

SLIGO COUNTY ENTERPRISE BOARD

LIMITED – PLAN (2010 - 13)

(Updated for review by March, 2011 Board meeting)

Small Business Support

The plan as approved by the Board in early 2010 is updated below. It is based on the Board continuing as is but against a backdrop of:

- (1) The recent programme for Government, which envisages that Boards will report to local authorities. The Section of the programme entitled “*Reforming Local Government*” states that “*We will merge local enterprise and job support functions of local, regional and national agencies into a single business and enterprise unit within Local Authorities. This will allow streamlining of local job creation and support functions, increased shared knowledge capability and resources while saving on administrative costs*”.
- (2) The McCarthy Report which envisages the functions of Boards being transferred into Enterprise Ireland. It is understood that the previous Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation saw merit in these recommendation.

Broad strategy of the Board, 2011 – 2013

The objectives and actions listed below, facilitated through the National Development Plan, 2007 – 2013 and funded through the Exchequer and the EU, are geared towards achieving the broad strategic aim of the Board of furthering the establishment and development of micro enterprise at the local level (including management and staff) and, more broadly, enhancing in particular the overall economic development of Sligo town and County. Against an adverse economic background, a key priority of the recently elected Government is to sustain and grow jobs. Given the unemployment levels in the Country and the resumption of emigration through necessity, it appears likely that that this goal will remain a priority for some time.

A critical factor in the extent to which these objectives are to be achieved will be budgetary allocations to the Board over the period and the flexibility afforded to the Board to apply them in a manner that is most appropriate to the needs of the County. The exchequer position is very much in the red which does not augur well. It is imperative to seek out any other opportunities that may emerge to boost funding.

Further critical factors include staff motivation and dedication, having a full staff complement, changes in Government/Departmental/EU policy, not being overly engaged in carrying out “non-core duties” having due regard to the small size of the organisation, etc. The latter point is much more significant than it might seem at first glance. There is no doubt but administrative duties place a significant burden on staff resources. This burden has increased over recent years and shows no sign of abatement – the opposite has been the case, exacerbated by further financial reporting given overall exchequer finances. Such non-productive work involves significant opportunity costs.

Finally, a core principle of the plan is to ensure that the scarce resources made available to the Board are spent in a way that maximises benefit for our clients. The general decline in the economy has meant that are procuring services at a lower rate than had been the case.

Objectives/actions to achieve the strategy in 2010 and beyond

The **principle** objectives of the Board for 2011 in particular but also beyond are set out below (these do not purport to encompass every single day to day activity of the Board and its staff):

Objective 1: To assist to the maximum extent possible in the start-up of small businesses, or the expansion of existing small businesses, through the provision of financial assistance in the areas of manufacturing, internationally traded services, tourism projects geared predominantly towards the overseas visitors and services provided by the unemployed, those recently made redundant and women returning to the workforce. In attaining this objective, due regard must be had towards displacement and deadweight issues.

- Action:

- Provision of grant assistance/refundable aid provided in particular that the Board is satisfied that deadweight and displacement issues do not arise;
- Offering, subject to adequate funding, a package of measures (not just grant assistance) where appropriate;
- Insisting, where considered appropriate, that the promoter undertakes mentoring and, if appropriate, training made available through the Board in order to avail of grant assistance;
- Identification of, and provision of appropriate services to businesses that require assistance with a view to expansion.

Objective 2: To minimise the extent of decommitments and ensure that we become aware of impending decommitments at an early date.

- Action:

- Appropriate follow-up from the Board's staff with project promoters in order to identify at an early stage if there is a possibility that funding approved will not be drawn down;
- Decommit and reallocate monies where staff are not satisfied that the project will proceed according to plan.

Objective 3: To play a role in assisting in the economic development of County Sligo outside of that contained within the Board's normal brief.

- Action:

- Take any opportunity, including in conjunction with other agencies if appropriate, to encourage prospective entrepreneurs to consider locating in Sligo;
- Input into the County Development Board, its relevant sub-groups, the formal structures between Enterprise Ireland and the CEBs, Sligo Leader Partnership, various "think-thanks", the Association of CEOs and its sub-groups, etc;
- Work with other agencies and bodies that might be pursuing a topic under this objective in which the Board wishes to be involved.

Objective 4: To continue to provide training and mentoring which meet the requirements of small businesses, the overall objectives being enhanced efficiency,

productivity, effectiveness and the competitive position of business, thus helping employment consolidation and expansion among client businesses.

