



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Mid-Term Progress Report

Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024



An initiative of the Department of
Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Contents

Minister’s Foreword	3
Chair’s Introduction	5
Midlands Highlights	6
Smart Specialisation	7
Strategic Objective 1: Climate Action – Transition to a net zero-carbon economy	9
Strategic Objective 2: Build on achievements to date in sectors in which the region has a competitive advantage through Smart Specialisation and wider adoption of digitalisation within business, leveraging the new Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest	12
Strategic Objective 3: Placemaking – Position the Midlands as a community of choice in which to live, create, study, work, visit, and invest	15
Action Status Table by Strategic Objectives	19

Minister's Foreword

I am pleased to provide an update on the implementation of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan, an initiative launched in 2022 to support economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development across the Midlands region of Ireland.

The Midlands comprises the counties of Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath. From the inception of the Plan, the focus has been on unlocking the potential of the region, ensuring not only its own economic prosperity but also its integral role in contributing to the overall economic well-being of the country.

Central to the approach is the commitment to craft a dynamic regional economy that builds on the unique strengths of the Midlands. Key sectors, including ICT, biopharma/life sciences, food/agri-tech and advanced manufacturing, have been strategically supported through investment, innovative programmes, and collaborative initiatives with key stakeholders. This approach has strengthened the competitiveness of these sectors, sparking local innovation and generating sustainable employment opportunities.

Innovation has been interwoven into the fabric of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan. By fostering a culture of creativity and entrepreneurship, the Plan seeks to cultivate an environment that actively supports research and development, nurtures emerging industries, and establishes the Midlands as a location of choice for indigenous enterprise but also enhances Ireland's global competitiveness.

A feature of the success to date is the spirit of collaboration in the Midlands. The partnership between government agencies, local authorities, businesses, educational institutions and others has been instrumental in overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities. The Midlands has embraced a collective approach, sharing insight, knowledge and resources to address regional challenges.

To assist with the implementation of Regional Enterprise Plans, my department has secured up to €145 million in funding for the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme, co-funded under the European Regional Development Fund, which will support projects aligned to the Regional Enterprise Plans. The first call of €35 million was announced in October 2023 with subsequent calls in the coming years. This funding complements the goals of the Regional Enterprise Plans and with continued collaboration, the Midlands is well positioned to compete for current and future funding calls to drive enterprise development in the region.

As we reflect on this report, it is clear that the Midlands is carving a path of sustained growth and prosperity. I encourage all stakeholders in the Midlands to continue their active engagement and support, as we build upon these accomplishments, ensuring that the region stands as a beacon of economic vibrancy, innovation, and sustainability in the years ahead.

My sincere appreciation goes to the Chair, Dr Anne Cusack, Programme Manager, Sarah Morgan, and all the regional stakeholders who have played a pivotal role in progressing the

implementation of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan. Their expertise and collaborative spirit have been vital in realising the successes highlighted in this Progress Report.

Dara Calleary TD

Minister of State for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation

Chair's Introduction

It gives me great pleasure, as Chair of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee, to highlight the exceptional progress in the implementation of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 as we review our regional objectives. This progress is a direct result of the strong collaboration ethos and wide stakeholder engagement which the Midlands is fortunate to foster.

In the Midlands, we have what I believe is a unique selling point as a region – a strong, positive and active dialogue and engagement at all levels and across all sectors which operate in the region.

Our plan focuses on three strategic objectives: transitioning to a net zero carbon economy, smart specialisation and digitalisation, and placemaking. We are striving to deliver on these objectives through a suite of ten discrete actions.

These objectives and actions are progressed by working groups, which consist of government agencies/bodies and private enterprise, ensuring that our work programmes are delivering on the needs of the sectors. These are underpinned by the enabler that is our skills and education providers, namely the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS), the Regional Skills Forum, Skillnet Ireland and the Education and Training Boards with the ever expanding and responsive mechanisms to meet the skills needs of industry.

I would like to both acknowledge and thank Mr Kieran Mulvey for the assistance he has provided to the Midlands in his capacity as Commissioner for Just Transition, as we navigate our path to a net-zero economy, through the guidance and recommendations provided through his Progress Reports.

The following report is a brief snapshot of the highlights taken from the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024, where local authorities, agencies and communities are working together to realise opportunities that will sustain our communities, including our newest members, into the future for the benefit of current and future generations.

