



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# MIDLANDS

## Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 – First Progress Report



An initiative of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation



## Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Enterprise Agencies and LEO activities in the Midlands in 2019	2
3. Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 – Progress Report	6
Midlands Strategic Objectives	6
2019 Highlights	7
Detailed Action Updates	8
<b>Strategic Objective 1</b>	
Ensure that the Midlands is well positioned to address the challenges posed by the transition to a low carbon economy and renewable energy.	8
<b>Strategic Objective 2</b>	
Leverage opportunities in big data and data analytics from iLOFAR.	15
<b>Strategic Objective 3</b>	
Position and support the Midlands as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence.	18
<b>Strategic Objective 4</b>	
Enhance the collective offering of the Midlands as a place to live, work, and invest in.	21
<b>Strategic Objective 5</b>	
Strengthen the attractiveness of the Midlands as a destination to visit.	25
<b>Strategic Objective 6</b>	
Harness the potential of the food and beverage industry in the Midlands.	29
<b>Strategic Objective 7</b>	
Ensure the availability of skills and talent to realise the region's economic potential and address upskilling requirements.	32
Appendix 1: Regional Funding approved for the Midlands supported by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation	36
Appendix 2: Other Funding approved for the Midlands	39
Project Ireland 2040 Funds	39
Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2019	41
Appendix 3: Brief profile and statistical snapshot – Midlands	43
Appendix 4: Employment creation and unemployment – Progress against targets set to 2020	44



# 1. Introduction

The Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 is one of nine regional enterprise plans launched in early 2019 by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. The Plan was developed by regional stakeholders, and as a 'bottom-up' initiative, it complements national enterprise policies and programmes. The Plan is a 'live' agenda that allows new initiatives to be considered in addition to the strategic focus it currently contains.

The principle underpinning the Regional Enterprise Plans is collaboration between regional stakeholders on initiatives that can help to realise each region's enterprise development potential, adding value to the core activities being delivered by the enterprise agencies, LEOs and other bodies in the region.

Implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 for the Midlands is being delivered by the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee, which was chaired by Dr Anne Cusack, Managing Director of Critical Healthcare. Sarah Morgan, appointed jointly by the four Local Authorities in the Midlands, is providing project management support to the initiative. The Midlands Steering Committee has met on two occasions during 2019, and as part of the implementation process has formed smaller Working Groups to drive delivery of actions or groups of actions.

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation has oversight of the nine Plans nationally, and in September 2019 facilitated collective engagement between the Chairs of the Steering Committees with the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. This meeting provided an opportunity for updating on progress, sharing good practice, and identifying areas for potential inter-regional cooperation.

Climate Action Plan 2019 has tasked each of the Regional Steering Committees with considering 'Just Transition' as part of their ongoing agenda. On 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019, Just Transition was included as an Agenda item for the first time by the Midlands Steering Committee and this facilitated a discussion on the topic. Just Transition will remain as a standing item on the Steering Committee's agenda.

The Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan is focused around 7 Strategic Objectives to positively influence enterprise and job creation in the region. The Midlands Plan is looking to ensure that the region positioned to address the challenges posed by the transition to a low carbon economy and renewable energy; leverage opportunities from iLOFAR; support the growth of advanced manufacturing; enhance the collective offering of the region; strengthen the attractiveness of the Midlands as a destination to visit; harness the potential of the food and beverage industry and to ensure the availability of skills and talent.

This Year 1 Progress Report details of the progress that has been made to date on the Midlands Plan. It also reports on the outcomes from the Enterprise Agencies and LEOs' core activities in the region during the year. Of particular significance for the region in 2019 is that in excess of €3.4 million has been secured for the Midlands under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF). (detailed in Appendix 1).

Finally, overall employment creation and levels of unemployment continue on a positive track in the Midlands. Since the first Regional Action Plan for Jobs was introduced in Q1 2015, 26,200 more people are in employment in the Midlands, and the region currently has an unemployment rate of 4.5 percent, down from 14.9 percent in Q1 2015, which means that the region has already exceeded the targets set in relation to employment growth and the reduction in unemployment since 2015.

## 2. Enterprise Agencies and LEO activities in the Midlands in 2019

In order to achieve the 2020 employment targets and maintain strong regional enterprise and job creation performance, the Strategic Objectives and collaborative actions identified for the Midlands region in the Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 are complemented by the ongoing core activities of the Enterprise Agencies (IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland) and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs).

Representatives of the Enterprise Agencies and the four LEOs are active members of the working groups along with the REP Steering Committee in the Midlands and will continue to work with the regional enterprise office and regional stakeholders on key regional enterprise ecosystem strengthening initiatives in the region in 2020.

The Enterprise Agencies each have corporate strategies which include national level objectives as well as frameworks for bespoke regional activities that support regional enterprise investment and development potential and leverage regional assets and opportunities.

IDA Ireland is currently completing work on its new five-year strategy which will focus on attracting foreign direct investment across all regions. Enterprise Ireland launched its regional plan 'Powering the Regions' in 2019, and in 2020, will commence the preparation of a new corporate strategy, the successor to 'Build Scale and Expand Reach 2017-2020.

Over the course of 2019, the enterprise agencies and the LEOs have achieved impact in a number of areas as they continue to roll out their core activities across all of the regions. The following summarises some key results and developments during the year.

### Enterprise Ireland Activities

During 2019, Enterprise Ireland published a new plan 'Powering the Regions' to accelerate growth throughout Ireland's regions. The plan is built on four key pillars, each of which support the nine Regional Enterprise Plans.

#### 4 Key Pillars

1. Maximising growth of Enterprise Ireland clients in the regions
2. Strengthening regional infrastructure to maximise future growth of Irish enterprise in the regions
3. Support entrepreneurship in all regions
4. Work in collaboration to deliver regional growth

The Midlands has a target of 600 hot desks/ remote working places under Powering the Regions and has recently established Midlands Network of Co-working Facilities (MNCF) to work towards this target.

In 2019, 16,971 new jobs were created by clients of Enterprise Ireland in all regions with 66% of this growth delivered outside of Dublin. Enterprise Ireland clients employed a record high of 221,895 during the year.

€24m was invested in 127 startups with 42% of these located outside Dublin.

During 2019, Enterprise Ireland ran a third competition for projects under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund. Minister Humphreys announced in January 2020 that under the fund 26 projects across every region were approved funding of over €40m and these will make an important contribution to the delivery of the Regional Enterprise Plans. This builds upon nearly €60m already approved under the Fund.

In December 2019, Ministers Humphreys and McHugh announced €4.6m in government funding under the Enterprise Ireland Regional Technology Clustering Fund to establish 12 technology clusters in partnership with the Institutes of Technology across the country.

In 2019, the Local Enterprise Offices also worked successfully with their clients to assist 162 companies transfer to Enterprise Ireland to help them scale.

In 2019, 12,343 people were employed in Enterprise Ireland supported companies in the Midlands, down 1.1% from 2018.

**Recent EI announcements include:**

- Revive Active – 11 jobs in Westmeath
- Glanbia – 78 new jobs in Laois

## LEO Activities

In 2019, the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) continued to be the ‘first stop shop’ providing entrepreneurs with advice, guidance, financial assistance and other supports available to assist with starting or growing their own businesses, with 31 offices spread throughout the country the LEOs are truly operating at the coalface of job creation and regional development in Ireland, providing a ‘signposting’ service for all the relevant supports available through the state.

The LEOs offer grant aid to businesses employing less than 10 people in manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors which have the potential to develop into strong export entities. They approved 291 priming grants to new start-ups, 80% of the approvals were to companies regionally.

To assist in their remit of developing regional employment, the LEOs also offer ‘soft’ supports by way of training (85%) mentoring (75%) and targeted programmes such as LEAN for micro (90%)\*. Participation in these has been successfully targeted by the LEO teams in each of the regions.

In particular, the LEO’s have awarded €2.5m in funding to 16 successful applicants through the LEO Competitive Fund, applications were open to individual LEOs; collaborative projects between two or more LEOs; and LEOs working with other local groups like Chambers, Community Enterprise Centres, Education or training bodies, Local Authorities or colleges. All projects are aligned with the strategic objectives in the Regional Enterprise Plans and the ambitions in Future Jobs Ireland.

