

**ACTION  
PLAN  
FOR  
JOBS**  

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**2015-2017**

**MIDLANDS  
REGION**

**Second Progress Report  
June-December 2016**



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## Foreword by An Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise and Innovation



I am delighted to see the publication of this second Progress Report for the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs. Since it was launched in June 2015, the objective of this Plan has been to provide a platform for Laois, Longford, Offaly, and Westmeath to work together, building on the unique strengths of the region to support businesses to start up, grow and generate exports. I believe that we, as a small country, can achieve so much more through productive collaboration, across county and provincial boundaries, combining resources and expertise, than we could acting alone.

The Regional Action Plan initiative as a whole remains a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, 135,000 of which are outside of Dublin. Employment figures from 2016 show that real progress is being made on this vision: an additional 66,100 jobs were created over 2016, 70% of which are outside Dublin.

During 2016, in every region the unemployment rate has fallen while the number in employment has increased. The enterprise agencies have also been working hard to make a significant contribution to employment across the whole country – in 2016, 61% of new jobs by Enterprise Ireland firms and 52% of new jobs by IDA firms were outside Dublin.

Progress in the Midlands has been very positive. The number employed in the Midlands has increased by 7,600 since Q1 2015, while the number unemployed has fallen by 5,900. The sectors which have seen the largest growth in numbers employed since Q1 2015 are Human Health and Social Work (up 4,000) and Construction (up 3,200)

By end 2016, the Midlands Unemployment rate stood at 7.9%, having decreased by 4.6 percentage points since Q1 2015, and by 3 percentage points in the previous 12 months alone. The Midlands Unemployment rate at Q4 2016 was only 1.2% above the State average.

Recent job announcements from firms such as Abbot Ireland and STERIS demonstrate the continued confidence of industry in the Midlands region to support both established and growing companies, often requiring specialist skills. The commendable work undertaken this year by the Midlands Regional Skills Forum, bringing business together with education providers, will further benefit the region's competitiveness by enhancing its pipeline of skilled workers.

In addition, the decision by Center Parcs to locate a €230m holiday village in Ballymahon, Longford is a transformative and hugely welcome development for the midlands region, bringing a much needed jobs boost. The project is expected to create 1,000 permanent jobs for the holiday village park, with 750 people expected to be employed during the construction phase.

I am looking forward, in the coming months, to meeting the committee for the Midlands Plan: in reviewing this progress report, it is clear to see the hard work being undertaken by all the individuals and organisations who are dedicated to making this plan a success. I would also like to express my thanks to the Chairman of the Midlands committee, Mr Pat Gallagher, for his ongoing commitment to this project. The results to date could not be achieved without the cooperation and input of the private sector, and thanks are due to the region's Enterprise Champions for that.

My colleagues and I across Government are, however, keenly aware that while our economy is growing strongly and unemployment is at the lowest level since 2008, we cannot be complacent. Our goal is that we must continue to ensure that all areas of the country are supported to achieve economic growth in line with their potential.

I also want to acknowledge that while 2016 was a successful year in many respects, it was one in which new challenges arose, in particular as a result of the UK referendum to leave the EU. I can assure you that my colleagues across Government and I will work hard to protect our economy from any adverse effects of Brexit. Building resilience among potentially affected companies will be crucial, and I will ensure that Enterprise Ireland, IDA, InterTradeIreland and the LEOs are working with these clients, helping them to focus strategically on competitiveness, research and innovation, and people.

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative will continue to support and drive job creation across the regions by encouraging the enterprise development agencies, Local Authorities, higher education institutions, as well as the private sector and communities, to come forward with innovative ideas to boost job creation in their area.

Following the success of 2016's Enterprise Ireland Regional Competitive Funding Calls, additional funding of up to €60m is being rolled out by Enterprise Ireland over the next 4 years to support the best regional enterprise projects, and to see each region building on the strengths they have in areas such as food, medical devices, software, aviation, engineering, and others. I believe that this is the right approach – directing these resources towards projects led by local people, for the benefit of their own communities and local economies.

In advocating this approach of collaborative working, I want to assure you that I will work closely with my Cabinet colleagues to ensure that we are aligned in our approach to important issues, and that we work together on initiatives that benefit us all. 2016 was a year in which we re-focused on the holistic development of our regions, with projects such as the Action Plan for Rural Development, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Action Plan for Housing, and the National Broadband Plan, working to ensure that every region has the capacity and capability to support sustainable job opportunities. I will endeavour now to ensure that this approach continues.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frances". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Frances Fitzgerald, T.D.**  
**Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise and Innovation**

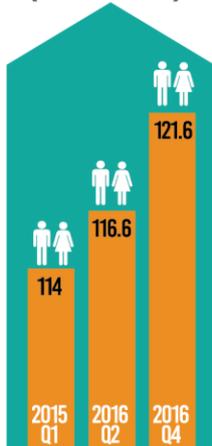


# ACTION PLAN FOR JOBS: MIDLANDS

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

2nd Progress Report, June – December 2016

## Numbers Employed (Thousands)



Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Thousand)

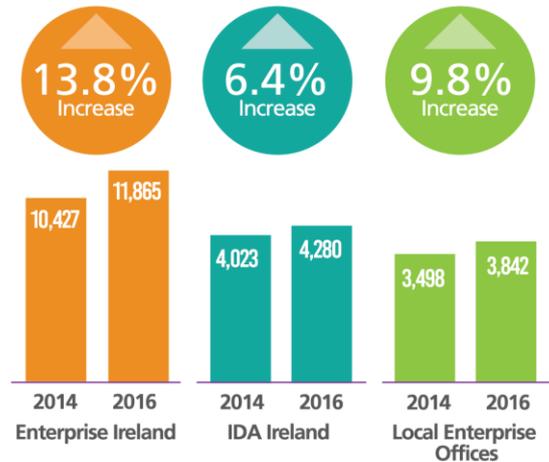
Source: CSO QNHS (QNQ22)

## Unemployment Rate



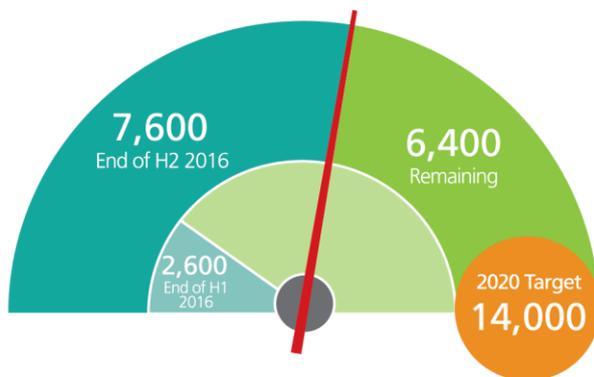
ILO Unemployment Rate (15 - 74 years) (%)

## Jobs in Agency Supported Businesses



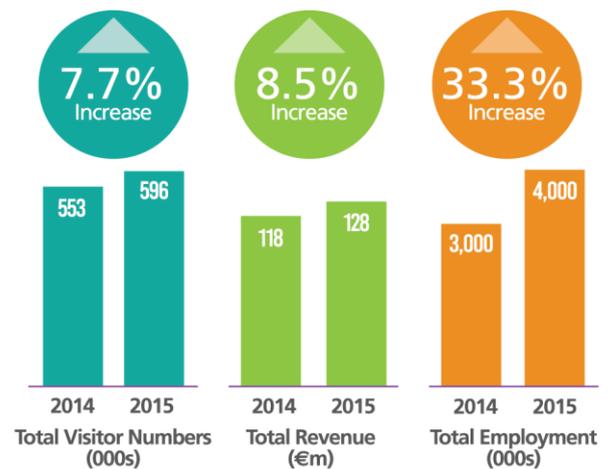
Sources: DJEI Annual Employment Survey and Local Enterprise Office Annual Employment Survey.

## Midlands Regional Jobs Target Q1 2015 – Q4 2019 Progress from Q1 2015 to Q4 2016



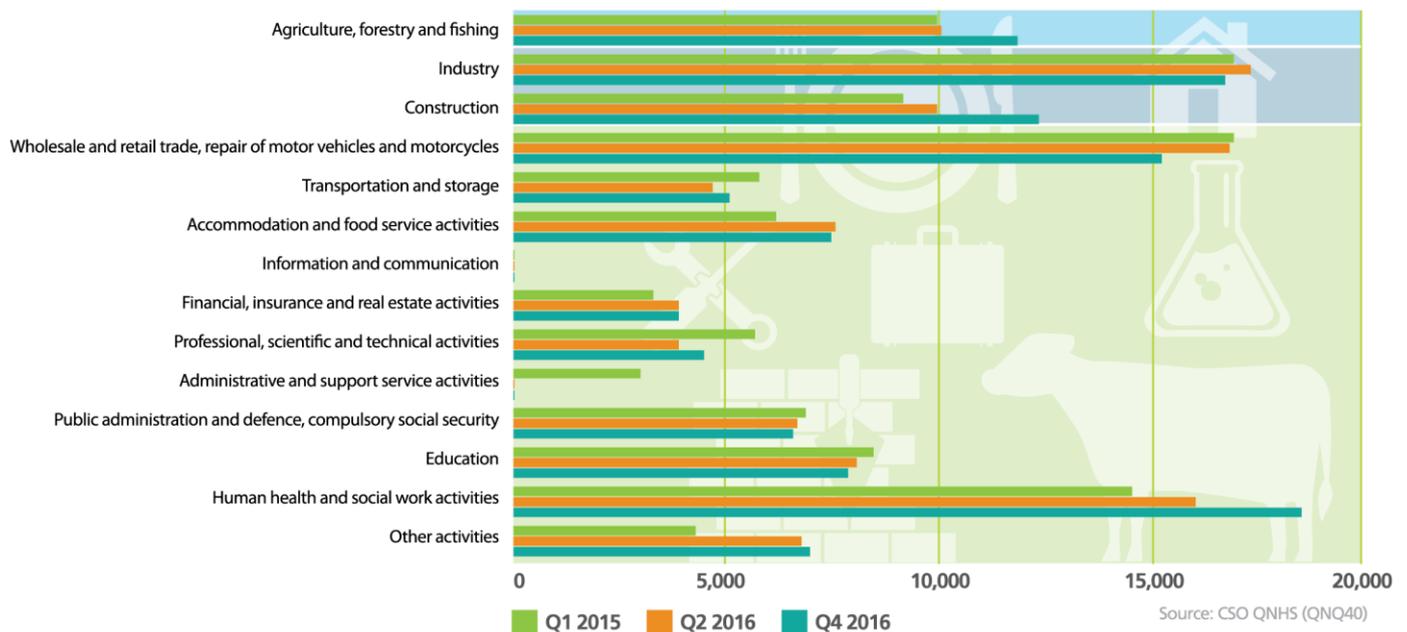
Source: CSO QNHS (QNQ22)

## Tourism in the Midlands



Source: Fáilte Ireland  
2016 figures unavailable at time of publication

## Employment by Sector



Source: CSO QNHS (QNQ40)

## Commentary

This is the second Progress Report from the Implementation Committee established by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise, and Innovation to oversee and monitor implementation of the measures contained in the Midland Region Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017. The report outlines progress made on measures due for completion up to and including the second half of 2016, as well as progress made on measures that are Ongoing during the 2015-2017 period of the Action Plan.

The Action Plan for Jobs for the Midland Region was launched on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The core objective of the Plan is to support the creation of an extra 14,000 jobs across the counties of Longford, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois by 2020 through the delivery of 121 collaborative actions focusing on increasing the number of entrepreneurs/ start-ups, developing the capacity of existing enterprises, with further actions targeted at sectors of potential competitive advantage such as manufacturing, tourism, food and energy. Increasing the number of people in employment by 14,000 by 2020 will represent a 13% growth in the numbers employed in the region in 2014. This represents an important step towards the target, as set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government's ambition of creating 200,000 extra jobs by 2020, with 135,000 of these to be outside Dublin.

The Regional Action Plans are monitored and driven in each region by Implementation Committees, comprising representatives from the Enterprise Sector, as well as the Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and other public bodies in the region. The Midland Implementation Committee is chaired by Mr Pat Gallagher, Chief Executive of Westmeath County Council.

