delivered and that annual plan is relevant and up to date	Q1  Q4

Staff training and development	To complete the individual personal development plans for all staff and to identify training needs of staff to ensure that LEO Limerick has the necessary skills to deliver a quality service to clients	To ensure that LEO staff are up to date and in a position to deliver a quality service to clients	Reputation of LEO as relevant and offering a quality service to clients enhanced	Q1 – Q4
Industry briefings	To facilitate industry briefings for staff and clients  To keep up to date with industry developments	Staff and clients kept up to date with industry intelligence.	A better service to be delivered to clients	Q1 – Q4
To develop strategic alliances	To develop strategic alliances with as many partners as possible in order to achieve goals	To ensure that LEO protocol partners are aware of LEO and to develop partnerships	A better co-ordinated service to small business in Limerick	Q1 – Q4
Enterprise advice	To enhance the enterprise advice service in order to provide a quality service to clients of LEO	To meet all clients that request 1 to 1 advice and to ensure that business advisors are up to date with information and details of programmes	All requests for advice are met and quality advice given	Q1 – Q4
Business planning	Provide guidance to clients on completing business plans  Ensure that template plans, information and cash flow templates are available on website	To meet the demands from clients for business advice  Quality resource materials available on website	Clients can source material as needed either directly or via website	Q1 – Q4
Start Your Own Business training	To organise SYOB courses in order to satisfy the demand  Review of SYOB course delivery and trainers	108 participants in courses to be organised in 2026  Review after each course	Courses successfully completed with target of 108 participants  To ensure that only quality programmes are delivered	Q1 – Q4  Q1 – Q4
Business and management development	To organise management development programmes for growth companies  To organise Lean for Micro programme	108 participants in organised programmes  Identify growth potential and deliver Lean for Micro programme to 6 businesses	108 business owners given the tools and skills to better run their businesses  Savings and productivity achieved in participants business	Q2 – Q4  Q2 2027

Grant/Refundable Grant Aid	To administer the following grant schemes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feasibility/Innovation</li> <li>• Priming</li> <li>• Business Expansion</li> <li>• Refundable Aid</li> </ul>	10% of approval capacity 4/5 grants 16 approvals 40 jobs per annum 20 approvals 60 jobs per annum 30% of priming grant aid 40% of Business Expansion grant aid approved to be in refundable form	Overall outcome is the creation of 100 extra net jobs in Limerick as a direct result of financial assistance	Q1 – Q4
LEO Microfinance Ireland	Assist applicants to prepare applications  Assess and submit applications to MFI  Allocate mentors to approved clients	22 applications submitted in 2026  Applications from qualified business to be supported and recommended for loans for each MFI approval as requested by MFI	Business who require finance and cannot access bank finance will be assisted to access MFI	Q1 – Q4
Evaluation and Approvals Committee (EVAC)	To maintain an Evaluation and Approvals Committee and to keep the Committee Members up to date with current information  To ensure that the committee receive quality inputs	1 EVAC to be maintained and Members to be kept up to date with new projects, etc.  Quality reports and information to be given to the Committee at all times	A timely evaluation and decision to be made on all applications for grant aid	Q1 – Q4



# 4.0 Associated Actions & Activities

# 4.1 Protocols and Policy Context

Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) have been agreed with a range of organisations, including:

- » Department of Social Protection
- » Credit Review Board
- » Fáilte Ireland
- » Microfinance Ireland
- » Skillnets
- » ETBI
- » Revenue
- » NACEC

The protocols govern the use of information packs and information signposting by LEO staff. For example, such protocols can be used when contacted by employers seeking information on revenue or Dept. of Social Protection programmes and schemes. LEO Limerick has direct contact with most of the above agencies and works closely with them to assist in job creation and information sharing and awareness for all.

# 4.2 Stakeholders

Other stakeholders involved in the activities of LEO Limerick include the following:

- » IDA
- » Enterprise Ireland
- » Limerick City and County Council
- » Limerick Chamber
- » Innovate Limerick
- » University of Limerick
- » LEO Clare Bord Bia
- » Ballyhoura Development CLG
- » Mary Immaculate College
- » Design and Crafts Council of Ireland
- » LEO Tipperary
- » West Limerick Resources
- » Limerick City Partnership
- » Technological University of the Shannon

## Limerick City and County SME Action Plan

Launched in early 2026, the Limerick SME Action Plan lays out an ambitious and forward-looking five-year strategy designed to elevate and accelerate the growth of small and medium enterprises across Limerick City and County. Commissioned by Limerick City and County Council and developed in partnership with Mayor John Moran's SME Expert Group, the plan blends rigorous socio-economic analysis with extensive stakeholder engagement to create a practical, evidence-based roadmap for unlocking Limerick's full entrepreneurial potential. Limerick LEO has been identified as the lead or co-lead on the following actions:

- 2.1 AI training and mentoring
- 2.2 First stop shop business advice clinics
- 2.3 Company benchmarking
- 3.1 Ex large company employee, new SME owner programme

## 4.3 Involvement in Major Events

### The Ryder Cup and other major events

LEO Limerick will support local businesses in engaging with major events such as the 2027 Ryder Cup. Procurement for this event is handled through a centralised process, and expressions of interest can be submitted directly via the official Ryder Cup website.

