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Chairpersons Foreword

The WDC has earned the enviable position of being seen as a national and international centre of expertise in regional development, in production and use of bio-energy resources, in efficient risk capital investment and in informing policy through high quality analysis.

We are a small yet highly dynamic and flexible organisation, which benefits from having a highly motivated and professional staff. Credit for this must go to our Acting CEO who continues to maintain staff morale and achieve increased productivity with limited resources.

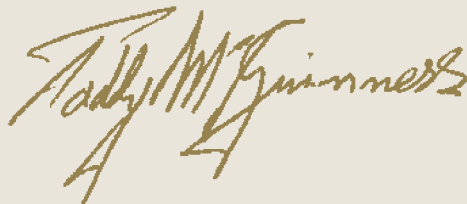
I welcome seven new members to our board. There are many challenges facing us collectively in the coming years but a high priority will be to perform with the same commitment and expertise as that demonstrated by of our staff.

Another clear objective will be to convince government of the necessity of having sufficient staff to ensure continuation of the drive for economic growth in the region.

Other important issues will be the retention and enhancement of air, rail and road infrastructure in the region.

We look forward to playing a significant role in implementing sections of the CEDRA Report.

So in setting out this strategic statement it is hoped that a clear path will be mapped out to support the growth of the region in the coming years.



Paddy McGuinness
Chief Executive

CEO Foreword

Through consultation with regional, national and international partners the Western Development Commission (WDC), sets out in this Strategic Statement how it will achieve its legislative remit of promoting the economic and social development of the seven Western counties.

The WDC remains committed to ensuring that the needs and aspirations of the citizens of the Western Region are voiced at the highest level in order that Government can achieve its policy on national growth and Balanced Regional Development. We believe that this balance can best be achieved by the Region maximising its potential through the sustainable exploitation of all of its resources, both human and natural. The Western Development Commission's goals are clearly aligned to the Government's national recovery strategy and the WDC is confident that the Western Region can play a very significant role on this road to recovery.

Traditionally the WDC has sought to undertake its remit through using its strengths in regional development, policy, and access to finance expertise to define growth potential for the region and then mainstream solutions within the larger existing state bodies. However in recent times the WDC has augmented this approach by taking a more direct approach to developing and implementing the growth ideas directly with appropriate regional bodies and wider stakeholders. This has led to a more efficient and impactful outcome for our remit. Thus today we have a funded, resourced approach to retaining or creating hundreds of jobs directly within the western region. The WDC now seeks to 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 regions key assets internationally as important to the states response to the current challenges.

Today we are working with national and international partners to drive enterprise growth in the following key areas:

- Creative economy
- Regional tourism
- Access to finance
- Renewable energy
- Engaging Diaspora
- Promoting the region
- Regional policy Insight and analysis

In the future our vision is to significantly accelerate this growth using funded initiatives. Many of these leverage EU expertise and resources. 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 1899 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.

These and other key developments such as the memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed with the Craft council of Ireland, the strategic positioning of the WDC within the *Commission for economic development of rural areas*, and the launch of the *Next Generation Broadband* report, have combined to greatly enhance the ability of the organisation to undertake its job growth remit and position itself as a self-reliant, capable, regional development organisation.

As such the WDC can now considered to have achieved a high water-mark and is now ready for future growth. This strategic statement forms the basis of all WDC activities during the period 2013-2014. The WDC looks forward with confidence towards ensuring that the implementation of the actions contained in this statement will deliver real progress for our citizens.

My sincere thanks to the staff of the WDC and the regional partners all of whom have helped in achieving these outcomes for the Western region and I look forward to our continued endeavours in the coming years.



Ian Brannigan

CEO (a) & Head of Regional Development



1. Background



This Strategic Statement builds on the WDC's Strategic Statement 2010 - 2012 and is underpinned by the objective of promoting sustainable employment opportunities in the Western Region through the delivery of regional development. While it builds on our previous strategies, it also marks a departure from them as it has been developed in, and must necessarily respond to, a very different economic and social climate, both nationally and within the Western Region.