The LEOs supported 38,535 jobs across 7,400 client companies in 2019 of which there was an additional 148 companies outside of the Dublin region. 3,149 net jobs were created during the year and 78% of these were produced outside of the Dublin region with an even distribution across the regions. This is the 6<sup>th</sup> year of continuous employment growth for the LEOs since their inception in 2014. LEOs saw increases across all supports in 2019 including training, mentoring and funding. The number of those trained in 2019 was up 6.4% last year with 37,306 availing of training through their Local Enterprise Office. There was also an 10.5% increase in mentoring assignments completed, with 10,756 clients benefitting from LEO mentoring.

Over €20million was invested in LEO clients and start-ups last year, up from €18.2million in 2018.

There were an additional 335 net jobs created in the Midlands in LEO supported companies in 2019.

\*Shows the regional percentage of the overall excluding Dublin.

## IDA Activities

IDA Ireland is the State's inward investment promotion agency. The mission of the agency is to partner with multi-national companies to win and develop foreign direct investment, providing jobs for the economic and social benefit of Ireland. Regional development is a key pillar of IDA's strategy.

Supporting the execution of the Regional Enterprise Plans across the country through our Regional Manager network and through working with strategic FDI stakeholders, has helped support and drive collaborative Regional enterprise objectives.

IDA Ireland concluded strategy, 'Winning: Foreign Direct Investment' 2015-2019 in December 2019. The Strategy set out ambitious targets to support the delivery of its mission to win and develop Foreign Direct Investment in Ireland. These targets included a focus on;

- Winning 900 new investments for Ireland
- Supporting clients in creating 80,000 new jobs
- Growing market share and helping maximise the impact of FDI investments
- Driving greater balanced Regional Development

For the first time, ambitious investment targets were set for each region. IDA targeted a minimum 30% to 40% increase in the number of investments for each Region outside Dublin.

Following the conclusion of 'Winning: 2015 - 2019, the key highlights and impact for Regional Development in Ireland are as follows;

- 516 investments overall were won across Regions over the past five years
- 50% uplift in investments for Regions recorded over the course of the five-year strategy
- Every Region delivered the five-year Strategy target of a 30-40% uplift in investments on previous Strategy
- 54,868 jobs were created outside of Dublin over the past five years
- 33,118 additional direct jobs (net) on the ground in Regions
- 57% of total FDI employment is now located in Regional locations

### To deliver on these ambitious targets IDA Ireland has;

- Worked with public bodies and the private sector on regional action plans
- Worked with existing clients to retain and strengthen their presence in each region
- Increased Global Business Services and High-Tech Manufacturing investments
- Aligned IDA business sectors with regional strengths to develop sectoral ecosystems
- Worked more closely with EI and its client companies to identify synergies, enhance clusters, participate in site visits and maximise benefits for the region through the Global Sourcing Program
- Delivered property solutions in designated regional locations
- Increased IDA Ireland's regional footprint to adequately support the regional strategy



In addition to direct employment and skills transfer, IDA Ireland's client companies have a hugely positive effect on the local economy with over eight jobs being created for every 10 jobs in an FDI company. 50% of the €5.7bn in annual capital expenditure by IDA client companies occurs outside of Dublin. These investments have been won despite the demographical challenges that exist and international trends of greater urbanisation.

IDA Ireland is committed to playing its part in the economic development of Irelands regions. However, winning investments is a challenge and will require a continued collaborative effort by all national and regional stakeholders.

Regional locations must continuously demonstrate the capability to deliver on a number of exacting criteria which generally inform the location decisions of multinationals.

An assessment of investments delivered for regions since 2015, would confirm the strategic importance of the following key criteria in actually influencing the investment decision;

- Critical mass in population
- The ability to attract and develop appropriate skills
- The presence of Third Level Institutes
- The existence of clusters of companies in specific industry sectors
- Regional Infrastructure
- Regional Place Making Strategies
- Availability of high spec standard manufacturing and commercial office properties

To support the delivery of IDA's current strategy and the attraction of investments into different parts of the country, a €150m property investment plan was announced in 2015. IDA Ireland's approach of developing strategic sites and developing advanced buildings has proven to be hugely successful. In 2019, IDA Ireland continued its building programme with the design and construction underway of advance buildings in Sligo, Dundalk, Athlone, Waterford, Galway, Monaghan and Limerick.

IDA Ireland is currently completing work on a new five-year strategy. This strategy will take account of the changing nature of work and the impact of technology on specific sectors. Profound changes are occurring in the world of work and this is already reflected in the jobs being created by the IDA Ireland client base. We can see an increasing complexity in the roles being created, technology skills becoming ubiquitous across roles, increasing demand for business professionals and a fall in the number of low-skilled jobs including back office support and basic manufacturing. This transition is likely to impact the nature and type of roles across the regions of Ireland.

Building on the success achieved to date, IDA will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders and parties in the regions to realise the economic potential and ambition of Irelands regions under the Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020.

In 2019, the Midlands had 43 IDA supported companies employing 6,209 people. This is an increase of 8.5% from 2018.

**Recent IDA announcements include:**

- Greenfield Global – 75 jobs in Laois
- Red Seal Cups – 100 jobs in Longford
- Avery Dennison – 200 jobs in Longford
- Neueda Technologies – 200 jobs in Westmeath
- Skout Secure Intelligence – 30 jobs in Laois

# 3. Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 – Progress Report

## MIDLANDS STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

Ensure that the Midlands is well positioned to address the challenges posed by the transition to a low carbon economy and renewable energy.



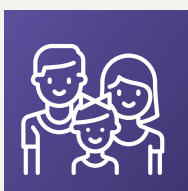
### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Leverage opportunities in big data and data analytics from iLOFAR.



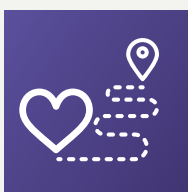
### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

Position and support the growth of the Midlands as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence.



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Enhance the collective offering of the Midlands as a place to live, work and invest in.



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:

Strengthen the attractiveness of the Midlands as a destination to visit.



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6:

Harness the potential of the food and beverage industry in the Midlands



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 7:

Ensure the availability of skills and talent to realise the Midlands' economic potential and address upskilling requirements.

# 2019 Highlights



The National Conference - Economic & Business Opportunities from Climate Change, took place on Wednesday October 9<sup>th</sup>, Tullamore Court Hotel.



The designation of Portlaoise as a “Low Carbon Town” supported by the awarding of over REDF funding of over €2m to Portlaoise Innovation Centre for low carbon initiatives.



Supermacs received planning to develop a €10m motorway service station at Togher, Portlaoise creating 140 jobs.



The Local Authorities conducted a survey of hubs / landing spaces and summarised same in a new brochure and have also established the “Midlands Network of Co-Working Spaces”.



The €223 million Center Parcs development at Longford Forest opened in July 2019, with 1,000 people hired to run and manage the 400-acre Parc and leisure centre.



€150m investment by Lumclon Energy to build two battery storage power plants creating 250 construction jobs and 20 full time jobs when complete.

# Detailed Action Updates

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## 1

Ensure that the Midlands is well positioned to address the challenges posed by the transition to a low carbon economy and renewable energy.



### Action 1:

Support the actions of the Regional Transition Team to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the acceleration of decarbonisation by Bord na Móna, including the submission of funding applications to Project Ireland 2040 funding schemes

### Working Group Members:

Midlands Regional Transition Team (Bord na Móna, Midlands Local Authorities, ETBs, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Regional LEOs, Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment, AIT, Chambers of Commerce, Partnership Companies)

### Timeframe for delivery:

2020

### Status:

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

### What were the milestone(s) for 2019?

The Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) was established to pursue funding opportunities and actions to mitigate the impact of Bord na Mona job losses and the impact on the local and regional economy.