## 4.4 New Initiatives

### International cooperation

LEO are seeking to develop international connections and collaborations with European companies and regions through working with various embassies. The aim is to combine Limerick's strengths in digital, design and connectivity to North America with compatible partners across Europe. Emerging programmes include:

- » Joining the Dots with the UK embassy
- » A programme with the Italian embassy focusing on design
- » Opportunities in technology with the Dutch embassy



# 5.0 Risks and New Initiatives

# 5.1 Risks

Potential risks that may adversely affect the delivery of proposed actions and activities during 2026 and the key upgrade goals up to 2027, and the actions proposed to mitigate or remove these potential risks are detailed hereunder:

## Identified Risks:

List any risks that can adversely affect the achievement of the objective outlined above	Actions to mitigate this risk
Lack of co-ordination between agencies regarding enterprise support	Ongoing and regular contact with all stakeholders, with particular attention to be paid to National, Regional and Local Plans identifying actions of relevance to LEO Limerick.
Reduction in budgets from central government through EI which reduces ability to meet ambition of this plan	Supporting EI through the continued delivery of strong employment results and metrics to validate continued strong support.
Lack of awareness among new and potential entrepreneurs regarding available business supports	Implementation of the LEO Communications Strategy, ensuring that all supports received a tailored approach towards marketing and promotion, thereby ensuring that the message regarding enterprise support is clearly and widely understood.
Closures of small businesses in Limerick, affecting employment levels significantly	Ongoing promotion of supports available to all businesses, reducing the likelihood of closure if addressed early and effectively, and/or identifying supports to the business owner and staff in developing existing and new business markets.
Over exposure to Foreign Direct Investment	Support indigenous enterprises to sustain, develop and grow their business; clustering programmes and matchmaking to ensure the development of sub-supply opportunities.
Geopolitical implications for Small Business	To put in place an information campaign to keep business informed of the possible implications of geopolitical events (e.g. international conflict) for their business and to assist business by way of various programmes to avail of opportunities that might appear.
Macro-economic shock/downturn	To put in place an information campaign to keep business informed of the possible implications of an economic downturn or shock (e.g. AI bubble, state conflict, steep increase in tariffs) for their business and to assist business by way of various programmes to avail of opportunities that might appear.
Lack of capital finance	LEO Limerick will promote, and raise awareness of, business finance and start-up finance supports available to businesses and entrepreneurs.
Lack of appropriate space	LEO Limerick will work with relevant agencies to create an adequate pipeline of office space (especially Grade B), workshops and warehousing to meet demand.



# Appendices

# APPENDIX 1:

## LEO Limerick Performance Metrics

Jobs	Output 2025	Target 2026
LEO Client Portfolio	310	340
Total Portfolio Employment (all jobs both FT & PT)	2,289	2400
Net Jobs Increase (all jobs created less job losses)	259	126

Progression Pathway	Output 2025	Target 2026
Number of Clients transferred to Enterprise Ireland	6	5

Measure 1 (including supports to Over 10)	Output 2025	Target 2026
Number of Clients Approved Funding	48	40
No. of projected potential new jobs associated with approvals (priming and business expansion)	293.5	101 over 3 years
Costs per job calculation associated with approvals (average cost calculated on new jobs over three years)	€3,937	

Digital Supports	Output 2025	Target 2026
Digital for Business	46	32
Financial Supports (trading online vouchers and grow digital vouchers)	10	22

Green Supports	Output 2025	Target 2026
Green for Business	42	32
Financial Supports (energy efficiency grants)	18	22

Competitiveness Supports	Output 2025	Target 2026
Lean for Business	21	18

Innovation Supports	Output 2025	Target 2026
No. of Companies approved Financial Supports (Agile, IPP, RD&I) and Intellectual Property Support (IP Start)	1	1

EI Grant Support Measure administrated through the LEO (e.g. grad start, etc)	Output 2025	Target 2026
No. of Companies supported	2	2

Measure 2	Output 2025	Target 2026
Training/Development Programmes (all training and networking events)		
Total No. of all Programmes (training/networking/events/seminars)	80	
Total No. of all Participants participating in above Programmes	1286	1080
No. of SYOB Programmes	12	
No. of Management Development Programmes	11	
No. of Participants attending Management Development Programmes	145	108
Mentoring	Output 2025	Target 2026
Total No. of individual mentoring - (participants availing of one-to-one mentoring, i.e. one-to-one engagement by a Mentor with one client)	566	324
Total No. of group mentoring participants - (are group mentoring engagements or clinics where a mentor engages with a group of clients)		
Total No. of Mentoring Participants (both one-to-one and group)	566	324
School Entrepreneurship	Output 2025	Target 2026
No. of Schools Participating (secondary schools only engaged in school enterprise programmes)	17	
Number of Students Participating	814	
First Time Explorers	Output 2025	Target 2026
No. of First Time Explorers	4	4
No. of Clients on Export Accelerator Programmes	5	
No. of Over 10 Clients supported with Financial Assistance to internationalise	2	
No. of Clients supported through other initiatives such as EEN, Intertrade Ireland	2	

