



**Limerick  
Chamber**  
Advancing business together

# Mid-West Policy Priorities for General Election

2024



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## President's Foreword

As President of Limerick Chamber, I am delighted to present our General Election Priorities report. I would like to thank all our members that provided insight into the research for this document, as well as the Limerick Chamber Policy Committee that oversaw the drafting of our election priorities. It is an honour of mine to be able to represent the views of over 400 diverse organisation across the entire Mid-West.

Our submission incorporates an evidence-based approach gained from our regular publications and submissions to various consultations.

As we have done many times before, we asked members what they would like us to focus on as part of our priority document. Unsurprisingly, the asks for the business community are consistent, and are many of the same issues that Limerick Chamber has been highlighting over the last number of years.

## Chamber Members Top Priorities for General Election



In line with our Budget 2025 survey, the majority of businesses asked that the Chamber focused on housing and the cost of doing business. Businesses asked that we also focus on healthcare, policing and transport. Other feedback from members wanted a focus on child care as well as talent retention and attraction, which has proven to be a challenge for many businesses over the last number of years. However, what insight this gives us, from a business perspective, is that while the cost of doing business is a priority, so too is the quality of life for employees of businesses. Ultimately, businesses are not solely interested in a sufficient landscape to do business they are also hugely interested in providing a landscape for employees that encourages improved livability and quality of life.

Throughout this document we are advocating for the next Government to address capital and social infrastructural gaps, enhanced housing affordability and availability, providing appropriate support and training to enhance skills of a diverse range of businesses, increasing transport and trade links across land, air and sea as well as ensuring safer communities through increased policing all while continually investing and expanding our health service.

Despite these challenges, the Mid-West region has maintained a strong brand as a place to do business with increasing employment numbers and job announcements. However, it is important that we do not allow complacency to set in and continue to fail to address challenges, in a highly globalised economy failure to address challenges will see Ireland and the Mid-West lose out on both investment and our most important asset of all, our people.

All stakeholders, including the Government, and indeed Limerick Chamber must ensure that the Mid-West remains a best-in-class destination to both live and do business in.

**Noel Gavin**  
President, Limerick Chamber



# KEY ASKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Affordable Housing

Deliver affordable housing at scale urgently. Provide larger targets and ensure brownfield and dense development



## Social Housing

Landbank and directly build social homes, and reduce reliance on private market



## Cities & Towns

Encourage affordable worker housing in city centres



## Energy Security

Advance Shannon LNG Project, improve planning process for existing onshore windfarms



## Ports

Invest in ports as key strategic energy and trade assets



## Offshore Renewable Energy

Immediately advance DMAPS for the West Coast



## Supporting Business

Improve support for SMEs



## Increased Policing

Increased on the beat policing by utilising a population based model



## Liveability

Boost liveability for Limerick and Ireland by tackling key infrastructural challenges



## Aviation

Long-term inclusion of Shannon in the RAP as well as a PSO connection to a Northern Europe hub



## Infrastructure

Ensure timely delivery and investment in critical projects



## Mobility

Begin the work of a commuter rail network for Limerick and improve adherence to TOD



## Skills & Talent

Continually increase skills offering for businesses



## Model 4 Hospital

Immediately begin the process of securing a site for a new hospital



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# WHY THE MID-WEST?



Limerick Chamber



## The importance of a regional future and the case for increased investment

Limerick and the broader Mid-West region of Ireland have become increasingly attractive for both domestic and international businesses. With its strategic location, strong state assets and access to a highly educated workforce, the region is positioning itself as a dynamic hub for investment. A large selling point being the largest 90-minute catchment area outside Dublin. Yet, despite its many advantages, Limerick also faces challenges, particularly in housing availability, city centre revitalisation, policing, and healthcare. Addressing these concerns will be essential to ensuring sustainable growth and maintaining the region's business-friendly environment. Government must not be complacent on these issues, and the next programme for Government must quickly address these challenges.

One of the most compelling reasons for businesses to choose Limerick and the Mid-West is its excellent connectivity. Shannon Airport, located just a short distance from Limerick city, provides access to international markets, with direct flights to the United States, the UK, and Europe.

This is a significant advantage for businesses involved in global trade and tourism, offering hassle-free international connections without the congestion of Dublin or Cork airports. However, the airport needs to be continually supported amongst Government, allowing it to grow and take pressure off Dublin Airport.

Shannon Foynes Port, Ireland's largest port for certain types of cargo, is another crucial asset for the region. The port's deepwater capacity and extensive facilities make it a key driver for sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, and international trade. With ongoing investments aimed at expanding its capacity, Shannon Foynes is set to become an even more important player in the movement of goods, reinforcing the Mid-West as a pivotal trading hub. Again, as a key state asset, the port must be supported ensuring investment into the future allowing it to both expand, and become the primary hub for renewable energy on the West Coast.