In 2007, when the economy last enjoyed full employment, the Midland Region had an unemployment rate of 3.7% - the lowest of all regions. However there was a very significant dependence on employment in the construction sector which employed over 20,000 people at that time. During the recession some 15,000 Construction jobs were lost and this contributed greatly to the high unemployment rate in the region which, by Q3 2011, stood at 19.6%.

There has been a substantial improvement in the Midlands region since the commencement of the National Action Plan for Jobs in 2012, with an additional 15,900 in employment in Q4 2016 compared to Q4 2012.

Progress in job creation and addressing unemployment has continued strongly since 2012. The unemployment rate in the region stood at 7.9% in Q4 2016, compared to the national rate of 6.7%<sup>1</sup>. At end 2016, the Midland Region was the fourth fastest growing region in terms of employment growth since 2014 (South West, Dublin and South East), up 6.5% and ahead of the national average growth rate of 5.9%<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> CSO Quarterly National Household Survey Q4 2016

<sup>2</sup> The Midland region is the second fastest growing region in terms of employment growth since 2012 (Q3 2012: Q3 2016, after the South East), up 14.1% and ahead of the national average growth rate of 10.8%.

## Key Highlights



IDA Ireland continues to focus on the region which had 29 IDA-supported companies at the end of 2016 and reported two investments in Tullamore during that year from Steris and Nexvet. **(Action 44)**



Work is due to start shortly on the **€230m** Center Parc holiday village in Ballymahon, Longford **with 1,000 permanent jobs expected plus 750** during the construction phase. **(Actions 55 and 93)**



Fáilte Ireland's hugely **successful initiative "Ireland's Ancient East"** which goes through the Midlands is continually **being improved and marketed** to international travel professionals. **(Action 53)**



The **cream of Ireland's food producers** were present at the International Food Festival and **business-to-business event** in Lanesboro, Longford in October 2016 with 6,000 attendees. **(Actions 57 and 75)**



**Expansion Planned For Ferbane Business Park** which follows on from the success of the Ferbane Food Campus which has been in operation since 2012 and recently acquired an award from National Pride of Place for 'Community Business Enterprise Initiatives' **(Action 73)**

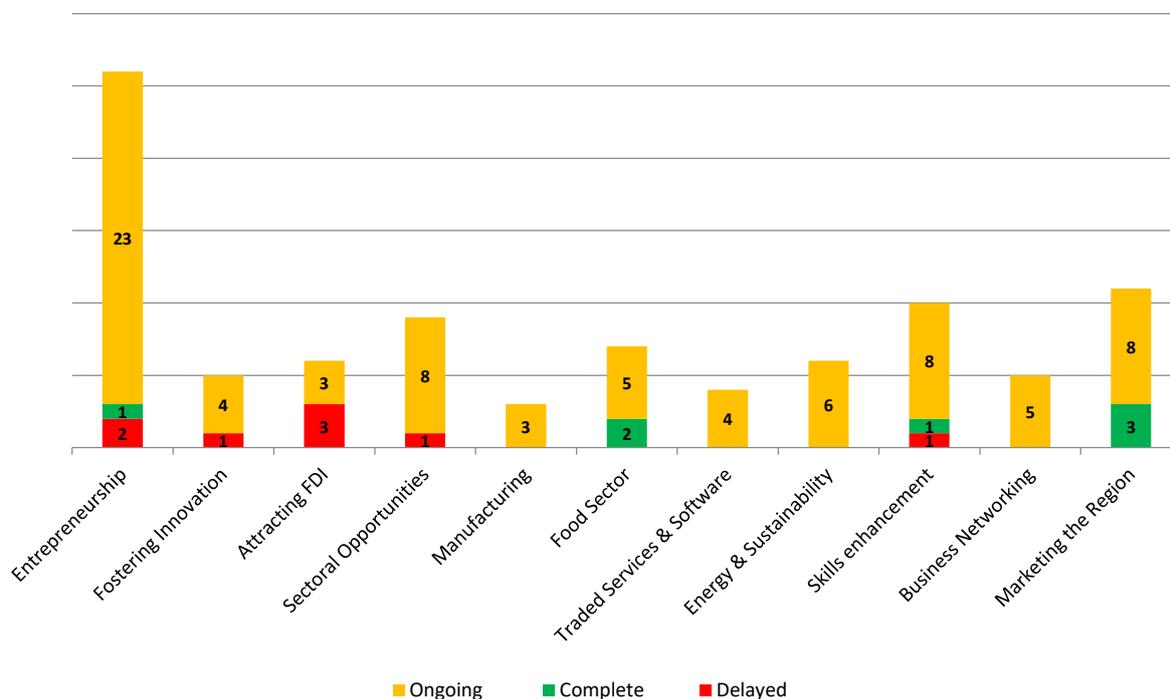


Marketing Strategies, videos , guides and other initiatives which aim to **attract and promote inward investment** as well as **encourage local enterprise** in the region were developed by Local Authorities. **(Action 111)**



The **newly built advanced manufacturing research** centre in Mullingar has made the town **more attractive** to foreign direct investment. **(Action 120)**

## SCORECARD: ACTIONS TO END 2016



### Actions due by December 2016

By the second half of 2016, 92 of the Midland Action Plan's 121 actions were due to be initiated or completed. Some 84 of these are on track to be delivered, or have been completed. 4 actions are delayed while another 4 are no longer being progressed or have been deemed unfeasible (see below). This represents an overall completion/implementation rate of 96.5%.

Two new actions, Actions 120 and 121 were added in the second half of 2016, a testament to the dynamic nature of the Plan.

### Measures not delivered as planned by December 2016

The actions below have not yet been, or will not be, delivered as planned for the following reasons:

- **Action 5**, 'Enterprise Ireland will pilot an Entrepreneurial Partnering Programme with 5 entrepreneurs'. This action is delayed due to its level of complexity; EI are looking into the matter in order to progress this action at a later date.
- **Action 35**: 'Teagasc Option programmes to support farm family diversification in the Midland Region'. This action has been deferred from H2 2016 to H1 2017 until a new Leader Programme is fully operational.
- **Action 40**: 'Enterprise Ireland will facilitate a Regional Innovation Forum to encourage peer to peer interactions and SME-HEI linkages to promote and showcase innovation'. This action is dependent on funding and is currently being delayed.

- **Actions 50, 51 and 52** in relation to ConnectIreland. These actions are no longer being progressed as the contract between IDA and Connect Ireland has concluded.
- **Action 58:** ‘Enterprise Ireland will establish a consortium to develop a pilot digital heritage workshop initiative to connect actors from the heritage and ICT sectors to explore start-up opportunities in the area of the “experience economy”’. This action is being delayed while EI try to identify sources of funding for this project which is likely to take place in 2017.
- **Action 101:** ‘The Midlands Local Authorities will increase the number of 22-month work placements under the Gateway scheme from 159 to 245, to assist participants gain or update experience of the workplace, to learn new skills and return to the routine of work’. This action is no longer being progressed as the Gateway Scheme is under review at national level.

## Noteworthy Developments

### ***STERIS***

In October, STERIS Applied Sterilization Technology (AST) based at the IDA Technology Park in Srah, Tullamore, County Offaly announced it is building a new electron beam operation, and expanding its microbiology lab. This expansion will enable Steris to expand their existing workforce, in addition to construction jobs.

### ***Mergon Global Innovation Centre, MiCentre***

The MiCentre in Castlepollard, Co Westmeath is the amalgamation of Mergon’s expertise in advanced manufacturing, robotics, automation and failsafe technologies, under one roof. The MiCentre will pilot and prove out production lines for the company’s rapidly growing business in Ireland, USA and Czech Republic. The MiCentre will be home to Mergon’s Lightweight Lab, dedicated to innovations that will optimise weight reduction of automotive components. In addition the MiCentre also houses Mergon’s expanding capabilities in additive manufacturing and 3D printing.

### ***Teleflex***

Teleflex is considering further expansion in Athlone, with the opening of new global operations headquarters in the IDA Business & Technology Park, Athlone. 250 people are currently employed by Teleflex.

### ***Biopharma, MedTech Engineering National Fair***

Regional Skills Forum (RSF) held a Life Science Career Opportunities – Biopharma, MedTech Engineering National Fair in Athlone Institute of Technology on September 28<sup>th</sup> 2016. The event hosted 50 Life Science companies from the Midlands, Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Galway, Limerick and Mayo. The event showcased employment opportunities, with 602 jobs on offer on the day, career advice for Transition Year students on skills within the sector and hosted CV and interview workshops throughout the day. Attendance was recorded at 1013 people.

### ***Internet of Things (IoT) Network***

The State's first Internet of Things (IoT) network was switched on in Athlone in October. The network which is owned by VT Networks operates through 2rn's national broadcast and telecommunications infrastructure, which gives it huge resilience, coverage and robustness. 2rn's involvement has made the fast rollout of a nationwide IoT network possible. This will allow VT to bring a SIGFOX network, valued at €10 million, to the entire country in a record-setting five months.

### ***Abbott Ireland***

Longford County Council has given Abbott Ireland approval to develop an extension to its existing plant at Lisnamuck. The development will include a new production facility of more than 1,800 square metres, while a warehouse of 1,000 square metres will also be built. It's understood it could lead to the creation of up to 200 new jobs.

### ***Regional Food Producers Directory***

The MidlandsIreland.ie Regional Food Producers Directory 2016 was launched by Minister Michael Creed at the National Ploughing Championships. The MidlandsIreland.ie Regional Food Producers Directory 2016 showcases the outputs of a CEDRA Agri-Food Tourism Initiative. This project enabled food producers in the Midland Region to develop a strong marketing portfolio for their products; with 100 regional producers participating in the project. The directory profiles producers across diverse categories which include Bakery; Beverages; Confectionery; Catering / Cookery Schools / Training; Dairy; Meats; Organic; Prepared Foods; Preserves and Produce.

### ***Taste of the Lakelands International Food Festival***

The Inaugural Taste of the Lakelands International Food Festival took place in Lanesboro, County Longford in October 2016, with 6,000 attendees. This was supported by Longford County Council, Longford Enterprise Board and MidlandsIreland.ie.

### ***Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ)***

Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) are functional areas that reflect the spatial patterns of local economic activities and development processes. The 2016 REDZ scheme provides funding for projects of differing scale and ambition that share the mutual objective of supporting economic development in rural areas, with a particular focus on maximising the synergies between towns and their hinterlands and encouraging collaboration between Local Authorities on larger projects.

The funding covers:

- Flagship projects – 1 in each Regional Assembly Region
- 9 Medium scale projects – 3 in each Regional Assembly region to a max grant of €200,000 per project.
- Small REDZ projects – to a maximum grant of €100,000

In November, 41 projects were approved nationwide in the amount of €5.3M, with over €1 million in funding awarded to projects in the Midland Region, including the only Flagship Regional project in the East & Midlands Region.

Projects funded across the region are detailed below:.

<b>Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) 2016: Approved Projects</b>			
Midland Region	County	Amount Approved	Project Details:
<b>Small Projects – up to €100,000</b>			
<b>Business of Food</b>	Laois	€67,200	Ten month programme of workshops, mentoring sessions and events designed to assist people in the Food Service Industry to improve their business.
<b>Fab lab Portarlinton</b>	Laois	€32,800	Communal Office for training hot-desking
<b>Banagher</b>	Offaly	€50,000	Enhance town around marina
<b>Kilcormac</b>	Offaly	€48,000	To promote & market awareness of Kilcormac as the gateway to Lough Boora Discovery
<b>Mullingar &amp; Athlone Blueways and Greenways</b>	Westmeath	€96,000	Blueways and Greenways unlocking potential Athlone Municipal District
<b>Royal Canal to Lough Owel Amenity Area</b>	Westmeath	€96,000	The Royal Canal Cycleway Extension Mullingar Municipal District
<b>Corlea Walking Route Longford</b>	Longford	€100,000	Walking Route
<b>Corn Hill Amenity Walk Project</b>	Longford	€50,000	Develop a walking loop around the top of Corn Hill on the exterior boundaries of the forest area
<b>Medium Projects – up to €200,000</b>			
<b>Granard Motte, Longford</b>	Longford	€200,000	Develop Interpretive Centre around Granard Motte
<b>Flagship Regional Project – up to €400,000</b>			
<b>Birr Castle</b>	Offaly	€316,870	Provision of Education Centre Birr, County Offaly

### **Clár**

CLÁR is a targeted investment programme that provides funding for small infrastructural projects in rural areas that have experienced significant depopulation. The programme provides funding under three measures:

- Safety package for Schools/Community Facilities
- Outdoor Play Facilities Enhancement Scheme/support for the development of Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA).