### What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?

The MRTT works across four groups:

1. Securing special status / designation for the Midland Region & Funding Opportunities
2. Addressing the needs of those offered redundancy & Emerging Employment Opportunities
3. Emerging Property/Land Opportunities
4. Marketing the Region

**Milestones of 2019 include:**

- Acceptance of the Midlands into the EU Coal Regions in Transition Platform
- Securing Technical Assistance for Regions in Transition (START) to develop a Holistic Plan for Just Transition for the Midland Region. A fact-finding mission was undertaken to the Midlands in December 2019.
- Budgetary announcement of Midlands Just Transition Fund and Midlands Deep Retrofit Programme.
- Engagement with NESF on the development for A Framework for Action for Transition to a Low Carbon, Digital Future
- Numerous clinics held in bog communities to assist impacted employees
- Skills, Education & Jobs Fair & Idea Generation Bootcamp, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Mount Lucas Training Centre
  - » Targeted casual, seasonal and those FT BnM Employees exiting under VR
  - » Sectoral focus – manufacturing and construction
  - » Partnership with BnM, CIF, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, Regional Skills Forum and ETBs
- Implementation of the Explore initiative for former BnM staff, a programme designed at upskilling older employees in manufacturing, in areas such as digital skills, personal development and preparation for change etc. The programme was delivered by ETBs following funding application by Regional Skills Forum and was very well received by the participants.
- AIT & Regional Skills Forum delivering Springboard + for skills to advance programmes for those leaving BnM through voluntary redundancy
- ETBs have developed bespoke courses for Skills to Advance for those accepting VR
- ETBs and DEASP undertook on-site skills audits in Blackwater and Mount Dillon bogs, which will inform the development of bespoke training courses for destination employment sectors
- ETBs currently developing bespoke courses for NZEB & Deep Retrofit Programmes for delivery in the National Construction Training Centre in Mount Lucas
- Striving to position the Midlands as the Low Carbon Region of Ireland, retaining its association with energy generation, transitioning to cleaner forms of energy, such as the Lumcloon Energy Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), the first of its kind in Ireland on a commercial basis, sod turning event in September 2019 and the development of Portlaoise as the national pilot Low Carbon Town Model
- National Conference Creating Business Opportunities from Climate Change, October 9<sup>th</sup>, examined international trends, and demonstrated how responses to climate change, by both business and business within communities, can effectively drive innovation, adoption of disruptive technologies, and embrace more flexible work practices.
- The Midlands has established a Midlands Network of Co-working Facilities comprising of over 20 facilities, which can provide flexible working solutions, and is exploring opportunities to provide additional enterprise space in impacted bog communities as facilities become vacant.
- The Just Transition Commissioner has met with the MRTT and on a one-to-one basis since his appointment.
- The Just Transition Commissioner office is located in County Offaly.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

- The MRTT will continue to work closely with the Just Transition Commissioner and the Dept of Climate Action to deliver the Midlands Just Transition Fund.
- The START Holistic Plan for Just Transition will progress in 2020.
- The ETBs will commence roll out of NZEB training in Mount Lucas, County Offaly.
- The MRTT will continue to lobby for the Midlands at a national and EU level in terms of the European Green Deal and the proposed European Just Transition Fund
- The MRTT will continue to engage with Bord na Mona and the ESB as they prepare a path forward.

**Action 2:**

Support the development and designation of Portlaoise as a “Low Carbon Town”. The pilot project of Portlaoise as a low carbon town will be managed by Laois County Council, which was successful in securing funding under the first call of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (UEDF). This pilot project will serve as a roadmap for the development and rollout of similar low carbon initiatives in county towns of Longford, Offaly and Westmeath.

**Working Group Members:**

Laois County Council, in partnership with SEAI, Climate Action Regional Office (CARO), Downtown Portlaoise, ESB Networks, Midland Energy Agency and Transport Infrastructure Ireland.

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

To support the development and designation of Portlaoise as a “Low Carbon Town” and to pilot Portlaoise as a low carbon town.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

Establishment of Low Carbon Implementation Team and work programme agreed.

- The Low Carbon Implementation Team, The Portlaoise Town Team has set up a subgroup to consider and implement measures associated with low carbon in the retail, grocery and hospitality sectors.
- Laois County Council commissioned a brief to develop the carbon footprint of the urban area of Portlaoise, to establish renewable energy potential and to develop a register of opportunities.
- Portlaoise Innovation DAC submitted an application for REDF funding to develop an Enterprise Incubation Hub, which has a low carbon focus.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

- Continue to support the development of Low Carbon Towns and explore available opportunities during 2020.
- Progress the development of the Enterprise Incubation Hub –The Cube, commencing with the recruitment of a development manager.

**Action 3:**

Develop and implement County Climate Change Adaptation Strategies including the identification of regional actions and economic opportunities.

**Working Group Members:**

Midlands Sub Regional Adaptation Steering Group, Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment, Local Authority Climate Adaptation Teams, Midland Energy Agency, SEAI, and Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

The Midlands Local Authorities prepare, adopt and publish Climate Adaptation Strategies in 2019.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

The five-year County Climate Adaptation Strategies seek to:

- ensure a proper comprehension of the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change
- bring forward the implementation of climate resilient actions in a planned and proactive manner and,
- ensure that climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all plans and policies and integrated into all operations and functions of the County Councils.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

2020 will see the mobilisation of efforts towards the practical implementation of the local authority climate adaptation strategies.

The Climate Action Plan, 2019 – to tackle Climate Breakdown, published in June 2019 charts an ambitious course towards national decarbonisation. The ambition is clearly set out to deliver a scale up in emission performance across all sectors over the coming decade to meet 2030 targets and to set a trajectory to meet 2050 objectives. The plan recognises that climate change is a hugely complex issue that requires transformative responses from every sector in society and that all measures, collectively, represent a coherent approach to dealing with the significant challenges ahead.

Pursuant to Action 147 of the Climate Action Plan the Local Authority Climate Action Charter, was signed by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action & Environment & the CCMA on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 2019. The Charter sets out the leadership role of local authorities in advancing decarbonisation objectives and building resilience to the negative impacts of climate change. The Charter sets out 23 guiding objectives providing a focus on mitigation and adaptation efforts to deliver effective climate action across the extensive range of functions performed at local level. A process of monitoring, evaluating and reporting is required annually on the implementation of activities under the charter.

**Action 4:**

Complete a feasibility study into the development of an energy park at a Bord na Móna cutaway peatland site.

**Working Group Members:**

Bord na Móna, 4 Local Authorities

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Undertake a feasibility study in 2019.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

- Concept of co-location of generation assets to be further explored as not currently possible from a regulatory perspective.
- Selection of potential sites for further detailed assessment.
- Preliminary design lay-out for combination of generation assets at selected site(s).

The development of the Energy park project remains very much at the feasibility stage. The concept involves the potential co-location of renewable energy generating assets, such as wind, solar and battery storage, with 21<sup>st</sup> century demand, such as a data center and/or a fast charging Electric Vehicle (EV) hub. The co-location of generating assets has never been done before in the Irish market and presents various technical and regulatory challenges. The project team has been working with an industry working group to assess the various challenges involved and to seek solutions. A screening process has been undertaken to assess a number of potential sites within the Bord na Móna landbank for more detailed assessment in terms of hosting such a facility.

A number of potential locations are now under active consideration, allowing more detailed site suitability assessments to be completed. Preliminary lay-out for the generating assets will be completed in early 2020 and this will allow an assessment of the layout of demand centers within the selected sites to be completed in 2020. Regulation around co-location will have to be progressed to make the concept feasible.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

In 2020 it is hoped to make progress on the current technical and regulatory barriers to co-location to allow more detailed design considerations to be assessed on the selected site(s). Decisions will be taken on the most suitable demand to be located within the energy park proposal. Once completed, this will allow more focused site suitability assessments to be completed. Once the various strands of site suitability assessments are completed, a preferred location will be selected, to pursue a more detailed design, with a view to finalising the initial feasibility phase and devising a planning strategy for the proposed development.

- Finalise lay-out for generating assets on all selected sites
- Conclude initial phase of site suitability assessments and identify the most suitable demand centers to be located on the selected sites.
- Progress design of co-located demand centers within the selected sites.
- Progress site screening to select preferred site for more focused and detailed assessment
- Conclude working group on co-location and integrate proposed solutions into overall site design



**Action 5:**

Complete a feasibility study into the potential for aquaculture on Bord na Móna cutaway Peatlands

**Working Group Members:**

Bord na Móna, Local Authorities, BIM, Bord Bia

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q3 2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Complete a feasibility study into the potential for aquaculture on Bord na Mona cutaway Peatlands in 2019.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

The AQUAMÓNA system is a multi-trophic fish farm trial being undertaken at Mountlucas wind farm in Co. Offaly. The trial commenced in September 2018 following initial construction. The key aim of the project is to assess suitability of cutaway peatlands for aquaculture production.

