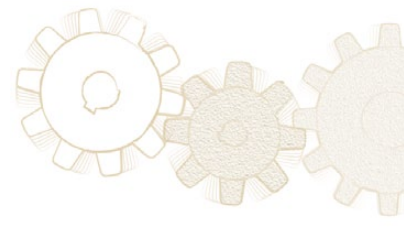




Strategic Plan 2015-2018

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Chairperson's Foreword

Since its establishment, the Western Development Commission (WDC) has pursued with determination its remit to *'foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region'*. The work of the WDC over the years has resulted in the organisation now being recognised as a centre of expertise in regional development, in the production and use of bio-energy resources, in efficient management of risk capital investment and in informing policy through high quality analysis.

We are a small, yet highly dynamic and flexible organisation which has made a significant contribution to the economy of the region. It benefits from having a hard working board and a highly motivated and professional staff.

At Government level, there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of balanced regional development. Recently there has been the publication of the CEDRA Report and the provision of €30m towards implementation of recommendations in the report. The WDC is pleased to have been charged with delivering aspects of the findings.

And so, it is in the context of current Government policy and proven WDC capacity to deliver that this Strategic Statement has been prepared and completed. The statement seeks to align priorities and actions identified during its preparation with collaborating responses from Government. We believe that this strategy will allow the region to grow and realise the benefits of prudent investment now.

The statement seeks to widen the scope and impact of the region's economic development through a focus on larger scale initiatives that build on success already achieved. A clear objective will be to work with government on providing sufficient resources for the retention and enhancement of air, rail and road infrastructure in the region.

I am satisfied that this statement represents a solid realistic plan of action for the next three years. It is the end product of many working sessions involving all of the staff, board members and an external consultant (Emperia). There has been important input from all three groupings. It sets down clear and ambitious targets with realistic timelines for their achievement.

I want to acknowledge the effort made by everyone involved in this important task.

I look forward to working with the entire WDC team in partnership with other agencies and Government in delivering on the goals and targets identified.



Paddy McGuinness
Chairperson



Chief Executive's Foreword

2020 Vision

In recent times Ireland has sought to reflect upon its modern history in part to assess where it stands and how it is set for the coming years. It is within this context that the Western Development Commission (WDC) finds a suitable opportunity to reflect upon how it may also wisely undertake its remit of growth for the West of Ireland region. This is the subtext of the Strategic Statement (2015-2018).

The West of Ireland region is one of opportunity for the whole country. Its GVA although lagging the EU average, is ahead of many neighbouring international competitors.

Its peripherality in fact offers true competitive advantage, skilled productive people working in a truly inspiring location, seeking to connect and compete globally. The WDC seeks to enable and facilitate this scenario. However that same peripherality offers challenges that other modern economies have considered and to varying degrees addressed. The WDC seeks to inform and assist the state to similarly consider the true investment opportunities that await in engaging with the West of Ireland region.

In recent times the WDC has sought to deliver to the region a funded, resourced approach to retaining or creating thousands of jobs directly within the Western Region of Ireland. Through both direct stimulus programmes and indirect promotion and linking of regional capabilities we have, with regional partners, achieved significant wins for regional business.

Our creative and cultural economy is now seen globally as a regional strength, both directly and indirectly. One which attracts business activity, funding and moreover investment. Similarly our renewable energy sector is starting to gain momentum with multi million euro projects now being considered as viable projects for regional investment. In recent times the WDC has nurtured the regional narratives for these opportunities through building capacity and understanding, and now we seek to scale these efforts to deliver on significant job opportunities.

Correctly positioning our regions peripherality as strength to citizens, investors and visitors alike the WDC analysis and policy expertise continues to identify, inform and drive change in critical areas. Access infrastructure, whether its international standard broad band or cheaper energy, remain a critical priority being pushed by the WDC.

Our www.Lookwest.ie platform has now become the face of the West of Ireland region with over 2 million visitors since inception and monthly tens of thousands of visitors to the information and updates on what the regions does and offers.

Similarly in giving the region a functioning access to finance capability, the WDC has invested a total of almost €41.6 million in 110 micro, SMEs and social enterprises in the region. 2,500 people are directly employed in our Western Investment fund (WIF) portfolio companies, with the potential of job numbers to grow as these companies expand.

Now as the national economic environment improves somewhat the WDC has sought to advance towards a strategic statement that will match the potential and needs of the West of Ireland region.