# Endnotes

i Limerick Chamber (2025) Mid-West Economic Insights 2025. Available at: [https://limerickchamber.ie/mwei\\_2025/](https://limerickchamber.ie/mwei_2025/)

ii Central Statistics Office Ireland (2023) Census of Population 2022 – Summary results Limerick. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2023pressreleases/presstatementcensusofpopulation2022-summaryresultslimerick/>

iii Ibid

iv Central Statistics Office Ireland (2024) County incomes and regional GDP 2022 2023. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cirgdp/countyincomesandregionalgdp2022-2023/disposableincomebycounty/>

v Central Statistics Office Ireland (n.d.) Data portal. Available at: <https://data.cso.ie/>

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# Appendix I: Innovate Limerick Growth Strategy 2026-2030

# INNOVATE LIMERICK GROWTH STRATEGY 2026-2030




Comhairle Cathrach  
& Contae **Luimnigh**

**Limerick City**  
& County Council



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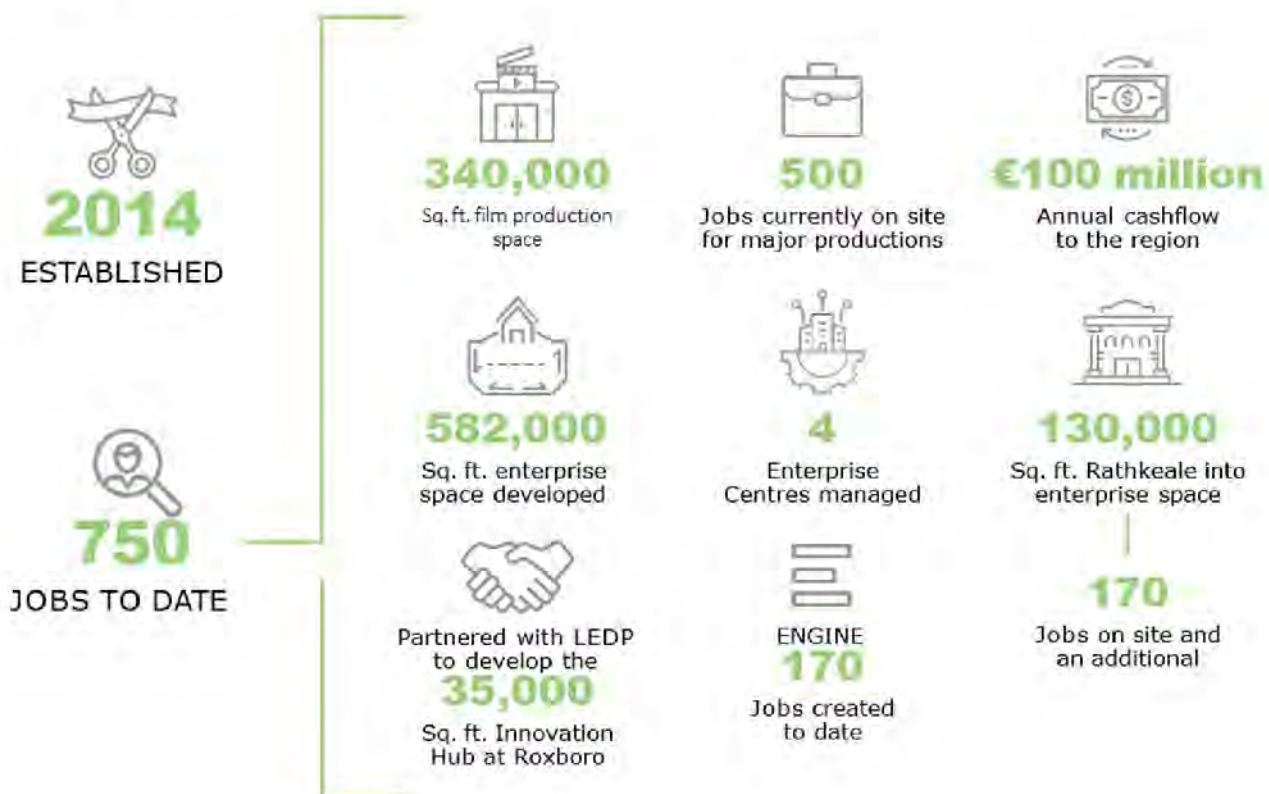
# 1. Who we are and what we do

## Context

Innovate Limerick was established by Limerick City and County Council and Enterprise Ireland to drive innovation and deliver on the objectives of the Limerick 2030 Plan, Limerick Regeneration Plan and the Mid West Regional Enterprise Plan, and others. To foster collaboration and growth in the business community, Innovate Limerick leads several key projects. These include:

- The Engine Hubs network
- Film in Limerick
- The Old Bank Abbeyfeale
- Rathkeale Enterprise Centre

## Accomplishments



## 2. Purpose of Growth Strategy

Innovate Limerick's *Growth Strategy 2026-2030* sets out a clear ambition to strengthen regional innovation, drive business growth, and enhance competitiveness. It focuses on supporting the journey from discovery to commercialisation, working with start-ups, SMEs, multinationals, investors, industry networks, higher education, and economic development partners.