I wish to thank and acknowledge the significant work of the Midlands Programme Manager, Sarah Morgan, and her small but dynamic team within the Midlands Regional Enterprise Development Office.

I also wish to thank the unwavering enthusiasm and commitment of the entire Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 Steering Committee and the working groups, all of whom work tirelessly to implement the actions within our regional objectives and are integral to the continued progress of the Midlands.

Dr Anne Cusack

Chair of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee

Midlands Highlights

- In April 2023, the EU Just Transition Fund of €169 million for the wider Midlands region was launched by the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan.
- Mount Lucas, the National Construction Training Centre, was designated the Modern Methods of Construction National Demonstration Park in July 2022 by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris.
- The Cube, a Midlands-based national centre of excellence focused on facilitating economic growth, innovation and education in the low carbon and renewables industry was officially opened. The development of The Cube was supported by the Regional Enterprise Development Fund and Laois County Council.
- European Digital Innovation Hub funding was awarded to Irish Manufacturing Research, Mullingar to lead the FactoryXchange in Mullingar. It will serve as a one-stop-shop, providing access to technical expertise and experimentation, as well as innovation services and the training and skills development necessary for successful digital transformation.
- The Midlands ICT Cluster was launched and its Action Plan was published in April 2023. The Action Plan will be implemented under the guidance of a steering committee chaired by industry, and thematic working groups.
- Midlands Ireland new branding and website was developed and launched. Midlands Ireland promotes the Midlands as the destination of choice in which to live, work, study, visit, and invest.
- The Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands and Midwest successfully secured funds for research in areas of innovation, sustainability and immersive technologies.
- The Midlands network of co-working facilities welcomed 12 new members to the network and, nine hubs are now e-learning gates of the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest.

Smart Specialisation

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment published Ireland's *National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 (S3)* in July 2022, which embraces a regional approach to addressing Ireland's Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) challenges. It provides a bridge between regional and national innovation strategy building and decision making, bringing coherence to RD&I planning for the benefit of enterprise, and advancing the RD&I agenda regionally and nationally.

Smart Specialisation is a key component of the economic element of each of the three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies for delivering balanced regional development in Ireland aligned with the objectives of Project Ireland 2040. S3 is also fundamental to developing smarter more competitive regions, one of the key strategic outcomes under Ireland's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Programmes 2021-2027.

The Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme has a very particular focus on supporting the Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs). It aims to accelerate economic growth in all regions by working with regional stakeholders to deliver on their potential regional enterprise strengths and opportunities, and by strengthening the regional enterprise innovation system. The scheme opened for applications on 12 October 2023.

Each of the Regional Assemblies sit on the National S3 Implementation Group which has overall responsibility for the delivery of S3 national and regional strategic priorities. In ensuring delivery of regional priorities, the Regional Assemblies also sit on the steering committees for the REPs. Working with the REPs is an important vehicle in translating S3 into regional and local impact.

Smart Specialisation in the Midlands Region

At NUTS 2 level the Midlands Region (NUTS 3), Dublin and the Mid East regions form Ireland's Eastern and Midlands Region (NUTS 2).

The Midlands Region has strong ICT, advanced manufacturing/engineering sectors and food/agri-tech sectors.

These sectors of strength align with the objectives and actions of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan and are being progressed through Working groups at regional level.

This progress report documents implementation to end of Q3 2023 and has been prepared and signed off by the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee.

Action Status Key

Action complete: The Steering Committee has deemed that these actions have been fully completed.

Action on target: The Steering Committee has deemed that these actions are on target for completion by the deadline.

Action not on target: The Steering Committee notes that delivery of these actions has been delayed but is still being progressed.

Action discontinued: The Steering Committee has agreed that these actions are no longer being pursued.

New/Amended action: The Steering Committee has agreed to create a new action or revise an existing action.

Strategic Objective 1: Climate Action – Transition to a net zero-carbon economy

Action 1.1: The Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) will work to develop transformative projects with the support of Project Ireland 2040 funding streams and to support relevant projects in the European Just Transition Fund (JTF), including the provision of technical sectoral advisors/mentors within the enterprise agencies and Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) to guide emerging low-carbon focused projects across the region

Action Leader: Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) Steering Committee and thematic working groups, under the auspices of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Development Office.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

A range of activity is underway to develop transformative projects.

