

17/04/2020

Cork Chamber
Fitzgerald House
Summerhill North
Cork
T23 TD90

Regarding the Programme for Government

Dear Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD and Micheál Martin TD

Cork Chamber represents 1,200 businesses employing 100,000 people and our vision is for Cork to be the best place for business. A thriving city region with a vibrant and influential business community.

I wish to commend you for your efforts to establish a strong Government and for your work to quickly establish a range of measures to bring a relative degree of stability to the business community and society in general at this time of global pandemic.

I would like to relay some points that I believe will be critical to our economic, societal and political stability. I have set these out as short, medium and long term goals, though in reality, this is an obvious simplification and the timelines and measures would of course be blended and overlapping.

Short Term

Deeper state controlled cashflow intervention

- It is important to clearly state that the current measures are very helpful and appreciated by the business community, however further steps must be taken to minimise economic damage.
- It is essential that every Government related charge which impacts on cashflow such as VAT, PRSI or commercial rates, as well as other costs such rent, mortgages, loan repayments and utilities controlled by financial institutions and others are deferred and effectively underwritten by government for a minimum of six months.
- Last week's Chambers Ireland survey shows that 76% of businesses report a two-month deferral of Commercial Rates payments will not be enough to have any meaningful impact on their business and 95% of respondents report that there is a need for liquidity grants.

Short – Medium Term

Infrastructure led stimulus

- Construction must be at the forefront of infrastructure led stimulus, with housing and sustainable mobility as a focus. The Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy, and significant NDP projects such as, roads, schools, hospitals and the Cork Event Centre are prime opportunities. This can be enabled by the approval of a social distancing working code that construction can adhere to.

- Absolute commitment to the urban and rural regeneration funds is essential. Greenways, walkways, countryside access, parks, woodlands, planting and amenities must be improved and accelerated. They are key to recovery, mental health and long term quality of life. Quality, people focussed amenity must always be within a 2km radius of home.
- Commitment to support a bid for Cork to be European Green Capital would provide a framework for progress in our City region.

Medium – Long Term

- Support for the EU Green Deal as central to the recovery of Europe and commitment to a strong national green agenda. 10 EU countries have already committed to this and Ireland must be a leader.
- Support for the Renewable Energy Subsidy Scheme is essential to ensure business is powered by green energy, which is becoming an important factor in investment decisions.
- Leverage all appropriate models of funding for infrastructural delivery.
- The mobilisation of a strong indigenous tourism campaign and investment in quality of life infrastructure that enhances the offer.
- A phased roll back of supports at point of recovery commencement. A steady scaling down rather than an abrupt stop point is essential for economic continuity.

In conclusion, there is a challenging but positive pathway for Ireland to further distinguish itself internationally and to be a better place for companies and people locally. There is a long-term reputational benefit to getting the public health dimension and stimulus package right. Quality of life, environmental awareness, and business competitiveness are intrinsically woven together. We have an opportunity, through ambition equivalent to a contemporary Marshall Plan to lay the foundations for a stable and better economy and society and to leave a legacy of resilience and sustainability for generations to come.

I attach our general election manifesto from earlier this year which I believe holds true.

I hope that you will give this your consideration, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss remotely, at a time of your choosing.

Best regards



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