Since 2014, Innovate Limerick has delivered significant impact across the region. However, economic conditions, geopolitics, and workplace trends have changed substantially since the previous strategy was adopted. The rate of change only appears to be accelerating. Consequently, this strategy seeks to prepare Innovate Limerick for its next phase of growth and ensure it continues to drive business expansion by being nimble to the challenges and opportunities that will emerge.



Pathway to Innovate programme launch with Mayor John Moran

# 3. Process

The process to create this strategy included:

**Consultation** with key stakeholders:

- Limerick City & County Council
- Enterprise Ireland
- Advisory Board Members
- Innovate Limerick Staff (workshop and survey)
- Stakeholder survey

**Case study reviews** of similar best practice examples:

- 1 x National
- 1 x International

**Testing** of proposed actions to ensure they are:

- Desirable
- Feasible
- Viable

Testing includes ensuring the plan is in keeping with relevant local, regional and national policy.

# 4. Consultation

## Summary of Innovate Limerick staff workshop 19/02/2025

### Key strengths and progress made

- E-Hubs Network expansion progressing well and viewed as a major success.
- Innovate Limerick brand strengthening and gaining visibility.
- Film in Limerick recognised as a standout area with international potential.

### Challenges and gaps identified

- Some projects have stalled, lack clear ownership, or are no longer aligned.
- Need clearer definitions and direction for:
  - Digital Innovation
  - Activities and measurable outcomes
  - Role relative to LCCC and other agencies
- Monitoring and reporting of KPIs needs strengthening.

### Opportunities for the new strategy

- Enhance collaboration with LCCC to identify enterprise space and shared priorities.
- Expand national and international enterprise linkages.
- Develop a stronger entrepreneur pipeline with higher education partners.
- Better align with Smart City / Smart Campus ambitions.
- Reassess strategic relevance of engineering and food sector initiatives.

### Enterprise and hub development

Strong call for:

- A community-focused, sustainable model for Engine/Enterprise Hubs.
- Positioning hubs as multi-purpose, co-operative spaces.
- Considering a representative from the Engine Hubs Network on the Board.

### Role and identity of Innovate Limerick

- Staff feel “enablers” is a more accurate description of Innovate Limerick’s role than “collaborators.”
- Emphasis on articulating a clearer value proposition and differentiating the organisation from an office/event space.
- Need to identify what tenants and partners want and need from the hubs.

## **Summary of Innovate Limerick staff survey results**

During January 2026 a short online survey was issued to all staff members. Its purpose was to understand their capacity to take on new tasks. Overall, staff felt that too much time was spent on administration. This left little capacity to take on new projects that would help Innovate Limerick grow. To address this, they advocated for:

- Improved management processes
- Greater digitisation
- Additional staff

## **Summary of stakeholder survey results**

Below are two headline results from a survey undertaken after a workshop in February 2025. The workshop focused on how to enhance the business ecosystem in County Limerick. In attendance were representatives of government agencies, SMEs, and third and further level education providers. Thirty responses were received.

### **Key challenges and priorities**

- Knitting the ecosystem together: 36%
- Affordable co-working spaces: 27%
- Other mentioned areas:
  - Promote the ecosystem
  - Build ecosystem around Engine
  - Fill Engine with active startups
  - Improve inter-hub connections
  - Improve visibility/location of Innovate Limerick

### **Desired initiatives and events**

- More networking/social events: 72%
- Monthly meet-ups & stakeholder involvement: 18%
- Monthly startup events: 10%

The survey results challenge Innovate Limerick to:

1. Establish the best way Innovate Limerick can assist businesses
2. Clearly promote available services

# 5. Case Study Reviews

## National case study: Platform 94, Galway City

### platform 94

Established in 1994, Platform 94 is a prominent innovation hub located in Galway City. The facility offers a variety of workspaces including private offices, co-working spaces and meeting rooms over 66,000 square feet.

Platform 94 provides tailored support services to assist businesses scaling internationally including access to networks, funding opportunities and strategic guidance. The facility promotes and ethos of collaboration, community and knowledge sharing, with over 50 businesses on site.

#### Findings:

- Focusing on one industry for tenants (e.g. Tech) may be too limiting. A mix of the tenants with good synergies proves more beneficial for cross pollination, collaboration and provision of support services.
- Large scale event space can prove too time and labour intensive with very poor financial return.
- Creation of a community with weekly meet-ups, relevant events and information sessions is an attractor to high-quality long-term tenants.
- A lot of focus can be put on start-up communities. However, Platform 94 has found that focus on mid-size scaling companies who wish to internationalise has been more beneficial for the facility but also job numbers and economic growth.
- Increased interactions and leveraging of supports from Enterprise Ireland needed by Innovate Limerick.
- Increased tenant engagement and supports needed by Innovate Limerick.
- Satellite facilities too difficult to manage and too costly.
- Increased focus on sustainability needed by Innovate Limerick.

## International case study: Tramshed Tech, Wales



Tramshed Tech provides connected workspaces, next-level business support programmes and specialist skills training to encourage the growth of tech, digital, and creative businesses in Wales. It has six locations across South Wales.

### Product

- Variety of workspace formats: flexible coworking (hot-desks), dedicated private offices, meeting rooms, event spaces, podcast studios, and virtual offices.
- Business support services: mentorship, startup/scale-up programmes (e.g. a Start-up Academy), strategic support, access to networks, and skills-training done in collaboration with academic institutions and industry partners.
- The variety of locations — across multiple locations in South Wales — increases flexibility and reach.