- Action:

- Identify suitable programmes which respond to identified needs (special cognisance to be taken of management development, productivity and ICT);
- Identify programmes and approaches that will help businesses respond to the economic downturn, particularly in the area of competitiveness, cost-reduction, increasing sales, accessing new markets, etc;
- Canvass views of clients on their requirements in the context of a changing marketplace, difficult trading conditions, etc. and respond appropriately;
- Progress, subject to availability of resources, etc. any sensible proposals that may be directed to the Board from organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce, the County Development Board, etc;
- Consider new programmes, modus operandi, approaches, etc;
- Keep in touch with clients who are participating on the Board's training, mentoring and other programmes and seek feedback;
- Continue with the normal yardsticks for assessing progress (questionnaires, invited feedback on programmes, etc.);
- Endeavour to increase participant numbers over and above 2008 levels on programmes (subject to resources and, in particular, not sacrificing quality for quantity).

Objective 5: To use all facilities at the Board's disposal in a context of increasing innovation.

- Action:

- When innovatory projects involving potentially promising opportunities present themselves, every avenue should be explored with a view to assisting promoters to develop their idea into a finished product;
- Promote co-operation with the Institute of Technology, Sligo, in particular, and also with St. Angela's College;
- Pursue opportunities such as working closely with Omagh Enterprise Centre;
- Take whatever action is necessary, in conjunction with Omagh and other Northern partners if appropriate, to try to procure and maximise the impact of any available EU funding.

Objective 6: To play a pro-active role in getting small businesses to export.

- Action:

- The Board should take all appropriate steps to identify existing customers that might either be interested in, or encouraged to export;
- The maximum assistance possible should be made available to such companies to prepare them for export;
- Relevant clients should be referred to Enterprise Ireland when appropriate.

Objective 7: To explore with established large industry any opportunities that may exist for the Board's client group to meet their supply needs.

- Action:

The weakness in sterling (even if not as pronounced as some months ago) is having an adverse effect on our clients' abilities to trade with the North (or indeed Britain). The marginal strengthening of sterling of late, coupled with significant inflation of late will, assuming that inflation does not take hold in the South, open further opportunities over coming months.

A "Tradelinks 2" programme involving all 6 counties adjacent to and north of the border is currently operating successfully, with a "Tradelinks 3" currently being planned. These programmes are/will be focused specifically on cross-border trade.

Objective 8: To harness insofar as possible the potential which business persons from or having an affinity with Sligo residing outside of the County/Country present in terms of locating businesses in the County or in trading with local businesses.

- Action:

- Ensure that the Board is represented and sold professionally at various events aimed at attracting investment to the regions;
- Avail of relevant opportunities to advertise and promote the assistance which the Board can provide to such persons;
- Take full advantage of networking opportunities to promote the Board's businesses to such persons and encourage them to locate in the County.

Objective 9: To continue to work towards greater cross-border co-operation.

- Action:

- CEO to continue to play an active role in the context of Omagh-Sligo initiatives, meetings of border CEOs, meetings between border CEOs and Enterprise Northern Ireland and any other appropriate fora where this goal might be advanced;
- Participate fully on the Joint Management Committee to implement the Tradelinks 2 Programme;
- Relationships with various Bodies including IntertradeIreland, ICBAN and the SEUPB to be continued and enhanced where possible;
- Active pursuit of funding for cross-border projects to be continued (this Board is currently involved in several applications and is leading one seeking funding for an environmental project to assist small businesses);
- Work not just within the ICBAN region but also further afield should suitable opportunities become available.

Objective 10: To play a full part in greater co-ordination of approach between the agencies at County level.

Action:

- Contribute to debate, committees, etc. of CEO Association and play a full part in any joint initiatives;
- Liaise in particular with Enterprise Ireland and the Sligo Leader Partnership Company, North West Tourism, Sligo County Council and other agencies that have a role in promoting Sligo;

- Continue to input to the County Development Board.

Objective 11: To provide a quality service to the Board.

Action:

- Comply with all directions of the Board speedily;
- Keep the Board advised, as succinctly but fully as possible, on all developments of concern;
- Encourage feedback/suggestions from the Board on the service which it is receiving from staff and take action as appropriate.

Objective 12: To maximise the level of funding available to the Board and ensure it is spent to maximum effect.

- Action:

- Seek funding from available sources and use any acquired in a manner that will ensure maximum value for money;
- Play a pro-active role in securing cross-border and other funding which may become available.

Objective 13: To input into policy developments regarding CEBs at the national level.

- Action: Make suggestions to colleagues, input into the agenda of CEOs meetings, serve on some committees and put forward various ideas that might be adopted nationally to colleagues and to the Department. Currently the CEO is secretary of the CEO Association/CEB Network and is heavily involved in activities at the national level.

Objective 14: To satisfy the requirements of the Department and the CEB Support Unit in a timely fashion.

- Action:

- Ensure that that all staff use their best endeavours to respond to the various requests that issue from the Department and the CCU for information in a timely fashion;
- Requests from Ministers must be afforded top priority.

Objective 15: To encourage the use of IT by Board staff and customers, having regard, inter alia, to the Government's objective of promoting e-Government.