The availability of a highly educated and skilled workforce is another major selling point for businesses considering the Mid-West. Limerick is home to several world-class educational institutions, producing over 10,000 highly skilled graduates each year. However, failure to deal with the housing crisis and other liveability concerns will force these graduates elsewhere, which will majorly impact business in Ireland and the Mid-West.

Looking to the future, energy has become a key focus for the Mid-West, with major projects like the Shannon LNG terminal and offshore renewable energy developments creating new opportunities. The Shannon LNG project is absolutely critical to Ireland's security of energy supply and needs to be supported by Government. Too much time has already been lost on the development of this project. Moreover, Ireland is completely at odds with the EU approach to LNG, whereby the EU sees it as a transitional fuel as we move towards renewables, but also it reduces reliance and promotes diversity of supply amongst more sources.

The region's potential for offshore renewable energy—particularly wind energy in the Atlantic—is immense. The development of these renewable resources will not only contribute to Ireland's climate goals but also position the Mid-West as a leader in the green energy sector. This growing industry could spur further investment, create jobs, and contribute to the region's overall economic resilience while allowing for energy hubs and data centres to be built along the estuary. However, the first critical step is the advancement of DMAPS for the west coast.

Despite these advantages, businesses in Limerick and the Mid-West must contend with several pressing challenges. The availability of affordable housing for workers is a growing concern. As more companies move into the region and attract talent from across Ireland and abroad, demand for housing has surged. However, the supply of affordable and suitable homes has not kept pace. This shortage is making it increasingly difficult for businesses to attract and retain employees, particularly in Limerick city, where housing costs have risen significantly in recent years. There has been an utter failure in dealing with the housing crisis thus far. For example, Limerick builds circa 800 new homes per annum, whereas the reality is we need approximately 3,000 just to meet existing demand.

The decline of Limerick's city center is another issue that could impact the region's attractiveness. Once a bustling urban core, parts of the city center now suffer from vacancies and underinvestment, which can deter both new businesses and consumers. While there have been

efforts to revitalise the city, more comprehensive urban renewal projects are needed to restore its vibrancy and make it a more appealing place to live, work, and invest. However, what is equally important is planning the city correctly ensuring all stakeholders have their voice heard and that all other plans adhere to one central strategy. At the moment, national policy allows for exemptions at the local level which goes against the spirit of planning guidelines and indeed policy documents such as Project Ireland 2040.

Policing and public safety have also emerged as areas of concern for residents and businesses alike. While Limerick has made significant strides in overcoming its past reputation for crime, maintaining robust policing in the city and its surroundings is essential for ensuring a safe environment for residents and businesses. Concerns about crime, particularly in certain parts of the city, need to be continuously addressed to foster a positive atmosphere for both locals and investors. Government also needs to ensure that while police allocation is based off a "needs based" model, there must also be consideration for a population based model in tandem.

Healthcare is another key issue that businesses and residents in the Mid-West region are grappling with. Ireland's national healthcare system has been under strain, and Limerick's University Hospital, the main hospital for the region, has experienced overcrowding and long waiting times. These healthcare challenges are not just a quality-of-life issue for employees but can also impact business operations, particularly for firms in industries where employee health and wellbeing are directly tied to productivity and performance. There is a clear need for Government to build a new model 4 hospital.

Limerick and the Mid-West of Ireland present a compelling case for businesses seeking a location that combines strategic advantages with growth potential and increased state investment. However, challenges remain that will require strong political leadership coming from the region. Limerick Chamber highlighted many of these challenges in our submission to the NPF review. Moreover, it has been highlighted by the Mayor of Limerick recently, that infrastructure investment per capita for Limerick is lower than counterparts and the next programme for Government needs to address this extreme imbalance.

**Seán Golden**  
**Chief Economist &**  
**Director of Policy**  
**Limerick Chamber**





# Affordable Housing

Housing has become the foremost priority for our businesses over the past several years. Consequently, Limerick Chamber dedicates substantial research to this area, adopting an evidence-based advocacy approach to increase home provision for workers in the Mid-West. The current housing crisis poses a severe threat to businesses, not just in the Mid-West, but across all of Ireland. Affordable and market housing is essential for providing stability and fostering economic growth for both employees and businesses. However, delivering adequate housing in Ireland faces immense challenges due to a severe shortage across all housing options.

While the state is responsible for allocating housing funds, it must also ensure transparency and accountability among the departments, agencies, and other government-funded organisations responsible for implementation. Election candidates should prioritise this accountability. Limerick Chamber's efforts focus on addressing the concerns of owner-occupiers and renters, who are under intense pressure in the current market.

