

EXCELLENCE INNOVATION CREATIVITY

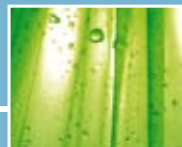


## STRATEGIC STATEMENT



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## FOREWORD

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Like the rest of Ireland, the seven western counties have seen many positive changes since the establishment of the Western Development Commission on a statutory basis in 1999.

Economic growth has led to the ending of emigration and stimulated significant population growth. Investments under the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006 have brought about much needed improvements in infrastructure and positioned the region to reverse negative perceptions of backwardness and to present itself as a thriving and diverse place.

At a time when global forces increasingly dictate the fate of countries and regions, much needs to be done to reverse the outcomes of decades of underdevelopment and to build on the Western Region's strengths. This is why the Western Development Commission (WDC) sees the commitment to balanced regional development and the rural economy in the new NDP 2007-2013 *Transforming Ireland* as fundamental to its work. Realising the economic, social and cultural potential of our predominantly rural region, requires investment, hard work and creativity. The WDC is keenly aware that the Western Region offers an attractive quality of life and many economic opportunities. We are confident that with the right supports, the region can build on its resources and maximise its potential.

In this, our third Strategic Plan, we focus organisational efforts on those key areas where we believe our organisational strengths and expertise can bring benefit to the Western Region and to the country as a whole. We have established good relationships with key interests at national, regional and local level. Maintaining and developing these relationships will be an integral part of ensuring the success of this Strategic Plan, enabling us to work with others in promoting the development needs of the Western Region.

The WDC recognises that the success of this Strategic Plan also depends on the dedication and competencies of the organisation's staff. We are therefore committed to the continuing staff development and training provided through the framework of our human resource strategy and Performance Management and Development System (PMDS).

The WDC's Strategic Plan 2007-2009 gives us the opportunity to make explicit our goals and expected outputs. The implementation of our plans and the achievement of the Strategic Plan's goals will be the WDC's priority in the coming years.

Gillian Buckley  
Chief Executive

# I. BACKGROUND

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The activities of the WDC are influenced by the socio-economic environment in which it operates. This includes international and national developments that impact upon the region, government policies and priorities, and the strategies and activities of other agencies.

## I.1 Policy Context

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The National Development Plan 2007-2013 (NDP) reiterates government commitment to balanced regional development through supporting the economic and social development of all regions so as to achieve their full potential. The work of the WDC is underpinned by this policy objective.

The role of investment policy under the NDP is to build on regions' strengths and address infrastructure deficits. The National Spatial Strategy provides the broad strategic framework for investment with a particular focus on Gateway towns<sup>1</sup> and on an urban-rural partnership which links urban centres and rural areas. The Western Region is predominantly rural so the focus on the rural economy in the NDP is particularly relevant.

## I.2 Economic and Social Context

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The Western Region has benefited significantly from the rapid growth of the Irish economy, which has created new employment opportunities and has attracted both returning migrants and others to the region. Nevertheless very significant development challenges remain. These include the vulnerability of the enterprise and employment structure in the region; the region's ability to compete in the knowledge-based economy; the need to maximise the potential of the rural economy, particularly sectors based on the region's own resources; retaining and attracting a dynamic, well-educated and entrepreneurial workforce; and significant infrastructure gaps particularly in transport access and broadband telecommunications.

Economic growth has not been evenly spread so that there are substantial intra-regional differences in wealth and wellbeing. Social change and in-migration have transformed the age and ethnic profile of many parts of the Western Region. This has brought about welcome diversity and fresh cultural influences, but has also challenged existing structures and services and generated demands for new services. These, then, are some of the trends that impact on the environment in which the WDC operates and influence its strategic goals.

<sup>1</sup> In the Western Region these are Galway, Sligo, Letterkenny (linked with Derry) and Shannon (linked with Limerick).



## 2. WESTERN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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The WDC has a unique focus on the Western Region covering the seven counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare.

### 2.1 Remit

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The activities of the WDC are governed by the Western Development Commission Act, 1998.

The WDC's core remit is to promote the economic and social development of the Western Region. The region's productive sectors, infrastructure and rural communities are of particular concern. The WDC works to ensure that the interests of the Western Region are always considered at the highest levels of Government.

