



County Kildare
Chamber

Advancing business together

LOCAL & EUROPEAN ELECTION MANIFESTO 2024



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Pre Budget Submission 2024

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2. Introduction

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, a particularly important role given the current economic climate in the county and the state.

County Kildare Chamber is committed to improving the business environment and quality of life in Kildare and the wider region. County Kildare Chamber welcomes the opportunity to comment on Budget 2024, which comes at a time of increased financial pressure and uncertainty for businesses and consumers.

As a business organisation, County Kildare Chamber believes that long term planning for the development of the Country is essential in responding to the challenges presented by housing & skills shortages, climate change, Brexit, and the current crisis in Europe. We have set out below several broad areas for you to consider within the confines of this election manifesto .

- 1) Housing
- 2) Infrastructure
- 3) Economic Development & Employment
- 4) Energy & Climate Action



3. Submission

As a county, Kildare has a number of significant attributes. Kildare, according to the last census has a population of 246,977, the fifth highest in the state, a growth of 11% over the past six years and is projected to grow again by up to 44,000 by 2031. It has a substantial multinational economic cluster, a highly skilled workforce coupled with a high quality of life, our infrastructure provision and connectivity (port, airport, and digital infrastructure) ensures we are well placed to achieve the goals set out in the National Planning Framework.

At County Kildare Chamber, our overarching vision is to become a world-leading Chamber of Commerce that actively contributes to a progressive economic, social, and sustainability agenda within our vibrant business community. We are committed to upholding the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a guiding framework for our actions. In collaboration with the Chambers Ireland network, we have identified five specific SDGs that we prioritise.

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. By advocating for policies and initiatives that promote sustainable urban development, affordable housing, and accessible infrastructure, we aim to create inclusive and resilient communities within Kildare.

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. Our efforts are directed towards fostering an environment that promotes job creation, fair employment practices, and entrepreneurship. By supporting the growth of businesses and facilitating opportunities for decent work, we aim to enhance economic prosperity and social well-being in our region.

Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure is another key area of our focus. We believe in fostering a culture of innovation, supporting the development of robust infrastructure, and encouraging investment in advanced technologies. By doing so, we strive to drive industrial growth, stimulate innovation, and create a competitive business environment that benefits our entire community.

Gender equality, as outlined in Goal 5, is a fundamental principle that guides our actions. We are committed to promoting diversity and inclusion, ensuring equal opportunities for all genders, and actively addressing any barriers that impede progress towards gender equality in the workplace and society.

Goal 13: Climate Action. Through our policy outputs and collaborative efforts, we advocate for sustainable practices, renewable energy solutions, and environmental stewardship within our business community. By promoting climate-conscious actions and supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy, we aim to mitigate climate change and build a sustainable future.

Through our Budget 2024 Submission and all our policy initiatives, we align our actions with these identified SDGs, ensuring that our efforts are in line with our vision of being a world-leading Chamber of Commerce that champions economic progress, social well-being, and sustainability in Kildare.



4. Membership Priorities for LE & EU Election 2024

County Kildare Chamber has prepared our Local and European Election 2024 manifesto, with a specific focus on housing, and community development within the County, based on engagement with our membership..

From the Q1 2024 survey conducted by County Kildare Chamber in 2024, the experiences of our members during the first quarter (Q1) of this year and their priorities for both 2024 elections were assessed.