As such the WDC has sought to inform this strategic statement through a consultation process involving business leaders, community advocates, academic heads, policy drivers and key niche sectors such as cultural and creative, life sciences, tourism and renewable energy.

Additionally the WDC is incorporating the EU2020 key themes of Smart, Inclusive, Sustainable, and to some extent Governance, within its plan to realise the regional 2020 vision. In total it is hoped that from the almost 3000 jobs today our efforts with regional, national and via the support of the EU, international partners will seek to yield an additional 19,000 jobs within this peripheral region by 2020. How we will achieve this is based on a highly collaborative ethos, with the Local authorities, regional stakeholders and indeed EU becoming essential to translating our efforts into enterprise and employment outputs.

The WDC now seeks to scale and drive regional employment and enterprise growth through linking the region both internally and internationally to both resources and markets. We are adapting and seeking to lead on this change manifesto; indeed, we see leveraging our region's key assets internationally as important to the state's response to the current international challenges. This strategic statement looks to set out the key areas in which we hope to achieve our vision for the region.



Ian Brannigan
CEO (A) & Head of Regional Development

1.0

Executive Overview

This Strategic Plan was developed in the summer of 2015. It sets out the Mission, Core Values, Vision, Goals and Strategic Objectives of the Western Development Commission (WDC) for the Three-Year period 2015 to 2018.

The Plan was developed by way of:

- A review of the Strategy Statement of the WDC for the period 2013 -2014.
- A series of four separate strategy workshops
 - Detailed SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats).
 - Detailed PEST Analysis (Political, Economical, Social, Technological).
 - Identification of key considerations for the WDC.
 - Development of Strategic Plan.
- A survey of key stakeholders of the WDC.
 - SWOT Assessment of the WDC and its role and work.
 - Identification of priority issues relating to the development of Ireland's Western Region over the next three years.

The development of the Plan was facilitated by Empeira Governance Advisors. The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government was consulted during the process to ensure the Plan being prepared was consistent with the structure, and approach required of the WDC, as a development agency affiliated to the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, and as a qualifying Public Sector body under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

The following statements incorporate the core purpose and strategic focus of the WDC for the ensuing three years.



1.1 Mission Statement

'To champion the economic, social and cultural development of Ireland's Western Region.'

1.2 Vision Statement

'To be the go-to agency for the development of Ireland's Western Region'.

1.3 Core Values

The core values of the WDC are:

i. Collaboration:

We collaborate with all national, regional and local Organisations for the development of the Western Region.

ii. Leadership:

Nurture leadership across economic and social activity within Ireland's Western Region.

iii. Innovation:

We encourage and promote innovation in the development of the Western Region.

iv. Integrity & Trust:

We strive to earn the trust of all our clients and stakeholders by operating with the utmost integrity, in all our dealings with them.

v. Adaptability & Flexibility:

The WDC and its staff are adaptable and flexible to meet changing circumstances.



2.0

Background / Context to the WDC



Set up in the late 1990s, the Western Development Commission (WDC) was a government response to intense public pressure to help tackle the massive population decline the Western Region of Ireland had endured over many years.

The scale of this decline, coupled with the region's peripheral location and weak infrastructure, resulted in little investment being attracted to the West. The resulting lack of job opportunities and widespread emigration led to the setting up of the Western Development Commission (WDC) in 1997.

The WDC has been hugely successful in responding to the challenge:

- It has been the only agency with the remit to advise national government on policy changes vital for the West of Ireland region
- It has been able to support local businesses with expertise and with investment from the unique Western Investment Fund (WIF).
- It has supported and set up projects and other initiatives both on its own and through working with other agencies. Since 2010 the WDC has sourced and invested over €13 M of non-exchequer funds in regional growth.
- Its cutting-edge and comprehensive research on the Western Region has helped throw new light on what businesses and individuals need, in order to thrive and prosper in the Western counties.
- Its regionally focused ethos and a strong culture of sharing its resources and information has meant that it has played – and will continue to play – a central role in bringing growth and prosperity to the Western Region.

2.1 Context for WDC Strategy 2015 - 2018

The WDC remit covers the seven county Western Region (Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare) with a population of just over 820,000, close to 18% of Ireland's total. The region's rural population distribution – two-thirds of people live outside towns of 1,500+ compared with the just over one-third (36%) nationally – is one of its defining characteristics and influences the WDC's strategic priorities. Galway city plays a key economic and service role, while the region has a further five population centres of 10,000+ spread across the region from Ennis to Letterkenny.