- The EU JTF was launched in early 2023, with information on all strands shared with the MRTT Steering Committee and working groups. A suite of funding opportunities has been communicated by the MRTT to regional stakeholders throughout H2 of 2023. The EU JTF is managed by the managing authority, the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly, and the intermediary bodies responsible for implementation of various strands.
- The Chair of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee is a member of the EU JTF Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC). The MRTT has also contributed to the national Climate Action Plan 2023.
- The MRTT is represented on the EU JTF PMC and the EU Just Transition Platform contributed to the work of the platform Horizontal Working Group 2022-2023
- The MRTT hosted the Just Transition Institute Greece under the exchange EU programme.
- The MRTT in collaboration with the European Investment Bank hosted a webinar outlining supports available to assist the development of projects which advance the transition to a net-zero economy.

Action 1.2: Develop a framework for Local Authorities to realise economic opportunities from the low-carbon transition and empowering communities to embrace social enterprise and community gain, in partnership with the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) and the County and City Management Association (CCMA) and other regional and national agencies and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE). Develop and implement Local Authority Climate Action Plans, addressing both adaptation and mitigation measures, including the development and designation of decarbonisation zones, building upon lessons learned from the various elements in Portlaoise, as the national low-carbon demonstration town, including The Cube

Action Leader: Local Authorities and the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Significant activity is ongoing in pursuit of this action.

- A report commissioned by CARO, Exploring Economic and Enterprise Opportunities from Climate Action – The International Context for Irish Local Government, highlights examples of actions and projects undertaken in various jurisdictions and how local government systems are supporting economic opportunity based upon addressing the challenges of climate change.
- The third annual Economic Opportunities from Climate Action conference was held in April 2023.
- A training course took place for LEO staff, the LEO advisors' network and staff working on Local Economic Community Plans (LECP) on the theme of Economic Opportunities and Climate Action. It was held in collaboration with Maynooth University, Enterprise Ireland, LEO network and Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), as part of the local authority climate action training programme.
- The Guidelines for preparation of Local Authority Climate Action Plans (CAPs) were completed and launched in March 2023 with resourcing for climate teams provided by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.
- Local Authority CAP preparation period has commenced Due for completion in Q1 2024.
- CARO is delivering the EMERGE Project, empowering impacted communities under the National Just Transition Fund programme.

Action 1.3: Regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs) will develop a National Pilot on Sustainability and a Rural Centre of Excellence within the Midlands Region

Action Leader: Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

The ongoing work towards developing a National Pilot on Sustainability and a Rural Centre of Excellence in the Midlands consists of many elements.

- Mount Lucas was designated the Modern Methods of Construction National Demonstration Park.
- Laois and Offaly Education Training Board (LOETB) and Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB) are delivering Green Skills QQI programmes validated for the Further Education and Training (FET) sector.
- Build Up Skills Ireland 2030, delivered by the Technological University of the Shannon, Construction Industry Federation, Irish Green Building Council and LOETB seeks to quantify the scale, range and type of skills required within the built environment in the context of 2030 climate targets.
- LOETB is leading a national FET agriculture pilot on sustainable agriculture and sustainable horticulture and the food sector with SOLAS, Tipperary Education and Training Board (TETB) and Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB).
- A Nature Skills Awareness Programme is at programme development stage. This programme is focused on supporting biodiversity conservation in and around sensitive environments The course is a collaboration between the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the OPW, LOETB and SOLAS.
- Ferbane Regeneration Programme, with Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) support, is ongoing and Offaly County Council has appointed a design team.

Strategic Objective 2: Build on achievements to date in sectors in which the region has a competitive advantage through Smart Specialisation and wider adoption of digitalisation within business, leveraging the new Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest

Action 2.1: Work with Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS) to capitalise and realise business, industry, and skills opportunities presented by Technological University status to further support the development of the region, including the growth and expansion of Empower Eco, and the development of the Midlands Technology Campus

Action Leader: TUS Midlands Midwest

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Activity regarding this action continues apace.