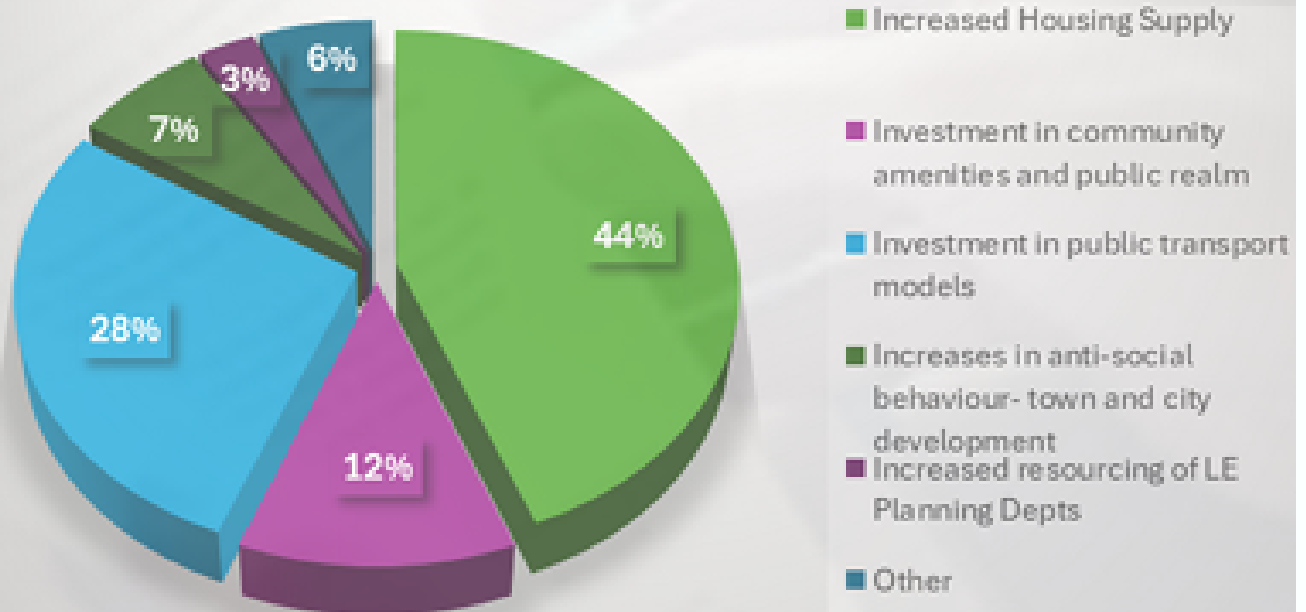
The insights gathered from the survey responses have helped shape this manifesto submission. Among the priorities highlighted by businesses for the upcoming election period, addressing the availability of housing emerged as the most critical concern, with 44% of companies emphasising it as the top priority for LE 2024.

When it comes to European Election Priorities , 50% of our membership suggest infrastructure development and increases in investment on a regional scale needs to be prioritised.

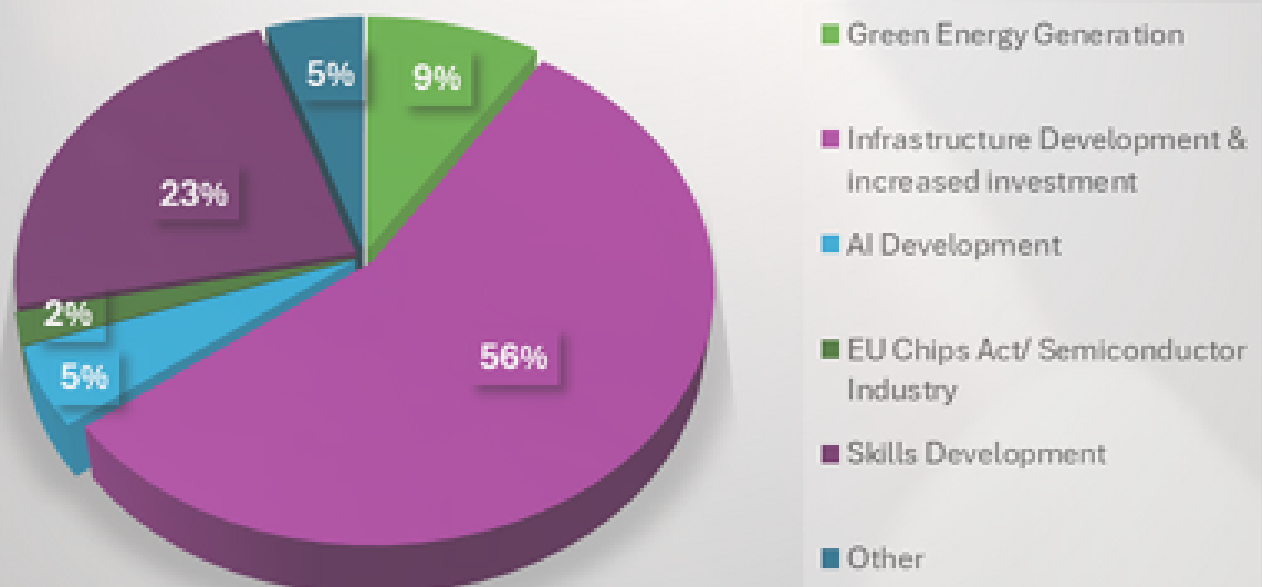
In summary, based on the survey findings, this budgetary submission emphasises the significance of ensuring adequate housing supply, investing in infrastructure and skills, and implementing measures to enhance business competitiveness.