At the start of 2015 the Western Region had a labour force of 350,000 people (16.5% of the national total), 316,000 of whom were working. High self-employment is a feature of the region with 1 in 5 people working for themselves (20.5%) compared with just 15.7% in the rest of the state. In 2012 (most recent data) 16% of all enterprises in the country were registered in the Western Region, just under 30,000, 91% of which are micro-enterprises.

Most people in the region are employed in Industry, Health, Wholesale & Retail, Agriculture and Education. Overall the region's jobs profile relies more on manufacturing, traditional sectors and public services compared with the rest of the state and has lower activity in the knowledge services sectors. There were 57,700 jobs in agency assisted companies (export focused) in 2014, with Medical Devices by far the largest, followed by Food, Computer Programming and Chemicals. High tech manufacturing is of particular significance to the Western Region's economy.

The unemployment rate in the Western Region in 2015 is 10.4%, compared with 9.8% in the rest of the state. The region's unemployment rate is beginning to decline but at a slower pace than in the rest of the country. The exception to the overall trend of falling unemployment is among young people. The region's youth (15-24 years) unemployment rate is 30.8%, 10 percentage points above the rest of the state, and is continuing to rise in the region even as it falls elsewhere.

Household Disposable Income per person in the Western Region was €17,735 in 2012 (most recent data), still significantly below its 2008 peak of €21,167. The Western Region's Household Disposable Income in 2012 was 91.1% of the state average but over the long term there has been a narrowing of the gap in disposable income with the Western Region 84.3% of the state average in 1995.

In 2012 the Gross Value Added (GVA) per person in the West region was €28,256 and €19,016 in the Border region. These compare with a state average of €34,308. GVA in 2012 was still below that of 2007 in all regions except the West, where recovery has been strong. GVA in the Border region in 2012 was 55.4% of the state average and in the West was 82.4%. There has been a widening of GVA disparities among regions since the recent economic recovery began.

While the Irish economy is beginning to experience growth after a period of retrenchment and minimal investment, this recovery is spatially imbalanced. A National Planning Framework, a successor to the National Spatial Strategy, is being prepared which is expected to influence where growth will or should occur. Consideration of capital investment priorities and how to plan for growth are back on the agenda. The needs of the Western Region, and the policy responses it requires to maximise opportunities for its residents, need to be integral to the development of national growth strategies.

2.2 Background

The WDC is an organisation under the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government and being a public sector body, it is audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. While it manages a commercial fund, the WDC itself receives an annual grant from Government to cover its operating costs.



3.0

Strategic Goals



The following goals have been identified by the Western Development Commission as being the primary drivers of Board and Management for the 3-Year duration of this Strategic Plan:

Goal 1

“To inform and influence policy-making on economic and social development in Ireland’s Western Region through high quality analysis.”

Goal 2

“To promote the benefits of living, working and doing business in Ireland’s Western Region.”

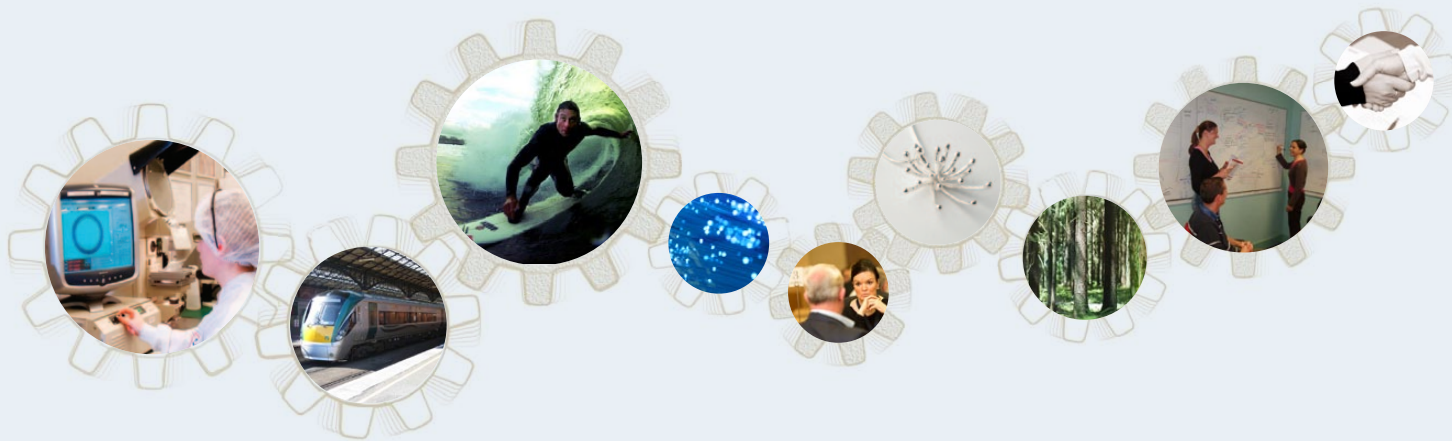
Goal 3

“To encourage the development of the Western economy based on the sustainable development of the Western Region’s strengths and resources.”