The WDC is responsible for the management and administration of the WDC Investment Fund. This dedicated fund addresses a funding gap experienced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and social enterprises in the region through the provision of risk capital, equity and loans on a commercial basis.

### 2.2 Vision

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A confident and ambitious Western Region where excellence, innovation and creativity are rewarded, and the rich quality of life, clean environment and unique heritage are valued and safeguarded.

### 2.3 Mission

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To be the signature agency for the Western Region helping to build on the region's strengths, address weaknesses and create a reputation for excellence.

## 2.4 Structure

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The WDC is made up of twelve members appointed by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Mr Éamon Ó Cuív, TD (see Appendix for current membership).

The Commission is supported by a committed executive located in Dillon House, Ballaghaderreen, County Roscommon. The WDC delivers its Strategic Plan through cross-functional Work Teams bringing together the different skills, expertise and perspectives of its policy, development, investment and administration staff. This teamworking approach to the delivery of strategic goals maximises in a very effective and efficient way the limited resources available to the organisation. The chart below shows the organisational structure.



## 2.5 Strategic Outlook

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The WDC's Strategic Plan sets out a challenging programme of work for the organisation to the end of 2009.

It is the result of careful consideration of:

- the WDC's legislative remit, particularly its role in promoting the economic and social development of the Western Region
- the national objective of fostering balanced regional development and the development of the rural economy through better regional distribution of public and private investment
- the scale and complexity of the challenge facing the Western Region in a global economy
- the very positive response to the WDC's work to date from a cross-section of interests within the region and nationally.

## 2.6 Working with Partners

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The WDC actively works with partners to ensure that its contribution to the development of the Western Region adds value to Government policy. Thus, the WDC fosters and encourages strategic regional initiatives in various sectors through working with national and regional agencies, local authorities, the private, and community and voluntary sectors.

## 2.7 Corporate Governance

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The WDC is required to implement and observe the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (Department of Finance, 2001). In complying with this Code, the WDC has developed a coherent and strategic approach to the development, management and implementation of its policies and goals. This approach is ongoing, and has resulted in the implementation of new functions and policies, including audit and internal audit functions, financial and risk management, a partnership process, human resource management, quality customer care and a communications policy.

## 2.8 Official Languages Act

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Under the WDC's Official Languages Scheme, the WDC currently provides bilingual services to a substantial extent and every effort will be made to provide services bilingually when requested. The WDC aims to ensure that any customer requesting to conduct their business through Irish can do so. The WDC is committed to assess on an ongoing basis the level of demand for services through Irish and to ensure that it continues to meet this demand in a planned, coherent and accessible way.

The WDC reports on progress on all of the above in its annual reports and in its Towards 2016 Action Plan.

## 3. STRATEGIC PLAN 2007 2009



The Strategic Plan is organised around five strategic goals to:

- Contribute to balanced regional development by ensuring that the Western Region maximises its full potential for economic and social development.
- Promote the benefits of living, working and doing business in the Western Region.
- Support the sustainable economic and social development of the rural economy.
- Provide risk capital to SMEs and social enterprises.
- Operate the WDC as a competent and effective organisation.

These goals provide a strategic focus for the work of the WDC for the next three years. Under each goal, the WDC has defined its strategy and performance indicators to realise that goal.

### 3.1 Contribute to balanced regional development by ensuring that the Western Region maximises its full potential for economic and social development

WDC Strategy	Performance Indicators
Identify and promote ways of maximising the region's potential by analysing economic and social issues, identifying opportunities and proposing appropriate actions.	Well substantiated and relevant policy analysis based on thorough investigation and engagement with stakeholders and policymakers. Provision of new and pertinent information on ways of more effectively linking public expenditure to balanced regional development. Reports produced and submitted to relevant Government departments in order to influence national policy.
Reinforce the region's strengths and address its weaknesses by highlighting necessary improvements in infrastructure (transport, communications, energy, social infrastructure).	Progress reports on key infrastructure issues with recommendations for improvements. Briefings and meetings held with infrastructure investment decision-makers. Significant improvement in economic and social infrastructure in the region.