The challenges currently facing the Region are considerable, notably high levels of unemployment, restrictions on access to finance, the return to out-migration, severe pressures on the rural economy, constrained public finances and increased competition for declining infrastructure investment. New approaches are now needed to address these challenges; approaches which tap into the underutilised potential and assets of the Western Region, while at the same time building upon the many positive developments of recent years, notably the strengthening of the region's labour force and skills base.

In responding to these challenges the Western Development Commission's activities, as set out in this Strategic Statement, are consistent with the Government's national recovery strategy. In the context of this national framework, particular emphasis will be placed on:

- Securing the enterprise economy and restoring competitiveness in the Western Region
- Building the capacity and value of innovation and creativity within the Western Region
- Developing renewable energy resources and infrastructure
- Highlighting the necessity for investment in critical infrastructure
- Delivering an efficient and effective public service to the citizens of the Western Region

The WDC, and this Strategic Statement, operate within the broader context of regional development policy within Ireland. Regions are the building blocks of the national economy and regional development is fundamental to national growth. How regional development policy, as well as national, regional and local actors, respond to the recession will be critical to recovery. In particular investments in infrastructure, human capital (education, training, skills) and innovation at a regional level will be key to enterprise and employment creation. It is within this context that the WDC has devised its Strategic Statement 2013-2014.



The WDC believes that the creation of sustainable employment should be centred on those sectors where the region enjoys comparative strength. In pursuit of this objective, it will be necessary to augment the region's ability to compete in the knowledge-based economy, to maximise the potential of the rural economy, to utilise the region's own resources, thus retaining and attracting a dynamic, well-educated and entrepreneurial workforce. In addition, the significant infrastructure gaps particularly in transport access, energy and broadband telecommunications will have to be addressed in order to create the competitive business environment necessary for growth. The fact that the activities outlined in this Strategic Statement will augment and support the activities of all our stakeholders, both in the public and private domain is implicit throughout.



2. History of Achievement



Broadly speaking the WDC has now become to all intents and purposes the pre-eminent regional development agency in Ireland. Despite continued reductions in (a) staff and (b) exchequer finance, the WDC is now performing well.

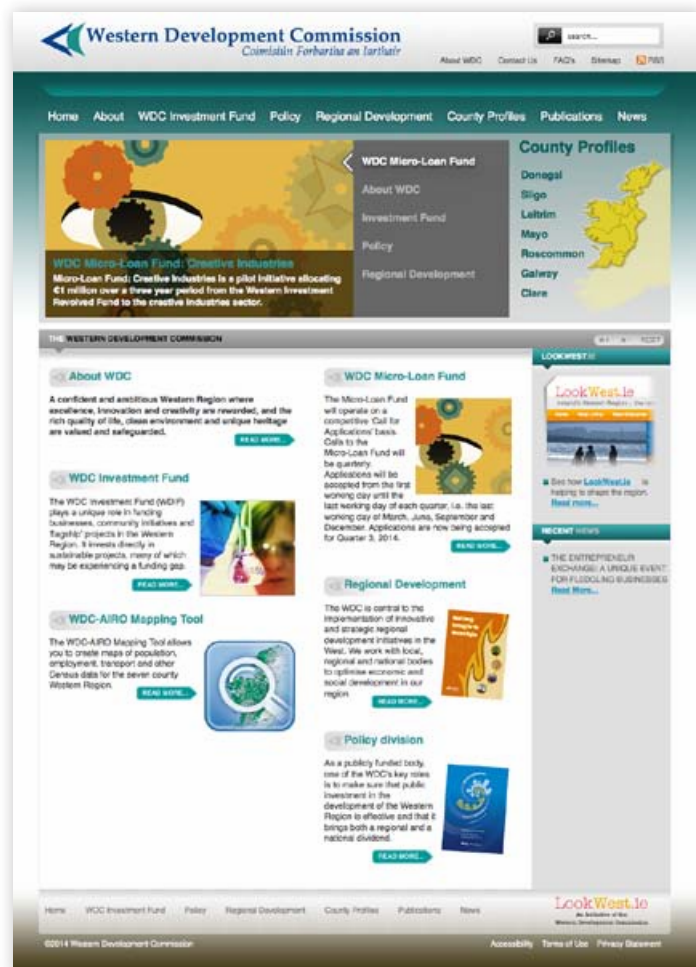
It is now stable and as ready for growth as it ever has been since its inception in 1998.