- Local Access Roads

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, Michael Ring TD, Minister of State for Regional Economic Development, announced the allocation of over €700,000 to projects the Midland Region under CLÁR 2016 (with Laois allocated €148,900; Longford allocated €237,560; Offaly allocated €123,398 and Westmeath allocated €214,280).

**Rural Recreation Scheme**

Minister Michael Ring announced allocations under the Rural Recreation Scheme in September with approx.€850,000 allocated to the Midland Region for the provision of recreational infrastructure (c. €352,000 – Laois; €30,000 – Longford, €292,000- Westmeath; €173,000 Offaly).

Local Authority Projects				
Organisation	County	Area	Brief outline of Proposal	Amount
Offaly CoCo	Offaly	Durrow	Develop Spur to allow access to Durrow High Cross	€172,959
Laois CoCo	Laois	Mountmellick	Promote four cycle trails in Slieve Bloom	€19,000
Laois CoCo	Laois	Portarlinton	Development, expansion and re-route of trails	€37,000
Laois CoCo	Laois	Mountmellick	Enhance parking facilities and upgrade access road	€200,000
Westmeath CoCo	Westmeath	Mullingar	Linking 2 cycle route and provide a car park	€56,000
Westmeath CoCo	Westmeath	Kilbeggan	Provision of an on road cycle link	€115,140
Westmeath CoCo	Westmeath	Castletown Geoghegan	Castletown Geoghegan Car Parking	€48,050
Local Development Company Projects				
Laois Partnership Company (LPC)	Laois	Abbeyleix	Construction of a bog bridge and maintenance	€20,762
LPC	Laois	Cushina	Development of 3 Looped Walks	€64,500
LPC	Laois	Durrow	Feasibility Study, Mapboards and People Counters	€10,516
Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)				
IFI	Westmeath	Athlone	Maintenance of Angling Facilities - The Meadows	€73,000
IFI	Longford	Ballinalee.	construct a boat slip, jetty and fencing	€29,100

### ***Town & Village Renewal***

Over €1.4m in funding has been announced for Midland projects to help “breathe life” back into rural towns and villages under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. 26 projects in Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath are benefiting from the fund this year, with each county allocated €360,000 for community projects.

Seven projects in Laois are receiving funding: Mountmellick, Ballinakill, Ballyroan, Shanahoe, Donaghmore, Mountrath and Portarlinton. Portarlinton is the biggest beneficiary, receiving €100,000.

Eight projects in Longford are receiving funding: Abbeyshrule, Aughnaclyffe, Drumlish, Edgeworthstown, Granard, Lanesborough, Longford and Newtownforbes; with Longford Town as the biggest beneficiary, receiving €88,400.

Clara and Edenderry are each receiving €100,000 in Offaly, with a further €90,000 going to both Kinnitty and Shannonbridge.

Seven projects are being funded in Westmeath in Moate, Castlepollard, Kinnegad, Ballymore, Clonmellon, Streamstown and Kilbeggan, the later receiving €100,000 for Town Park, Cycleway and Memorial Recording projects.

### ***Best Library Service - Excellence in Local Government Awards***

Offaly County Council was awarded Best Library Service at the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards 2016 in November for ‘My Open Library’ Initiative.

### ***Entente Florale Competition 2016***

Tullamore was awarded a Gold Award in the Entente Florale, one of only three towns to receive a Gold award. The Entente Florale is a competition that operates to promote a greener and more pleasant environment in European towns and villages through landscape development and horticulture. The International Jury – coming from the 8 member countries of Entente Florale bases the Award on a scoring system that examined Tullamore on the following considerations:

- Quality of landscape and vegetation: seasonal and permanent planting of flowers, trees, shrubs; respect for landscape and landscape policies, promotion of biodiversity and ecologically friendly maintenance and management.
- Quality of natural and built environments including waste management, water management, heritage, quality of streets and buildings and cleanliness.
- Participation and cooperation by local bodies and organisations, contribution and role of local statutory authorities.
- Education and schools- ecology and green dimension, and other educational endeavours.
- Attractiveness and presentation- tourism and leisure policy, information and communication to locals and to the public at large- preparation and presentation of the town for the actual assessment visit.

### ***Progress on Areas for Further Job Creation***

#### ***Center Parcs***

The recent announcement that Center Parcs were granted planning permission for a €230m holiday village in Ballymahon, Longford is a welcome boost for the entire region. The project is expected to create 1,000 permanent jobs for a holiday village park in Longford. In addition, 750 people are expected to be employed during the construction phase, which will see more than 400 holiday lodges being built in a forest near Ballymahon. On November 9<sup>th</sup>, Center Parcs announced that it has awarded the first construction contract for its holiday village to a Mullingar firm, Bennett Construction Limited, who will build a four kilometre public footpath and security fence around the perimeter of the 395 acre site

#### ***Trail Development***

The development and roll out of the National Cycle Network, including the phase from Athlone and Mullingar, which will link Dublin and Galway affords many opportunities to link with and develop complementary strategic corridors and routes to the South and North of the region. The benefits that trails can bring to the area in which they are situated is evidenced by the success of the Great Western Greenway and similar projects around the country. These benefits are not just confined to jobs created and sustained through the construction of the trails, but extend to the spend on food, drink and accommodation by those using the trails. These benefits are in addition to the physical and mental health benefits that cycling and walking bring, which are well documented.

In July, the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport granted funding to Longford and Westmeath County Councils for projects which build on and enhance the great success of the Old Rail Trail between Athlone and Mullingar providing the country with a long distance, multi-day, off-road cycling. The two projects will be completed by the year end and will connect Abbeyshrule to Longford Bridge, Ballymahon - a 15.2km extension from Mullingar to Abbeyshrule (€513,000) and in Westmeath a 2.2km extension from Garycastle to Whitegates to the Mullingar to Athlone Greenway (€496,187).

## Driving Entrepreneurship & Growing Business

### Increasing the Number of Start Ups

#### Action 1

Enterprise Ireland will increase enterprise formation in the Midlands through initiatives such as Enterprise Start workshops, the New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme, Competitive Feasibility Fund and Competitive Start Fund.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

#### Narrative

New Frontiers is Enterprise Ireland's national entrepreneur development programme for innovative, early-stage start-ups. It is a three-phased programme, based in 14 campus incubation centres across the country. In the Midlands Region, New Frontiers is delivered by the Athlone Institute of Technology, in partnership with Maynooth University. EI has agreed a 5 year programme for New Frontiers with AIT/MU starting H2 2016. Funding for increasing the size of the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre incubator on AIT campus has also been agreed.

Regional enterprise development, start-up formation, is supported by a range of players at a regional level, such as the Local Enterprise Offices, the Local Authorities, the Higher Education Sector and Enterprise Ireland. To contribute to supporting start-up creation nationally, Enterprise Ireland provides a range of supports which are available regionally.

#### **Enterprise Start Workshops:**

These workshops target people who have an idea for an innovative and ambitious start-up business that has the potential for exporting and growth in International Markets. The objective of the workshops is to explore key business areas of focus, such as customer, market and funding needs.

**New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme:** Nationally, each year, New Frontiers funds approximately 150 companies. In 2016 - 62 people participated in Phase 1 (6 weeks part-time); 14 projects progressed to Phase 2 (6 months full time). In 2016 Enterprise Ireland's Board approved the funding of a revised New Frontiers programme for the period 2016-2020, with this approval in place, AIT has been issued with a funding contract to deliver the programme in the Midland Region.

**Competitive Feasibility Fund:** See Action 7 below for further detail.

**Competitive Start Fund:** The purpose of the Competitive Start Fund is to accelerate the growth of start-up companies that have the capability to succeed in global markets through the provision of €50,000 seed capital per company against a €5k matched funding. In 2016 Enterprise Ireland provided Competitive Start Funding to 4 companies from the Midlands new frontiers programme.

A Competitive Feasibility Fund (CFF) programme for Midlands /Mideast was completed in Q1 2016 and a CFF for Agritech was opened in H2 2016. A Regional Competitive Start Fund (CSF) (all Ireland) was also held; a pitch day for shortlisted candidates was held in H1 in Athlone.

As part of Enterprise Irelands involvement in the national ploughing championships held in Tullamore in September 2016, EI managed the Innovation Arena competition. This year, 195 applicants applied to exhibit as finalists in the Innovation Arena, supported by Enterprise Ireland, the Irish Farmers Journal and National Ploughing Association (NPA). 68 finalists were selected from that cohort to exhibit in the innovation arena at the national ploughing in September. All finalists were invited to participate in a parallel Pitch Competition. 30 opted to enter and EI supported their preparation through a series of business planning workshops (4 x EnterpriseSTART workshops), and the EI Investor Panel, and finally shortlisted to a Final 8 which participated in a pitching workshop with Gavin Duffy & Orlaith Carmody.

A competitive feasibility programme focussed on the agri sector was held in Sept/October 2016. In total 15 applications were received and 3 were funded.

In H2 2016 14 projects were selected to participate in phase 2 of new frontiers of the AIT programme. Each project is supported with a €15,000 stipend over 6 months.

#### Action 4

Enterprise Ireland will work with the LEOs to develop new ways of delivering capacity improvement.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

Enterprise Ireland is engaging with LEOs to effect transfers of clients that are in the EI portfolio but for whom it would be more relevant to be clients of the LEO. As part of the transfer process, 11 companies were transferred to LEOs in the Midlands in 2016. Enterprise Ireland will also work closely with the LEOs and the New Frontiers programme to assist start-ups that do not make it through to the Phase 2 part of New Frontiers.

#### Action 5

Working with enterprise partners in the region, Enterprise Ireland will pilot an Entrepreneurial Partnering Programme with 5 entrepreneurs. This mentoring programme will seek to match new entrepreneurs with leading enterprises.

**Update:** Delayed

#### **Narrative:**

This action has been delayed as it is a much more complicated concept than originally envisaged around the matching process. Experience from other schemes including the

Mentor programme, and a similar scheme for micro business in another region have identified a number of key issues. This process will require further work in establishing ground rules and getting both large and micro company CEO's to opt in.

#### Action 6

Enterprise Ireland will

- promote the €5 million Community Enterprise Initiative Scheme launched in May 2015 in the Midlands Region;
- assess applications; and
- approve grant funding as appropriate for new projects for job creation in the Region.

**Update: Ongoing**

#### Narrative:

Incubation space for start-ups and entrepreneurs in the Midland region is a key piece of the start-up ecosystem. In mid-2015 Enterprise Ireland launched the Community Enterprise Initiative. The scheme focussed on three elements - Collaboration Initiatives; Renovation Projects; and support for Business Development Managers via a national competitive call process, this initiative aims to provide supports for Community Enterprise Centres and other enterprise centres, such as those in the Midlands, to collaborate to utilise and promote their infrastructure to assist in driving start-ups and entrepreneurship in the region. The Minister for DJEI announced the results of the first call in June 2016. Three Applicants were successful in the Midlands.

- The Junction Business Innovation Centre in Tullamore;
- Ferbane Business Park for the development of employment generation opportunities in Ferbane and West Offaly in the Food Sector;
- Smart incubation facilities at Westmeath Enterprise Hub for new tech sectors.

A further regional fund of up to €60m was launched in May 2017 to drive enterprise development and job creation throughout Ireland.

#### Action 9

Enterprise Ireland will support the participation of 12 entrepreneurs in the Midlands on Phase 2 of the New Frontiers Entrepreneurial Development Programme.

Enterprise Ireland will implement the findings from the review of the Programme in order to maximise the positive impacts of the programme on entrepreneurship in the region, working closely with AIT (in partnership with NUIM) in the provision of the Programme.

**Update: Ongoing**

#### Narrative:

Approximately 35 participants were involved in New Frontiers Phase 1 and Phase 2 commenced in September 2016 with 14 participants. Discussions are ongoing between EI and AIT/Maynooth University on the details of how best to assist these entrepreneurs. The

overall aim of New Frontiers is to help would-be high potential start-ups develop an investable business plan and EI is constantly reviewing the approach on how best to achieve that through using new tools such as business model canvas, customer development in workshop formats and through 1-to-1 clinics.

