comhairle chontae na mí
meath county council

Miontuairiscí / Meeting Minutes

Economic Development, Enterprise, Tourism, EU Affairs & Rural Regeneration SPC
3.00pm Thursday 11th June 2026, THRIVE Centre & Hybrid Format

Attendees Councillors:	Cllr Joe Fox (Chairperson), Cllr Padraig Fitzsimons, Cllr Brian Fitzgerald, Cllr Paul O'Rourke, Cllr Eugene Cassidy, Cllr Sarah Reilly
Sectoral Representatives:	Dermot Ward IFA, Paula McCaul CEO, Meath Chamber,
Apologies:	Dara McGowan, Director of Services, Cllr Gerry O'Connor, Anne Headley Kentstown ICA, Carol McSherry ICTU,
Officials:	Majella Farrell, A/Director of Services, Sheila Harkin, A/Finance Director of Services, Karen Dalton, Finance, Michelle Goodwin, Regional Enterprise, Rebecca Meade, Food Development Officer, Michelle Rogers, Rural Regeneration, Áine Bird, Rural Regeneration.

Item	Discussion
1.	**To Approve Minutes** The minutes of the SPC meeting held on the 5th of March 2026 were approved by **Dermot Ward** and seconded by **Cllr Brian Fitzgerald**.
2.	**Ethics Declaration** **2.1 To Declare any Conflicts of Interest** Members were asked to disclose any conflict of interest be it financial or other beneficial interest that they may have with an item that comes before the meeting. There were none.
3.	**Finance** **3.1 Report to the SPC on the consideration of the 2027 Business Support Scheme.** Sheila Harkin, A/Director of Finance presented an update to the committee on the 2027 Business Support Scheme. She gave an analysis of the income sources and said that commercial rates generate 24% income to the Council annually. She outlined the rates customers profile and said that the top 10 customers yield 45% income whilst the bottom 2000 generate 3.94%.

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	The Council introduced a Business Support Scheme in 2015 to support small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with approx. 80% of customers eligible for support. This is applied automatically once the relevant criteria are met. The members approved a once off increase to the Business Support Scheme for 2026 to assist customers adjust with the 10% increase in rates for 2026. Ms Harkin said it is proposed to increase the grant amounts in the Business Scheme by 10% for 2027, supporting customers who pay an annual rates bill to the max of €20,000. The revised scheme will be more straightforward for customers and the council to administer. The committee welcomed the proposal and said this will give support to the bottom 2000 businesses. Cllr Fitzgerald noted that there has been no increase in rates since 2009 with the rate base having increased from over €38m in 2019 to over €62m in 2026. Dermot Ward enquired about new businesses starting up and if they pay the full rates, even though the premises may have been vacant for part of the year. He was advised that the rates bill be issued based on a pro rata basis rather than on a full year. Regarding vacant premises, Meath County Council's revenue collector would need to carry out a site visit to confirm that the premises was vacant, or a business was not trading. Where a premises meets the vacant premises criteria a write off, of rates for the period that the premises is vacant will be applied to the customer account in line with Meath County Council Rates Abatement of Rates Scheme Cllr Fox stated that the rates are not a big expense to a business, rather it's the increase in costs and overheads that could cause them to close. Paula McCaul welcomed the scheme and asked if the businesses know that the supports in place in 2026 are a one off. Cllr Eugene Cassidy asked if the rates bill will show the rates increase along with a credit. Ms Harkin responded and said that customers had received details of the support scheme and rates increase which were enclosed with their bills. She said also that statements are issued during the year with this information. The committee agreed to support the scheme on the proposal of Councillor Brian Fitzgerald and seconded by Councillor Eugene Cassidy. Sheila Harkin advised that this will be brought to the Budget Meeting in November for adoption.
4.	**Meath Chamber** **4.1 To receive update on Retail Supports and Meath Mí Card** Paula McCaul CEO, Meath Chamber, updated the committee on the Mí Meath gift card. She said the card has been very successful and stated that it ringfenced