Key Notes to Support Main Message:

The key achievements in 2012/13 which underpin this conclusion include: Five new funded job growth programs launched by WDC in 2012.

- Raslres Bio tool service product launch – contributing to an estimated 21 new businesses in the sector Bio PAD.
- Creative industries micro loan fund (€1m over 3 yrs) – supporting over 60 jobs in its first year.
- Regional tourism marketing plan (€1.4m) – Uniquely the region coming together to market the region for themselves. The pilot led to 13,000 new visitors delivering over €3m to the region's economy.
- Reconnect diaspora program (€23,000)- linking the region to the global diaspora, initial events in the UK have led to over 40 new jobs e.g. Lafferty group investment in Mayo.
- Creative edge EU export growth program (€1.2m) – an innovative programme to help the regions creative industry access global markets (66% of them were not) – now initiated with almost 200 business's linking to global customers through the www.mycreativeedge.eu website – aiming for hundreds of jobs in the near term and thousands by the end of the decade.
- In 2012, 292 new jobs were created by the WDC growth programmes
- These and the on-going WIF work have led to circa 1899 jobs being supported in the region by the WDC in recent years.
- The WDC continued to provide strong policy and regional analysis to enable the state to invest in suitable “access infrastructure” (energy, broadband, transport) which could realise the regions potential for its people. The WDC produced a series of WDC Policy Briefings to highlight and provide discussion and analysis of key regional policy issues:
 - Why care about regions? A new approach to regional policy
 - How is the Western Region doing? Measuring regional development
 - Air Access and the Western Region: A Regional Perspective

- Education, Enterprise & Employment: How can better integration of the 3Es drive growth in the Western Region?
 - Why invest in gas? Benefits of natural gas infrastructure for the North West
 - A comprehensive examination of the issues for rural areas in the roll out of next generation broadband was set out in the 2012 report *Connecting the West: Next Generation Broadband in the Western Region*.
- During 2010-2012 the WDC monitored and analysed key socio-economic indicators of progress for the Western Region. Notably this included work on Census 2011 and the development of the WDC mapping module with the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO). Analysis of labour market trends at regional and county level was provided to community, public sector and education stakeholders across the region.
 - For the future the WDC has established a framework with regional, national, and international partners to realise up to 19,000 jobs in the region.
 - These and other key developments such as the memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed with the Craft council of Ireland and approved by the WDC board, and the strategic positioning of the WDC within the TEGASC led *CEDRA* have combined to greatly enhance the ability of the organisation to undertake its job growth remit.
 - As such the WDC can now be considered to have achieved a high water-mark and is now ready for future growth.



3. The Western Development Commission



The WDC has a unique focus on the Western Region. The counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare are included in its remit. The WDC works to ensure that the interests of the Western Region are always considered at the highest levels of Government.

Functions

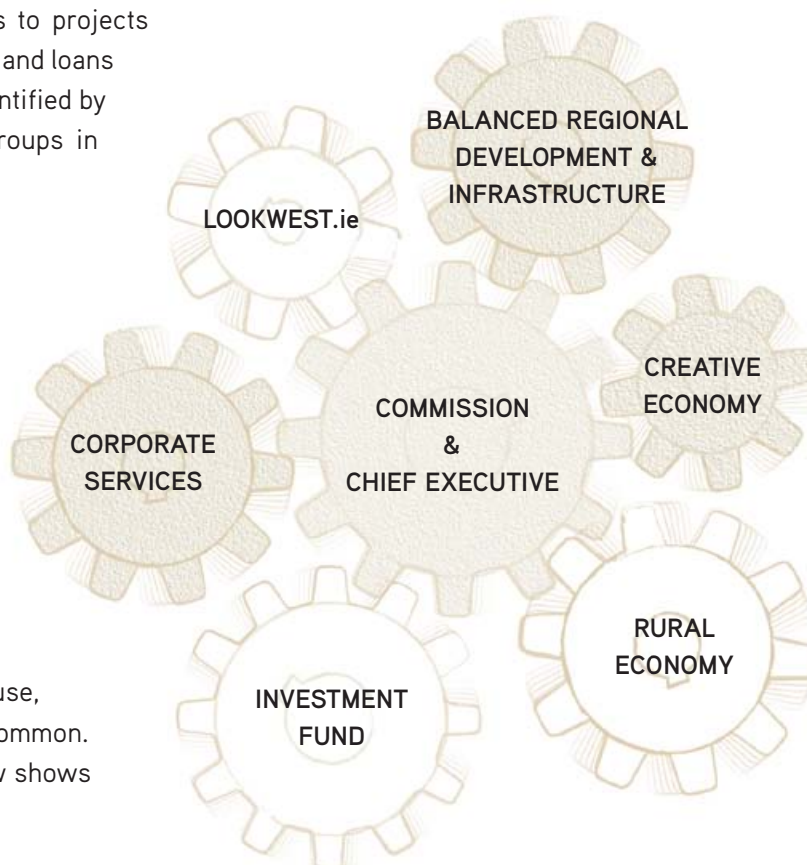
The functions of the WDC are governed by the Western Development Commission Act, 1998. The WDC works to ensure that economic and social policy and practice meet the development needs of the Western Region effectively. The Region's productive sectors, infrastructure and rural communities are of particular interest.