The Mountlucas system is one of the most unique fish farms in the world. Powered by wind energy and utilising algae and duckweed to organically grow fish, the system can truly claim to be the world's most sustainable fish farm. The system is still relatively young and evolving but is providing a wealth of information, which would allow the next iteration to be even more efficient.

Bord na Mona monitored all aspects of the facility from water parameters, fish composition, bacteria and algae in the system, duckweed growth progress and planktonic organisms.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

The farm is assessing the growth and performance of European perch and rainbow trout in a multi-trophic pond system, utilising algae and duckweed to remediate nutrients produced. Both trout and perch are present on site.

**Action 6:**

Complete a study into the potential to produce herb products on Bord na Móna cutaway Peatlands.

**Working Group Members:**

Bord na Móna, Local Authorities, Enterprise Ireland

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Complete a study into the potential to produce herb products on Bord na Mona cutaway Peatlands.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

The main aim of the project was to examine the commercial and technical feasibility of growing medicinal herbs in cutaway peatlands. The main ethos of the project was to identify herb species that were native to the peatlands and are in market demand. The species chosen were shortlisted on this basis, resulting in most species being Irish native peatland plants with several other non-native herbs chosen based on market demand alone.

During late 2018, and throughout the season in 2019 growing trials were undertaken following comprehensive site selection. These were carried out in a shallow peat trial site and a gravel soil trial site, with a mineral soil site used as a control for comparison.

At the end of the growing season, from August to October, plants were, harvested by hand, dried in a drying room, and dry yields noted.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

- Site Selection
- Procurement of Equipment & Materials
- Recruitment and Training of Personnel
- Upgrade & Fit Out Works to Processing Facility
- Soil Preparation, Seedling Preparation, Cultivation and Maintenance
- Harvesting, Wildcrafting, Drying, Cutting & Storage
- Sales & Distribution
- Employment Creation

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## 2

## Leverage opportunities in big data and data analytics from iLOFAR.

**Action 1:**

Establish STREAM Creative Suite in Birr

Services will include: hot desk facilities and office space, IT training facilities and training, industry focused events, and industry-led research projects (undergraduate and post-graduate). Connecting STREAM Creative Suite with Athlone Institute of Technology, Irish Manufacturing Research Centre (IMR) in Mullingar and co-working facilities throughout the region will create a new and dynamic hub for research and economic development in the Midlands. It will harness cutting edge research, advanced manufacturing, industry led training initiatives, enterprising start-ups and investment throughout the Midland Region.

**Working Group Members:**

Offaly Design & Innovation CLG, Offaly Local Authority, LEO Offaly, iLOFAR Consortium, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Skillnet Ireland

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Establish stream BIRR to offer hot desk facilities and office space.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

- Advisory Group established and has met on 3 occasions
- stream BIRR Business Development Manager appointed
- stream BIRR offices rented on the first floor of Birr Technology Centre, Birr, Co. Offaly
- Branding and Marketing Plan developed
- stream BIRR website landing page and social media channels setup and active.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

- Launch and promote the usage of stream BIRR for hot desk users, businesses, and researchers working with Big Data
- Develop key relationships with key academic institutions nationally with a view to providing relevant training programmes.
- Develop and roll out a calendar of industry focused events.
- Develop collaborative actions between STREAM Birr, AIT, IMR and multinationals in Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore.

**Action 2:**

Connect the Birr Creative Suite with AIT, IMR Mullingar and regional Business Innovation Hubs to create a formal network of linked e-Hubs to leverage economies of scale in research, advanced manufacturing, collaboration, training and funding applications.

**Working Group Members:**

Offaly Design & Innovation CLG Network of Innovation Hubs, Midlands Local Authorities, Midlands LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, IMR, AIT.

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Create a formal network of linked e-Hubs.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

Initial meetings have taken place with each of the stakeholders to discuss opportunities for collaboration.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

Group meetings for the stakeholders to explore opportunities for collaboration

**Action 3:**

Identify sites that are suitable for data centre development and complete a feasibility study and planning designations

**Working Group Members:**

Bord na Móna, Local Authorities, working with REP Steering Committee

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2019

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

To identify suitable sites in the region.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

Bord na Mona identified two sites in the Midlands as potential Data Centre Sites.

Discussions have taken place between the Bord na Mona, the Enterprise Agencies and the LAs regarding the suitability of different lands, zoning and the requirements of Data Centre companies.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

The Midlands Regional Transition Team will work in collaboration with Bord na Mona to identify best use of land and buildings that may become available after the peat harvesting industry ends, including for data centre use.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

3

Position and support the Midlands as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence.

**Action 1:**

Promote and support the growth of the Midlands as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence

**Working Group Members:**

includes IMR, AIT, Abbott Diagnostics, Grant Engineering, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, LEO Westmeath and Regional Skills Forum

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2019

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Support the growth of the Midlands as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

The working group has met on four occasions and the group are currently scoping the terms of reference for the development of a plan for the region as an Advanced Manufacturing Centre of Excellence.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

In 2020, the services of a consultant will be procured in line with national procurement guidelines.

**Action 2:**

Complete feasibility study and concept development for a Midlands Technology Campus at AIT

**Working Group Members:**

AIT, working with regional stakeholders, including enterprise agencies, IMR, industry

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2019

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

To complete a feasibility study and concept development at AIT.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

- Terms of Reference completed in consultation with agency and industry stakeholders.
- Funding support for MTC Feasibility project awarded by Enterprise Ireland under Call 3 of Regional Enterprise Development Fund.
- Procurement process for Lead Consultant underway.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

- The Feasibility project will be undertaken in collaboration with Enterprise Ireland, IDA, SFI, the LEOs, the four Local Authorities, IMR and industry.
- The MTC will be a multi-partner concerted response towards building regional competitiveness and innovation capacity in the Midlands.
- A key focus of the Feasibility project will be to ensure that the areas of focus and proposed infrastructure of the MTC are complementary to existing infrastructure/offers nationally, are aligned to national policy and to Enterprise Ireland / IDA / SFI priorities and are validated by the needs of industry.
- The MTC Feasibility project, including Final Report, will be complete in Q1-Q2 2020.

**Action 3:**

As part of the Skills for Growth and EXPLORE initiatives the Regional Skills Forum (RSF) will assist local manufacturing enterprises to identify and address their skills needs so as to ensure that the Region has the effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity. Once skills needs have been identified, the RSF will link companies with the education and training providers best suited to responding to identified skills need

**Working Group Members:**

RSF, and partners including EI, IDA, ETB, IMR, Skillnet Ireland and DEASP

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2019

**Status:**

Work commenced & completed in 2019

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

The Regional Skills Forum (RSF) will assist local manufacturing enterprises to identify and address their skills needs.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

RSF have undertaken a number of audits and currently identifying suitable programmes

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

RSF will use the audits to assist in skill training requirements during 2020.

**Action 4:**

Build on the success of the Regional Engenuity Programme through further roll-out.

**Working Group Members:**

LEOs, Regional Skills Forum, Skillnet Ireland & ETBs

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Continue to support of the Regional Engenuity Programme to facilitate innovation and product development, including securing funding for development of the sector and the recruitment of Coordinator.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

A breakfast briefing was held for members of the network outlining Project Ireland 2040 funds and providing tax advice. The Engenuity network is co-ordinated by LEO Westmeath on behalf of LEOs operating in the Midland Region.

The Midland LEOs, with Westmeath as Lead applied and secured funding of €250,000 for the Engenuity Engineering Midlands Project under the LEO Competitive Fund and the project aims to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of member companies.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

The Engenuity Engineering Midlands project will power the next level of development for a cluster of engineering companies in the Midland region and aims to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of member companies to respond to changing market challenges and opportunities arising from Brexit.

It will also aim to deliver the following;

- Business development and marketing research
- B2B and supply chain opportunities within the network
- Deliver R&D collaboration between cluster members,
- Utilising the advantage of the Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR) and Athlone IT.
- Recruitment Cluster Manager



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## 4

Enhance the collective offering of the Midlands as a place to live, work, and invest in.

**Action 1:**

Develop, resource and deliver a digital marketing strategy for the region, building on the work already undertaken to develop MidlandsIreland.ie

**Working Group Members:**

Local Authorities, State Agencies, local industry and other regional partners.