#### **Action 10**

Enterprise Ireland will run a "Start-up Open Days & Clinics" in the Midlands for newly registered Start-ups in Manufacturing and Internationally Traded Services from the region, with a view to prospecting for future start-ups and communicating and raising awareness of supports available to potential entrepreneurs in the Midlands.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

#### **Narrative:**

Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans. In addition to financial support to companies in the Midlands, support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. Furthermore, Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

#### **Action 12**

Enterprise Ireland, working with other enterprise partners in the region, will increase its start-ups from the enterprise infrastructure in the region (e.g. incubators).

**Update:** **Ongoing**

#### **Narrative:**

Enterprise Ireland's primary focus is to increase the number of High Potential Start-Ups (HPSU) and candidates to the Competitive Feasibility Fund (CSF) in the region through working with Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT). Discussions with AIT and EI on focussing the New Frontiers programme more on the HPSU agenda has been planned, in advance of the start of the new programme. In addition, funding has been provided in doubling the size of incubation space in AIT.

#### **Action 13**

Enterprise Ireland will run four "Innovating Start-ups" events in the Midlands to develop the pipeline of innovative start-ups in the region.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

El are continuing the pilot for lean start-up that commenced in 2015. In H2 2016 El ran a region wide lean start-up programme (utilising the funding of 5 Enterprise Start Programmes ). The programme took place over 5 full days and was an in-depth programme for the participants. Participants were drawn from young entrepreneurs (identified through other programmes) and unsuccessful Phase 1 participants of New Frontiers, with the aim of selecting 8-10 of the most appropriate prospects for this programme. In terms of an innovating start-up type event i.e. Enterprise Start, El plan to run a combined event for Longford, Westmeath and one for Laois/Offaly in H1 2017 depending on demand.

**Action 14**

Enterprise Ireland will run two facilitated Lean Start-up workshop for at least 16 start-ups in the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Lean is a particular approach to entrepreneurial development. Participants are taken through the business model canvas as a key tool to help them develop their business plan. Two programmes for 10 people each commenced in H2 2016.

This programme will be re-evaluated early 2017.

**Action 15**

The four Local Development Companies in the region will provide an area-based response to long-term unemployment and deliver a range of programmes to support entrepreneurship and social enterprise. The Local Development Companies will also work with the LEOs, with a view to progressing clients to the LEO services.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

The four midland companies are currently delivering the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) for people going on the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance. In Laois 53 clients have been supported in 2016 to start their own business. Laois Partnership Company has supported 3 social enterprises in 2016

**Support Existing Companies to Grow & Improve Performance**

**Action 17**

Promote existing schemes to provide access to finance to start-ups and existing companies.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

A range of channels are used on a continuous basis to make entrepreneurs and existing companies aware of the range of supports available to provide access to finance. These include 1-1 consultations with executives of Enterprise Ireland (regionally & nationally based), briefing seminars, provision of relevant literature, attendance at exhibitions & conferences to promote the supports to new audiences, promotion through social media (regionally & nationally) and via eZines.

**Action 18**

Enterprise Ireland will work with client companies from the region, including high potential start-ups, to increase participation on programmes and accelerate their capacity to scale up and succeed in international markets.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

A key focus of Enterprise Ireland is to support the establishment of high potential start-up companies and to scale up indigenous industry to compete in international markets. In 2015 financial support was provided to 5 high potential start-up companies in the Midland Region. In addition investments of €50,000 each were provided to 2 early stage potential high growth projects via the Competitive Start Fund programme in the region. Selected companies from the Region participated on a range of programmes including the Access Silicon Valley Programme, the IPO Ready Programme, the Accelerate Programme, on Trade Missions overseas, the Global Sourcing Programme and the Public Procurement programme.

**Action 19**

InterTradeIreland will host 6 workshops under its “Funding for Growth” initiative in the region to promote all traditional and non traditional sources of finance to local businesses.

ITI will also deliver equity awareness events including equity advisory clinics where companies can meet with an equity expert, business planning workshops and venture capital case studies.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

The Seedcorn Investor Readiness Competition offers a cash prize of €280,000 and helps companies get investor ready and introduces them to valuable networks. An Investment Pitch Masterclass took place in H2 in Athlone (12/10), County Westmeath to assist companies get investor ready and introduce them to valuable networks..

### Action 20

InterTradelreland will promote its Acumen and Elevate programmes in the region. ITI will target 5 Acumen approvals in the Midlands, providing financial assistance to local companies to investigate and pursue export opportunities in Northern Ireland.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

InterTradelreland continued to engage with the Local Enterprise Offices in the region to promote the Acumen and Elevate Programmes in H2 2016.

Both programmes continued to be promoted in the region through the Acumen Leinster Regional Consultant and InterTradelreland events. During the period 3 Midlands based Acumen applicants were approved to the programme.

### Action 21

Through its Trade Accelerator Voucher scheme InterTradelreland will help companies to identify and break down barriers to trade leading to new export opportunities in Northern Ireland. The Trade Accelerator Voucher can help businesses get advice from participating expert providers in Northern Ireland and Ireland, and can be redeemed against the cost of practical advice and expertise on specific issues.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

InterTradelreland continues to engage with the Local Enterprise Offices in the region to promote the scheme to help companies get advice, to help them trade across the island and develop a better understanding of the cross-border market opportunities and solutions.

### Action 22

The Midland LEOs will run the new ACCELERATE step-up programme, which is aimed at helping local small businesses to develop their management capabilities, improve their sustainability and accelerate their growth prospects.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

LEO Offaly & LEO Westmeath delivered a joint Management Development Programme which facilitated networking and information sharing between the 20 participating enterprises from the Midland Region. Longford LEO commenced a programme in H2 2016. LEO Laois will commence in H1 2017.

### Action 23

InterTradeIreland will deliver 3 Public Tendering workshops for SMEs over the period 2015-2016 and provide relevant training for local small businesses.

InterTradeIreland will also promote public tendering opportunities to SMEs in the region, including cross border public sector opportunities, consortia building for larger contracts and below threshold contracts.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

InterTradeIreland continues to engage with the Local Enterprise Offices in the Midland region, through initiatives including the “Go2Tenders” workshops, to support them in preparing for public procurement. The next workshop will be held in Athlone in H1 2017.

### Action 24

The LEOs will deliver procurement seminars and workshops to assist business people tendering for larger contracts.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

LEO Offaly delivered a Mentoring Clinic on Procurement in November 2016. LEO Westmeath ran a Procurement Workshop in Athlone with Intertrade Ireland. Longford LEO continues to provide mentoring on an ongoing basis for procurement. Laois LEO procurement seminar is planned also.

## Ensuring the Availability of Work Space for Entrepreneurs

### Action 25

The Local Authorities in the Midland region will manage enterprise space and lands in the main towns to facilitate and encourage economic development, whether by start-up companies, expansion of existing businesses or inward investment.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Laois: Advanced the sale of 4 sites within the towns Portlaoise (1 site) and Portarlington (3 sites) within the Industrial Estates during 2016.

Longford County Council is the majority shareholder in the Community Enterprise Centre Space in Longford Town, with 12,000 sq.ft of industrial space and 6,000 sq.ft of office space.

Offaly County Council owns approx. 63.5 acres in Raheen, Clara and Clonminch, Ballard which are leased on an annual basis. In addition, Offaly County Council owns 27.1 acres of industrial lands at Syngfield, Birr and an industrial site at Leamonaghan. Ongoing promotional activity - online and via 2 page spread in 'In Business Magazine'

Westmeath County Council has units in the following locations: Blyry Industrial Estate (Athlone), Castlepollard, Lynn Industrial Estate (Mullingar) and Newbrook Industrial Estate (Mullingar). The Local Authority also manages a portfolio of industrial lands (c. 8.4 hectares) at various locations throughout the county. Westmeath County Council are in the process of disposing their commercial space and plan to reinvest in enterprise space with the proceeds.

#### **Action 26**

The Local Authorities will assist businesses in the identification of suitable premises/sites through the development of a Property Database of Industrial and Commercial properties available for sale or let.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

The Offaly LEO and Westmeath LEO developed and manage the county commercial property database with updates provided on a quarterly and monthly basis respectively. Longford and Laois County Councils have deferred development of the property database to H1 2017.

### **Other Initiatives to Promote & Encourage Entrepreneurship**

#### **Action 29**

Provide support and assistance to pop up shops and markets in the principal towns of the region, enabling artists and craft makers to showcase and sell products.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

Laois: Laois Business Support Unit is working with Portlaoise Market Traders with a view to the development of a number of market events in 2017.

Longford: Longford Christmas Market in Longford Town was coordinated by Longford Chamber of Commerce supported by Longford County Council. This Christmas market enables local food and craft producers to market their products.

Offaly County Council and Offaly LEO provided support to craft/food makers to participate in Tullamore Show and the National Ploughing Championships.

Westmeath County Council supported the Christmas Festival in Mullingar, which is organised by Mullingar Chamber of Commerce. In addition, Westmeath County Council has actively supported markets throughout the county as part of local festival programme. Westmeath LEO continue to support Christmas Market in Belvedere House Gardens & Park.

**Action 30**

Pilot “Out-of-Hours” access for people to utilise the library services outside of normal opening hours.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

Open Libraries are libraries that allow self service access to library members outside of normal opening hours. Offaly County Council continue to operate this initiative in Banagher and Tullamore, which enables members to access the libraries on a self-service basis from 8am - 10pm, 7 days a week. Offaly Library Service was awarded Best Library Service in The Excellence in Local Government Awards 2016, hosted by Chambers Ireland.

Longford County Council to pilot Out-of-Hours access to libraries early in 2017, beginning with Ballymahon Library.

**Action 31**

Longford and Offaly Library services will pilot the provision of business supports and job seeking supports through a collaboration between the Library and the Local Enterprise Office.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

Business space has been created in the libraries which are supported by the Offaly and Longford LEOs. LEO Offaly facilitate outreach clinics in both Birr and Banagher libraries Longford Library Service has been providing a dedicated business supports section with Longford LEO since July 2016. A dedicated business space in Longford Library was completed in September 2016.

**Action 32**

Pilot a Part-time Entrepreneurship initiative, which would involve support for those who wish to develop an enterprise on a part-time basis, outside their normal working hours.

**Update:** **Complete**

**Narrative:**

LEO Offaly completed a Pilot Programme with 12 participants attending and the feedback received was very positive. This course is ideal for people looking at ways of making some extra money or converting their hobby into a business. The course gave practical tips on

how to set up and run a part-time business. The course included information on how to successfully run a business in the evening; financial/legal obligations; what to tell the taxman; how to tell your boss and how to manage your time and resources.

### Action 33

The ETBs will deliver inputs on entrepreneurship to all participants on relevant Further Education and Training programmes and promote self-employment within the Adult Guidance Service.

**Update: Ongoing**

#### Narrative:

The Network For Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) training programme is running in four of our Further Education and Training Centres in LOETB, namely Tullamore, Banagher, Edenderry & Clara. The programme is primarily running in LOETB's youthreach service in order to target disadvantaged youth groups in County Offaly. For 2016/2017 provision, relevant entrepreneurial business skills programmes have been embedded in the curriculum, which engage the learners in the functional aspects of business planning and management. The Entrepreneurial Skills component at QQI Level 5 (5N1951) is delivered as part of the curriculum on business programmes in some of LOETB's PLC Colleges.

Longford, Westmeath ETB (LWETB) offered a night course in 'Start your own Business. The key areas focused on are the development of a business plan, identification of local agencies to provide help and assistance, legal and financial responsibilities. The course includes a number of guest speakers specialising in areas of business providing learners with practical and current knowledge. As part of existing VTOS programmes learners are encouraged to develop entrepreneurial skills in team working and business related learning outcomes.

### Action 35

Under the Teagasc Option programmes support farm family diversification in the Midland Region, including support measures to diversify into artisan foods, rural tourism, alternative land use and other entrepreneurial activities.

**Update: Delayed**

#### Narrative:

The Teagasc Options for Farm Families Programme is designed to:

- Provide new thinking
- Generate new ideas
- Generate additional income on and off farm

Teagasc Options Courses (20 hours duration) are run over 5 consecutive weeks (usually in 4 hourly sessions) in rotation across the region on an annual basis. The programme consists of

a series of workshops covering a wide range of topics such as: Equine, Bioenergy, Forestry, Organics etc. Teagasc specialists are in attendance to answer questions. Visits to farms with successfully diversified farm enterprises are a vital aspect of the programme. Participants will also have the opportunity to network with local development and training agencies.