The housing crisis is multifaceted and indeed there will be no one singular solution to the challenges observed in the sector. However, there are some chief concerns that if addressed could make significant strides towards solving the issue. For example, the scale at which the state is interfering in the private market to bulk purchase social homes, drastically reduces the supply of private housing. Furthermore, the extremely slow pace at which the Land Development Agency (LDA) is bringing forward housing in Limerick must be investigated and solutions brought forward.

We also need to ensure adequate targets and responsibility for delivering homes. The LDA has no county or city level targets, and only some local authorities have affordable housing targets, and those that do are far too low to have any impact on the wider market.

## Supporting Research



**Short-term Letting Report**



**Limerick Rental Barometer**



**Mid-West Economic Insights**



**Budget 2025 Submission**



**Limerick City Centre Report**



**National Planning Framework Review**



## Key Asks

Introduce an expanded help-to-buy scheme for apartments

Change cost rental discount to market criteria to account for quality of accommodation

County level targets for the delivery of housing must be implemented as per the findings of the Housing Commission

The Local Authority Home Loan limit for Limerick must be increased to match Cork and Galway

Income limits for cost rental must be revised upwards

Schemes must be expanded / brought forward to bring student housing under affordable housing

The vacant and derelict grant should be amended to help provide owners with the cashflow to undertake works

The state and adjacent bodies need to drastically reduce reliance of turnkey properties and thus competing with owner occupiers

Multi annual funding must be provided for the Land Acquisition Fund with an increased focus on affordable housing

Agencies that are under-delivering in the provision of affordable housing must be held to account and swift action taken

The Living Cities Initiative needs to be re-worked as per the Limerick Chamber Pre-budget Submission 2025



# 1

## Social Housing



Like any country, Ireland needs a robust and dependable social housing system. However, there are many challenges in the Irish landscape of social housing provision.

Continually, Limerick Chamber research has found social housing impacting on the availability of private housing across Limerick and indeed the Mid-West. This is due to the bulk purchasing of homes and developments by approved housing bodies (AHBs), local authorities and other organs of the state. Because of this, in Limerick alone, bulk purchasing of social homes often accounts for 60% of new housing built that year. Meaning, just 40% goes to the private market. This does nothing to increase the absolute number of homes delivered, instead it allocates housing from one cohort to another, when in reality all segments of society are in need of housing. This policy sees the state essentially competing with owner occupiers which may result in artificially inflating of house prices.

This policy is a result of a failure to build up a landbank

for the provision of social homes, and a lack of direct build developments undertaken by AHBs and local authorities.

The policy of bulk purchasing of homes must be ceased and replaced by a more sensible approach by landbanking and directly building social homes.

Furthermore, we have also seen, because of density guidelines and the cost of building apartments that these developments are normally targeted towards social housing and does not encourage a mixed-tenure approach by also including private or cost rental and home ownership. This repeats the mistakes of the past and Government must address this to ensure that workers and private occupiers will no longer be locked out of the apartment market.

Lastly, the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) continues to be an extremely poor investment for the state, where, again, landbanking and directly building social homes would provide a much larger return in the medium to longer term. An adequate plan must be brought forward to address this issue.

## Supporting Research



Short-term Letting Report



Limerick Rental Barometer



Mid-West Economic Insights



Budget 2025 Submission



Limerick City Centre Report



National Planning Framework Review

## Key Asks

A drastic decrease in states reliance on the private market to deliver housing through turnkey properties, Part V and leasing

The state must move to a direct build model of social housing and correctly supporting local authorities

End competition with owner occupiers by reducing state interference in the private market for the provision of social housing

The tenant purchase scheme reduces stock of social homes and should be stopped unless the sales cost is adequate to build a new social home

An adequate plan for reducing state reliance on the Housing Assistance Payment must be implemented

Where the state provides non-repayable grants or other monetary support, it should take an equity stake

Local Authorities need to be encouraged to landbank for the provision of social and affordable housing

The cost of the Cost Rental Tenant in Situ Scheme must be analysed to ensure value for money

Repair and leasing scheme should be expanded to include cost rental housing

# 2

## Revitalisation Enablers

Limerick City Centre is the vibrant heart of the Mid-West region, rich in commerce, culture, and community. As the city evolves, it's crucial to ensure the city centre's resilience and adaptability to meet the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.

The Limerick Chamber City Centre report is the most comprehensive study of its kind, focusing on this core area. It examines the current status, identifies challenges and opportunities, and offers strategic recommendations to secure a prosperous and sustainable future for Limerick City Centre.

This research report presents evidence-based findings and recommendations aimed at accelerating the revitalisation of not only Limerick's city centre, but to act as a blueprint for other cities, towns and villages across the Mid-West and Ireland.

Leveraging Census 2022 data and a survey of nearly 500 respondents, the study highlights both the strengths and areas for improvement in the city.