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q1 2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Develop, resource and deliver a digital marketing strategy for the region

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

During 2019 research was underway in terms of digital marketing tools

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

- Develop a terms of reference and secure funding for the procurement of digital marketing strategy.
- Identify potential funding streams for marketing campaigns.

**Action 2:**

Establish and market a network of 'remote working' hubs and enterprise landing space in the region that will form the basis of a value proposition to be developed and presented to companies in Dublin, Galway and elsewhere interested in second sites/remote working sites in the Midlands Region. Advance the formation of proposals for the development of new hubs as appropriate.

**Working Group Members:**

Local Authorities, IDA Ireland, LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, AIT

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

To complete an audit of co-working spaces.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

- Initial audit undertaken in Q1 2019 with Audit promoted during National Enterprise Week in March 2019
- Co-working managers attended Networking Workshop in June with briefings given on opportunities and merits of collective promotion.
- MNCF established with Standing Orders and agreed a Work Programme for 2020
- MNCF Co-ordinator secured and the MNCF will endeavour to meet 4 times in 2020.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

- MNCF members will progress agreed work programme in 2020
- MNCF to produce 2020/21 Directory to promote and market the facilities collectively for remote working, learning gates and as enterprise landing space in the region.

**Action 3:**

Development of County and Regional datasets to support the value proposition for the Region

**Working Group Members:**

Secretariat for Regional Enterprise Plan, Midland Local Authorities, LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, AIT, ETBs

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2019

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Develop County and Regional datasets to support the value proposition for the Region

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

Following tendering process, consultants were appointed to develop a Value Proposition for the region as a whole and the five principal towns of Athlone, Longford, Mullingar, Portlaoise and Tullamore.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

2020 will see the completion of the overall regional profile. The lower tier settlement profiles will be progressed by the LEO's at county level.

**Action 4:**

Identify, scope, develop and promote available greenfield and brownfield sites as potential enterprise landing spaces.

**Working Group Members:**

Local Authorities, LCDCs, LEOs, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Regional Chambers of Commerce, Ibec

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2019-2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Identification of suitable sites undertaken by LAs and funding applications submitted

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

- Submission to the REDF for an Innovation Hub in Portlaoise Town Centre.
- Co-Works, Edgeworthstown has secured ownership of the former Ulster Bank
- Abbeyshrule Hub has secured funds to repurpose a disused building on the canal for remote working
- Bloom HQ and the Beale Business Centres opened as co-working space in July 2019.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

- The LAs will continue to identify suitable sites and secure funding to repurpose.
- IDA has a detailed programme of work over the coming years which includes the development of new Advanced Office Buildings and Advanced Technology Buildings in some Midlands locations

**Action 5:**

Identify the cultural assets and creative resources that can be used to help improve places that the region's citizens view as important to community living and daily experiences

**Working Group Members:**

Local Authorities, LEOs, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Regional Chambers of Commerce, Ibec

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Identify cultural assets and creative resources to help improve community living and daily experiences for the people of the region.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

A number of projects are being delivered across the region with support from Project Ireland 2040 funds and match funding from Local Authorities and associated partners. Such developments include library developments in Edgeworthstown and Portlaoise and many public realm in towns and villages throughout the region

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

The LAs will identify projects in consultation with communities with a view to progressing to funding applications under Project Ireland 2040 funds.

**Action 6:**

Strengthen collaboration and alignment around regional promotion by establishing 'Team Midlands', comprising regional stakeholders including Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and private sector representatives. Team Midlands will ensure that up to date information and relevant testimonies are readily available, better aligned and coordinated, and capable of being mobilised efficiently, such that a robust value proposition for the region is presented to companies considering investing in the region in support of the enterprise agencies.

**Working Group Members:**

Regional Steering Committee, working with LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, AIT, ETBs, Regional Skills Forum, Ibec and others.

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Strengthen collaboration and alignment around regional promotion by establishing 'Team Midlands'.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

In 2019, work focussed on the collation of a suite of materials to showcase the region as potential second site location and outcomes include principal town profiles and audit of co-working facilities within the Region.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

Identify diaspora that regional pitch can be presented to.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## 5

Strengthen the attractiveness of the Midlands as a destination to visit.

**Action 1:**

The Regional Tourism and Heritage Officer Network will identify collaborative projects for development under Project Ireland 2040 funding streams, in support of the Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands propositions

**Working Group Members:**

Local Authorities, Fáilte Ireland and other State Agencies

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

To identify collaborative projects for development under Project Ireland 2040 funding streams, in support of the Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands propositions

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

Tourism, Heritage and Rural Recreation Officers from across the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands completed a programme this year. The programme was facilitated by Fáilte Ireland specialists, international consultants and other experienced and recognised industry leaders in tourism. Participants who completed the course are now equipped to generate new ideas for tourism projects; improve how they approach and plan for capital investment and; better engage with local communities. Both in the IAE and IHH Fáilte Ireland will meet directly with Local Authorities to identify, prioritise and support strategic tourism priorities projects.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

Failte Ireland has a network established with Tourism and Heritage Officers and will invite Arts Officers to join the group with a view to identifying projects on which to collaborate.

**Action 2:**

Support Fáilte Ireland in the delivery of and implementation of visitor experience development plans (VEDP's) under Irelands Ancient East and Irelands Hidden Heartlands brands. The first plan, 'Tale of Two worlds' has been created by public and private sector working together. The plan focuses Delivery of the County Tourism Action Plans by the Local Authorities. Fáilte Ireland will work with local authorities on agreed county specific tourism projects for Ireland's Ancient East & Ireland's Hidden Heartlands

**Working Group Members:**

Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities, Waterways Ireland, OPW, Coillte

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & is continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Support Fáilte Ireland in the delivery of and implementation of visitor experience development plans (VEDP's).

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?****Irelands Hidden Heartlands:**

The Shannon Masterplan was commissioned by Waterways Ireland in association with Failte Ireland and the 10 local authorities. This is the first single holistic and dedicated tourism plan for the Shannon. It will seek to reposition the Shannon as a destination of scale and singularity at the centre of IHH and will issue for consultation in Q1 2020.

Once the report is finalised it will inform the roll out of Visitor Experience Development Plan in the region.

**Irelands Ancient East:**

- Tales of Two Worlds: Offaly and Laois stakeholders and trade have participated in all TOTW workshops to date and a number of Offaly and Laois businesses are have almost complete a bespoke 15-month Great Houses & Gardens Experience Development Programme. This programme is looking at the house and garden experiences including guiding, events development, cost and revenue management and sales distribution. Birr Castle, Emo Court, Ballintubbert participated in this programme.
- Under the Tale of Two Worlds - Failte Ireland have initiated bespoke commercial development plans with 3 major attractions in Laois and Offaly to develop them as significant driver of visitors in the region and incremental grow visitor by over 30,000 over the next 4 years. One of the projects is Emo Court. Following the €1.2m award to Emo Court from the Rural Regeneration Development Fund in late 2018, Fáilte Ireland appointed BOP consultants (UK) to work with Emo Court to deliver a visitor engagement strategy to guide their strategic investment in the spending of the €1.2m award.
- Christian and Sacred sites such as Clonmacnoise Monastic Settlement along with Food & Drink experiences such as Tullamore D.E.W. will layer across all visitor experience development programmes. Experience development cluster workshops were held in Offaly and Laois with over 30 business participating.

**Taste the Island**

Food and Drinks experiences across the region have been submitted events and experiences as part of the Taste the Island campaign. Taste the Island is a new all-island initiative that will significantly enhance Ireland's reputation for its food and drink experiences. It is a three-year programme developed by Fáilte Ireland in conjunction with Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland.

Taste the Island is a 12-week celebration of Ireland's seasonal ingredients, adventurous tastes and bold experiences taking place this September, October and November. This initiative supports Fáilte Ireland's strategic imperative to address seasonality and grow revenue by driving increasing bed nights outside of the summer season while also driving visitors to explore lesser-known locations across the country and will, in the long term, enhance Ireland's international food and drink reputation before they get here.

Strategic Tourism Development priorities have been agreed by the Midland Local Authorities and Fáilte Ireland will support these priorities in 2020.