- The Empower Eco Innovation Hub was launched and is now an integral innovation hub of the RUN-EU European Innovation Hub (EIH) Network. Three EIHs are established in areas of (1) Future and sustainable industries; (2) Bio-economy; (3) Social innovation. Empower Eco is a multi-actor, interdisciplinary, quadruple-helix hub that connects key stakeholders in academia, industry, government, and society to advance solutions for complex societal challenges with a focus on agri-food, the environment, bio-economy and climate change. Central to Empower Eco is to support and enable companies and entrepreneurs through bespoke training, testing, piloting and scaling of new innovations to realise new Green Deal opportunities.
- A €10 million EU grant on Immersive Technologies co-ordinated by TUS with regional industry.
- The development of Erasmus-funded Dark Skies Tourism (€45,000) and Marie Curie Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE) Food Innovation Mobility (€100,000) projects is underway. The Dark Skies project aims to empower training bodies and business in remote and rural European tourism sectors to seize a more equitable share of Europe's post-pandemic tourism opportunities. It will play a key role in rebuilding and refocusing European tourism to be more sustainable, resilient, and future orientated. Under the Marie Curie RISE Programme, the European Commission funds research and innovation projects to boost top researchers' careers through mobility and innovative doctoral and postdoctoral training.

- TUS is making more than 1,500 flexible learning places worth more than €8.5 million available. Funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), HCI and Springboard. These places are focused on increasing capacity in higher education for skills-focused programmes and are designed to meet the priority skills needs of industry in the region and nationally. These programmes range from level six to level nine and include shorter certificate courses up to postgraduate diplomas. Places are 90% funded for those in employment and 100% for unemployed people.

Action 2.2: Deliver on the actions within *Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan*, to position the region as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence through defined actions across enabling themes of education, training and skills; research and innovation; support infrastructure and networks; and strengthening the manufacturing base

Action Leader: Industry chair and public sector chair

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

The *Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan* seeks to position the region as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence.

- The Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Steering Committee has continued to meet on a quarterly basis.
- The Midlands Regional Skills Forum has completed a skills audit with critical vacancies, skills-needs and education and training preferences identified. An upskilling guide has issued to all companies.
- All advanced manufacturing partners, including Engenuity, atim cluster and Skillnets, continue to support regional enterprise to understand and avail of supports and funding opportunities available to them. This has led to companies engaging in innovation projects to address specific challenges.
- Events are being held across the region by advanced manufacturing partners to promote take-up and engagement of advanced manufacturing and sustainability practices.
- European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) funding was awarded to Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR) Mullingar to lead the FactoryXchange (FxC).

Action 2.3: Develop a Smart Connected Technologies Cluster to leverage identified and established regional competencies in telecoms and supporting areas including augmented reality and data analytics

Action Leader: Industry Chair and Regional Enterprise Development Office

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action complete

Action Update:

The Midlands ICT Cluster is a smart connected technologies cluster initiative operating on a triple helix model including ICT companies, public sector organisations and academia operating across the Midlands.

- The Cluster was officially launched with a Steering Committee and thematic working groups meeting on a regular basis focused on cluster development; skills and talent; marketing and communications; ecosystem and R&D development.
- The ICT Cluster's first action plan was commissioned, developed and launched. It will be necessary to secure funds to support a cluster development team which will implement the Midlands ICT Cluster Action Plan.
- TUS secured funding for a Postgraduate Diploma in Software Design for Digital Transformation.
- A funding briefing series commenced with an Early Funding Mechanisms workshop for LEO clients sharing information on how to access various supports available from Enterprise Ireland and InterTrade Ireland, while providing opportunities for LEO clients to meet with technical teams within TUS.
- Successful schools initiatives have been delivered, including Longford Dreamspace where over 300 students took part in a coding competition as part of the Dreamspace programme. This is all part of a wider plan to make Longford the first county in Ireland to offer computer science as a Leaving Certificate subject in all secondary schools in the county. The initiative is another of the key future skills programmes for technology in the Midlands, with increased collaboration and cooperation across the region through the Midlands ICT Cluster. VEX Robotics is another unique school programme, giving children as young as five their first opportunity to learn about engineering and robotics. Schools are provided with an easy-to-follow curriculum with support from Offaly County Council. VEX Robotics gives students a hands-on, minds-on, STEM learning experience with technology.