The WDC is responsible for the management and administration of the WDC Investment Fund (WIF). This dedicated fund provides risk capital on a commercial basis to projects and businesses through equity and loans and thus fills a funding gap identified by businesses and community groups in the Region.

Structure

The WDC is made up of 9 members appointed by the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government Phil Hogan TD. (see Appendix 1 for current membership).

The Commission is supported by a committed executive located in Dillon House, Ballaghaderreen, County Roscommon. The organisational chart below shows the staffing structure.



Working with partners

The WDC recognises the importance of partnership in its work. It ensures that its contribution to the development of the Western Region adds value to the achievement of national Government policy. To this end, the WDC does not duplicate the activities of any other agency, but rather it actively fosters and encourages strategic regional initiatives in a variety of sectors through working in partnership with other agencies, local organisations and community groups. It is careful not to duplicate the work of any other agency; rather it works in a collaborative way with public, private and voluntary partners to achieve specific outcomes.

The WDC works strategically with Government Departments and agencies, and with local and regional authorities, as well as with commercial companies operating or investing in the Western Region and with the voluntary and community sector in the Region.

Corporate governance

The WDC is required to implement and observe the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (Department of Finance, 2009). 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.

Regional Context

In 2011 the seven counties of the Western Region had a population of just over 820,000 people, close to 18% of the national population. While the region experienced very strong population growth between 2002 and 2011, more recent figures indicate a return to out-migration particularly from smaller towns and more rural areas. Future population projections suggest the region will experience weak population growth in the coming years.

A positive sign for the region has been the considerable improvement in its educational profile over the past decade, with 27% of those whose full-time education has ceased now having a third level qualification. This share is continuing to rise, particularly among young men, which is vital for the region's economic future.

However a number of key socio-economic indicators illustrate the Western Region's ongoing economic challenge. In 2010 (latest data) the Gross Value Added (GVA) per person in the West region was 79.6% of the national average, while in the Border region it was just 57.5%, a very substantial drop from 2009. The Border region also has a high unemployment rate of 15.2% while the West has a rate of 13.5%, both above the 13% national rate (Q3 2013). The ultimate result is that in 2011 20.4% of individuals in the Border, Midlands and West region were classified as 'at risk of poverty' compared with just 14.3% in the Southern and Eastern region.

Recent trends (end 2013) point to an improving employment situation nationally and also in the region. The implementation of the WDC's strategy for policy analysis, regional promotion and development and provision of risk capital is vital if all areas of the region, enterprises from a broad range of sectors and people with differing skill levels are to benefit from this economic growth.

Vision

The Western Development Commission's Vision for the Western Region is

To be the hub for the strategic economic and social development of the Western Region

Mission

The WDC will contribute towards maximising the Western Region's full potential in order to give effect to the economic, social and cultural aspirations of the citizens of the Western Region.

Strategic outlook

The WDC's Strategic Statement sets out a challenging programme of work for the organisation to the end of 2014.