Options Course Tullamore has been deferred from H2 2016 to H1 2017 until new Leader Programme is fully operational.

## Fostering Innovation

### Action 38

IDA Ireland will continue to roll out its Research, Development & Innovation Program to incentivise client companies to develop new processes and products.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

IDA Ireland continues to support and provide its Research, Development & Innovation Program to incentivise client companies to develop new processes and products.

### Action 39

InterTrade Ireland will provide access to its Challenge programme, giving SMEs the opportunity to learn how to develop a culture of innovation through the use of a sustainable and repeatable innovation process.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Challenge is aimed at MDs and CEOs of SMEs, allowing business owners to transform their company's prospects in just nine months by learning and applying the most effective methods of generating, marketing and launching new products and services.

Challenge remains open to all eligible companies (SMEs ideally with between 10 and 250 employees; currently exporting or considering exporting; serious about growth through innovation; financially viable) in the Midland Region as promoted through engagement with the LEOs of Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath.

#### Action 40

Enterprise Ireland will facilitate a Regional Innovation Forum to encourage peer to peer interactions and SME-HEI linkages to promote and showcase innovation (people, resources, training and research).

HEIs involved in this event will include: Maynooth University (MU) working with Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT), Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC), Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

**Update:** **Delayed**

**Narrative:**

Implementation of this action is dependent on funding.

#### Action 41

AIT will increase awareness of – and access to – AIT’s R&D/knowledge resources among enterprise and industry in the region.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

AIT has undertaken the following measures to increase awareness of its R&D facilities and knowledge resources:

- New content has been, and continues to be, created for the Materials Research Institute (MRI), Applied Polymer Technologies (APT), Software Research Institute (SRI), Connected Media Application Design and Delivery (COMAND), Bioscience Research Institute (BRI) and Centre for Industrial Services and Design (CISD) internet portals. This content provides updates on facilities, expertise and case studies of Completed industrial interactions.
- A vibrant social media presence has been established and maintained utilising Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Content is regularly refreshed to drive traffic and engagement.
- APT and COMAND were represented in Enterprise Ireland’s Innovation Arena at the Ploughing Championship in September.
- An industry Innovation workshop was hosted by APT in October.
- APT participated in the Miniaturized Systems for Chemistry and Life Sciences (MicroTAS) Conference in October.
- AIT will participate in Maynooth University’s Connect eHealth event in November.
- Enterprise Ireland and IDA client visits are hosted by AIT on an ongoing basis.

The Midlands Regional Skills Forum Manager plays an important role in supporting the alignment of AIT skills provision and knowledge resources with the needs of the region. On 28-Sep-16, AIT hosted a Life Science Career Fair which showcased the collaboration of the Biopharma and MedTech sector with the Midlands Regional Skills Forum. The event which was opened by AIT President Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin brought together over 50 companies across the MedTech, Biopharma and Engineering sectors who are actively

recruiting for positions.

#### **Action 42**

AIT will increase awareness of MetricIreland to help more companies navigate and gain easier access to the MedTech-related research capabilities within the HE sector.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

#### **Narrative:**

Established in 2011 by 5 Irish HEIs (NUI Galway, University of Limerick, Galway-Mayo IT, IT Sligo and Athlone IT) MetricIreland is a Medical Technologies Research & Innovation Consortium. MetricIreland helps companies navigate and gain easier access to the MedTech-related research capabilities within the Higher Education sector. This consortium has the advantage of offering MedTech enterprises efficient and effective access to the HE sector via a single contact point

AIT is represented on the Working and Steering Groups of MetricIreland. The Materials Research Institute (MRI including the Centre for Industrial Services and Design (CISD)) promotes MetricIreland through its extensive client engagement within the MedTech sector.

### **Attracting and Embedding Foreign Direct Investment**

#### **Action 44**

IDA Ireland will target at least 25 additional investment projects in the Midland Region over the period 2015-2019.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

#### **Narrative:**

IDA Ireland continues to target at least 25 additional investment projects in the Midland region over the period 2015-2019.

In October, STERIS Applied Sterilization Technology (AST) based at the IDA Technology Park in Srah, Tullamore, County Offaly announced it is building a new electron beam operation, and expanding its microbiology lab.

#### **Action 46**

IDA will source clients for its Advance manufacturing facility in IDA Garrycastle Business & Technology Park, Athlone.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

IDA Ireland continues to source clients for our Advance Technology Building in Athlone.

**Action 49**

IDA will drive its Transformation programme with its established base of client companies, through increased client interaction.

**Update: Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

The Transformation Program supports the evolution of companies to help them embed in the region ensuring their longevity. This is often supported with a training grant to upskill staff and/or a LEAN program to increase efficiency.

IDA is continuing to engage with clients and drive its transformation programme.

**Action 50**

Develop a Regional Connect Ireland Plan that is integrated with the Local Authorities' enterprise development and job-creation activities. Formalise the name of a nominated officer from each county in the region for the roll-out of the Plan.

**Update: Not being progressed**

**Narrative:**

The contract between IDA and Connect Ireland has concluded.

**Action 51**

Announce and run the Connectivation competition, inviting Third Level students to share their ideas for the future development of the Succeed in Ireland initiative.

**Update: Not being progressed**

**Narrative:**

The contract between IDA and Connect Ireland has concluded.

**Action 52**

Liaise with AIT with a view to holding partnership events to create a network that will allow greater communication between the institution and its alumni.

**Update: Not being progressed**

**Narrative:**

The contract between IDA and Connect Ireland has concluded.

## Building Sectoral Opportunities

### Tourism

#### Action 53

Develop and market Ireland's Ancient East, which will help in scaling up the asset base and achieve international "stand-out" for the region based on its comparative advantage in built and cultural heritage.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Internationally, Ireland's Ancient East (IAE) continues to be promoted by Tourism Ireland across a range of platforms overseas including TV, print and online advertising; on Ireland.com and through social media channels; and at major international consumer and trade fairs.

A major integrated marketing campaign for the domestic audience was conducted by Failte Ireland during H2 2016. The objective of the campaign is to drive awareness of the new brand and to inspire holiday makers to take (incremental) short breaks and holidays in the region. The "Great Stories Stay with You Forever" campaign, valued at €2.1 million, includes TV, press, online and social media advertising, and will reach 3.1m Irish people.

Since the launch of IrelandsAncientEast.com in May 2016 there have been in excess of 232,000 visits to the website (almost 90% ahead of target for the first year).

Familiarisation trips for media and trade to experience Ireland's Ancient East are Ongoing. During 2016, some 206 buyers from around the world have been welcomed. In addition, 46 international publicity visits have been made to Ireland's Ancient East including Bloggers, TV and Press Journalists.

Grant-aided projects in the Midlands including Hill of Uisneach (grant investment €65,000), Athlone Castle (grant investment €76,524) and Laois Heritage Trails (grant investment €84,804) are now complete.

Signage: 66 County Boundary signs have been upgraded with Ireland's Ancient East branding across Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath. In addition, branded IAE orientation signs will be installed at 15 key attractions across the 4 counties before year end.

#### Action 54

Promote the Lakelands as part of Discover Ireland home holiday campaign.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

With the Lakelands tourism proposition under review, the Midlands counties are now being promoted under the signature Ireland's Ancient East (IAE) theme "Ireland's Mystical Waterway". As part of the domestic campaign, many key tourism experiences in the 4 counties were featured. Examples include:

- Laois: Rock of Dunamase, Donaghmore Workhouse, Heywood Gardens, Barrowline Cruises, Stradbally Steam Museum, Laois Heritage Trails
- Longford: Corlea Trackway, St. Mels, Granard Motte & Bailey, Viewmount House
- Offaly: Tullamore Dew, Lough Boora, Clonmacnoise, Birr Castle
- Westmeath: Hill of Uisneach, Athlone Castle, Belvedere House, Tullynally Castle, Dún na Sí

**Action 55**

As part of the Ireland's Ancient East and Lakelands and Inland Waterways tourism offerings, work with clusters of tourism businesses, mostly in the accommodation and food sector, to improve their ability to generate international sales and food experience for visitors.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

In 2016 Fáilte Ireland has delivered a range of business supports for the tourism trade in Ireland's Ancient East including storytelling workshops, revenue workshops, customer care, cross selling and practical skills training.

During 2016, key digital and sales related workshops held in the Midlands included 'Optimising Your Website for Mobile' and 'Business to Business Contracting at Trade Shows'. In the accommodation and food sector, the following were run in the Midlands: 'Increasing Food & Beverage Sales Through Service Experience', 'Enhancing Management and Customer Care' (in conjunction with the VFI).

Fáilte Ireland has also initiated a programme called 'Dwell on Excellence' across Ireland's Ancient East, with 4 Dwell programmes delivered in the Midlands in 2016 (total of 58 participants, who have committed to further train an additional 500 in their businesses/communities). There are three main elements to the workshop resulting with participants being able to explain Ireland's Ancient East to visitors, engage with visitors through local story telling thus enhancing customer care, support and plan itineraries and cross sell other attractions of interest in the area and so increase the dwell time of the visitor.

A storytelling workshop for Irelands Mystical Waterway took place on Nov 15th in Athlone.

**Action 56**

Develop Destination Athlone to make Athlone one of the top five centres for short breaks in Ireland, and bring a higher number of visitors to the region as a whole.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

The Destination Athlone marketing group has formed a company and registered with CRO in summer. A Board of Directors has been appointed. Marketing campaigns and promotions have continued in 2016.

The Destination Athlone Team comprising Westmeath County Council, Failte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Chamber, TT, AIT and industry has met 3 times in 2016 and hosted a workshop on Destination Development. The workshop was attended by approximately 40 people including IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Roscommon CC, Westmeath CC, Chambers and Industries.

**Action 57**

Support a suite of festivals that complement Ireland’s Ancient East and Lakelands and Inland Waterways offerings.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

The Regional Festival and Events Programme for 2017 opened for applications in Q4 2016. Festivals in the Midlands that featured in Ireland's Ancient East (IAE) 2016 marketing campaign include: Lakelands International Food Festival, Johnny Keenan Banjo Festival, and Irish Game & Country Fair. Offaly Tourism Limited has developed a Marketing Strategy which includes regular engagement with events and festivals to align with quarterly themes.

**Action 58**

Enterprise Ireland will establish a consortium to develop a pilot digital heritage workshop initiative to connect actors from the heritage and ICT sectors to explore start-up opportunities in the area of the “experience economy”.

This pilot will support companies to identify and develop new products or services, using digital technologies, to enhance the experience of tourists.

**Update:** **Delayed**

**Narrative:**

EI have clarified the methodology whereby this programme will be run. The approach is similar to the TechInnovation Programme run by NUI Galway in the Portershed Accelerator in Galway city. The TechInnovation team is currently running a programme with Agri - 3 start-up projects, and the Defence Forces have a further 3 start-ups projects. The programme is ten months long and first identifies the participants from a broad national call and selected participants are then put on this full time programme. Each participant will

cost €25,000 and currently EI are trying to identify sources of funding for a minimum of 3 participants in digital heritage, this is likely to be a 2017 project.

#### Action 59

The Local Authorities will maintain and manage local tourism attractions on an on-going basis.

**Update: Ongoing**

##### **Narrative:**

The Local Authorities assist in the promotion, development and management of local tourism attractions on an ongoing basis:

The Donaghmore Workhouse & Museum and the Heritage Centre in Timahoe in Laois are leased to Local Community Groups by the County Council.

Longford County Council supports the work of County Longford Tourism Committee to develop and promote tourism in the county through the provision of funding to the committee to employ a tourism officer. Longford Local Authority in negotiations with OPW on expanding the Councils involvement in the development of an enhanced Corlea Interpretative site.

Offaly Tourism Forum manages [www.VisitOffaly.ie](http://www.VisitOffaly.ie) website with associated social media platforms to create greater awareness of the tourism assets of the county. Offaly Tourism is currently reviewing visitor services at Clonmacnoise Monastic Site.