Their offering is not only physical space but a full “innovation-hub ecosystem” targeted at startups, scale-ups and creative/tech businesses.

### Price

- Tramshed Tech offers flexible membership/pricing tiers to accommodate different needs: day passes (£20 per day), part-time coworking (£130/month for 80 hours), full-time coworking (£199/month), and unlimited memberships (£250/month incl. VAT).
- For more limited needs, they also offer virtual-office packages (address, mail handling etc.), which can be more affordable and lower commitment.

Their pricing and flexibility makes Tramshed Tech accessible to freelancers, early-stage startups, and scaling companies alike.

### Place

- Tramshed Tech operates from multiple locations across South Wales: including central city-centre and well-connected venues in Cardiff, Newport, Barry, Swansea, etc.
- Their original site is in a former tram depot in Grangetown, Cardiff (close to Cardiff Central Station), making it very accessible. Their Swansea location, based in a restored historic former theatre, offers a multi-floor workspace, event space and coffee shop.
- The multi-location network means members may have flexibility to use different sites — which can be appealing for businesses with remote/hybrid or traveling teams.

## Promotion

- Tramshed Tech markets itself as “the home of startups in Wales,” emphasising its community, flexibility, and support services across tech, creative and digital sectors.
- They offer business growth programmes (e.g. Startup Academy, mentoring, skills training) — using these as differentiators to attract companies seeking more than just desks.
- Their expansion across multiple cities and towns and into repurposed landmark/historic buildings (e.g. the Palace Theatre in Swansea) gives visibility and appeals to businesses looking for a unique and inspiring working environment.
- Through partnerships (e.g. with educational institutions, industry partners) and by providing perks (e.g. tech credits, networking/community events, flexible memberships), they aim to attract a wide range of clients: freelancers, startups, scaling firms.
- Website is high quality and updated regularly. Social media actively used: LinkedIn 8.5k followers; Facebook 1.6k followers; Instagram 4.3k followers.



The Old Bank, Abbeyfeale

## 6. Customer Profiles

Persona	What they want/need?
Solo freelance developer/sole trader	High-speed internet, professional workspace (not café or home), meeting rooms, flexible hours, networking with other freelancers and SMEs
Early-stage startup founder / small team	Affordable office space, flexibility, mentoring/support, networking, possibility to scale in same location
Scale-up SME looking to grow	Good quality, larger premises, access to regional infrastructure, connection to relevant public sector and private enterprise networks, collaboration potential, flexibility
FDI looking for landing site and to grow	High quality landing site, access to regional infrastructure, connection to relevant public sector and private enterprise networks, collaboration potential, flexibility
Remote worker	Good quality workspace without commuting large distances, occasional office/meeting space, prefer community/work-life balance

# 7. Policy Context

## **Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028**

County development plans set out the relevant local authority's policies for land use and development control in the area. It also sets out objectives for the use of particular areas. In Limerick's current development plan there are two objectives that explicitly focus on SME. Both are relevant for Innovate Limerick:

### **Objective LEDP O1** Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership

It is an objective of the Council to: a) Support and facilitate expansion of the existing employment uses and training facilities, enhancing the broad range of employment opportunities for the local community. b) Facilitate the reuse of the vacant Innovation Hub for employment uses such as a multi- functional Creative and Innovative Industries Centre. c) Facilitate and encourage employment creation by SMEs.

### **Objective ECON O33** Enterprise Incubator Units

It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the development and growth of incubator/innovation facilities in the City and County, to support the growth and development of SMEs and the creation of a sustainable start-up ecosystem. This will be achieved in conjunction with the Local Enterprise Office and Innovate Limerick, to ensure the long-term resilience of SMEs in Limerick.

## **Limerick Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2028**

Following the enactment of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, every local authority area is required to have a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). The purpose of LECPs is to set out the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the relevant local authority area. Limerick's LECP has eight Sustainable Economic Development Objectives (SEDO). Two of these are especially relevant for Innovate Limerick:

### **SEDO E2** Entrepreneurship & micro- & Small & Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

Encourage and support entrepreneurship for people of all ages and backgrounds as a route to job creation and support the start-up and business performance of micro- and small enterprises and social enterprises.

### **SEDO E3** Infrastructure & supportive business environment for SMEs

Develop the physical infrastructure including workspace, ICT Hubs and technologies and build the business ecosystem (including cooperation networks) to create an excellent environment for business and innovation in Limerick.

## **Mayoral Programme: More for Limerick 2024-2029**

In 2024, the State's first directly elected mayor was chosen by the people of Limerick. Following this, the new mayor unveiled an ambitious vision for the future of Limerick City and County with the publication of the *Limerick Mayoral Programme 2024-2029*. Some of the actions of direct relevance to Innovate Limerick include:

**CK03** Support for Local Businesses and Rural Enterprise - Implement initiatives to support and incentivise small businesses in rural towns and villages, including more remote working hubs and a network of enterprise community centres. Promoting business parks and local entrepreneurship will ensure economic opportunities are available to all, creating more inclusive communities.