It is the result of careful consideration of the following:

- The WDC's legislative remit, particularly its role in fostering and promoting economic and social development and in operating the WIF
- The national objective of fostering balanced regional development in the National Development Plan and the new National Spatial Strategy. A strong commitment is needed to achieve this through better regional distribution of public and private investment.
- The scale and complexity of the challenge of economic and social development in the Western Region
- The very positive response to the WDC's work to date from a cross-section of interests in the Region and at national level ie: CEDRA, and the widely expressed demand for the WDC to develop its operations along the lines put forward in this Strategic Statement
- The need to put in place a strategy that brings together the various functions of the WDC, as set out in the WDC Act
- The necessity to enable the WDC's policy, action and investment functions themselves to be a model of integration and partnership.



Strategic Statement 2013-2014



The Statement is organised around five strategic goals:

Goal 1:

To inform policy-making on economic and social development in the Western Region through high quality analysis.

Goal 2

To promote the benefits of living, working and doing business in the Western Region.

Goal 3

To encourage the development of the rural 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

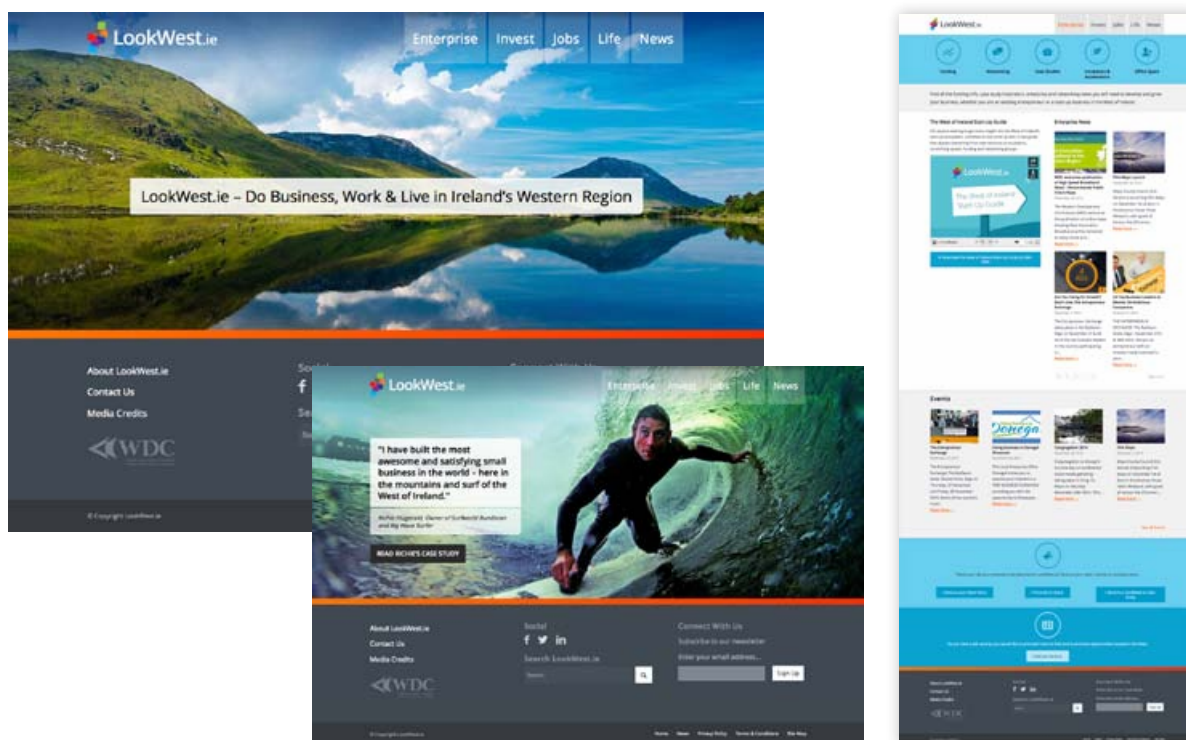
To operate the WDC as a competent and effective organisation.

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, outputs and potential impacts that these goals can deliver for the Western Region.

