



Note on the Enterprise Forum of Thursday, 29 November 2023

Meetings are held under Chatham House rule.

Attendees

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Simon Coveney, TD (Chair)
Minister of State for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation	Dara Calleary, TD
Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail	Neale Richmond, TD
Secretary General, DETE	Declan Hughes
DETE officials	Pauline Mulligan, Dermot Mulligan, Ronnie Downes, Gary Tobin, Dermot Coates, John Hughes, Jonathan Patchell, Tom McLoughlin, Brian Walsh, Sarah Henry, Mary Cullen, Marie McMahon, Ciara O'Sullivan, Adviser to Minister Calleary, Fiona Campbell, Adviser to Minister Richmond. Forum Secretariat: Susan McNamee, Sinéad O'Brien, Alessandro Mederios E Silva, Jamie Cosgrove
Enterprise Ireland	Donal Leahy
IDA	Mary Buckley
Local Enterprise Office Network	John Magee
American Chamber of Commerce	Mark Redmond
Business in the Community Ireland	Bernadette Phelan
The Family Business Network	John McGrane
Chambers Ireland	Shane Conneely
Irish Exporters Association	Karl Picard
ISME	Neil McDonnell
RGDATA	Tara Buckley
SFA	David Broderick

Item 1: Welcome, opening remarks and approval of Minutes of last meeting

- Minister Coveney welcomed the attendees both in the room and those attending online.
- Minister Coveney offered his sympathy with the victims of last Thursday's events in Dublin city centre. He acknowledged the role of the Gardai and the emergency services and also the businesses and Dublin City Council who have done a great job in cleaning up the aftermath.
- Responsible use of social media platforms and ensuring public safety are all part of future considerations and were noted as issues not only for Ireland.
- Minister Coveney informed the Members that he, along with Minister Calleary and Minister Richmond, had met with members of the business community and discussed many of the issues that had affected so many businesses and people. The need to ensure people feel safe coming back into the city centre to shop and socialise is of great importance now.
- Minister Coveney advised that the Digital Services Act will fully apply in all Member States from 17 February 2024, many of the obligations in the regulation apply directly to providers of online intermediary services. Ireland is obliged to designate a competent authority, a Digital Services Coordinator and the Coimisiún na Meán, has been designated for this role. The General Scheme of the Bill also provides for some miscellaneous other matters, such as the liability regime for providers of online intermediary services and the harmonisation of Court Orders to take down illegal content from online services.
- The Digital Services Coordinator will have powers to conduct investigations, cooperate with the Digital Services Coordinators in the other 26 Member States, and impose fines. The Bill will also designate the CCPC as a competent authority for the Articles relating to online marketplaces.
- Minutes from the Enterprise Forum meeting of 28 September 2023 were approved.

Item 2: Update on Stakeholder workshops seeking the views of employers of the changes to working conditions.

- Minister Coveney acknowledged that the Government measures being introduced to improve working conditions in Ireland will have cost implications for businesses, however, there are also important economic and societal benefits that will ensure that Ireland is brought in sync with competitors.
- An official from the Enterprise Strategy Competitiveness and Evaluation Division, spoke about the stakeholder workshops recently held with both employer representatives and trade union officials to provide an opportunity to gauge the impact of these new measures.

- A report, led by DETE and DSP, which will look at the costs and benefits of these measures and the cumulative impacts for businesses, is currently being prepared for the Minister. It will include case studies and is expected to be delivered before end-Q4 2023.
- From initial findings, the report indicates that there will be a cost impact on businesses and that these will vary significantly by sector. Costs to employers are expected to arise from the introduction of the living wage, statutory sick pay and pension auto enrolment.
- The impact for sectors with the largest concentration of minimum wage workers was noted but these sectors which have a high staff turnover could benefit in the long term in relation to staff retention.

Item 3: The Increased Cost of Business (ICOB) Grant

- An official from the Enterprise Strategy Competitiveness and Evaluation Division, provided an update on the new €250m¹ Increased Cost of Business (ICOB) Grant which is in development.
- The grant will be targeted at small and medium businesses operating directly within a premises that is commercially rateable by a Local Authority and is a recognition that many businesses have seen an increase in their costs, through a number of factors. It is not intended to compensate for all of the increased costs, but rather is a once-off grant aid provision. It will have no bearing on the commercial rates paid by firms and is not a rate rebate.
- DETE officials are currently working with the Local Authorities to develop the Scheme to ensure that support can be provided by the Local Authorities early next year. The Scheme will be administered by the Local Authorities for delivery to businesses in Q1 2024.
- Lessons have been learned from previous schemes and, whilst businesses may need to verify their details to the Local Authority, it is not intended that there be a formal application process, rather that businesses will be contacted directly by their Local Authority.

Item 4: Responsible Business Subgroup feedback

- The Assistant Secretary of Trade Division spoke to the overall responsible business agenda items and gave an update on the second meeting of the Responsible Business Subgroup, which was held on 28th November.

¹ Subsequent to the meeting, on 5th December, Minister Coveney announced Government approval was increased to €257m, with the grant to be paid at a rate of half the enterprise's 2023 commercial rates bill for firms paying up to €10,000 in rates. For those paying between €10,000 and €30,000 in rates, they will receive a grant of €5,000. No grant will be available for firms paying more than €30,000. Firms who do not have a rateable premises are not within scope of this grant.

- The meeting was centred around two main points: (1) Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and (2) Communications.
- It was acknowledged that the EU are introducing many new initiatives with obligations for businesses and these initiatives come from a worthy place but may pose challenges for businesses in understanding and implementing these new requirements.
- A Responsible Business webpage has been set up, with advice and help for businesses to evaluate their requirements. The website contains clear and concise messaging around CSRD.
- Enterprise Ireland have recently launched their new website with an Enterprise Hub which contains practical messages in this area.

Item 5: DETE Economic Infrastructure and National Planning Framework Policy

- The Government's White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030 identified the importance of addressing infrastructure gaps to achieve growth across Ireland. Although Ireland ranks well for overall competitiveness, its rankings in terms of infrastructure is lower when compared to the other indicators.
- An official from the Department's Regional Enterprise Plans, Funding & Infrastructure Unit within Indigenous Enterprise Division gave a presentation on the work under way to develop the Unit's function on economic infrastructure and National Planning Framework policy.
- The objective of the team's work is to align infrastructure delivery under Project Ireland 2040 with the needs of enterprise to support balanced economic growth. This will be achieved by mapping and analysing existing data, identifying regional infrastructure priorities, and then engaging with relevant Departments and bodies across the system to advise and advocate on the economic infrastructure needs of enterprise.
- The team's work is primarily focused on the infrastructural areas of energy, water and wastewater services, and transport, as well as on the National Planning Framework (NPF) itself.
- The NPF provides the overarching framework which feeds down into the Regional Assemblies and into the Local Authority areas making up each region.
- The Economic and Social Research Institute is looking at population growth projections and modelling into the future and these will also be fed into the revision of the NPF currently underway.

Item 5: AOB

- Members were reminded that the next 'Building Better Business' event is taking place on Thursday 7 December from 9am to 1pm in the in the Convention Centre Dublin.