**MP69** Review the film festival offering in Limerick in partnership with Film in Limerick to design a festival of impact.

**MP71** Explore a collaboration with the third level institutions, LCCC and Innovate Limerick to establish an event to celebrate Limerick Design in all its forms.

**MP73** Investigate the feasibility of a dedicated officer in Innovate Limerick, or the SME Agency, assigned to supporting the growth of the self-employed persons or small businesses operating in creative industries sector. This resource can help with the settling in process for individuals moving to Limerick before the Welcome to Limerick office is established.

**MP130** Work with the IDA to identify the next state-of-the-art business park of scale for Limerick and expand land or buildings available for business parks and innovation hubs which can service as landing space for companies in key county towns.

Finally, the Mayor wants to increase the level of transparency of all the Council owned DACs, including Innovate Limerick.

## **Limerick SME Action Plan**

The Limerick SME Action Plan lays out an ambitious and forward-looking five-year strategy designed to elevate and accelerate the growth of small and medium enterprises across Limerick City and County. Commissioned by Limerick City and County Council and developed in partnership with Mayor John Moran's SME Expert Group, the plan blends rigorous socio-economic analysis with extensive stakeholder engagement to create a practical, evidence-based roadmap for unlocking Limerick's full entrepreneurial potential. There are 15 actions in total. Innovate Limerick is the lead or co-lead on three actions:

**1.4** Co-working hub network

**2.2** First stop shop business advice clinics

**3.5** Power of networking

## Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 – Mid West

Together with Clare and Tipperary, County Limerick is part of the Mid-West region. The regional enterprise plans are an initiative from the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment. They are developed by regional stakeholders and focus on undertaking collaborative initiatives that can help deliver enterprise growth.

The Mid-West's plan to 2024 is still in use until a replacement has been completed (expected later in 2026). There are 30 actions in place across five themes. Innovate Limerick is an action lead on:

**Action 3.1:** Create an efficient and sustainable regional network of enterprise centres and remote working eHubs.

**Action 3.3:** Support the regional agri-food sector through the development of food hubs.



N21 Rathkeale Enterprise Centre

# 8. Vision

Over five years 2026-2030:

**To nurture a nimble innovation ecosystem built on infrastructure, networking and partnerships, that delivers strong success for businesses in Limerick.**



Engine Collaboration Centre

# 9. Objectives



1. AN ECO-SYSTEM FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS



2. A CULTURE OF INNOVATION IN THE HUBS



3. ACCESSIBLE PATHWAYS TO CREATING AND GROWING A BUSINESS



4. GROWTH THROUGH PARTNERSHIP



5. BETTER LINKAGES TO ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE



6. TALENT ATTRACTED AND RETAINED



7. HIGH QUALITY OFFERING TO MEET CUSTOMER NEEDS



GASP event at Engine Collaboration Hub

# 10. Strategic Pillars

There are five strategic pillars to enable the development of a nimble innovation ecosystem:

## 1. Space

Provide the high-quality spaces that businesses need to grow which are not being provided to the sufficient level by the market.

## 2. Technology

Facilitate innovation, efficiency and profitability by ensuring clients in all locations have access to the technology infrastructure they need.

## 3. Networking

Nurture an environment where it is easy for businesses to collaborate and learn.

## 4. Programmes

Support the rollout of business development programmes that provide Limerick businesses with a competitive edge.

## 5. Capacity

Provide the means to carry out the plan's actions.



Treaty Software, Chamber Award Winners

# 11. Actions

The 26 actions below have been benchmarked against the offerings of:

- Tramshed Tech, Wales
- The Ministry, London
- WeWork, Dublin
- Dogpatch Lab, Dublin
- Republic of Work, Cork
- Platform 64, Galway
- Ludgate Hub, Skibbereen
- The Cube, Portlaoise

The actions were also tested against the various customer profiles to ensure a desirable and useful proposition is provided.

In total, there are 26 actions organised under five strategic pillars: space; technology; programmes, networking, and capacity.

## 1.0 Space

### 1.1 Configuration of spaces

Where there is capacity in Innovate Limerick owned spaces reconfigure offering to provide variety of smaller office spaces to match market demand. Only limited hotdesking should be available.

Mayoral Programme Action Supported: CK03

Estimated cost: Dependent on scale of modifications (e.g. light partitioning, reconfiguration, high spec, M&E works)

### 1.2 Multi-site membership

Investigate the feasibility of developing a partnership whereby members can have access to a high quality co-working hub in both Dublin and London.

Estimated cost: Own staff costs to investigate feasibility. Final cost dependent on reciprocal access agreement.

### **1.3 Benefits of membership**

There is a need for an impressive set of membership benefits (see below). Complementing this is a dedicated membership webpage (e.g. <https://www.ludgate.ie/membership-packages/> <https://www.tramshedtech.co.uk/community/>)

Possible benefits of membership:

- Access to a high quality co-working hub in London and Dublin
- Free access to meeting rooms
- Ready access to expert business advice and mentoring services from Limerick LEO (located in Engine)
- Software perks
- Access to business library in Engine
- Communal kitchens in all Innovate Limerick owned sites with free tea and coffee
- 10% discounts at selected high-quality cafés and restaurants in Limerick City, Newcastle West and Abbeyfeale
- 10% discount on gym membership from high quality gyms close to Innovate Limerick owned hubs in Limerick City, Newcastle West and Abbeyfeale

Mayoral Programme Action Supported: CK03

Estimated cost: Own staff costs to investigate additional membership benefits. Negotiated discounts will likely have minimal direct costs.