Goal 4

“To provide risk capital to micro, small and medium sized and social enterprises (in their start-up and expansion phases) through the WDC Investment Fund (WIF).”





Goal 5

“To operate the WDC as a competent, effective and learning organisation.”

Goal 6

“To ensure the WDC’s remit is recognised and supported at all levels of Government.”

Goal 7

“To secure and maintain a novel region specific strategic growth fund to meet the development requirements of Ireland’s Western Region.”

Goal 8

“To establish and assess a Strategic Regional Development Office (SRDO) pilot in the West of Ireland to augment the WDC remit of accelerating economic growth in the region.”

4.0

Strategic Objectives

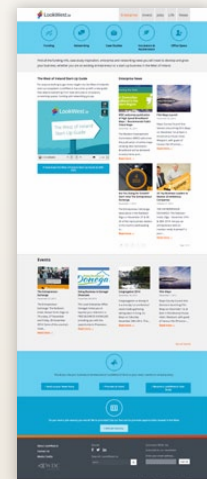
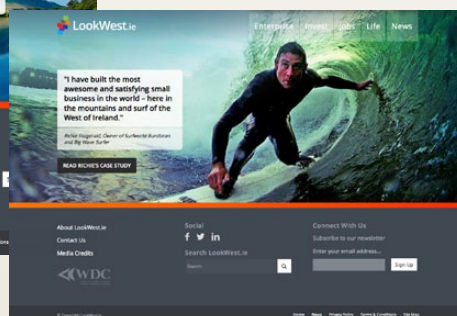
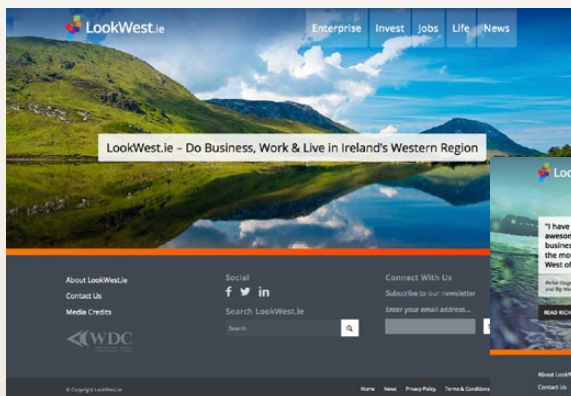


Goal 1: To inform and influence policy-making on economic and social development in Ireland's Western Region through high quality analysis.

Goal 1 Objective	Desired Outcome
Contribute to understanding and debate on balanced regional development in Ireland.	Balanced regional development a core objective across all government policies.
Conduct analysis of economic and social trends of importance to the growth and development of the Western Region	Greater awareness among key stakeholders of the specific issues and needs of the Western Region.
Contribute to the debate on national and regional policies in areas of importance to the Western Region.	National and regional policies address issues relevant to Western development. Sectoral policies more cognisant of regions' needs.
Analyse the Western Region's infrastructure requirements & propose solutions with particular focus on transport, energy & communications.	Infrastructural needs of the Western Region highlighted to Board and key decision makers nationally and regionally
Identify issues for the rural and remoter parts of the Western Region and propose solutions.	Greater recognition of the needs of rural and remoter areas in sector specific and rural policy making.

Goal 2: To promote the benefits of living, working and doing business in Ireland's Western Region.

Goal 2 Objective	Desired Outcome
Position the western region of Ireland as a leading global region. (Characterised by a dynamic draw for enterprise, activity and creativity)	<p>Evolve www.lookwest.ie platform to <i>lookwest.ireland</i> to help drive enterprise growth and investment.</p> <p>An enhanced facility for meeting and assisting individuals and businesses interested in the Region.</p> <p>Leveraging emerging social media channels.</p> <p>An improved profile for regional businesses and partners leading to increased economic activity in the Region.</p> <p>Greater regional dynamism in attracting SME investment.</p>
Development of a coherent entrepreneurial growth capability for regional SME's with partners.	<p>Increased entrepreneurial activity in the region.</p> <p>Increased number of cost effective, novel, entrepreneurial growth models for stakeholders (e.g. local authorities, LEO's).</p>
Effectively engage with the Region's global diaspora.	Establishment of tangible diaspora programmes with stakeholders to further economic development of the region.
Encourage Volunteerism.	To increase numbers involved in socio economic volunteering in region in order to increase momentum in regions self-image and initiate potential social enterprise models.