While Limerick Chamber envisions a thriving, vibrant city centre, this vision remains somewhat removed from the current reality. Key recommendations include increasing housing availability, particularly private ownership and affordable rentals, and making the city centre a safer, more attractive place to live, work, and raise families.

Policing in the city centre remains a pressing concern for the business community.

Limerick has fallen behind other cities such as Cork and Dublin on a per capita basis due to a sustained period of under investment. The Limerick Chamber is calling for the following immediate actions:

- Steep increase in police numbers to match the population, as per Cork and Dublin
- Allocation of funding allocation for courts to use privatised services, as occurs in other urban centres, thereby releasing considerable and valuable police resources for other duties
- Confirmation of funding for the continuation of resourcing, including staffing, for the Community CCTV scheme is also critical to ensure this does not absorb desperately needed police resources (current funding is under threat from Q1, 2025)
- Allocation of community wardens to enhance daytime presence and support law enforcement, and
- A dedicated mobile community policing van for Limerick (currently ad-hoc).

These measures are vital for attracting people back to the city. They are a fundamental cornerstone in ensuring a vibrant retail, hospitality and services hub which in turn can be leveraged for further investment. Doing nothing is not an option given the sustained underinvestment in Limerick policing relative to other cities on a per capita basis.

There is a core concern around the magnitude of IPAS accommodation being brought forward in the city centre. These developments do not require a submission through the regular planning system whereby observations can be made. These developments can often go against Local Development Plans. Limerick City Centre must be carefully monitored and planned in order to succeed, however, the current systems allows any building owner to engage with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to bring forward this type of temporary housing with no consideration for the longer-term goals of the area. This policy approach returns Ireland to a developer-led system, which is not appropriate.

### Supporting Research



Limerick City Centre Report



Mid-West Economic Insights



Budget 2025 Submission



National Planning Framework Review



Future Limerick Report

## Key Asks

Policing in the city centre is a key concern from the business community

- Increase police numbers in line with Cork & Dublin on a per capita basis
- Funding for courts to use privatised security services as in other cities
- Dedicated mobile community policing van
- Allocation of community wardens
- Continued funding for Community CCTV Scheme

There needs to be better annual collection of data for NPF focused cities to increase frequency of data collection for key areas

The provision of social services for those at risk need to be better dispersed taking a whole county approach

In a regional context, not enough is being done in terms of providing new homes for workers in the city centre. This is critical and without it city centres will continue to decline

The Living Cities Initiative needs to be expanded to include all homes pre-1945. Furthermore, a review of the LCI must be undertaken to estimate the impact and outcome of the scheme

There needs to be a clear definition of a city centre boundary. The current designation sees the city extend to the suburbs

A Government fund must be launched to enable local authorities to provide grants for painting the fronts of buildings, upgrading signage and revitalising shop fronts

Government must outline targets for building homes in city centres for workers, and enforce these targets with the LDA, local authorities and other state supported developers such as AHBs

Government must review flexibility for local authorities to charge reduced commercial rates. Currently, in some counties there is a write down for vacant premises which is not appropriate

Barriers to over the shop living and development must be analysed with an appropriate policy brought forward to encourage worker housing being brought forward

Lucrative IPAS contracts with the DCEDIY act as a disincentive for building owners to invest in their property for long-term residential, commercial or other use. This must change

The exemption for IPAS accommodation is not appropriate and sees a return to developer-led planning with no need for the accommodation to adhere to local development plans



# 3

## Energy Environment



Ireland's energy security hinges on two paths: maintaining reliance on the UK's gas pipeline at Moffat, Scotland, or making substantial efforts to fully harness Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) while also utilising other alternative fuels to enhance supply security. Limerick Chamber firmly advocates for the latter. A critical step is advancing the Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAPS) for the west coast, providing clarity and security for private investors.

Given the extended lead time for ORE projects, aligning with EU energy policies and supporting Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) in Ireland as an interim measure is essential for security. Limerick Chamber has consistently supported LNG for supply security.

Energy security must also encompass onshore generation, including wind farms, biomass, and alternative fuels such as HVO.

### Supporting Research



National Energy Security Framework Consultation



Security of Energy Supply Consultation



Budget 2025 Submission

## Key Asks

The national electricity grid needs to be upgraded. Particularly in the west of Ireland to take advantage of ORE

The national gas grid must be futureproofed by funding biomethane and hydrogen technologies and systems

Increased policy support for repowering and life-extension of existing wind assets

Support lower carbon flexibility infrastructure such as carbon capture and storage and emerging technologies such as HVO

Implement the 2023 Hydrogen Strategy into a strategic plan for deployment of hydrogen storage and transmission as well as production and offtake