These priorities reflect the urgent need to support businesses, address capacity constraints, and navigate challenges affecting economic growth and sustainability in the Kildare region.

Local Election Priorities 2024



European Election Priorities 2024



5. Housing

A recent survey of our membership identified housing availability as the number one issue affecting business competitiveness in Kildare over the past 36 months.

Low levels of residential construction during the post 2008 recession in Ireland, has not kept pace with the growing levels of employment and population in the mid-eastern region. Given that current housing stock levels are inadequate, it is crucial that the level of housing supply target is correct for key growth areas such as Naas, Maynooth and the surrounds. This on-going housing crisis has the potential to impede business activity, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), our international reputation and ability to attract talent.

As we look ahead, ensuring the availability and affordability of housing is essential for fostering economic development in the region. Alignment is key between the priorities of Councils, developers, and providers of crucial utilities to ensure efficient delivery of units. Any obstacles to the speedy delivery of housing must be targeted and removed.

While the capital funding for housing in 2024 stands at a record €5 billion, speed of implementation and delivery are crucial, and any obstacles to the speedy delivery of housing must be removed.



A man and a woman are sitting on a wooden floor, high-fiving over a large cardboard box. The man is on the left, wearing a blue and white checkered shirt and blue jeans, holding a piece of brown paper. The woman is on the right, wearing a light blue denim shirt and blue jeans, with a blue bandana on her head. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The background is a bright, modern interior with a blue armchair and large windows.

Key Asks:

- Prioritisation of review findings of the NPF & Housing for All targets
- Activation of vacant and derelict property
- The Town Centre First Programme needs to be expanded to reach a wider number of towns over the next 5 years, and a parallel programme for larger towns that were not initially included should be implemented.
- Accelerate the use of brownfield sites that are serviced by public transport for housing development

6. Infrastructure

Industry and infrastructural development are crucial to Kildare's continued growth. Kildare is facing overwhelming constraints on its growth due to a lack of basic services such as housing, water, electricity, and public transport.

For Kildare to continue to flourish, it needs champions who will ensure the county receives its fair share of investment. The National Development Plan has severely underestimated Kildare's population and consequent housing needs, which must not be allowed to hinder the county's growing demands.

Moreover, there has been an increase in anti-social behavior in Kildare's towns, exacerbated by the long-term trends of remote and hybrid working, leading to fewer people engaging with town centers. Kildare now faces significant traffic congestion issues, with substantial time lost to drivers annually. Traffic congestion in the Kildare region costs the Irish economy significantly, and this impact is projected to rise in the coming years.

The GDA Transport Strategy plans for a 20% reduction in private car use, which will likely impact suburban and rural areas like Kildare disproportionately. We call on Councillors to advocate for grant aid to small businesses to help them facilitate the projected modal shift to cycling by covering the cost of constructing facilities for employees.

To support Kildare's growth, the county needs world-class infrastructure, including frequent and reliable public transport, an improved planning system, increased grid capacity, and water infrastructure that is fit for purpose. Additionally, investments in social amenities and public safety measures are essential to ensure a safe and vibrant community environment. Ensuring these needs are met will enable Kildare to thrive and sustain its economic and social development.

Safety, and the feeling of being safe, in our towns is essential for all those who live, work, and visit Kildare. Safety in urban areas must be addressed before anti-social behavior in Kildare damages our reputation as a welcoming county for talent and investment. Kildare is now a multicultural community. This evolution over the past 20 years has been harmonious, but we must not be complacent.

We all need to ensure that social cohesion and integration continue to be positive aspects of the county and avoid the harmful impact that a coordinated and sustained negative narrative around immigration can have. As a business community, we must be actively anti-racist. With an increasing number of people seeking international protection in Kildare, it is vital that social and economic integration pathways are provided to newcomers.