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

| WDC Activity | Output | Outcomes | Impacts |
|---|--|---|--|
| Analysis of social and economic issues and data relevant to development of the Western Region in order to inform the national and regional policy making process through reports, briefs, submissions, events and direct engagement with stakeholders | Contribution to and participation in regional policy debate, supported by well substantiated and relevant analysis of socio-economic trends in the Western Region | Key regional and national stakeholders better informed of regional socio-economic issues, particularly for the Western Region | Balanced regional development a core objective of Government policy |
| | Analysis of Enterprise, Employment & Education and Innovation issues in the Western Region and provision of new and pertinent information (e.g. labour catchments, rural employment) to policymakers | Greater awareness among key stakeholders of the enterprise, employment, education and innovation issues in the Western Region | Policy on Enterprise, Employment & Education and Innovation meeting the needs of the Western Region |
| | Highlighting the transport, energy and communications infrastructure requirements of the Western Region through robust analysis | Infrastructural investment needs of the Western Region highlighted to key decision makers | Infrastructural investment policy addressing the infrastructural requirements of the Western Region |
| | Analysis of the dynamics of the rural economy, inputting to policy and informing debate by highlighting issues for rural areas in the Western Region | Greater recognition of the requirements of the Western Region's rural economy in policy-making process | Policies for rural areas informed and attending to important issues for the Western Region's rural economy |





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

| WDC Activity | Output | Outcomes | Impacts |
|--|---|---|---|
| Position the Western Region of Ireland as a pre-eminent global region (Characterised by a dynamic draw for enterprise, activity and creativity) | Evolve www.lookwest.ie platform to help drive enterprise growth and investment | An enhanced facility for meeting and assisting individuals and businesses interested in the Region. Leveraging emerging social media channels | An improved profile for regional businesses and partners leading to increased economic activity in the Region |
| | Develop flagship events in region of an international calibre and reach (e.g. creative and cultural activity based) | A model for a social enterprise capability to develop global events in region based on unique regional attributes (cultural or otherwise) | Increased global perception of and interaction with western region. Leading to increased economic activity and improved esteem levels |
| | Development of a coherent entrepreneurial growth capability for regional SME's with partners | Regional business growth – through enhanced capability for SME's to scale | Increased economic activity |
| | Regional Network of National and International Diaspora | Greater regional dynamism in attracting SME investment | Increased contribution of Western Region to National Economy. Increase in relative Private investment in Western Region |

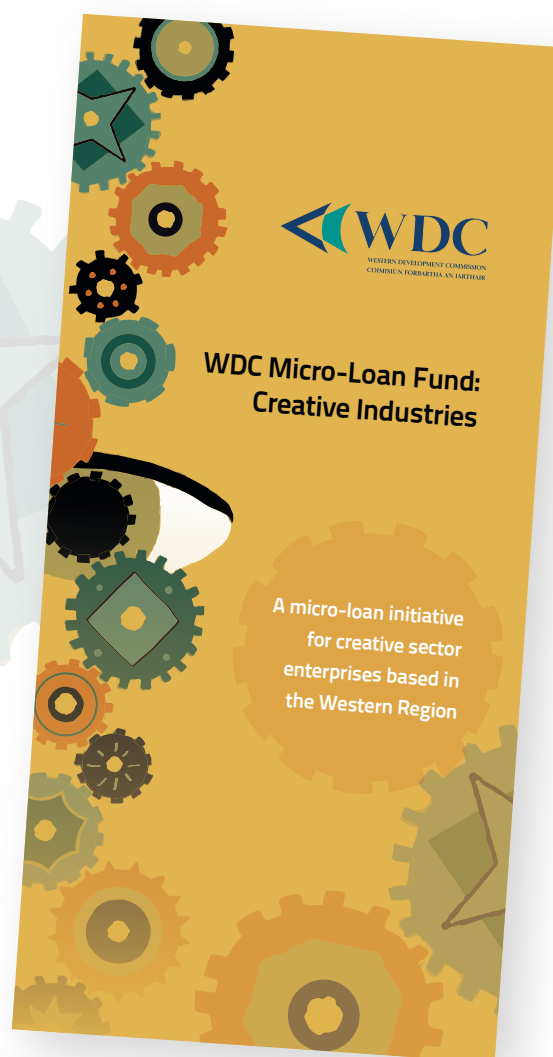


Goal 3: Encourage the development of the Western economy based on the sustainable development of the Western Region's strengths and resources