## 3.2 Promote the benefits of living, working and doing business in the Western Region

WDC Strategy	Performance Indicators
Through the WDC's LookWest campaign, deliver a high level of awareness and confidence among key consumer and business audiences, that the West is an excellent place to live, work and do business.	<p>Consumer and Enterprise LookWest promotional campaigns delivered through advertising, website, exhibitions and a suite of printed promotional literature.</p> <p>Key stakeholders engaged with the WDC in promoting the benefits of the region.</p> <p>Skills register with profile of potential workers and enterprises.</p>
Develop the region's capacity to attract and support enterprises within the Creative Economy. <sup>2</sup>	<p>Examination of the region's capacity to attract and retain creative individuals and enterprises.</p> <p>Enhancement of the West's capacity to be recognised as a creative region.</p>

## 3.3 Support the sustainable economic and social development of the rural economy

WDC Strategy	Performance Indicators
Support the development and diversification of the rural economy through influencing national policy and developing projects of significant scale and impact.	<p>Major flagship project to deliver innovative high quality integrated tourism product in the region initiated.</p> <p>Strategy for the development of the renewable wood energy sector in the region delivered and flagship template projects initiated.</p> <p>Template project for community investment in renewable energy delivered.</p> <p>Drawing on development experience, influence national policy on the development of sectors in the rural economy.</p>

<sup>2</sup> The Creative Economy can be defined as encompassing industries which have the potential for job creation through the generation and exploitation of individuals' creativity, skill and talent. These businesses can include for example architecture, art, craft, design, film, software, music, performing arts, television and radio etc.

## 3.4 Provide risk capital to SMEs and social enterprises

WDC Strategy	Performance Indicators
To address funding gaps by providing risk capital to new and expanding SMEs and social enterprises from the WDC Investment Fund's allocation under the NDP.	<p>€4 million annual NDP allocation invested in a number of SMEs and social enterprises.</p> <p>A balanced investment portfolio that delivers a social and financial return to the WDC.</p>
Ongoing review of funding environment in the region and adjustment of investment strategy as appropriate, including securing any necessary State Aid approvals.	State Aid approval received.

## 3.5 Operate the WDC as a competent and effective organisation

WDC Strategy	Performance Indicators
To be a modern and flexible organisation complying with legislative requirements, Public Service Modernisation and best practice.	<p>Human resource policies compliant with current legislative requirements and best practice.</p> <p>WDC compliant with Code of Practice for Governance of State Bodies.</p> <p>Towards 2016 Action Plan approved and commitments met.</p> <p>Compliance with the WDC's Customer Service Charter.</p> <p>Efficient, reliable and secure information technology system in place.</p>
To provide a comprehensive accounting system and promote best practice in financial management and internal audit.	<p>Clear annual audit report from the Comptroller and Auditor General.</p> <p>Full compliance with the Prompt Payments Act and Public Sector Procurement Procedures.</p> <p>Internal audit workplan implemented ensuring risks are minimised and value for money maximised.</p>
To communicate the role and activities of the WDC to all stakeholders.	<p>WDC has high public profile and stakeholders have a positive image of the organisation.</p> <p>Customers have easy access to up to date, accurate, comprehensive information including all WDC publications in printed format or through the WDC's website as appropriate.</p>



## 4. IMPLEMENTING, MONITORING AND REPORTING

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The WDC Strategic Plan will be implemented through the preparation and delivery of annual work programmes. In addition, the WDC is committed to supporting the goals and objectives for better management as expressed in *Towards 2016*.

The WDC's annual reports will include updates on progress in achieving the strategic aims and objectives set out in this Strategic Plan. Annual reports will be presented to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and laid before the Oireachtas. They will also be made available to stakeholders, key customers, clients and the general public.