Key Asks:

- Accelerated delivery of the electrification expansion of the Maynooth Dart+ West rail line
- A greater Garda presence is needed on the streets of our towns. Visibility is a prime deterrent to anti-social behaviour.
- Additional resources needed to fit Kildare's growing population
- Kildare needs to be proactive in ensuring that the social cohesion within the county continues.



7. Economic Development & Employment

Businesses are the single largest contributor to local authority income by some margin. In Kildare, this is also significant. Kildare County commercial rates make up a substantial portion of total revenue, reflecting the county's reliance on business contributions to fund local services. For example, businesses in Naas, Newbridge, and other towns play a crucial role in supporting local infrastructure and services through their commercial rates.

Kildare's Local Authorities are over-reliant on commercial rates revenue as a means of making ends meet, with businesses increasingly feeling that the councils are not meeting their needs. This is also seen in the Local Property Tax (LPT) variations in 2023, where a relatively small percentage of Kildare County Council's income was made up of LPT.

This is not a sustainable model of raising funding in the long term. There is a clear need for more local investment in Kildare. With businesses already heavily relied upon, LPT is a more stable revenue stream that should be used to improve urban services while being prudent in relation to household impact. Retaining the 15% discount over the next five years would seem prudent at a time of population growth and pressure on Kildare's resources.

In Naas, Newbridge, and other towns within Kildare, the dependence on commercial rates is substantial, similar to other major urban areas. This financial model places significant pressure on local businesses, which may not see a proportional return in services and infrastructure improvements. The call for better allocation of LPT funds is especially pertinent in these areas, where urban services, public safety, and infrastructure are in dire need of enhancement to support the growing population and economic activities.

Kildare, like many regions, requires a balanced and sustainable approach to funding. Leveraging LPT effectively could help in reducing the undue financial burden on businesses while ensuring sufficient revenue to meet the community's needs. Prioritising this approach would help foster a more equitable and growth-conducive environment across the county.

Key Asks:

- **Increase Local Investment:** Advocate for diversified funding sources and greater local investment to support urban services and infrastructure in Kildare.
- **Leverage Local Property Tax (LPT):** Utilise LPT as a stable revenue stream, retaining the 15% discount over the next five years to manage population growth and resource pressure.
- **Support Businesses:** Reduce the financial burden on businesses and ensure they receive proportional improvements in services and infrastructure.
- **Enhance Urban Services:** Invest in public safety, infrastructure, and services to support Kildare's growing population and economic activities.

8. Energy & Climate Action

Kildare Chamber is a strong advocate for sustainability and stresses the importance of a business voice in developing and implementing the national climate action plan.

Ireland is almost unique within the EU in experiencing the Green Transition as a largely win-win scenario. We do not have large legacy industries dependent on specific fossil fuels, nor do we have extraction industries on which a significant proportion of our population relies. Instead, we possess enormous, untapped green energy resources.

Kildare, in particular, has great potential to contribute to Ireland's green energy future. The county's abundant natural resources can be harnessed for renewable energy projects, including wind, solar, and biomass energy. By focusing on these renewable sources, Kildare can play a pivotal role in reducing Ireland's reliance on fossil fuels and moving towards energy independence.

Furthermore, Kildare Chamber emphasises the necessity of local businesses participating actively in this transition. Businesses can lead by example, adopting sustainable practices and investing in green technologies. They can also advocate for policies that support renewable energy development and environmental protection.

By recognizing and harnessing Kildare's potential for green energy resources, the county can support local and national sustainability goals and become a leader in sustainability within Ireland and beyond.

Key Asks:

- **Embrace Green Energy Potential:** Recognise and harness Kildare's vast renewable energy resources, including onshore wind, solar, and biomass, to drive the transition towards a cleaner, more sustainable future.
- **Business Engagement:** Encourage local businesses to actively participate in sustainability efforts by adopting green practices and investing in renewable energy technologies.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Advocate for policies that support renewable energy development, environmental protection, and the transition to a low-carbon economy at both local and national levels.
- **Leadership in Sustainability:** Position Kildare as a leader in sustainability by leveraging its green energy potential and fostering collaboration between public and private sectors to drive positive environmental change.





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