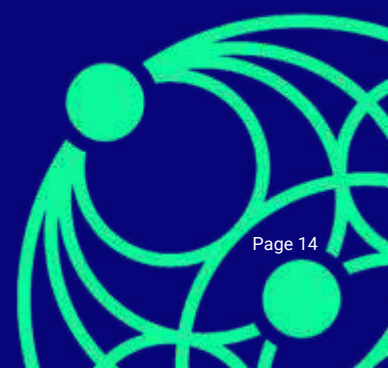
Local Development Plans and Climate Action Plans need to be aligned with national objectives and policy including zoning relevant land

A Minister for Energy Security with the responsibility for ensuring supply and building out future infrastructure

Ireland needs to align with EU policy on Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and the infrastructure at Ballylongord must proceed

Develop a clear timeline for onshore renewable energy auctions to 2030 and extend duration of contracts to de-risk investment

Further define Ireland's electricity generation mix past 2030, providing clarity on types of generation, storage and other assets needed



# 3

## Foynes Port & ORE



Ireland’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is around seven times the size of its land area, offering vast potential for wind energy, especially along the west coast, thanks to strong and consistent winds. The deep waters in this region make it ideal for floating offshore wind turbines, a technology already gaining momentum in the UK, with Scotland awarding 15 GW of leases in 2022. This technology is available and ready for deployment.

Foynes Island and the Shannon Estuary have exceptional features that position them as a prime supply chain hub for ORE on the west coast. There’s the potential to generate 70 GW of wind energy within a 36-hour towing distance from Foynes Island. Additionally, 400kV transmission lines from Foynes and Moneypoint connect to the East Coast, and the deep channels—reaching 32 metres—are particularly suitable for offshore wind installations.

The Shannon Estuary offers numerous locations for wet storage, and the Foynes to Limerick rail line, set to reopen by 2026, will further enhance infrastructure. Plans for major upgrades to the Limerick to Foynes road will improve national access to the port and region.

As mentioned in our previous section, the expedited advancement of West Coast DMAPS is critical to advance the sector and provide clarity to investors.

As Limerick Chamber highlighted in our Submission on the National Planning Framework (NPF) Review, there are some concerns that must be addressed in party manifestos and the next programme for Government.

The shortage of port capacity, as highlighted in the Port Policy Review Issues Paper, is likely to be a major constraint for Ireland to reach its binding Climate Action Targets. Therefore, we need to ensure strategic investment in the sector not only from a trade perspective, but also from a climate perspective.

### Supporting Research



**Offshore Wind Phase 2 Consultation**



**Security of Energy Supply Consultation**



**Review of National Ports Policy Consultation**



**National Energy Security Framework Consultation**



**Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan II Consultation**



**Budget 2025 Submission**

## Key Asks

The West Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) must not be delayed any longer

Port infrastructure is crucial to Ireland's economic and energy growth and multi annual funding must be provided for upgrades

Utilising the resource of the Shannon Estuary will allow for data centres and energy parks to be sustainably located along the estuary

With the next programme for Government, the Government should publicly back Shannon Foynes Port and the estuary as the enabler for ORE development on the West Coast

It is critical that the Government prioritises the funding and implementation of the Limerick to Foynes road which will connect the port to the national network

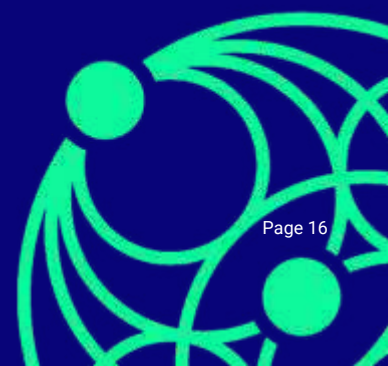
Funding from the connecting europe facility (CEF) plays a key role in ports projects and Government will need to drive this along with MEPs

The track access charge for rail freight acts as a disincentive and drives more HGV traffic to roads. This must be reduced, as per the findings of the All Island Strategic Rail Review

This flexibility needs to allow a range of funding structures such as corporate debt and project finance from a variety of public and private structures

When it comes to exchequer support of ports, Government need to view the investment through the lens of improved trade links, energy security and economic appraisal

Government need to ensure quick decisions on an increased range of acceptable investment structures for ports



# 4

## Supporting Business



The rising cost of doing business has been a concern since Brexit, and this has been worsened by the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, rising interest rates, and shipping challenges in the Red Sea. The introduction of an increased minimum wage, statutory sick pay, and a mandatory pension program are further straining business viability. Adding to this, the proposed EU Late Payments Directive will require firms to repay all invoices within 30 days or incur additional fees.

Although recent changes in the tax debt warehousing scheme are welcome, a significant viability issue remains for many businesses.

Nearly 44,000 people in the Mid-West work in retail and hospitality, representing about 18% of total employment in the region. Urgent action is needed to ensure these businesses can continue to operate and serve the community.