Westmeath County Council & Athlone Art Heritage Ltd. manage three significant attractions within the Midland Region, namely Belvedere House & Gardens, Athlone Castle and the Luan Gallery.

#### Action 61

Offaly and Laois Local Authorities will continue to work with Fáilte Ireland and Coillte to develop an off-road Mountain Bike Trail in the Slieve Bloom mountains on part of the Coillte landbank.

**Update: Ongoing**

##### **Narrative:**

The Planning Application for a 72.8km mountain bike trail in the Slieve Bloom Mountains was lodged with Laois and Offaly planning authorities in 2016. The project includes provision for bike hire, wash facilities, and parking (40.6km within County Laois and 32.2km in County Offaly, linked by an on road section along the R440 in the townland of Baunreagh, County Laois and Glenregan, County Offaly). Further information received in November 2016. A decision on the application is due in H1 2017.

### Action 63

Progress the development and promotion of Greenway and Blueways to capitalise on the centrality of the Midlands, linking the River Shannon, Royal Canal, Grand Canal, and River Barrow.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

The Local Authorities are actively involved with a range of partners in development of greenways and blueways throughout the Midland Region, to capitalise on the centrality of the Midland Region.

Laois - Barrow Blueway - Waterways Ireland are leading the project and intend to submit planning applications to the 3 planning authorities involved in H12017.

**Offaly** - Offaly County Councils 'Connecting People - Connecting Places', A Strategy for Walking and Cycling in Offaly, sets out a vision for County Offaly to connect to, embrace and build on the opportunities for cycling and walking in the Midland Region.

#### **Longford & Westmeath:**

In July, the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport granted funding to Longford and Westmeath County Councils for projects which build on and enhance the the Old Rail Trail between Athlone and Mullingar providing the country with a long distance, multi-day, off-road cycling. The two projects will be completed by the year end and will connect Abbeyshrule to Longford Bridge, Ballymahon - a 15.2km extension from Mullingar to Abbeyshrule (€513,000) and in Westmeath a 2.2km extension from Garycastle to Whitegates to the Mullingar to Athlone Greenway (€496,187).

## Manufacturing

### Action 64

Enterprise Ireland will target manufacturing companies in the Midlands region to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management &

Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. Enterprise Ireland has also been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

### Action 67

Progress the development of the Midlands Manufacturing Technologies Campus (MMTC) - which will focus on Advanced/Discrete/Additive Manufacturing technologies, Industrial/Product Design and 'Smart Factories.

**Update: Ongoing**

#### Narrative:

AIT is engaged in ongoing dialogue with regional and national partners/stakeholders. In H2 2016, AIT continued to progress the Midlands Manufacturing Technologies Campus R&D agenda in collaboration with research/HEI and industry partners.

MMTC Model/Objectives:

- The MMTC will focus on applied research directed at medium term industry needs as well as shorter term technology development and technical services for industrial clients. The MMTC will work jointly with industry partners to get technologies into the manufacturing floor and drive technologies to market.
- The MMTC will be coherent with an element of the planned national Advanced Manufacturing Centre (arising from Action 63 of the national Action Plan for Jobs 2014) – working in partnership with and guided/driven by the needs of industry.
- The MMTC will increase access to Advanced Manufacturing technologies facilitating the development of Advanced Manufacturing talent and workforce development.
- The MMTC will have a national outreach/access programme.
- The MMTC will focus on the needs of the manufacturing sector for technology and knowledge and a range of technology and knowledge-related services – supporting more vigorous growth of a spectrum of Irish-owned manufacturing companies, and locally led development with MNCs' Irish operations.
- The MMTC will provide “sand pit” trial and test facilities for trial/test and demonstration of new technologies by large and small companies and start-ups and will be a neutral sandpit for industry driven collaboration.
- The MMTC will provide the facility envisaged under Strategic Action 6.2 of Making it in Ireland: Manufacturing 2020:
  - 6.2 Assess the feasibility of establishing a facility that provides access to entrepreneurs and early stage start-ups to equipment and expertise to facilitate proto-type development of new products/solutions.
- Enterprise Ireland and IDA are key partners in the MMTC. Science Foundation Ireland will also be a key agency partner.

The MMTC will be industry-focused with a strong enterprise mission, will have significant activity/capacity in the applied research space, will offer contract services to industry and aims to secure significant income from companies. The MMTC's industry focus will ensure that its technology outputs are efficiently converted into commercial products, processes and services.

AIT has extensive experience and an outstanding track record in linking its applied research and innovation to the needs of indigenous and multi-national industry and start-ups - building competitive advantage in companies by developing and matching AIT's research and innovation strengths to business needs in order to address emerging opportunities and market developments.

### Action 68

Enterprise Ireland and AIT will host an Innovation workshop with a particular focus on Manufacturing firms (including Med-Tech) in the second half of 2015.

**Update: Ongoing**

#### **Narrative:**

AIT and Enterprise Ireland hosted an industry Innovation workshop at AIT on September 8<sup>th</sup> 2016. The Innovation workshop was hosted by AIT's Applied Polymer Technologies Gateway. APT is a member of the Technology Gateway network, funded by Enterprise Ireland and its core remit is to provide companies in the plastics space with R&D support and state of the art polymer processing facilities. The event was well attended with over 90 participants being briefed on emerging technologies and trends by a range of industrial and academic speakers. The event also showcased a range of suppliers and service providers including First Polymer Training, Precision Extrusion Technologies, Zwick and the NSAI. Participants from companies such as Boston Scientific, Trend, Athlone Extrusions, IPC, Oxymem and DeltaQ had the opportunity to attend talks on topics such as polymer compounding and standards for the medical device industry, research supports for Irish industry from Enterprise Ireland, and several case studies of R&D programmes being carried out by Irish industry in association with AIT.

Alejandro Espiago from Irish Manufacturing Research in Mullingar spoke about Additive Manufacturing. Dr Sean Lyons, Centre manager of the APT Gateway also outlined how AIT "can help drive material and process innovation with industrial collaborators, lead root cause analysis for troubleshooting when our clients encounter challenges and crucially, provide graduates with advanced degrees and hands on process and materials science experience". On the day the delegates had the opportunity to see industrial scale medical tube extrusion, twin screw compounding, injection moulding, fibre spinning, 3D printer filament production and fused deposition modelling (FDM) additive manufacturing first hand in the APT facilities.

## Food Sector

### Action 69

Enterprise Ireland will target, with its new company engagement model, food companies in the Midlands to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Supporting manufacturing and internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. Furthermore, Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

### Action 72

Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia will facilitate collaboration/co-opetition on new product development and promote synergistic opportunities between large and small food companies in the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

The Food Division of EI has been working with Bord Bia in progressing this Action for delivery in 2017.

### Action 73

Review the demand for food infrastructure, such as test food kitchens, to identify potential gaps based on defined industry needs, including that of micro food enterprises.

**Update:** Complete

**Narrative:**

Ferbane Group was successful in securing €125,000 from EI Community Fund towards the expansion of Food Campus.

Food Incubators Transforming Regions event took place in Athlone in November 2016. The

event explored the immense potential of food incubators to stimulate local food economies. AIT, Ferbane Food Campus participated in this event.

#### Action 74

The LEOs will target and increase in the number of participants on the Food Academy Programme.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

The Food Academy programme is a two month programme for those looking to develop and grow a small-scale food or drink production business. The Food Academy Programme is a collaboration between Bord Bia, Local Enterprise Offices and SuperValu (Musgraves).

The Midland LEOs currently promote the Food Academy programme through information evenings, advertisements in regional media, and digital media channels including ezines, twitter, facebook. When feasible the Food Academy programmes are based in shared kitchens facilities within the Midland Region, namely The Kitchens, Mountmellick, County Laois and Ferbane Food Campus, Ferbane, County Offaly.

Westmeath and Offaly LEOs completed a joint Food Academy Programme in H2 2016 with 12 participants, 7 from Offaly and 5 from Westmeath.

#### Action 75

The Midland Local Authorities will run a Food Event of scale to support artisan food producers of the region.

**Update:** Complete

#### Narrative:

The **MidlandsIreland.ie** Regional Food Producers Directory 2016 was launched by Minister Michael Creed at the National Ploughing Championships. The **MidlandsIreland.ie** Regional Food Producers Directory 2016, showcases the outputs of a CEDRA Agri Food Tourism Initiative. This project enabled food producers in the Midland Region to develop a strong marketing portfolio for their products; with 100 regional producers participating in the project. The directory profiles producers across diverse categories which include Bakery; Beverages; Confectionery; Catering / Cookery Schools / Training; Dairy; Meats; Organic; Prepared Foods; Preserves and Produce.

The Inaugural Taste of the Lakelands International Food Festival took place in Lanesboro, County Longford in October 2016, with 6,000 attendees This was supported by Longford County Council, Longford Enterprise Board and **MidlandsIreland.ie**.

### Action 76

Assist in the development of the agri food and agri tech sectors within the region in line with Harvest 2020 objectives and the Rural Development Programme.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

This action will be progressed through the LEADER programmes which are commencing business Q4 2016.

### Action 77

AIT will host an annual event which will showcase regional artisan foods.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

During 2016, AIT's engagement with regional artisan food producers evolved from a one-off event to very strong engagement on an ongoing basis to include curriculum and menu design and showcasing regional artisan foods in AIT's training restaurant on an ongoing basis.

During 2016, culinary students from the Department of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure also developed their own food products, showcased local produce in their weekly restaurant classes and visited the following food producers in the four Midlands counties:

- Cakes by Una in Ballymahon, Co Longford;
- Clanwood Organic Farm in Cloghan, Co Offaly;
- Culcow Ice Cream in Banagher, Co Offaly;
- Ireland's only cranberry bog outside Ferbane, Co Offaly (with Ciara Morris from Slieve Bloom Farmhouse Products);
- O'Donohues' Craft Bakery in Tullamore, Co Offaly;
- Tullamore D.E.W. in Tullamore, Co Offaly.

The above were among regional artisan foods showcased on menus at AIT over the course of the year.

In Sep-16, AIT launched a new BA in Culinary Entrepreneurship degree programme which, among other topics focuses on regional food production. Students from the programme will be showcasing their new food products at AIT on 5-Apr-17. Donal Bracken and Zara Dunne from Offaly, and Natalie O'Reilly from Cavan, who are calling their company 'BIY' (Bake it Yourself), will showcase their gluten-free "Nut and Seeds" bread. Ciarán Kiveney from Westmeath and Johnny Harvey from Galway, who are calling their company 'CJ Food', have developed a range of convenience onion rings for the hotel and restaurant trade that cleverly utilise the entire onion. Jennifer Smith from Meath and Helen Keane from Tipperary, who are calling their company 'VitaPopz', have created wholesome fruit and

vegetable ice-pops and power shots that have no added sugar, making them safe for diabetics and children.

## Internationally Traded Services and Software

### Action 78

Enterprise Ireland will continue to utilise supports within its remit to assist Internationally Traded Services and Software companies in the Midlands to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Supporting internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. Furthermore, Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

### Action 79

Enterprise Ireland will run an Internet Marketing Awareness Workshop targeted at Midland based businesses, including understanding of EI supports available.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

This is part of a series of workshops held around the country. Discussions are taking place regarding a Midlands specific workshop.

### Action 80

Enterprise Ireland will continue to work on an individual basis with the companies in the Mobile Telecommunications cluster to support employment growth and development of their export market plans.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Supporting internationally traded service companies in the Midland Region to grow is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. This is achieved by working with client companies on a one-to-one basis to deliver on their business plans.

Financial support was provided by Enterprise Ireland to support business growth plans of individual companies in the Midland Region. In addition to this financial support, extra support was provided through access to a range of programmes such as Management & Leadership development, Trade Missions, Selling Opportunity events, Mentoring, providing Market Intelligence and more. Furthermore, Enterprise Ireland has been active in the development of the market for risk money, enterprise space, and the innovation infrastructure. Some of the funding is provided to schemes nationally that deliver locally while some funding is provided locally.

**Action 82**

Enterprise Ireland will continue to utilise supports within its remit to assist relevant construction companies in the Midlands to scale, innovate and develop international markets.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

This action is very closely aligned with activities outlined in Action 78 above.

**Energy and Sustainability**

**Action 83**

Progress the development of a Regional Energy Hub in the Midland Region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Offaly County Council have appointed consultants to undertake the feasibility study. A Regional stakeholders workshop was held in August 2016. A Report is due in Q1 2017.