#### What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?

- The Shannon Masterplan will be finalised which will inform the VEDP for the Midland Region.
- Fáilte Ireland in partnership with the local authorities will progress agreed tourism development priorities.
- Taste the Island will issue a second call for projects.
- Delivery of Destination Towns Programme Evaluation of Platform for Growth Initiative.

#### Action 3:

Complete a study into the potential to develop Lough Boora Discovery Park into an Eco Tourism destination of national and international significance

#### Working Group Members:

Bord na Móna, Offaly County Council

#### Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

#### Status:

Work commenced & completed in 2019

#### What were the milestone(s) for 2019?

Complete a feasibility study to develop Lough Boora Discovery Park into an Eco Tourism destination

#### What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?

- Undertake a market analysis and prepare a feasibility report on the future development potential of Lough Boora Discovery Park as a tourist attraction;
- Undertake a review of the current operations at Lough Boora Discovery Park in order to identify areas for improvement to enhance the customer experience.
- The feasibility study was commissioned by Bord and Mona and Offaly County Council
- The market study has been completed, by Tourism Development International and they have presented their draft report outlining their findings and development recommendations. The draft is under review and the final report due in Q1 2020.
- A number of workshops were held with the assistance of Fáilte Ireland and a program of improvement measures is being drawn up.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

- Implement the customer experience improvement initiatives identified in the operations review over the course of 2020.
- Further develop the findings of the feasibility study to generate a future development strategy by Q4 2020.

**Action 4:**

Development and roll out of the Slieve Bloom Brand The brand will be used by the local business communities to promote the Slieve Bloom area for rural retreats, walks and mountain biking.

**Working Group Members:**

Laois and Offaly Local Authorities, Local Partnership Companies, Coillte, Communities of the Slieve Bloom

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Development and roll out of a brand for the Slieve Bloom area.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

Project outputs included the following digital items:

- Development of the Slieve Bloom Brand
- Brand guidelines
- 10 Slieve Bloom Walking mapcards
- Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trailcards – Baunreagh and Kinnitty
- 1 – Driving Route Map

[Slievebloom.ie](http://Slievebloom.ie) reflects the new brand and all digital outputs are available for download from this site.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

- To build brand recognition
- To review road signage in the Slieve Bloom Area
- To develop an interagency Slieve Bloom Outdoor Recreation Plan



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## 6

## Harness the potential of the food and beverage industry in the Midlands.



### Action 1:

Develop a Regional Food Strategy to identify areas for cross-county collaboration, including the development and linking of food hubs and support for food producers, including artisan.

### Working Group Members:

Bord Bia, LEOs, Local Authorities, Regional Rep from Hotel Federation and EuroToques, Regional Food Producers, AIT, Skillsnets, The Kitchens Mountmellick, Ferbane Food Campus

### Timeframe for delivery:

Q2 2020

### Status:

Work started in 2019 & continuing in 2020

### What were the milestone(s) for 2019?

Develop a Regional Food Strategy for the Midlands.

### What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?

In May 2019, the Midland Region, led by Laois LEO, launched a tender to create a regional food and drink strategy to support artisan, micro and small food producers. In line with national procurement guidelines and following evaluation of tenders, Food First Consulting, were appointed to prepare the Strategy.

The project team held a kick-off meeting in August, followed by a scoping meeting in September, which allowed the working group to brainstorm the list of stakeholders that would be contacted in the first phase research.

Since then, the following progress has been made:

- A list of stakeholders has been created targeting small, medium and large food and drink producers. The stakeholder list also includes people and organisations from education and training sector, tourism, food-service and hospitality, retailers and other similar industry supports in Ireland, Northern Ireland and beyond. A standard questionnaire was developed to guide the research interviews with each stakeholder.
- Stakeholder interviews were held in Q4 2019.
- Invitation to Tender to develop a Food & Drink Strategy to support Artisan, Micro and Small Food Producers for the Midlands Region
- Assessment of tenders received/Award of Contract
- A detailed 360° survey to give full visibility of all the challenges currently facing food and drink businesses in the Midlands and their related stakeholders along with an assessment of best practice approaches

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

- Develop a value proposition for Midlands Food & Drink
- Develop a comprehensive plan of initiatives that can build on strengths or address problems
- Identify key themes for the strategy
- Create a simple multi-pillar strategy document
- Create a SMART project plan with clear project owners and a governance schedule.
- Creation of final report for Midlands Food & Drink Strategy, a stakeholder briefing document/stakeholder engagement plan

**Action 2:**

Develop the Midlands as a food and drink destination, capitalising on its local food and drink offerings and develop a Regional Food Story with Fáilte Ireland.

**Working Group Members:**

Fáilte Ireland, Bord Bia, LEOs, Local Authorities

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q2 2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

To develop the Midlands as a food and drink destination and develop a Regional Food Story with Fáilte Ireland.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

Addressed as part of the Food Strategy.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

Working group will meet again in Q1 2020 to discuss 2020 plan

**Action 3:**

Establish a food learning network between food hubs, education providers, hospitality sector in the region to capture/identify best practice, share expertise, and fill gaps in provision through collaboration.

**Working Group Members:**

LEOs, Local Authorities, AIT, The Kitchens Mountmellick, Fermoy Food Campus, Bord Bia

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2020

**Status:**

Work commenced & completed in 2019

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

In 2019 establish a food learning network between food hubs, education providers, hospitality sector in the region.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

Addressed as part of the Food Strategy in consultation with AIT, the Kitchens, Ferbane Food Campus and the Regional Skills Forum.

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

Addressed as part of the Food Strategy in consultation with AIT, the Kitchens, Ferbane Food Campus and the Regional Skills Forum.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

7

Ensure the availability of skills and talent to realise the region's economic potential and address upskilling requirements.

**Action 1:**

As part of the Skills for Growth initiative the Regional Skills Forum will assist local enterprises identify their skills' needs through a variety of audit tools to ensure that the Region has the effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity. Once skill needs have been identified, Regional Skills Fora will link companies with the education and training providers best suited to responding to identified skills need

**Working Group Members:**

RSF, and partners including EI, IDA Ireland, ETB, and DEASP

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2019

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Regional Skills Forum will assist local enterprises identify their skills' needs through a variety of audit tools.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

The RSF has set a target of 40 companies (achieved over 90) and a number of audits are already completed, and appropriate training identified.

**Also achieved the following:**

- Over 90 companies met year to date
- 36 formal audits completed
- Some very detailed skills needs identified

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

Continue to identify skills needs in the region during 2020

**Action 2:**

Double the number of participants on the EXPLORE programme over the 2018 figure. The EXPLORE programme is designed to address the need for enhanced digital skills among older workers in manufacturing sectors within the region

**Working Group Members:**

ETB, Regional Skills Forum.

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q4 2019

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Double the number of participants on the Explore Programme over the 2018 figure.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

- Double the number of participants on the Explore Programme over the 2018 figure.
- 40-44 participants completed in 2019 through ETB
- Explore Programme is designed to address the need for enhanced digital skills among the older workers in Manufacturing sector within the Region
- Also looked at opening up the mind to change new ways of working

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

2019 saw the completion of the targets as set however, DES have indicated that this initiative may well continue in 2020 through collaboration direct with ETB's under the Skills to Advance programme.

**Action 3:**

Support education and training providers in preparing applications under Springboard+ 2019 in collaboration with local enterprise in order to increase provision of programmes for upskilling and reskilling within the region.

**Working Group Members:**

RSF, HEIs

**Timeframe for delivery:**

Q2 2019

**Status:**

Work commenced & completed in 2019

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Support education and training providers in preparing applications under Springboard+

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

Support Education & Training Providers in preparing applications under Springboard + 2019 in collaboration with local Enterprise for upskilling and reskilling within the Region

Including the following:

- AIT 24 courses
- Innopharma 2 courses
- Total places 950
- €3.5 million plus

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

- Springboard will continue into 2020.
- Support the Midlands as an Advanced Centre of Manufacturing.
- Cluster Fund re Industry 5.0

**Action 4:**

Support all actions in the Regional Enterprise Plan where linkages to Education and Training Providers are required.

**Working Group Members:**

RSF

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Identify the linkages with the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to the following:

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

Identify the linkages with the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to the following:

- **Objective 3:** Support the Midlands as an Advanced Centre of Manufacturing.
  - » Cluster Fund re Industry 5.0
- **Objective 4:** Enhance the collective offering of the Midlands as a place to live, work and invest in.
  - » Remote Hubs

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

Continue to support Strategic Objective 3 & 4 objectives of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan.