Smaller firms, and those in the retail and hospitality sector, due to smaller margins are unable to deal with the increased cost of doing business in the same way a larger business would.

Given the economic impact the impending closure of Wyeth will have on West Limerick and the Mid-West as a whole, we strongly encourage the next Government to ensure a buyer and operator for the plant is secured.

## Supporting Research



**Budget 2025 Submission**



**Mid-West Business Sentiment Survey**



**National Energy Security Framework Consultation**



**National Planning Framework Review**



## Key Asks

The 9% VAT rate for independent food focused businesses must be reinstated

There needs to be a strong focus on repurposing the Wyeth plant to ensure a supply chain for the agriculture and food sector, and for economic development of West Limerick

Some businesses in rates arrears were not eligible to have the ICOB grant paid out despite having a payment plan in place. These businesses should be eligible and have payments backdated

The power up grant announced as part of Budget 2025 only applies to businesses that receive the ICOB grant. This must be expanded to other businesses within hospitality and retail

There needs to be a focus on setting expedited timelines for the introduction of business energy efficiency supports

There is a clear need amongst customer facing businesses for increased Police numbers and response times. Government needs to prioritise improvements in both areas

Implement a trading interruption waiver on local authority rates for businesses due to unforeseen or unplanned changes to capital projects which results in long delays

The next Government must review the tendering process for state contracts to ensure Irish SMEs have an equal chance of participating and winning contracts versus larger companies

Ireland is highlighted as having one of the highest energy prices in Europe, this directly impacts businesses. As part of the next Government, there is a requirement to investigate and tackle this

Given the impact certain changes such as minimum wage and pension contributions will have on SMEs, Government must investigate if the burden on SMEs can be reduced elsewhere in the system



# 4

## Skills & Talent



There are many ways that businesses can be supported. One of those is developing the skills of new and existing employees to ensure business productivity and competitiveness is maintained or increased.

Over the last number of years Ireland has undertaken an incredibly effective skills and training regime which has provided much needed support to the enterprise sector as a whole. In many ways, other countries are looking to Ireland for ideas on how to undertake skills provision transformation.

However, there are also very real challenges in the sector, particularly for SMEs. This is due to the unique skillset required, but also the fact there isn't the ability for employees to take leave for training to the same extent as there would be for larger companies. Party manifestos, and indeed, the next programme for Government must account for this issue. Furthermore, we need to ensure continual support for the expansion of initiatives for SMEs and other companies to take part.

There is also the potential for greater clarity and transparency around the allocation of the NTF and other skills funding. This will allow companies to examine where the funding is going and how they might be able to receive skills investment.

The current employment landscape and availability of skilled workers makes expansion difficult for some companies. However, the solution is not as simple as expanding the labour force, the labour force must be expanded by those with appropriate skills. Limerick Chamber believes that this can be tackled and addressed through continued investment in programmes and liaising with industry participants of all sizes and sectors.

### Supporting Research



Budget 2025 Submission



Mid-West Business Sentiment Survey

## Key Asks

Following Budget 2025 it is critical that the NTF supports all businesses, particularly SMEs, through upskilling and workforce development incentives

There needs to be a targeted approach to utilising the NTF by providing direct support to employers via such avenues as Skillnet

The micro-credentials system must be reviewed to make it more attractive to SMEs and to ensure a greater uptake from industry

SME engagement is critical and we need to ensure programs like Springboard+ and other SME-targeted initiatives receive increased funding to boost appeal to smaller businesses

SMEs face financial and resource difficulties with the block release model which limits participation. Increased funding and flexibility will help to boost participation utilising apprenticeships

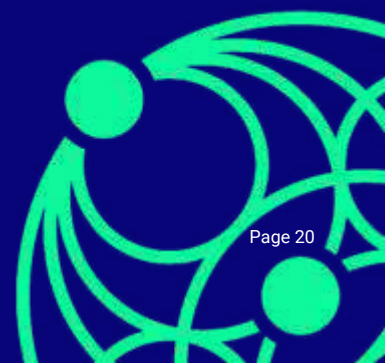
Employers require transparency on how the NTF is allocated, this should be a priority of the next Government

There also needs to be greater communication and transparency on how funds are allocated to workforce development programs such as Skillnet, Skills to Advance and Springboard+

The current funding model for some agencies makes it difficult for education providers to plan training. Multi-annual funding provides certainty and should be more widely adopted

Larger companies receiving investment assistance show less interest in training due to potential double dipping. This needs to be reviewed to develop larger workforces appropriately

The Human Capital Initiative (HCI) requires continual funding to ensure the development of skills for enterprise



# 5

## Liveability



In Ireland's dynamic business landscape, creating a liveable environment and fostering talent are key to attracting and retaining skilled workers. As a small, open economy, Ireland's growth and competitiveness are heavily reliant on its human capital. Investing in people is not only critical for individual success but also essential for building a thriving business ecosystem. Feedback from our members consistently points to Ireland's skilled workforce as a primary reason businesses choose to establish themselves here.