Strategic Objective 3: Placemaking – Position the Midlands as a community of choice in which to live, create, study, work, visit, and invest

Action 3.1: Utilising [MidlandsIreland.ie](https://www.midlandsireland.ie), promote and position the region as community of choice, showcasing the value proposition of the region: centrality, access to talent, the existing enterprise base, regional recreational assets, arts and cultural assets.

Action Leader: [Midlands Ireland](https://www.midlandsireland.ie) Office, Midlands Ireland Working Group and Regional Enterprise Development Office

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Midlands Ireland holds responsibility for the promotion of awareness campaigns around the objectives and actions of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan.

- MidlandsIreland.ie is being successfully used to promote the region's unique value proposition. A rebrand of Midlands Ireland was completed in July 2022 and the new mobile first website launched in September 2022.
- The new website and associated social media accounts promoting the Midlands as the destination of choice in which to live, work, study, visit and invest are securing month on month increases in terms of visits across all platforms.
- Other refreshed resources have been developed for the region including a promotional video, marketing campaign assets and point-of-sale materials.
- A performance marketing model has been implemented for regional advertising campaigns, aimed at driving awareness and conversion with key target audiences.
- PR and media campaigns are being delivered in line with the ambitious annual work programme developed by the working group.

Action 3.2: Expand the Midlands Network of Co-Working Facilities (MNCF) in partnership with existing network members, chambers of commerce and local authorities, to support and develop additional flexible office solutions throughout the region, including the exploration of and the development of vacant properties, through strategic partnerships and in cooperation with communities

Action Leader: MNCF Business Development Manager and the Regional Enterprise Development Office

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Significant progress has been made in expanding the Midlands Network of Co-Working Facilities.

- 12 new hubs opened across the region since March 2022.
- The new MidlandsHubs.ie website went live in Q1 2023 and features the Midlands Hubs Directory 2023, a guide to the remote working and enterprise spaces located throughout the Midlands.
- The majority of MNCF members have participated in the Grow Remote National Conference 2023, which was held in Portlaoise.
- MNCF members have also contributed to the consultation sessions for the preparation of the new National Hub Strategy.
- The MNCF members worked with TUS to become official Learning Gates, where people can access TUS courses from hubs within their own communities. There are nine hubs signed up as Learning Gates.
- The Programme Manager of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan represents the Regional Enterprise Plans on the National Steering Committee overseeing development of a Quality and Innovation Management Programme, QHubs, for the National Hub Network. QHubs is being developed by the Community Enterprise Association Ireland (CEAI) and the Midlands has been selected as a region to pilot the QHubs diagnostic tool.
- The Business Development Managers of the hubs participated in the Capacity Building - Hub Manager Training programme. Developed by CEAI and MentorsWork, the first of seven LearnLab online training sessions has been completed.

Action 3.3: The regional stakeholders will progress the implementation of Visitor Experience Plans and deliver targeted experience economy projects across the region

Action Leader: Industry Chair and Public Sector Chair

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

A range of activity has occurred to deliver targeted experience economy projects across the Midlands.

- The final link of the Galway-Dublin cycleway, the bridge crossing the River Shannon in Athlone, is now in place. This will strengthen the attractiveness of the Midlands as a cycling destination, while enhancing the visitor offering of the Midlands.
- Fáilte Ireland in partnership with the local authorities and service suppliers undertook the Greenway Activation Programme delivered for Royal Canal Greenway and the Old Rail Trail by Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, and Westmeath and Longford County Councils.
- A study from Waterways Ireland found that the Royal Canal Greenway in its first year of operation generated €17.2 million in revenue for the region, welcomed 500,000 visitors, and was responsible for the direct creation of 17 new businesses.
- The Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail officially opened, the longest mountain bike trail in Ireland and the UK. The trail is supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development, Coillte, Fáilte Ireland and Laois and Offaly County Councils.
- The National JTF Velo cycleway at Lough Boora Discovery Park is progressing.
- A €69 million EU JTF Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme was announced by Fáilte Ireland, with the creation of employment opportunities, visitor experience development and securing greater market share for tourism across the wider Midlands at its core. JT Tourism Activators are now in place in each local authority to assist potential applicants.
- Feasibility study for a peatlands visitor attraction of scale in the Midlands is now complete and a tender process underway for design at preferred location.