**Action 85**

Promote and assist the delivery costs savings through energy efficiency programmes and training for businesses and public sector organisations in the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

The SEAI supports for business and the public sector have been developed. SEAI is exploring the potential for further engagement with new models for delivery of the programme for business through the Local Authorities.

**Action 86**

Work to develop and promote Sustainable Energy Communities model in the region and identify willing early adopter communities to act as exemplars.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

SEAI recently appointed a Sustainable Energy Communities Mentor to the Midland Region and a regional information event was held in Longford in November.

**Action 87**

As part of the alignment of Further Education and Training provision with local and future skills needs in the region, ETBs will identify skills gaps and develop tailored training solutions to enable the region to maximise economic benefits from the emerging Green Economy.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Athlone Training Centre has built a purpose Training Unit for the delivery of the Plumbing Apprenticeship this includes all areas of renewable energy.

Laois Offaly ETB are exploring a Green/Sustainable Construction approach to course provision in partnership with local educational providers and the local construction industry. This will be carried out in the context of the recently published Building Control Amendment Regulations (BCAR) and Construction Industry Register Ireland (CIRI). Courses will be designed to ensure prospective learners are upskilled / reskilled with the aforementioned regulations in mind in order to meet the rising demand in the local sustainable construction industry.

**Action 88**

Develop Bioenergy Ireland to supply biomass for a range of customers, including power plants, CHP plants, etc.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Feasibility studies are being assessed at present which have indicated that project may need

to be divided into separate workstreams.

Consultation with relevant Departments/Government Ongoing.

#### Action 89

Research the growing of suitable biomass on Bord na Mona peatland for potential use in Anaerobic Digestion plants for energy generation.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

#### **Narrative:**

A number of different initiatives are being progressed to determine the feasibility of growing biomass on peatland, particularly reeds and rushes. These need to be assessed over different weather conditions/growing methods. The results of initial trials are being assessed to decide whether the trials are worth extending.

## Skills Enhancement and Labour Market Activation

### Improving Engagement between Employers and Skills Providers

#### Action 91

Following on the work of the Steering Group, establish a Skills Forum in the Midlands region which will connect education providers with employers and industry stakeholders on an on-going basis to collaborate in building the skills of the region.

**Update:** **Complete**

#### **Narrative:**

##### ***Enterprise Engagement***

##### Life Science Sector:

Following on from the recommendations in the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs report on the Biopharma sector the Regional Skills Forum (RSF) organised a Life Science Career Opportunities – Biopharma, MedTech Engineering National Fair in Athlone Institute of Technology. This event hosted 50 Life Science companies from the Midlands, Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Galway, Limerick and Mayo. The event showcased employment opportunities (602 jobs on offer on the day), career advice for Transition Year students on skills within the sector and hosted cv and interview workshops throughout the day. The attendees registered through Eventbrite and we had 1013 attendees on the day. Attendees came from all over Ireland and the feedback from the companies' present was on the high calibre of attendees. The RSM issued the companies with a skill needs survey which they completed and returned to the RSM. This feedback was very valuable as it gave an insight into their immediate skill needs and their future skill needs. It also showed the level of engagement the education and training providers have with this sector. The data collected showed

clearly that there is a need for linking the industry with course experts within the education and training sector to assist in ensuring delivery of course/modules aligns with industry skills needs. With this information the Regional Skills Manager (RSM) organised an Industry/Academia facilitated workshop in Athlone for 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2016 where the agenda was based on industry and academia needs. The purpose of the workshop was to:

- 1) link industry with Athlone IT Science department to offer placements to graduates
- 2) for industry to advise academia on what modules align with their needs and to
- 3) work together to design/alter modules to suit the future skill needs of industry.
- 4) Athlone IT to be a future talent source for the Biopharma sector as this is a growing sector in the Midlands.

Other examples where the RSF reacted to and meet immediate industry needs:

The RSM, Pharmachem Skillnets, DSP and BPCI Ibec are working together with industry in the Biopharma sector in providing a training course to meet immediate industry needs - Course commenced on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2016 in Athlone. This course will deliver two modules required by industry - Bio analytics and GxP modules. The course is two days a week for 8 weeks, the candidates then start a 3 month paid placement in one of the companies involved in the project. The RSM would have worked with these programmes before and to date; they are 100% successful in that the candidates get offered full time employment after their three-month contract and the companies get the candidates trained to suit their skill needs.

#### Construction Sector (Engineering)

*CIF are members on the RSF and on the subgroup for training.*

The Regional Skills Manager and the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) are working together in linking the construction sector to the education and training providers in the midlands to assist in ensuring delivery of course/modules aligns with industry skills needs. Having discussed and reviewed the courses available in this sector within the Midlands we started with the new (first time) Quantity Surveyor course in Athlone IT. The outcome from this was that CIF would get 12 companies to offer placement (9 months) in 2018 to the students but to also offer them summer jobs starting May 2017. This is a great initiative, the students will gain work experience and develop business acumen, the sector will gain students with experience. Going forward, the recruitment for next year's course will involve CIF linking Industry names to the course to increase awareness thus increasing the number of students up taking the course in Athlone IT. At a meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2016 the CIF and the RSM introduced the 12 industries to the Engineering department in Athlone IT.

#### **Information Analysis & Reporting**

- DJEI are currently working on a skill needs report for the food and beverages sector. The RSM organised a meeting with key stakeholders in the food and drinks sector and DJEI in Athlone to collate information for the skills needs report in this sector. Other RSM who are working on this sector also attended.
- The RSM set up a sub group of training providers from the RSF.

#### **Educational & Training Provider Collaboration**

- Terms of reference and objectives designed for the education and training sub group.
- Monthly meetings with the RSM and the Educational & Training Providers to discuss training course requirements from industry. Currently working on course planner for 2017.
- RSM is working on the skill requirements from Center Parcs in collaboration with the educational and training providers in the Midlands
- RSM is working with the educational and training providers in dealing with the 170 redundancies from Cameron in Longford. Redundancies started in January 2017.

### Action 93

The ETBs will work in collaboration with a number of new partners and local employers in 2015 to develop and deliver targeted responses to local skills and employment needs in areas such as Retail, Hospitality, Manufacturing, Marketing, Languages and IT.

These partners include Fasttrack to IT (FIT) in the ICT and Engineering sectors, and SOLAS (developing a Traineeship programme in Hospitality targeting 18-24 year olds under the Youth Guarantee). These approaches will be piloted in in 2015 with a view to further expanding provision in 2016.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

Longford Westmeath ETB (LWETB) has delivered programmes in conjunction with DSP called Guidance to Employment & Training (GET) which is aimed at under 25s with a low educational attainment. New initiatives from Fáilte Ireland nationwide have captured the imaginations of travellers and the industry. Locally, the midlands region is going through something of tourism regeneration. Increased recognition of the value of the region's cultural heritage, food, sport and retail attractions have created many local employment opportunities. This is set to continue in coming years with the planned arrival of Center Parcs to Ballymahon. This venture is hoped to cater for up to 2,500 guests and employ up to 1,000 people in permanent jobs. Athlone Training Centre is currently running the FIT IT programme which is similar to an Apprenticeship addressing local employer needs, currently 15 learners on phase 2. A tourism focused programme at QQI level 4 has started in Ballymahon, Co. Longford. A Tourism and Business programme at QQI level 5 was delivered in Athlone and completed in December 2016.

Laois Offaly ETB are currently running a Hospitality and Tourism programme in response to demand in the Laois/Offaly region. LOETB also have a number of retail skills programmes in both Laois and Offaly and have customised both courses to meet local employer needs, specifically in the retail/pharmacy sector. Consultations are also ongoing with the Pharmaceutical and Food Industries with a view to the provision of training in electrical/automation and other related areas. Welding courses in the region have also been tailored to include modules such as fabrication and oxy-acetyline in order to provide learner with more employable skills in the engineering sector. LOETB are exploring the option of adding a number of Language subjects to their PLC provision for 2017-2018. A

number of Further Education and Training Centres in LOETB are running modules in Catering and Culinary Skills under both the Youth Guarantee Scheme and the Youth Education Initiative.

#### Action 94

The ETBs will develop local course design processes to reflect direct employer involvement in ITN, curriculum development, pilot and evaluation to meet the needs of employers, learners, jobseekers and priority cohorts so that processes are available and are embedded into and adhere to the relevant Awarding Body quality system.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Due to the phenomenal growth of social media and a need for all business to have a social media presence, Training Services have developed a CITY & GUILDS Level 3 Diploma. This enables learners and employers to ensure they understand social media and digital marketing as a competitive business tool and how these tools and skills can be utilised proactively and constructively. Training Services administer the entire Standards Based Apprenticeship System for the Longford Westmeath ETB (LWETB). This involves working with industry, employers and apprentices prior to apprenticeship registration, on to final certification and every stage in between. Training Services in conjunction with Certified Public Accountants have developed a yearlong course incorporating a formal work experience element with host employers. LWETB has successfully delivered numerous Skills for Work programmes since the project's inception and has built significant capacity to deliver targeted programmes that meet the needs of individual learners, employers and the wider labour market.

Laois Offaly ETB are currently providing 4 programmes in Construction Skills for Employment for learners in the region, as a result of partnering with CIF, SISK, DSP and SOLAS. The courses were developed with the above partners in order to reflect both local and national employer/industry needs. The current programmes are focused on Formwork, it is planned to follow this with Steel-fixing and Curtain-walling.

### Delivering Courses to Address Identified Skills Needs

#### Action 95

**The Education & Training Boards (ETBs) will increase provision in the STEM subject areas.**

**Update:** Ongoing

#### Narrative:

Training Services, the training element of the LWETB, has developed strong links with Industry over the past years. The Midlands region is noted for its strong manufacturing

based companies and Athlone TC recently participated in the Midlands Life Science & Engineering Trade Expo. From this Training Services will link up with Solas with the national Engineering career Traineeship which will also support companies in the Medical Device Design with ATC newly developed online course.

In addition to the STEM related PLC courses in Tullamore Further Education and Training Centre being continued through 2016/2017, LOETB have introduced an Applied Science PLC course in Portlaoise College. This course has a particular focus on criminal law, criminology and forensics.

#### **Action 96**

The ETBs will deliver short term courses in security, retail, hospitality, and generic employment skills to target vacancies in the local economy.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

ETB have delivered Security courses in Longford, Mullingar and Athlone. In excess of 60 learners trained and certified. Short courses in Retailing were hosted in Athlone and one is due to finish in December with trained personnel for the Christmas demand.

Laois Offaly ETB have a number of retail skills programmes in both Laois and Offaly targeted at long term unemployment and at meeting local employer needs. An 'Introduction to Construction Skills' course was run, aimed at early school leavers many of whom progressed to the Construction Formwork programme. Welding courses in the region have also been tailored to include modules such as fabrication and oxy-acetyline in order to provide learner with more employable skills for the local economy.

#### **Action 97**

Promote the Graduate Business Growth Initiative through EI's regional office in the Midlands. The programme supports the placement of graduates with SME companies.

**Update:** Ongoing

#### **Narrative:**

Launched by Enterprise Ireland in 2015, The Graduate Business Growth initiative supports Enterprise Ireland SME client companies to hire up to two graduates per year. The Scheme has been promoted to Regional companies through one-to-one engagements with clients and through social media in 2016.

#### **Action 98**

Skillnets will continue to fund groups of companies with similar training needs, through training networks that deliver subsidised training to Irish businesses and their employees,

as well as free training to job-seekers.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

Skillnets has continued to fund the development of workforce skills in the Midlands Region. 44 Skillnet training networks have provided training to businesses in the Midlands Region in the first three quarters of 2016, including the four networks based in the region:

- First Polymer Skillnet
- Taste4Success Skillnet
- MBE Skillnet (Midlands, Border, East)
- Space Industry Skillnet

Training delivered in this region was across all sectors including retail, healthcare, hospitality, agribusiness, IT and manufacturing technology. In total, 1,403 employees and business owners from 373 businesses in the Midlands Region have participated in training with a Skillnets training network in the first three quarters of 2016. Over 85% of companies supported by Skillnets were SMEs or sole traders.