To meet the evolving demands of industries, retention and attraction of our people is crucial. With rapid technological advancements and shifting global markets, businesses must adapt. By prioritising Ireland's liveability, we can ensure to attract and retain a workforce that remains agile and proficient in emerging sectors, strengthening the Irish economy's resilience.

Attracting and retaining top talent, however, goes beyond what a person's career can offer. Quality of life factors such as housing, childcare, and overall liveability are becoming increasingly influential. For Ireland to maintain its status as a global hub for innovation and technology, these elements must be addressed. A strong connection exists between business success and the well-being of individuals. By enhancing Ireland's liveability, we not only support the growth of skilled workers but also reinforce Ireland's position in the global business landscape, ensuring long-term prosperity and sustainability.

### Supporting Research



Budget 2025 Submission



Mid-West Business Sentiment Survey



Mid-West Economic Insights

## Key Asks

The Mid-West requires an appropriate health system for its people including a new model 4 hospital - finding an appropriate site must be expedited

Government need to take a more hands on approach to the allocation and distribution of police while allocating police based on population and need

Government needs to commit to the indexation of income tax bands to ensure real wages are not eroded

Greater urgency and intervention is required in the childcare sector to ensure that it becomes affordable for workers to remain in the workforce while placing children in creche

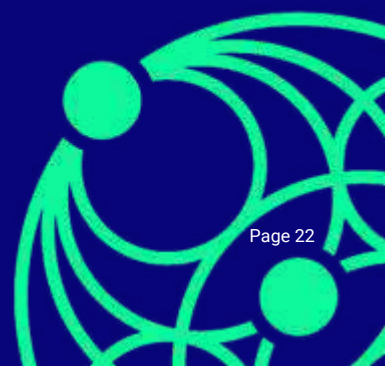
Overhaul personal investment system to cut red tape to make investing outside property more attractive such as individuals investing in ETFs

Greater emphasis needs to be put on retaining talent and attracting diaspora home including those in public services

Ireland must continue to invest in its transport network, both public/active transport and the road network

Housing is seen as the number one concern for businesses and Government must bring forward a realistic plan for tackling the crisis

Government need to ensure that funding remains available for local authorities to invest and improve public realm as well as boosting recreational and cultural amenities





# 5

## Aviation



Shannon Airport is a key driver of growth for regional development. Nationally, we are lagging behind in providing the necessary infrastructure to support a growing population. Additionally, we are falling short of aligning the ambitions of Project Ireland 2040 and the National Planning Framework (NPF) with concrete delivery mechanisms and policies. We believe that expanding Shannon Airport is one such vehicle for both regional and national growth.

While much of the discussion centres around the capacity limits at Dublin Airport, there remains considerable unused capacity within state-owned airports in Shannon and Cork. Shannon alone could accommodate an additional 3 million passengers annually, with Cork capable of handling an extra 2 million, providing up to 5 million passengers that could be diverted to relieve pressure on Dublin's airport and infrastructure.

There is also a compelling argument from a national security standpoint against concentrating 88% of the country's aviation traffic into a single asset.

It is unwise not to fully leverage Shannon Airport, especially considering that 40% of passengers arriving in Dublin are travelling onward to other locations. Shannon's catchment area already encompasses 38% of the national population, yet it only accounts for just over 4% of Ireland's total air traffic.

Furthermore, Shannon/Limerick boasts the largest 90-minute catchment area outside Dublin. Indigenous companies and multinational corporations view Shannon as a key growth enabler, a major reason they choose to base themselves in the Mid-West.

Improved connectivity is essential to attracting businesses and supporting trade in the region. We welcome the inclusion of a rail link between Limerick and Shannon Airport by 2030, as outlined in the All-Ireland Strategic Rail Review (July 2024). We urge the Government to back this project with the necessary support and funding to ensure it becomes a reality by 2030. Enhanced transport links will strengthen the regional economy, contributing to more balanced growth beyond Dublin.