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	spend within the County which is directly supporting local business, communities and Meath jobs. She said that over 200+ retailers in Meath are registered to accept the card. Employers can also gift cards per annum tax-free to staff under the small benefits exemption scheme. She said that commission is only 4% to the retailer compared to 10% for a One for All card. She advised that the Chamber set the commission rates, criteria and spend amount and that any commission raised returns into the scheme. Ms McCaul gave a demo of the Mí Meath webpage, on how to register as a business/customer, check balances, where to spend, FAQ etc. She said that the cards can be ordered online or by calling into their offices. The committee welcomed the update whereby Cllr Cassidy outlined the benefits of consumers getting a card and retailers accepting the gift cards. He suggested that there be more promotion of the card and discounts offered within a retailer's premises. Cllr Fox supported the tax free benefits that businesses, employers, groups can avail of for gifting a card. Ms McCaul thanked the committee and the support of the Council, businesses and communities and said that they will continue promoting the card and getting the message out there.
5.	**Economic Development** **5.1 Food Business Development Boyne Valley Flavours** • To receive an update on current initiatives and work programme**.** Rebecca Meade, Food Development Officer presented on the Boyne Valley Flavours work programme. The current strategy in place is the Boyne Valley Food Development Strategy 2024-2028 which was developed in co-ordination with Boyne Valley Flavours, Centre of Food Culture Ireland, Meath & Louth County Councils and Fáilte Ireland. She said the vision for Boyne Valley Flavours is to develop food as a sustainable economic sector and the Boyne Valley as a food destination where the local producers are at the heart of the food culture. She stated that there are 105+ members with 19 new members joining during 2026. These are made up of 60% producers and 40% food service and experiences. There is a Board in place of seven Directors with Kevin Sheridan as the Chairperson. Rebecca advised that there are several key areas identified from the strategy that they are focusing on namely Network Growth & Development, Awareness & Profile, Sustainable Food Economy, Food Partnerships and Food Tourism Destinations.

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	Rebecca outlined some of the initiatives she is involved in, for businesses, from skills & capacity training, collaboration with the various industries, mentoring and offering funding support. She said that the Boyne Valley Flavours website has been refreshed and this gives updates on events, membership etc. with social media having 20k followers. Several events have taken place which included a Regional Food & Drinks producer showcase, engagements between Buyer, Retailer and Distributors along with Producer to Chef introductions. She advised on attending several showcasing events which included Paris and for the first time will attend the Ploughing Championships later in the year. Rebecca informed that food tourism is a massive area now with Fáilte Ireland using the Boyne Valley region as a pilot for other locations. Lonely Planet has also recognised the Boyne Valley region as a tourist destination. She outlined several food and drink events and experiences such as the Boyne Valley Bites which is connecting local food/drink producers with suppliers and customers thus making the local food culture and economy stronger. She also mentioned an inaugural dining week scheduled for October which will be held within the region. The committee welcomed the updates and congratulated Rebecca on the work she is doing with Boyne Valley Flavours. Cllr Fox stated that Boyne Valley Bites is very important for producers to market their produce and connect with local restaurants and cafes and to boost the local food economy. Dermot Ward raised the issue of food labelling by small farmers being used by other countries and needs to be reported. Paula McCaul commended the work of the Boyne Valley Flavours and said you can link businesses in with other trusted businesses. She said also it is an opportunity to showcase our food and drinks during the EU Presidency where Meath has been paired with Italy. Majella Farrell commented that the Food Tourism is doing very well as per Fáilte Ireland who are using this region as a pilot to roll out to other locations. Cllr Cassidy suggested that we should be promoting food to the Americans where they visit the County in large numbers every year. Dermot Ward advised that 2026 is celebrating Women in Agriculture and enquired about seeking some funding to assist in hosting an event locally. This was noted by the Director. Cllr Fitzgerald cautioned that we don't loose our identity as a County as opposed to Boyne Valley region.
6.	**Meath Local Enterprise Office** **6.1 Priorities for the Local Enterprise Development Plan**

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	Majella Farrell congratulated Michelle Goodwin on her recent appointment to Head of LEO with the members wishing her well in her new role. Ms Goodwin gave a presentation outlining the priority actions for the LEO over the next three years which included Digitalisation, Green Impact, Inclusive Entrepreneurship, International Growth and Knowledge Sharing. She said the LEO will focus on supporting the SME's by offering sector focused supports such as targeted grants for energy & green transition, mentoring & business advisory services and digital training opportunities. She said stronger partnerships will be developed with the other sectors with knowledge sharing to promote enterprise. She advised that there is a need to change, as mentoring and training numbers need to increase, drawdown of grants at year end also needs to increase along with supporting SMEs to expand and grow globally. She said that there are opportunities now to review internal roles and responsibilities, look at aligning the business advisors to the MD areas to allow for stronger local delivery, and to carry out a business profile of the county. By doing this she said the LEO can support the delivery of more jobs and competitive businesses. The committee thanked Michelle and raised the following: Cllr Fox stated that there is a need for businesses to collaborate to get them to the next level. Cllr Reilly said that the business advisor pilot in the Kells MD is working. Cllr Fitzgerald commented that we should be mentoring graduates from college for six months that have a business idea and allow them to expand this to see if it might be a success. Paula McCaul commended the work being done, signposting businesses to the various sectors and keeping things plain and simple.
7.	**AOB** Paula McCaul, Meath Chamber informed every one of the upcoming inaugural Meath Business Showcase scheduled for June 17th at City North Hotel. She said that 70 businesses were already registered, and she expected a good networking event. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday September 10th, 2026, at 3pm.

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