**Action 5:**

Communicate to employers the services available through Regional Skills Forum to assist with resolution of emerging skills needs.

**Working Group Members:**

RSF

**Timeframe for delivery:**

2020

**Status:**

Work started in 2019 & continuing in 2020

**What were the milestone(s) for 2019?**

Communicate to employers the services available through Regional Skills Forum.

**What progress was made in reaching the milestone(s) in 2019?**

- Over 90 companies met year to date
- Details got re Critical Vacancies and Skills needs
- Linkage made with Education & Training Providers and Employers
- Skills roadshow held in Longford and Mullingar
- Others planned for Laois & Westmeath

**What will the Workplan for 2020 contain?**

Other roadshows planned for Laois & Westmeath

## Appendix 1: Regional Funding approved for the Midlands supported by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

### Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF)

The Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) was launched in May 2017 with the overarching aim of driving enterprise development and job creation in each region throughout Ireland.

Administered by Enterprise Ireland, it supports new collaborative and innovative initiatives that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in the region/across regions, or nationally. Just under €100m has been approved across 68 projects nationally.

Over the three calls under the REDF, the Midlands Region secured funding of just over €7.5 million across six projects\*:

REDF Call	Project	Location	Description	Grant amount
1	Irish Manufacturing Community Network	Westmeath	Irish Manufacturing Sector Research	€2,165,280
1 Shared	Leitrim County Enterprise Fund	Leitrim/Cavan/Longford	Development of Innovation and Digital Hub in Longford Town	€1,284,000
2	Mountmellick Development Association CLG	Laois	Centre for Business Excellence	€218,200
2	Offaly Innovation & Design Centre CLG	Offaly	A Creative Suite to provide central location and space	€458,240
3	Portlaoise Innovation Centre DAC	Laois	Creation of a Low Carbon Centre of Excellence	€2,050,560
3	Premier Lakelands Food Hub	Longford	Development of a state-of-the-art food hub	€1,358,000
Call 1 Total				€2,165,280
Call 1 Total (incl shared)				€3,449,280
Call 2 Total				€676,440
Call 3 Total				€3,408,560
Total (incl shared)				€7,534,280
Grand Total				€6,250,280

\*Figure includes additional REDF project cross regional  
Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) successful Call announcement dates:  
REDF Call 1: 4<sup>th</sup> December 2017  
REDF Call 2: 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018  
REDF Call 3: 8<sup>th</sup> January 2020



## Regional Technology Clustering Fund

Under Project Ireland 2040 Government identified an ambition to build sectoral clusters of Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) at regional level. This ambition will be delivered through initiatives supporting the development of business-led clustering of competitive advantage.

As one of the Government initiatives in this area, a multi-annual fund for Regional Technology Clustering was announced in Budget 2019. An initial €2.75 million budget will be administered by Enterprise Ireland on behalf of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation to support this initiative. This will be in the form of a competitive fund open to the Institutes of Technology (IoT) / Technological Universities (TU).

Applicant Name (Correct Legal Entity Name)	Stream	Project Summary	Fund awarded (€)
Athlone IT	1	An Industry 4.0 Cluster will support SMEs to capitalise on the opportunities presented by Industry 4.0, maximising their productivity, competitiveness, internationalisation and growth potential.	€377,520
<b>Total</b>			<b>€377,520</b>

Regional Technology Clustering Fund successful announcement date:  
4<sup>th</sup> October 2019

## Funding under LEO Competitive Fund

The LEO Competitive Fund is to encourage LEO projects aligned with the pillars of Future Jobs Strategy and the Regional-Enterprise-Plans. It supports LEOs to collaborate within the network and enterprise eco-system.

Project & Summary	Lead Local Enterprise Office	Partners collaborating in the project	Funding
The Midlands Artisan Food & Drinks Producers project aims to strengthen the capacity of the sector to create additional employment and support the progress of some of the participants to become client businesses of Enterprise Ireland. It will encourage networking and collaboration between businesses on a regional basis and encourage business expansion through a process of innovation.	Laois	IT Carlow	€143,000
The Going Green project aims to educate, advise and support small businesses in the Midland's region in their adoption of environmentally positive actions and demonstrate the commitment of small firms to sustainability. By becoming exemplar businesses, they can act as positive role models to other small firms and gain competitive advantage as the consumer becomes more discerning in relation to dealing with environmentally conscious firms.	Longford	Local Authorities in the four Counties	€222,000
<p>The Engenuity Engineering Midlands project will power the next level of development for a cluster of engineering companies in the midland's region. It aims to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of member companies to respond to changing market challenges and opportunities arising from Brexit.</p> <p>To deliver business development and marketing research and subsequent collaboration to identify and capitalise on domestic and international opportunities, B2B and supply chain opportunities within the network including joint tendering and enhancing competitive advantage within the region through the network co-ordinator and the proposed steering group members.</p> <p>Deliver R&amp;D collaboration between cluster members, education institutions and support agencies in the region, utilising the advantage of the Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR) and Athlone IT.</p>	Westmeath	ETB's, Regional Skills Forum, Enterprise Ireland, Athlone IT, Irish Manufacturing Research Centre, Irish Centre for Robotics Mullingar, National Cleanroom Training Centre, Offaly.	€250,000
The First Time Exporters project aims to assist high potential micro enterprises expand into international markets for the first time. Through a specially designed programme of expert advice and support, practical workshops and masterclasses, exporting clinics with specialists and networking opportunities; micro businesses will be equipped to maximise their full potential in appropriate international markets.	Westmeath	Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia, European Enterprise Network, National Robotics Skillnet, Regional Skills Forum.	€150,000
<b>Total</b>			<b>€765,000</b>

LEO Competitive Fund successful announcement date:  
4<sup>th</sup> October 2019

## Appendix 2: Other Funding approved for the Midlands

### Project Ireland 2040 Funds

In 2018 the Government launched Project Ireland 2040 and committed €4 billion in funding under the Rural regeneration and Development Fund, Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund and the Climate Action Fund.

The four funds are a major innovation in Project Ireland 2040 and rather than allocating funding in a 'business as usual' way to Government Departments, money was allocated competitively to the best projects, which leverage investment from other sources thereby ensuring that the impact of this investment goes further.

### Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF)

As part of Project Ireland 2040, the Government has committed to providing an additional €1 billion for a new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) over the period 2019 to 2027. Initial funding of €315 million is being allocated to the Fund on a phased basis over the period 2019 to 2022. The Fund will provide investment to support rural renewal for suitable projects in towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas. It will be administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The new Fund provides an unprecedented opportunity to support the revitalisation of rural Ireland, to make a significant and sustainable impact on rural communities, and to address de-population in small rural towns, villages and rural areas. It will be a key instrument to support the objectives of the National Planning Framework, and in particular to achieve Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities – one of the National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF.

Call	Project	Location	Grant amount
RRDF Call 1	Emo Court estate upgrade	Laois	€1,200,000
	Historic Granard Motte Project	Longford	€2,872,434
	Edgeworthstown Regeneration	Longford	€1,269,019
Call 1 Subtotal			€5,341,453
Shared RRDF project cross regional	International Mountain Biking Project	Multiple counties including Offaly & Laois	€10,262,900
Multiple County Subtotal			
Call 1 total (incl shared)			€15,604,353
RRDF Call 2	The Yard Abbeyshrule – Community and Economic Hub	Longford	€522,265
	Edenderry Regeneration – Phase 1	Offaly	€522,207
Call 2 Subtotal			€1,044,472
Shared RRDF project cross regional	Barrow Blueway, 46km	Kildare, Laois	€5,067,941
Call 2 total (incl shared)			€6,385,925
Call 1 & 2 Total			€15,820,640
Call 1 & 2 Total (inc shared)			€21,990,278

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) successful Call announcement dates:  
RRDF Call 1: 14<sup>th</sup> February 2019  
RRDF Call 2: 6<sup>th</sup> November 2019

## Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF)

The €2 billion Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) is intended to drive regeneration and rejuvenation of strategic and under-utilised areas within Ireland's five cities, key regional drivers and other large towns. The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) has responsibility for implementing the fund, which has €100m available for expenditure in 2019 and an overall allocation of €550 million allocated to the fund up to the end of 2022. The fund will operate on a competitive, bid-based Exchequer grant basis, with proposals being required to demonstrate that they will be:

- Innovative and transformational urban regeneration projects;
- Public-sector led and with the option of community and/or private sector partners;
- Matched by at least 25 percent direct funding from other public and/or private sources;
- A minimum bid of €2m;
- A catalyst for development that would not otherwise occur; and
- Likely to leverage significant further public and private sector investment.