### **1.4 Landing space**

Relevant information on using Innovate Limerick sites as a landing space could be available online in French, Spanish, German, Japanese and Chinese.

Estimated cost: €2k-€5k depending on number of languages for landing space webpage.

### **1.5 New spaces**

Continue to support the development of a network of competitively priced, high spec work hubs where needed throughout the county.

The number and distribution must ensure one hub does not undermine another. Any hubs outside of the city should be located within the town or village centre. Each hub should be tailored for the needs and strengths of the area in which it is located (e.g. eco-tourism).

Due to commercial risk, a feasibility study/cost benefit is to be conducted before any new hub is approved by the Innovate Limerick board.

Mayoral Programme Actions Supported: CK03; MP130

Estimate cost: €25k-€60k per feasibility study. Final project cost dependent on scale.

## **1.6 Food hub**

Support the formation of a Limerick Agri-Food Innovation Centre by facilitating introductions and meetings with Pallaskenry, Macra and Bia Innovator.

Mayoral Programme Action Supported: MP43

Estimated cost: Own staff resources. Facilitate use of own venues. Additional resources from Mayoral fund as needed.

## **1.7 Sustainability**

In order to support the ESG/CSRD credentials of client companies and attract new clients - especially as a landing space for FDI, solar panels are to be installed where feasible across the roofs of Innovate Limerick properties.

Estimated cost: Varies widely dependant on system size. Significant grant support available from SEAI.

## **2.0 Technology**

### **2.1 Benchmarking technology**

Benchmark every two years the quality of technology at the Innovate Limerick owned hubs against national peers. Take measures to address any gaps. Seek to be an early adopter of relevant technologies.

Estimated cost: Own staff resources for benchmarking and to assess likely costs

### **2.2 Software perks**

Investigate creating a set of software perks for members.

For reference, Dogpatch has the following software perks for its members:

- Google Cloud. Residents receive up to €100k credit for 1 year.
- AWS Promotional Credit for 1 year (up to \$25k) and €1k in training.
- Notion Plus 6 months free, including unlimited AI
- Kota, 50% off for 1 year
- Hubspot, 75% off for 1 year and 50% for following year
- Stripe, €50k worth of free processing

Mayoral Programme Action Supported: CK03

Estimated cost: Own staff resources for research. Likely to be minimal direct cost.

### **2.3 Booking space online**

It should be easy for members to book online tables and meeting rooms in all Innovate Limerick owned buildings. (e.g. <https://www.tramshedtech.co.uk/book/?resource=event-space>)

Estimated cost: €1,200-€2k per site per annum

### **3.0 Programmes**

#### **3.1 UL and TUS collaboration**

Develop a programme with UL and TUS where ex-Nexus and Hartnett Centre start-ups receive low cost/no cost space in Engine for up to two years. Additional mentoring could also be part of the programme.

Grow connections between Innovate Limerick based entrepreneurs and higher education partners.

Estimated cost: Own staff resources. Facilitate use of own venues. Main cost will be short term Opportunity Cost by not having space available to rent, only applicable if approaching 100% capacity at venues.

#### **3.2 Business programmes**

Work with relevant agencies to develop and/or host programmes targeted at making SMEs and start-ups more successful. Provide entrepreneurs with access to best practice approaches, expertise, and additional supports, e.g. access to national and international networks, immersion programmes, and innovation events.

Estimated cost: Own staff resources. Facilitate use of own venues.

#### **3.3 Sustainable and organic farming**

Support a programme for sustainable and organic farming practices, providing technical and financial assistance to farmers. This is primarily to be accomplished by providing input into the programme design and assisting in its implementation.

Mayoral Programme Action Supported: MP44

Estimated cost: Own staff resources. Facilitate use of own venues. Additional resources from Mayoral fund as needed.

#### **3.4 AI**

Host/develop short AI sprints/workshops/seminars in the Engine Hub. Likely partners Skillnet, LCETB, LEO, Limerick Chamber.

Estimated cost: Own staff resources. Facilitate use of own venues. Use external funding for innovate Limerick led events.

#### **3.5 Website**

Information about existing programmes hosted in Engine is not available on the Innovate Limerick website (e.g. Pathway to Innovate). This should be remedied (e.g. <https://www.tramshedtech.co.uk/programmes/>)

Estimated cost: Own staff resources. Likely minimal cost, under €1k.

## **4.0 Networking**

### **4.1 Digital Collaboration Centre**

Grow the community of innovators through the Digital Collaboration Centre.

Estimated cost: Own staff resources. Some additional budget also likely.

### **4.2 Enterprise networks**

Grow the linkages with national and international enterprise networks.

Estimated cost: Own staff resources

### **4.3 High potential sectors support**

Develop opportunities as they arise and capacity enables to support the growth of various emerging high potential sectors (e.g. film via Film in Limerick, createch, design, sustainable energy).