## Supporting Research



**Budget 2025 Submission**



**Mid-West Business Sentiment Survey**



**Assessment of aviation policy as a driver of economic development**



**Regional Airports Programme Review Submission**

## Key Asks

A new National Aviation Policy must be undertaken and published with a new focus on the regional goals of Project Ireland 2040

Shannon Airport must be included in the Regional Airports Programme in the long-term with threshold increased to 3m passengers

Funding must be provided to support strategic business route development such as a PSO to a Northern European hub

Public transport is critical to any airport and we ask that both train and bus routes remain a Government priority

De-risk our aviation system by encouraging more flights from Shannon and Cork Airports

Fully utilise the capacity at Shannon and Cork Airports prior to the expansion of capacity elsewhere in the system

There needs to be support in developing a high-speed bus network for the Shannon Airport catchment area

There needs to be a focus on increasing inter-county bus services to regional airports that align with flight times

# 5

## Infrastructure & Mobility



A well-functioning transport network is essential for societal and enterprise wellbeing. With significant population growth, it is crucial to ensure that Limerick and the Mid-West's transport needs are effectively met. Limerick Chamber advocates for a diverse transport system, emphasising the importance of light rail or commuter rail networks for the region's long-term public transport future. While buses will continue to play a role, a rail system is necessary to achieve the critical mass required for efficient regional transport. Unlike buses, which face congestion unless dedicated bus corridors are created, rail offers a more reliable alternative, despite challenges like single-track networks.

Future transport planning in the region must follow transit-oriented development principles, where dense residential areas are built near transport hubs and nodes. This approach will reduce Limerick's sprawl and make public transport more attractive by minimising journey times.

Additionally, Limerick Chamber views active travel options as crucial for future transport success and advocates for their support, especially connecting large residential and employment areas.

Limerick boasts the second-largest catchment area within a 90-minute drive outside Dublin. It's crucial to not only enhance infrastructure for our growing region but also for the extensive area it serves. Strategically, investing in critical infrastructure in Limerick is imperative to maximise balanced regional development, given its substantial population impact outside Dublin.

Several key infrastructure projects in Limerick are slated for completion under Project Ireland 2040 and other supplementary initiatives. However, lengthy lead times and the current planning system threaten to delay these projects significantly. It is imperative that these projects remain a top priority. The projects in question are:

- The N/M20 Limerick to Cork
- The N21/N69 Limerick to Adare to Foynes
- Foynes to Limerick Railway
- BusConnects (with inclusion of Annacotty)
- The Limerick Northern Distributor Road

### Supporting Research



Budget 2025 Submission



LSMATs Consultation



Future Limerick Report



Limerick BusConnects Consultation



Limerick Chamber Strategic Development Pipeline

## Key Asks

A review of prison system capacity to examine if a new prison is required, while budget 2025 announced additional capacity this must be measured against population growth

Limerick and the wider Mid-West is ripe for a commuter rail system, this needs to be a priority of the next Government

Adherence to transport oriented development principles has been weak in the region to date and require greater focus and investment from Government

The Limerick Northern Distributor Road is required to alleviate congestion in the city centre and create a knowledge corridor

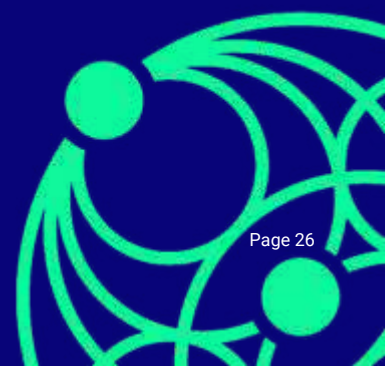
Annacotty Business Park is home to a significant number of employees and still has no adequate public transport, it is urgent that this is rectified

The Mackey Roundabout congestion poses a significant danger to people traveling to the east of the city and works must advance quicker

It is of critical importance to the designation of Shannon Foynes Port as a TENT-T port that funding is allocated and works begin on the road

The advancement of works at Colbert Quarter and other state owned sites is proving to be extremely slow and need to be address by Government

Active and public transport need to be continually invested in and expanded, particularly with a focus on key employment nodes



# Other Publications & Recommended Reading

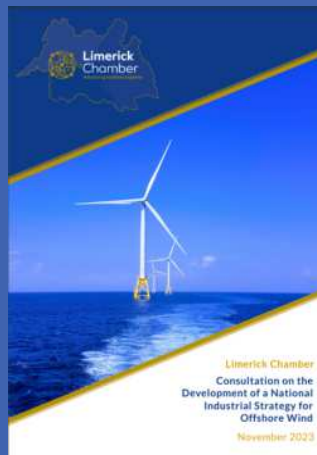
## Economic Development



## Housing



## Energy





## Transport & Trade



## City Centre



Find more at  
[www.limerickchamber.ie/influence](http://www.limerickchamber.ie/influence)



**Limerick Chamber**  
Advancing business together



# Some critical questions to ask your election candidates

- *How do you propose to positively contribute to the housing issues in Limerick?*
- *How do you propose to increase footfall in city and town centres?*
- *How does your party propose to increase security of energy supply?*
- *How will you help to decrease the cost of doing business?*
- *What are your priorities for your term?*
- *What is your track record in dealing with the issues outlined in this priority document?*



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[www.limerickchamber.ie](http://www.limerickchamber.ie)