Action 3.4 Deliver the *Midlands Regional Food and Drink Strategy to 2024*, including the resourcing and establishment of Regional Food and Drink Cluster to progress sustainability goals, build resilience and grow exports

Action Leader: Midlands Food and Drink Programme Manager and Regional Enterprise Development Office

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

This action has not progressed as planned as funding opportunities to support the implementation of the Regional Food and Drink Strategy have yet to be realised due to delays in the call for proposals. The Regional Enterprise Development Office along with the Food and Drink Working Group has made limited progress in respect of the following items from the Midlands Regional Food and Drink Strategy:

- Fostering innovation and nurturing capability: Site visits undertaken to TUS Athlone and Bia Innovator Campus, Athenry, to create an awareness of facilities and capabilities available to shared kitchens operating and planned for the region.
- The preparation of a online Regional Food and Drink Directory is underway, with the digital directory of producers to be hosted on Midlands Ireland.
- Night-time economy workshops have been held in Athlone, Tullamore and Portlaoise in partnership with TUS and Midlands Ireland, with regional stakeholders from across the four counties with internationally renowned destination and night-time economy expert Dr Terry Stevens. Additional workshops are planned for Q1 2024 in Longford and Mullingar.

TUS has been appointed to undertake the Food and Drink Regional Skills Needs Assessment and will engagement with regional stakeholders is underway, with the report expected in Q2 2024.

Action Status Table by Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 1: Climate Action – Transition to a net zero-carbon economy.	Status	For completion by
<p>Action 1.1: The Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) will work to develop transformative projects with the support of Project Ireland 2040 funding streams and to support relevant projects in the European Just Transition Fund (JTF), including the provision of technical sectoral advisors/mentors within the enterprise agencies and Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) to guide emerging low-carbon focused projects across the region.</p>	Action on target	Q4 2024
<p>Action 1.2: Develop a framework for Local Authorities to Realise Economic Opportunities from the low carbon transition and empowering communities to embrace Social Enterprise and Community Gain, in partnership with the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) and the County and City Managers Association (CCMA) and other regional/national agencies and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Develop and implement Local Authority Climate Action Plans, addressing both adaptation and mitigation measures, including the development and designation of decarbonisation zones, building upon lessons learned from the various elements in Portlaoise, as the national low-carbon demonstration town, including The Cube.</p>	Action on target	Q4 2024
<p>Action 1.3: Regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs) will develop a National Pilot on Sustainability and a Rural Centre of Excellence within the Midlands Region.</p>	Action on target	Q4 2024

Strategic Objective 2: Build on achievements to date in sectors in which the region has a competitive advantage through Smart Specialisation and wider adoption of digitalisation within business, leveraging the new Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest.	Status	For completion by
Action 2.1: Work with Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS) to capitalise and realise business, industry, and skills opportunities presented by Technological University status to further support the development of the region, including the growth and expansion of Empower Eco, and the development of the Midlands Technology Campus.	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 2.2: Deliver on the actions within <i>Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan</i> , to position the region as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence through defined actions across enabling themes of education, training and skills; research and innovation; support infrastructure and networks; and strengthening the manufacturing base.	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 2.3: Develop a Smart Connected Technologies Cluster to leverage identified and established regional competencies in telecoms and supporting areas including augmented reality, data analytics.	Action complete	Q4 2024

Strategic Objective 3: Placemaking – Position the Midlands as a community of choice in which to live, create, study, work, visit, and invest.	Status	For completion by
Action 3.1: Utilising MidlandsIreland.ie , promote and position the region as community of choice, showcasing the value proposition of the region: centrality, access to talent, the existing enterprise base, regional recreational assets, arts and cultural assets.	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 3.2: Expand the Midlands Network of Co-Working Facilities (MNCF) in partnership with existing network members, Chambers of Commerce and Local	Action on target	Q4 2024

<p>Authorities, to support and develop additional flexible office solutions throughout the region, including the exploration of and the development of vacant properties, through strategic partnerships and in cooperation with local communities.</p>		
<p>Action 3.3: The regional stakeholders will continue to progress and support tourism development, visitor experience development plans and experience economy across the region.</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024</p>
<p>Action 3.4: Deliver the <i>Midlands Regional Food and Drink Strategy to 2024</i>, including the resourcing and establishment of Regional Food and Drink Cluster to progress sustainability goals, build resilience and grow exports.</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024</p>