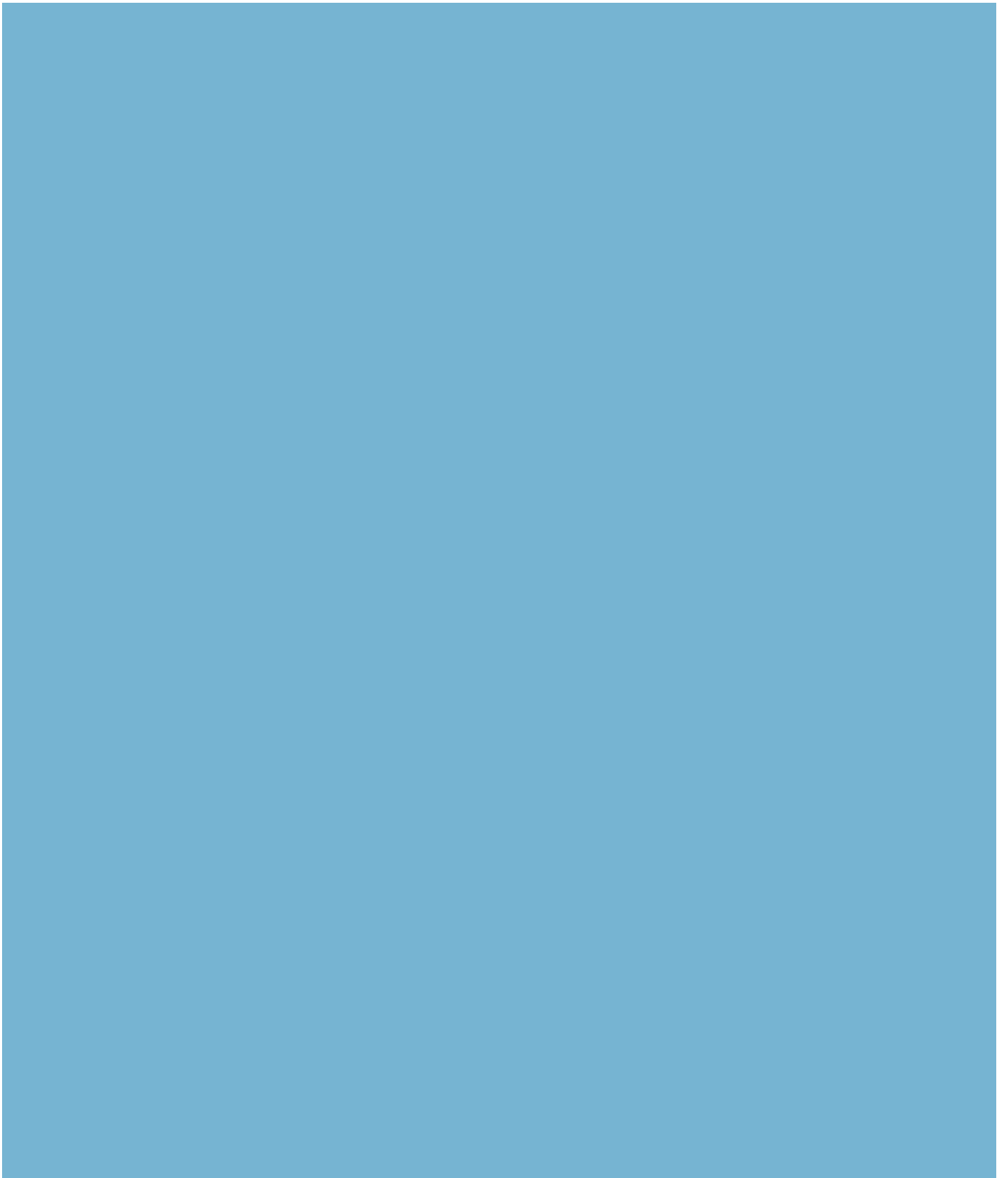
# APPENDIX

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## Western Development Commission Members

Mr Michael Farrell (Chairperson)	<i>Ballymote, Co Sligo</i>
Cllr Mary Bohan	<i>Member, Leitrim County Council</i>
Ms Mary Devine O'Callaghan	<i>Office Manager, Co Roscommon</i>
Ms Tish Gibbons	<i>Branch Secretary, SIPTU, Galway</i>
Mr Pat Gilmore	<i>Publican and Farmer, Co Galway</i>
Mr Billy Grimes	<i>Lecturer, Killybegs Tourism College</i>
Mr Greg Jackson	<i>Auctioneer, Co Mayo</i>
Mr Des Mahon	<i>County Manager, Mayo County Council</i>
Ms Martina Minogue	<i>Director, eTeams (International) Ltd., Co Clare</i>
Mr Pádraig Ó Caomhánaigh	<i>Community Activist, Co Galway</i>
Mr Ray O'Donoghue	<i>Council for the West, Co Galway</i>
Dr Katie Sweeney	<i>CEO, Mayo VEC</i>





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