Goal 3: To encourage the development of the Western economy based on the sustainable development of the Western Region's strengths and resources.

Goal 3 Objective	Desired Outcome
Ensure the Western Region achieves its aspiration as a globally significant creative region (a hotbed for creativity”).	<p>Increased economic activity in the Region's creative sector.</p> <p>Increased awareness among key stakeholders of the economic contribution and potential of the creative sector in the Western Region.</p> <p>Government Policy on the Creative Sector informed and accommodating of the sector's potential within the Western Region.</p>
Support the western regional goal of becoming a national and international leader in exploitation and commercialisation of renewable energy sources and technologies.	<p>Creation of a sustainable support structure for regional bioenergy SMEs.</p> <p>Also support for large scale growth in bioenergy of renewable resources of the region in general.</p>
Identify and support the key regional growth segments in The western tourism sector.	<p>Grow the total Western Region tourism value and visitor numbers.</p> <p>Facilitate the region maximises tourism growth through collaboration and niche sectoral growth.</p>
Investigate the feasibility of developing an “offshore” EU shared service capability to support economic development for regional industry and Local authorities etc.	That Local authorities, HEI's, LEO's and other regional stakeholders have a business development capability actively identifying and realising regional socioeconomic risk capital within the EU framework.
Champion small town initiative.	<p>Transform small towns into sustainable population centres to live, trade and work in.</p> <p>Prioritise the needs of small towns.</p>

Goal 4: To provide risk capital to micro, small and medium sized and social enterprises and strategic initiatives (in their start-up and expansion phases) through the WDC Investment Fund (WIF).

Goal 4 Objective	Desired Outcome
Operate the Fund on a commercial basis in line with the Market Economy Investor Principle for equity investments and de minimis principle in the case of loans	Portfolio returns maximised through investment in enterprises that can offer a return commensurate with the risk taken, and monitoring and support of portfolio companies. The Fund seeks to be sustainable from an investment perspective.
Investigate how the Fund can invest in projects with a strategic focus	Develop strategic initiatives that the Fund can invest in.



Goal 5: To operate the WDC as a competent, effective and learning organisation.

Goal 5 Objective	Desired Outcome
Ensure Succession Plan in place for the Organisation.	Succession Plan in place.
Ensure full complement of human and financial resources required to deliver remit and strategy.	Sufficient resources to carry out the work of the WDC and implement the Strategy.
Ensure full Financial Control Compliance	Fully compliant with all Government requirements. Fully efficient and competent acting in accordance with best practice requirements.
Developing and harnessing staff competencies	Highly motivated team to manage and control the administration and business of the WDC. Training aligned to actual organisational goals.
Develops and maintains effective communications.	WDC stakeholders fully briefed on the relevant issues at the appropriate time.
Be fully compliant with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.	Fully compliant with Code.
Fully compliant with all statutory and regulatory requirements.	Full compliance.



Goal 6: To ensure the WDC's remit is recognised and supported at all levels of Government.

Goal 6 Objective	Desired Outcome
Engage with Government and Governmental Departments.	Relevance of work of the WDC recognised at Government level.
Seek to have a Regional Development brief at Cabinet level.	Regional development given priority at Cabinet level.
Engage with the work of other Agencies	Constructive working relationship in place between WDC and other Agencies.
Engage with the work of Local Authorities.	WDC identified and relied upon as a leader in regional development by local authorities.
Develop and maintain a coherent Communications Strategy	WDC is communicating effectively with both the public and all regional players.



Goal 7: To secure and maintain a growth fund to meet the development requirements of Ireland's Western Region.