| WDC Activity | Output | Outcomes | Impacts |
|--|---|--|---|
| Ensure the Western region achieves its aspiration as a globally significant creative region (a hotbed for creativity") | Economic Impact Assessment of the "Creative West" | Increased awareness among key stakeholders of the economic contribution and potential of the creative sector in the Western Region | Increase in relative Public/Private investment in Western Region |
| | Development of a coherent support approach to growing regional creative industry SME's | A programme which directly supports regional creative businesses leading to increased penetration of Creative Products on international markets | Increased Gross Value Added (GVA) of Creative Products. Increased export levels of creative goods and services. International recognition of the Region as a creative hotspot. Spill-over effects to the wider regional industries through innovation to the smart economy |
| | Support for National Policy on Sector | Increased coherence in sector at national level | Government Policy on the Creative Sector informed and accommodating of the sector's potential within the Western Region |
| Investigate potential added value of WDC contribution to the Offshore energy sector | Stakeholder Mapping exercise sector in the Western Region | Increased coherence of national policy as it affects the Region's energy assets | assets of the region maximised to their full renewable potential |
| Realise the western regional goal of becoming a national and international leader in exploitation and commercialisation of renewable energy sources and technologies | Creation of a sustainable support structure for regional bioenergy SME's. Also support for large scale growth of renewable resources of the region in general | Increased economic activity in the Regional bioenergy market as suppliers engage with potential clients in wood etc. Lower CO ₂ in the national and regional economy Diversification opportunities for those involved in agriculture, engineering and construction sectors. | Increase in critical mass of renewable bioenergy supply and demand. Lower emissions, for the regional economy Jobs safeguarded or created. |

Goal 4: To provide risk capital to SMEs and Social Enterprises in their start-up and expansion phases through the WDC Investment Fund (WIF)

| WDC Activity | Output | Outcomes | Impacts |
|--|---|---|---|
| Provision of risk capital to new and expanding, micro, SMEs and social enterprises on a market economy basis | <p>Unique and dedicated source of funding to support Western enterprises start-up and expand</p> <p>On-going review of funding environment and adjustment of WIF investment strategy as appropriate</p> | Innovative western enterprises supported through start-up and expansion phase | Increased entrepreneurship, employment and wealth generated in the region |



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

| WDC Activity | Output | Outcomes | Impacts |
|--|--|--|--|
| Financial Control | Annual Financial Reports | WDC recognised as being efficient and fully accountable in its use of Public Funds as illustrated by a positive report from C&AG | WDC seen as providing a value for money service to the public |
| Developing and harnessing Staff Competencies | Highly motivated executive in place to manage and control the administration and business of the Commission | WDC recognised as providing high quality work to its stakeholders by virtue of the professionalism and motivation of its executive staff | WDC widely continued to be regarded as a source of high level expertise in the economic and social development spheres |
| Ensuring that the WDC develops and maintains effective communications with its various audience groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual Report - Press Statements - Websites - Conferences and Seminars - Published Documents | The WDC's varied audiences are fully briefed on the relevant issues at the appropriate time | WDC recognised as a source of insightful, timely and relevant information in the areas under its remit |


5. Implementing, Monitoring and Reporting



The WDC Strategic Statement 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 the *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (May 2009)*.

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

Appendices



Appendix 1:

Members of the Western Development Commission from Feb 2014

Mr Paddy McGuinness (Chairperson)

Dr. Katie Sweeney

Mr. Brendan Mooney

Dr. Deirdre Garvey

Mr. Paul Keyes

Mr. Michael Frain

Ms. Ann Higgins

Mr. Gerard Mullaney

Mr. Eugene Lavin

Appendix 2:

Abbreviations and terms used in this Statement.

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| WDC | Western Development Commission |
| WIF | Western Investment Fund |
| C&AG | Comptroller and Auditor General |
| CEDRA | Commission for Economic Development in Rural Areas |
| BioPAD | Bioenergy Proliferation and Deployment |
| RASLRES | Regional Approaches to Stimulating Local Renewable Energy Resources |
| SME's | Small Medium Enterprises |

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