Call	Project	Location	Grant amount
URDF Cat A	Longford Connected (public realm market square)	Longford	€1,000,000
	Tullamore Urban Area (public realm)	Offaly	€3,000,000
	Portlaoise cultural quarter	Laois	€2,343,000
	Portlaoise 'Low Carbon Town'	Laois	€1,014,000
		<b>Total</b>	<b>€7,357,000</b>

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) successful Call announcement date:  
URDF Call: 26<sup>th</sup> November 2018

## Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2019

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is an initiative under the Action Plan for Rural Development and is part of a package of national and local support measures to rejuvenate rural towns and villages throughout Ireland through the Government's Project Ireland 2040 Rural Regeneration Programme. The Scheme is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and administered by the Local Authorities.

Local Authorities will be required to advertise for expressions of interest from towns/villages in their area and can select up to 12 proposals for development into detailed applications to be submitted to the Department by the end of June. Selection of projects will be by means of a competitive process, with the final project selection being made by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Project & Summary	Town	County	Funding
Installation of footpaths and construction of wildlife walking track in wildlife park.	Ballacolla	Laois	€55,000
Upgrade outdoor swimming pool.	Ballinakill	Laois	€100,000
Provide lighting to Camross Village Walkway and secure the perimeter of the Village Park.	Camross	Laois	€35,000
Upgrade of Castletown Community Centre.	Castletown	Laois	€47,761
Public Realm Works and improvement of pathway at perimeter of People's Park to link the Leisure Centre with the Lake Development.	Portarlington	Laois	€200,000
<b>Laois Total</b>			<b>€437,761</b>
Upgrade and make safe an existing walkway from Ardagh Heritage and Creativity Centre to Bri Leith.	Ardagh	Longford	€55,864
Second phase of the redevelopment of Rose Cottage	Ballinalee	Longford	€21,040
Installation of new street lights and footpaths within Keenagh	Keenagh	Longford	€100,000
Develop a car park in village.	Killashee	Longford	€100,000
Erect heritage signage, information panels and plaques at key locations and historical sites in the village.	Drumlish	Longford	€21,040
Legga Construct a footpath linking Legga Church and Legga Cemetery in the village.	Legga	Longford	€77,200
<b>Longford Total</b>			<b>€454,104</b>
The enhancement of the streetscape and Public Realm of the Green	Birr	Offaly	€200,000
Public Realm Works in the Village.	Crinkill	Offaly	€100,000
Enhancements at Blundell Park, Edenderry to include toddlers play area and provide pedestrians walkways through the park.	Edenderry	Offaly	€200,000
Public Realm Works in the Village.	Mount Bolus	Offaly	€100,000
To provide new footpaths, new pedestrian crossing and upgrade public lighting in the village	Shinrone	Offaly	€100,000
<b>Offaly Total</b>			<b>€700,000</b>
Public realm enhancement including new footpaths, upgrade public lighting and new drainage system	Ballinagore	Westmeath	€100,000
Village park improvement works, accessibility improvements and enhancement of amenities	Ballinahown	Westmeath	€100,000
Improving the public realm area by creating a pedestrian civic area, street furniture, signage, lighting and landscaping.	Castletown Geoghegan	Westmeath	€100,000
Enhance the public realm area by upgrading signage, street furniture, new road markings, upgrade footpaths and improving parking areas.	Clonmellon	Westmeath	€100,000
Public realm works to render the village Age Friendly.	Collinstown	Westmeath	€100,000
Streetscape Enhancement	Moate	Westmeath	€200,000
<b>Westmeath Total</b>			<b>€700,000</b>
<b>Midlands Grand Total</b>			<b>€2,291,865</b>

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme successful announcement date:  
1<sup>st</sup> November 2019

## Appendix 3: Brief profile and statistical snapshot – Midlands

Constituent counties	Laois, Longford, Offaly & Westmeath	
Regional Population & change (1996-2016)	205,542 (1996): 292,301 (2016) increase of 86,759*	
GVA <sup>1</sup> per person 2000 and 2015	€15,988: €22,320*	
Total in employment	134,300 <sup>2</sup>	
Labour Force Participation rate	59.5% <sup>3</sup>	
Unemployment rate	4.5% <sup>4</sup>	
Unemployment blackspots <sup>5</sup>	4 <sup>6</sup> *	
Percentage employed in Manufacturing: Services: Public sector	15%: 19%: 24% <sup>7</sup>	
Educated to third level in West: State	34%: 45%*	
Third Level Students (full-time & part-time)	4,525 <sup>8</sup> *	
Number of enterprises <sup>9</sup> (micro: small: medium: large) (2016)	11,587: 594: 101: 9*	
Number of Enterprise Ireland High Potential Start-Ups <sup>10</sup> (HPSUs) Midlands: State (2019)	0: 90	
EI supported employment & no. client companies (2018 – 2019)	2018	2019
	Jobs: 12,481	Jobs: 12,343
	Companies: 464	Companies: 258
IDA supported employment & no. client companies (2018 - 2019)	2018	2019
	Jobs: 5,714	Jobs: 6,209
	Companies: 43	Companies: 43
LEO supported employment & no. client companies (2018 - 2019)	2018	2019
	Jobs: 271	Jobs: 335
	Companies: 802	Companies: 827
Number of LEO Priming Grants <sup>11</sup> Midlands: State (2019)	31: 291	

1. Gross Value Added (GVA) is the measure of the value of goods and services produced in an area, industry or sector of an economy.

2. CSO Labour Force Survey Quarterly Series Q4 2019

3. CSO Labour Force Survey Quarterly Series Q4 2019

4. CSO Labour Force Survey Quarterly Series Q4 2019

5. Unemployment Blackspots are defined as Electoral Districts with at least 200 people in the labour force and an unemployment rate of 27% or higher

6. Unemployment blackspots in the region: Longford (3) & Westmeath (1).

7. CSO Labour Force Survey Quarterly Series Q4 2019

8. Athlone Institute of Technology (4,525) CSO

9. A Small Enterprise is defined as: an enterprise that has fewer than 50 employees and has either an annual turnover and/or an annual Balance Sheet total not exceeding €10m; A Medium Sized Enterprise is defined as: an enterprise that has between 50 employees and 249 employees and has either an annual turnover not exceeding €50m or an annual Balance Sheet total not exceeding €43m; A Large Enterprise is defined as: an enterprise that employs greater than 250 employees, has either an annual turnover of greater than €50m or an annual balance sheet of greater than €43m

10. HPSUs are start-up businesses with the potential to develop an innovative product or service for sale on international markets and the potential to create 10 jobs and €1m in sales within 3 years of starting up.

11. A Priming Grant is a business start-up grant, available to micro enterprises within the first 18 months of start-up.

\* Latest available update

## Appendix 4: Employment creation and unemployment – Progress against targets set to 2020

Since the launch of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJ) there has been an increase of 346,800 people in employment across the State since Q1 2015 to Q4 2019, with 222,600 people in the regions outside of Dublin entering employment in that period.

The RAPJ initiative was a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, 135,000 of which are outside of Dublin.

The new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020 continue the focus on delivery to these targets:

- employment growth of between 10 and 15 percent;
- and an unemployment rate reduced to within one percentage point of the State average.

Utilising data from the CSO Labour Force Survey (LFS), the rate of growth and unemployment rates achieved for the Midlands region during the period Q1 2015 up to Q4 2019 are as follows:

	Numbers Employed				Unemployment Rate	
	Q1 2015	Q4 2019	Change Q1 2015 to Q4 2019	Growth Q1 2015 to Q4 2019	Q1 2015	Q4 2019
<b>Midlands</b>	108,100	134,300	26,200	24.2%	14.9%	4.5%
<b>State</b>	2,014,400	2,361,200	346,800	17.2%	10.5%	4.5%

Source: CSO Labour Force Survey, Q4 2019

The Midlands is currently performing ahead of the targets to end of 2020.



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