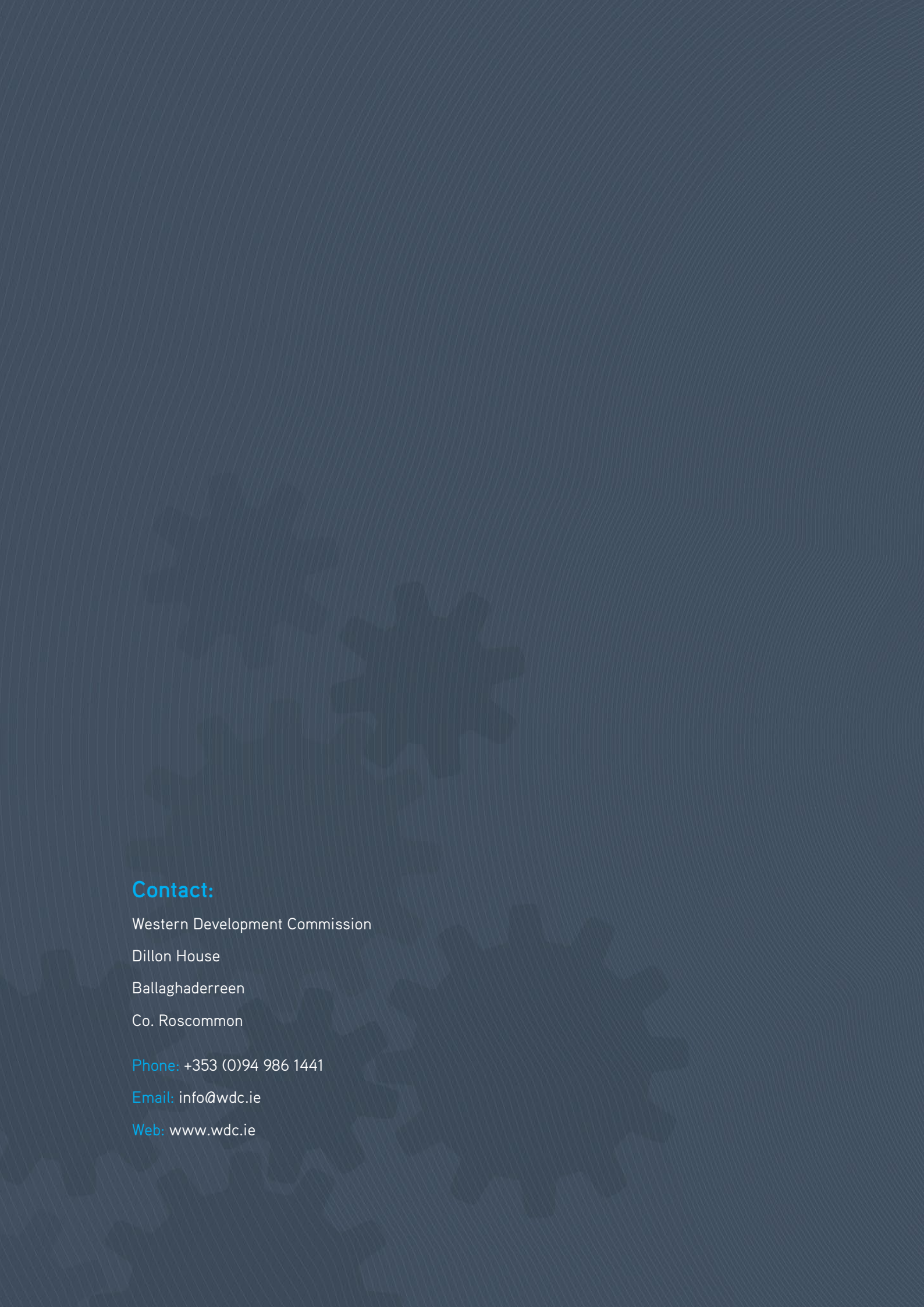
Goal 7 Objective	Desired Outcome
Investigate feasibility of regionally based strategic development fund to 'scale' job growth.	Determine feasibility of fund.
Secure funding for new growth fund (conditional on outcome of Feasibility Study).	Funding for new fund secured, once formal approval to proceed has been made.
Establish regional based strategic development investment fund to "scale" job growth (conditional on outcome of Feasibility Study).	Assess the possibility of delivering a capability to the region to invest in job rich proposals which deliver on jobs and total economic impact (with key prerequisite of long term investment requirement).



Goal 8: To establish and assess a Strategic Regional Development Office (SRDO) pilot in the West of Ireland to augment the WDC remit of accelerating economic growth in the region.

Goal 8 Objective	Desired Outcome
Establish a regional capacity to identify and exploit strategic, market led growth opportunities.	Enhanced ability of the West of Ireland region to identify and grow priority strategic initiatives.
Assess actual and forecasted economic impact of the initiative. Thereby formulating recommendations for future direction.	Understanding of SRDO capability to deliver strategic regional growth.





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