Mayoral Programme Actions Supported: MP69; MP71

Estimated cost: Own staff resources. Additional budget also likely needed depending on scope of involvement.

### **4.4 Tech entrepreneurs**

Assist in the development of a regional Tech Start-Ups Network / Eco-system.

Estimated cost: Own staff resources. Facilitate use of own venues.

### **4.5 A social space**

In order to drive collaboration, opportunities should be taken to enhance Engine and the other Innovate Limerick owned hubs as social spaces for clients and their employees.

Estimated cost: €2k-€5k

### **4.6 Quarterly high-quality events**

Once a quarter deliver a high-quality event that will educate and inspire clients and their employees. Possible events include:

- Signature annual conference (e.g. 3 x themes focusing on important issues, 2 x speakers per theme, 1 keynote). Possible themes: scaling up, exporting to Europe and Asia, managing change, strategy.
- Joint Innovate Limerick/Nexus Centre/Hartnett Centre event
- Limerick design conference/exhibition with UL, TUS and LCCC
- Film festival venue for screenings, talks, etc.

Mayoral Programme Actions Supported: MP69; MP71

Estimated cost: €5k-€20k depending on scale of events.

#### **4.7 Member run events**

Create a modest budget available to assist hub clients to run business development events on site (e.g. for speaker expenses). To qualify for support, the event must be open to other clients and their employees.

Estimated cost: €2k-€5k

#### **4.8 Hosting other agencies**

Work to further develop relationships with relevant organisations (e.g. TUS, UL, Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Limerick Chamber, LCETB, AxisBIC, Mid-West Regional Skills Forum, LCETB) and seek to increase their use of Innovate Limerick hubs as venues for events of interest to clients and their employees.

Estimated cost: Own staff resources. Facilitate use of own venues.

#### **4.9 Start-up investment**

Work to develop relationships between AxisBIC and growing SMEs based in Innovate Limerick hubs.

Collaborate with Axis BIC and others to attract venture capital investors, angels etc. to Limerick (e.g. Futura Conference).

Estimated cost: Own staff resources. Facilitate use of own venues.

### **5.0 Capacity**

#### **5.1 Core capacity building**

Where viable and in keeping with good governance, Innovate Limerick is to reduce the administration burden through digitisation, adoption of new processes, and recruitment of additional staff as necessary.

Estimated cost: €30k-€60k for digitisation systems plus annual licence and support costs. €40k-€50k for full time administration officer per annum. Own staff resources for management approaches.

#### **5.2 Creative sector staff member**

Investigate the feasibility of a dedicated officer in Innovate Limerick or LEO assigned to support the growth of the SMEs operating in the creative industries sector.

Mayoral Programme Action Supported: MP73

Estimated cost: €50k-€60k for full time officer per annum

# 12. Outcome Key Performance Indicators

**1. Clients consistently report high satisfaction with Innovate Limerick.\***

Measure with annual survey and ascertain opportunities to improve offering.

**2. High occupancy across all Innovate Limerick hubs (80%+).**

Quantify each quarter. Ascertain how to improve offering. If any client leaves, learn why?

**3. Strong relationships between Innovate Limerick client companies – especially Irish SMEs – which leads to greater success.**

Measure with annual survey and ascertain opportunities to improve the development of relationships.

**4. Clients consistently report higher innovation levels in Innovate Limerick hubs than in other similar locations.\***

Measure with annual survey and ascertain opportunities to improve.

**5. Clients “graduate” from smaller spaces to larger spaces, especially Irish SMEs.**

Track movement and any associated sectoral trends.

**6. Consistent increase in number of Irish start-ups in Innovate Limerick hubs succeeding nationally and internationally.**

Track development of Irish start-ups based in Innovate Limerick hubs.

**7. Demand exceeds supply for space which encourages Innovate Limerick to develop more high-quality hubs, including in the creative sector. Must be deemed long term viable.**

Track enquiries to build any necessary business case. Number of new hubs in development/developed as needed.

**8. The economy of County Limerick is stronger and more resilient due to the efforts of Innovate Limerick.**

Track quantity, quality and sectoral origin of employment associated with Innovate Limerick activities.

\* Fully within the power of Innovate Limerick to influence.

# 13. Governance

To aid implementation, the following is recommended:

- The board in consultation with Innovate Limerick leadership are to decide the prioritisation and sequence of the 26 actions to pursue. The prioritisation and sequence of actions are to be reviewed annually.
- A master Gantt chart is to be used to track overall progress. This will be provided at each board meeting.
- It is not enough to simply implement the actions. Their impact must be measured at appropriate times. This will aid in conducting adjustments. The KPIs have been designed to permit this.

To demonstrate good governance, the following is to be conducted:

- Each year a set of accounts and an annual report s to be published on Innovate Limerick's website. Amongst its contents are to be information about salaries/expenses of senior management and information about the attendance of directors at board meetings and sub-committees.
- Information is to be published to show how the board operates in line with best governance practices. This includes describing the process to recruit high quality and diverse board members to fulfil the purpose of Innovate Limerick.



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Comhairle Cathrach  
& Contae **Luimnigh**

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ATLANTIC EDGE

**LIMERICK**  
EUROPEAN EMBRACE