

Mr. Leo Varadker TD  
Taoiseach  
Government Buildings  
Merrion Street  
Dublin 2

24 April 2020

**Re: Reopening the Irish Economy**

Dear Taoiseach,

This morning (24 April 2020) Chambers Ireland launched its latest [Covid-19 Business Community Survey](#). The third in a [series](#), the survey seeks to quantify the economic impact COVID-19 is having on businesses around the country and looks at the supports that will be needed to reboot the economy.

With lockdown measures due to expire on 5 May, Chambers Ireland has already started a conversation with businesses on how local economies can be supported to re-open. We are acutely aware of the geographic approaches that will be required to lifting measures and the challenges that this will pose to local economies across the country. We call on the Government to take into consideration the following recommendations on how the Irish exit strategy could be framed over the coming months and weeks to prevent a further breakdown and to limit such economic and social impacts:

- **Social Distancing in Urban Spaces**

It is timely to review our shared public realm and the space allocated to pedestrians and cyclists, and where possible and appropriate adapt our urban and community recreation spaces to meet this challenge going forward. To avoid the current situation where pedestrians and cyclists are obliged to enter road space to ensure sufficient distancing, which in itself is a safety issue for all road users, we suggest where possible that community groups are engaged to identify such pinch points and work with the appropriate teams in Local Authorities to safely allocate this road space.

Both the Urban and Rural Regeneration and Development funds should be used to support these investments in the physical environment of our towns and cities. As part of the Post-Covid19 rebooting of the economy, Local Authorities should be able to avail of these funds in an accelerated fashion. These works are already necessary but in this time of social distancing, they are also a very suitable and effective form of public works that will allow surplus capacity in the construction sector to be activated and thereby stimulate the local economies of our towns and cities.

- **A Taskforce to coordinate this effort**

Specific experts from different disciplines will be required for the appropriate design of an exit strategy. Health and safety experts, regulators, town planners, chambers of commerce, education representatives – among others as is required – would form the structure of such a national taskforce. It is important that all interests and sectors of the economy and society are represented so as to ensure a balanced and adequately considered exit strategy is designed.

A national taskforce comprised of the aforementioned range of delegates would ideally be in a position to feed into the NPHET in their efforts to set out a contingency exit plan, involving carefully specified levels of lockdown, and the thresholds at which they would be triggered. This would allow businesses and people to plan and begin to look to the future.

Additionally, local taskforces should be set up that deliver a coordinated response from Chambers and Local Authorities across the country that would feed into a national taskforce. Chambers of Commerce throughout the country play an important role in stimulating and promoting business and employment, and have a strong track record of working with local government in this regard. This cooperation and collaboration will be just as important in the coming months and weeks as the economy begins to re-adjust.

While it remains unclear when exactly the wider economy will begin to reopen, what is clear is that we must begin to plan for how to reboot the economy, and how businesses will be supported in this process. We continue to have extensive dialogue with our members and this will continue, particularly in light of the speed at which circumstances, and the issues they raise, are developing on a daily basis.

We are available to brief you on developments as they unfold in local economies across our network. Please do contact me directly to discuss any matter raised within this letter, or any other matter as it arises.

Yours sincerely,



**Ian Talbot**

Chief Executive