Training has been highly diverse ranging from Competency Based Interviews, Data Protection, Agile Excellence, and Medication Management, Cloud Computing for Architects, Mobile Journalism for Radio, and longer certified Diploma and Degree programmes in subject areas such as Injection Moulding, Early Childhood Education and Food Manufacturing Management. 70% of all training days delivered to businesses in the Midlands Region through Skillnets networks in the first three quarters of 2016 were accredited through NFQ or industry certification.

The Skillnets networks based in the Midlands Region have provided industry-led training with a work placement to over 300 jobseekers in the first three quarters of 2016. Examples include the Pork Butchery Skills programme delivered by Taste4Success Skillnet in Offaly and the Programmable Logic Controllers programme delivered by First Polymer Skillnet in Westmeath.

**Improving Participation in Work & Training**

**Action 100**

Engage with Department of Education, IoTs and Universities to determine the feasibility of establishing Third Level outreach facilities.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

Local Authorities and Midland LEOs met with Midland Regional Skills Manager to discuss meeting employer skill needs.

**Action 101**

The Midlands Local Authorities will increase the number of 22-month work placements under the Gateway scheme from 159 to 245, to assist participants gain or update experience of the workplace, to learn new skills and return to the routine of work.

**Update: No longer relevant**

**Narrative:**

The Gateway Scheme is under review at national level.

**Action 102**

IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland will continue to collaborate with the Dept. of Social Protection and SOLAS in promoting the recruitment of people from the Live Register amongst client companies.

**Update: Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

During 2016, working protocols were established between DSP and IDA and EI. These protocols prompt regular meetings between the parties to jointly inform of upcoming events, progress on initiatives and new programmes. IDA Ireland and EI continue to collaborate with the Dept. of Social Protection and SOLAS in promoting the recruitment of people from the Live Register amongst client companies.

## Building Business Networks

### Action 103

Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland will facilitate the establishment of an industry-led CEO Forum in the Midlands to connect Irish and foreign owned companies in the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Industry CEOs identified, during the stakeholder events associated with the development of this Plan, the value of CEOs from both multinational and indigenous companies meeting on a regular basis among themselves. This forum will ideally be only an industry CEO forum. Ideally, EI are looking for a number of CEOs who will take ownership of this forum. The agencies can provide support to enable this to get started. This ongoing item is linked through Enterprise Champion sub-groups. This action item will require some degree of funding and could form part of an application to the regional funds once the call for these regional funds has been launched. Discussions are continuing on the scope and nature of this call

### Action 104

Regular meetings of local public enterprise partners will be held at regional level to discuss innovative approaches to collaboration to harness the enterprise potential of the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

An active strategic brainstorming group has met a number of times to discuss collaboration with regards to operational plans. Engagement with all LEOs and Local Authorities on the Local and Community Economic Plan process has happened and will continue in the future. From these meetings a number of projects are currently in gestation. These include an initiative supporting part-time entrepreneurship, the iLOFAR radio telescope in Birr Castle and an initiative around food hubs. Discussions between local authorities and the agencies have been happening on a regular basis. In addition, the work of the Regional Skills Forum has included an active series of meetings between all bodies on the issue of skills development for industry.

### Action 106

As part of their Global Sourcing initiative, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland will work together to increase collaboration - including the sourcing of goods - between Multinational and indigenous companies. The agencies will ensure that their clients in the region, where appropriate, are engaged in this initiative.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Enterprise Ireland & IDA Ireland, in collaboration with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, ran a series of workshops in Athlone, Sligo on the 18th May 2016 and in Limerick on the 19th May, 2016. During the course of the two days the EI Global Sourcing Team had delivered 365 1:1 meetings between 180 Enterprise Ireland clients and 64 IDA clients. The mission was led by Minister Mitchell O'Connor DJEI.

IDA Ireland continues to work closely with Enterprise Ireland to increase collaboration - including the sourcing of goods - between Multinational and indigenous companies.

**Action 107**

Introduce relevant Enterprise Ireland clients to potential FDI investors to highlight possible collaborations for those investors if locating in Ireland.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

As outlined above, IDA Ireland is working closely with Enterprise Ireland to increase collaboration - including the sourcing of goods - between Multinational and indigenous companies.

The outputs are to grow the linkages between strong indigenous EI technology companies who can fulfil the supply chain needs of the IDA companies and help differentiate their product offering and improve their plant and R&D efficiencies within their corporate groups.

**Action 108**

The Midlands Gateway Chamber will celebrate and recognise the contribution of indigenous and multi national companies to the economy of the Midland Region through its annual Best in Business Awards.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

The Best in Business Awards will be hosted in Mullingar in 2017.

## Marketing the Region as an Attractive Place to Work and Live

### Marketing the Region

#### Action 110

Strengthen the marketing of **MidlandsIreland.ie**, and continue to support the **MidlandsIreland.ie** website to promote the region across the straplines of Tourism, Enterprise, Living and Learning, in the interests of regional economic development. An annual work plan will be implemented across these different straplines.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

The Planning Policy & Research Officer prepares and delivers an agreed annual work programme for the **MidlandsIreland.ie** brand across the straplines of the brand.

#### Action 111

While maintaining a whole-of-region approach to enterprise support and job creation, the Local Authorities will develop a suite of branding initiatives to attract and locate businesses to the Midlands. These include, for example:

- Guide to Doing Business in Laois.
- Invest in Mullingar.
- Westmeath Business Promotion Fund.
- Doing Business in Offaly Guide.
- Marketing Strategy for lands in Council ownership in Longford.
- Strategy to enhance tourism and other enterprise potential in Offaly.
- Destination Athlone

**Update:** **Complete**

**Narrative:**

Laois : Consultants have been appointed to develop a Marketing Strategy for Laois in order to attract inward investment into the County and encourage local enterprise; establish a strong and clear economic identity for Laois, identify and develop online and social media marketing solutions to promote the County's attractiveness and competitiveness to a local, regional, national and international business audience; and to make suggestions as to how, either collectively or individually, the stakeholders in the County can work to promote a positive image of Laois in a local, regional, national, and international context.

Longford LEO has commissioned a series of short videos aimed at promoting Longford as a dynamic location for business investment. Longford County Council participated in a North Midlands Showcase event in Dublin on Nov 3rd 2016 to introduce the establishment of a Diaspora Economic Forum for Longford.

Offaly County Council is producing 3 videos promoting Offaly as a place to live, work, and invest. Funding through Diaspora Strategy award. A Diaspora related marketing plan will be in place for 2017. Offaly also produced and promoted a video highlighting Offaly as a hub for energy and innovation.

**Westmeath** County Council have developed a series of eight videos to promote Westmeath. Westmeath County Council have entered into a Service Level Agreement with Mullingar Chamber of Commerce in respect of marketing Mullingar. Westmeath County Council have developed a Tourism Strategy for the County.

#### Action 112

Attract at least one additional major employer to the region in the short-term through a collaborative approach on the part of industry

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

The Midland Gateway Chamber continues to advocate and support the expansion of business in the Midland Region and progress will be reported on an ongoing basis.

#### Action 113

Work with Film Offaly to promote Offaly as a destination for film production, with benefits to local professional, people and businesses.

**Update:** **Complete**

**Narrative:**

FilmOffaly launched a new website and tv style advert in October 2016 to promote Film Offaly (REDZ funding).

#### Action 114

The Midlands Local Authorities will commence a regeneration programme to enhance the streetscape in the main towns and villages.

**Update:** **Ongoing**

**Narrative:**

**Town and Village Renewal Scheme**

Over €1.4m in funding has been announced for Midland projects under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. 26 projects in Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath are benefiting from the fund in 2016, all projects involved a level of physical enhancement works in or around town or village centres, with each county allocated €360,000 for community projects.

Seven projects in Laois are receiving funding in Mountmellick, Ballinakill, Ballyroan, Shanahoe, Donaghmore, Mountrath and Portarlinton. Portarlinton is the biggest beneficiary, receiving €100,000.

Eight projects in Longford are receiving funding, Abbeyshrule, Aughnacliffe, Drumlish, Edgeworthstown, Granard, Lanesborough, Longford and Newtownforbes; with Longford Town as the biggest beneficiary, receiving €88,400. In Longford MD projects concentrated on the Athlone Road approach to the Town, long recognised as an area that detracts from the overall visual of the Town giving visitors a negative impression of the town as they approach in from the Athlone or Roscommon side. It also includes an element of signage for the two business parks. North Longford MD projects include street enhancement in Granard and Drumlish as well as lighting in a public park in Aughnacliffe. South Longford MD projects include riverbank enhancement works in Lanesboro to include pontoons on the Shannon to facilitate swimming and installation of three camping van bays for visitors to the area.

Clara and Edenderry are each receiving €100,000 in Offaly, with a further €90,000 going to Kinnitty and Shannonbridge.

Seven projects are being funded in Westmeath in Moate, Castlepollard, Kinnegad, Ballymore, Clonmellon, Streamstown and Kilbeggan, the later receiving €100,000 for Town Park, Cycleway and Memorial Recording projects.

### **Public Realm**

Laois County Council commissioned GVA Bilfinger to prepare a Public Realm Strategy for Portlaoise Town in July 2016. The work is Ongoing with a delivery date of H1 2017. Consultations have been held with key stakeholders has been held and public meetings.

Offaly County Council worked with local groups to win Gold for Tullamore at the Entente Florale. The Birr public realm programme is complete. Tullamore is pursuing a project to rejuvenate and redevelop the public realm of the retail core of Tullamore town. The project was awarded 50% funding through the Urban Development Strand of the ERDF Regional Operational Programme. The project is due for completion in 2018.

Westmeath County Council secured a grant of €1.5m for public realm projects in the towns of Athlone and Mullingar and is augmenting this with a local contribution of a further €3m, giving a total fund of €3m per town. The projects are due for completion in 2018.

**Action 116**

Work with local businesses in the Gateway and principal towns to apply for the Purple Flag<sup>3</sup>, enhancing the region's reputation as a place to work, live or visit.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Longford County Council's regeneration team in discussions with Longford Chamber of Commerce about submitting an application for Purple Flag Status for Longford Town.

**Action 117**

The Midland Local Authorities will continue to develop comprehensive programmes for Culture Night and Heritage Week across the region.

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Local Authorities within the Midland Region are committed to both Heritage Week and Culture Night. In 2016, over 100 events took place across the region on Culture Night and over 100 scheduled events took place during Heritage week. It should be noted that a number of additional unscheduled pop-up events took place all across the region.

A similar number of events are planned for 2017.

**Action 118**

Construct new Library in Portlaoise. This €3.2m development in the Main Street area of Portlaoise, will be a very significant regeneration of a vacant property

**Update:** Ongoing

**Narrative:**

Under the Library Capital Investment Programme 2016-2021, €1.65M was allocated to the development of a new library on Main Street, Portlaoise. The design team has been appointed.

**Action 119**

Refurbish Portarlington, Edgesworthtown and Moate Libraries.

**Update:** Ongoing

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<sup>3</sup> The Purple Flag is a designation that is given to a town that reaches a certain standard of service and security in the realm of evening and night time activities and has recently been awarded to Mullingar.

**Narrative:**

The Tender process for Edgeworthstown Library is underway.

The refurbishment of Moate and Portarlington libraries were Completed in H12016.

**Action 120**

Explore the feasibility of an Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility in Mullingar

**Update: Complete**

A local industrial development group, operating under the aegis of Mullingar Chamber have been very active in seeking state and private sector investment in manufacturing research in Mullingar and the group has established a manufacturing research centre in Lough Sheever Corporate Park in Mullingar. A sum of €25,000 per annum as a contribution towards the cost of premises for this project over two years was agreed by Westmeath County Council and it is proposed that this would continue for 2017. It is funded from the Westmeath County Council Economic Development & Promotion Fund.

**Action 121**

iLOFAR: Support the Establishment of a next generation telescope in Birr.

**Update: Ongoing**

The Low Frequency Array (LOFAR) is a €150 million network of radio telescopes located in the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, France, Poland, and the UK, and which are giving scientists fascinating new images of galaxies, stars, the sun, and opening the possibility to find new planets.

A consortium of Irish universities is building a LOFAR radio telescope at Birr Caste, Co. Offaly with €2 million in funding from Science Foundation Ireland, the universities, and philanthropists ([www.lofar.ie](http://www.lofar.ie)) and Offaly County Council. This will be fully operational by Autumn 2017.