- Action:

- Keep the Board's website up to date and re-vamp it from time to time as required;
- Increase the number of clients on the Board's group-mail system;
- Continue to provide for application forms for various programmes to be downloadable from the Board's website;
- Aim for larger numbers of applications to be accepted on-line.

Objective 16: Promote an enterprise culture

- Action:

- Participate in awards schemes such as the National City and County Enterprise Awards and Sligo Young Entrepreneurs Awards;
- Aim to continually improve and enhance the level of information and services provided on the Sligo County Enterprise Board web site;
- Continue to liaise with enterprise agencies, local authorities and community enterprise groups to encourage enterprise development;
- Give presentations to local interest groups on the services of the Enterprise Board and entrepreneurship;
- Provide business planning guides, information packs and literature to local entrepreneurs and business;
- Advertise and promote the services of the Board through media promotions and advertisements;
- Liaise and co-operate with Sligo Institute of Technology, aim to develop joint programmes (they are currently one of the partners with the Board on a cross-border environmental proposal for small businesses), participate on their careers exhibition, etc;
- Participate in local trade fairs;
- Upgrade our range of promotional materials;
- Distribute the small business “Starting Your Own Business Guide” to appropriate businesses.

Objective 17: Promote enterprise awareness among students (second and third level).

- Action:

- Avail of all opportunities to foster entrepreneurialism in young persons (these include, in addition to the specific actions below, addressing career events in schools, working with groups of young persons in mock start-up situations, taking limited advertising in certain student publications, etc);
- Continue the facilitation of young entrepreneurs schemes and events by promoting them to second level schools throughout the County, adjudicating the County Final at junior (first year) and senior (transition year, leaving certificate applied) level and subsidising the expenses of winning students participating in regional and national finals;
- Continue to build on the progress over recent years relating to student enterprise promotion and having regard to the emphasis placed on it by Government with a view to enhancing existing provision if possible. In that regard, continue examination of possibilities to encourage science and innovation among students from an enterprise perspective;
- Support the Institute of Technology Sligo’s careers seminars;
- Promote the student enterprise “business games” developed by the CEB Education Committee;
- In broad terms, and as already referred to under (5) above, co-operate and work with the Institute of Technology, Sligo, in particular, and also with St. Angela’s College.

Objective 18: To commission appropriate research as necessary, in conjunction with other agencies if possible.

Actions:

- Consider contributing to any requests for research that are appropriate and of potentially tangible benefit to small businesses in Sligo;
- Instigate research into the needs of small businesses where appropriate;
- Given the limited budgets available to the Boards for research, pool funding with other potentially interested parties for research where possible.

Objective 19: To maintain adequate staff numbers and to ensure that they are positioned to provide optimal service to customers. With regard to the latter, training and enhancement of their ability to advise customers on the full range of services available by the CEB and other agencies with a brief in the area of business/personnel development should be provided insofar as possible. While a constraining factor is the limited budgets available for training, all options should be explored to circumvent this to the maximum degree possible.

Action:

- Ensure that any vacancies that arise are filled as speedily as possible;
- Select candidates who are well suited for any positions that may arise;
- Provide feedback to staff on their performance;
- Make clear from the outset to staff on probation that they will not be retained in the organisation should their probationary period prove unsatisfactory;
- Arrange for staff to attend various seminars and other events that have a potentially relevant and useful content in the context of their duties;
- Ensure insofar as possible that any training provided by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation and relevant training provided by bodies such as Sligo County Council is availed of by staff;
- Facilitate staff to be accommodated as observers at training courses run by the Board.

Objective 20: To promote administrative simplification to the maximum extent possible.

- Action:

- Review application forms for various programmes;
- Encourage customers and staff to make increased use of ICT.

Other objectives:

- To use the limited resources available to the Board for promotional activities in a manner which ensures maximum value for money;
- CEO to continue to serve on the Board of the County Enterprise Fund and to promote its activities through the Board as appropriate;
- To continue to promote the Business Expansion Scheme and the Seed Capital Scheme;
- Staff to become familiar with any evolving regulations relating to EU aid;
- Assist businesses to develop new markets in Northern Ireland and overseas;
- Avoid duplication in State supports when assisting clients.

Review of Plan

This plan will be reviewed and updated/amended as appropriate.

At each Board meeting the Board will, in line with well-established practice, be presented with specific proposals relating to training, mentoring and other substantive activities and a review of progress and performance targets since the Board last met. The aforementioned proposals will be carried out subject to any amendments that may be decided by the Board and reviewed at the subsequent Board meeting. With regard to Measure 1 funding, again the Board will continue to be apprised of the funding position at each Board meeting, in line with established practice. It will be advised periodically of overall progress with regard to Measure 1 funding. In addition, the number of jobs created will be reviewed at least annually. In summary, the Board will continue to set, monitor and review plans/targets at each meeting.