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Simon Coveney TD  
Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment  
23 Kildare Street  
Dublin 2  
D02 TD30

6<sup>th</sup> November 2023

**RE: Increased Cost of Business Scheme**

Dear Minister,

County Kildare Chamber is the business organisation in Kildare, proactively working to identify and progress developments that are facilitative of economic and sustainable growth. Representing an employer base of 400 businesses and over 42,000 employees across the county, County Kildare Chamber is the largest business organisation in the mid-east region of Ireland.

Given the significant breadth and depth of our membership, and our representation on various bodies at local and national level, County Kildare Chamber constitutes the representative voice for business in Kildare. County Kildare Chamber is committed to improving the business environment and quality of life in Kildare and the wider region.

In Budget 2024, it was announced that a new €250 million Increased Cost of Business Scheme would be introduced for Small-Medium businesses most impacted by additional business costs, and to alleviate some of pressure to meet the increase in Minimum wage. An acknowledgment that our business community will face significant increases in cost output next year.

County Kildare Chamber welcomed this announcement at the time, adding while foreign direct investment is so important to our country, so too are the private indigenous small, medium, and large companies that are the lifeblood of our economy. We therefore need to ensure we always have the right structures in place to encourage and support these companies. We would caution against using some of the restrictive application criteria applied to the TBESS, which saw less than 10% drawdown of the €1.25 billion set aside in Budget 2023.

The scheme has a cap of €20,000 per annum for a company who pays commercial rates. Under the grant, these businesses would be entitled to a refund of 50% of their rates, which means a maximum refund of €10,000. However, this does not take into account business owners who are in a high-rate zone and is essentially punishing a business owner for providing a good or service in a larger town/city.

A typical unit in a town/village in Kildare will currently pay between €4-5,000 in rates per annum, this will equate to approximately €2-2,500 of a grant under this scheme. With the large increase in costs predicted for businesses in the coming 12 months, this grant will barely scratch the surface of what many stressed businesses will need in order to keep afloat.

A significant number of SME's who are currently struggling, will not be able to avail of this scheme at all, as they do not pay rates directly to their Local Authority or are exempt from paying commercial rates. These businesses are providing much needed service to communities around Kildare and will be facing the same increases in cost but will not be entitled to a grant.

We have seen before how exclusionary and convoluted policy does not work for business. We believe enhanced communication between the Department and key stakeholders is imperative for a cohesive and joined up approach to the economic ecosystem in the Country. We would therefore ask that going forward, budget schemes such as ICOB would be worked on together with businesses organisations and the views of Chambers Ireland and other stakeholders be taken into account before a scheme is announced.

We write to you Minister, to ensure that the provisions of this scheme are looked at again, and there are mechanisms put in place to support the SME's who at present will be excluded from the Increased Cost of Business Scheme.

We have a strong ecosystem of SME's & Multinationals here in Kildare & the Mid-East Region. Kildare is a location of choice for many, with a world class university in Maynooth, a young highly skilled workforce, the attractiveness of our region coupled with the quality of life we enjoy; our excellent infrastructure provision and connectivity ensures we are well placed to drive innovation and growth.

We ask that the Department and Government be open to reviewing and revising the scale and eligibility of this new scheme as it is rolled out over the next number of weeks and months, to ensure the maximum number of our SME's are able to avail of it.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Your sincerely,



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Sinéad Ronan  
Public Affairs Manager