

These elections come at an important time as they are the first opportunity for the public to influence the newly reformed system of Local Government.

Chambers Ireland has always recognised the importance of Local Government and valued the work of Councillors throughout the State.

We call on all candidates to support the priorities put forward by the local Chamber in their area, as well as the national priorities set out in this manifesto.

Building upon the excellent relationships between local chambers and Local Government, we believe the suggestions put forward in this manifesto can support business and facilitate job creation. This will make every part of Ireland a better place to live and work.

This manifesto represents common issues across our nationwide network of Chambers and may also be supplemented by an area specific manifesto from individual Chambers.

“Local Government is in a process of reform and we have a unique opportunity to work together to build a sustainable future for our communities. If candidates support our five key commitments, they will not only be supporting local businesses – they will be supporting local communities, local jobs and local people.”

Ian Talbot
Chief Executive
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The Chamber Network



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Local Elections 2014 Business Manifesto

Chambers Ireland represents the largest network of businesses in the State. With almost 50 members located in every major town and city in the country, we are uniquely positioned to understand the needs of the business community.

The business community remains the largest single source of funding for Local Authorities throughout Ireland. Therefore, we call on all candidates to recognise this vital contribution and commit to being pro-active advocates for business. On behalf of Chambers throughout Ireland and the businesses they represent, we urge all candidates to commit to backing policies that support their local businesses. In this way they will be supporting local communities, local people and local jobs.



**CHAMBERS
IRELAND**
IN BUSINESS FOR BUSINESS

New Structures; new opportunities; new employment

Chambers Ireland actively supports Local Government reform, calling for a rationalised and streamlined system to achieve a more effective and efficient model. We also supported the introduction of a Local Property Tax (LPT) to ensure a sustainable funding model for Local Government.

The reform of Local Government introduced since 2011 is far reaching and ambitious. We welcome the new powers and responsibilities given to Local Government and Councillors. We see these new structures, new funding models and new powers as an opportunity to ensure Local Government works with and works for the local business community.

All of the policies in this manifesto are designed to achieve two key aims:

1. Reduce the cost of doing business
2. Create new jobs

The swift and full implementation of the measures contained in this manifesto could lead to the creation of 100,000 new jobs in the construction, retail and tourism sectors.

As business, through commercial rates, provides the single greatest source of funding to Local Government, the business community must be a key contributor to policy. This will ensure that every area can contribute to and benefit from Ireland's economic recovery.

Chambers Ireland calls on all candidates to:

1. Support local economies

Local business supports

- Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) must be exclusively focused on a core remit of mentoring and supporting start ups and SMEs with 0-9 staff. There must be no duplication of services already provided by the private sector.

- Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and LEOs must use the expertise and experience of local Chambers to provide the best environment and conditions in which to do business.
- All business support units should regularly engage with Chambers; to work together on delivering agreed economic development targets. Ideally, business representatives on these bodies should be representatives of the local Chamber.

Tourism

- Local Councils should work with Chambers to deliver and support initiatives that attract tourists and tourism spend to their local areas.
- Councils must work to enhance amenities that will attract tourists and improve the quality of life in their respective areas.

Town centres

- Retailers and other businesses in town centres should be supported and given the opportunity to remain competitive with companies located 'out of town'.
- Car parking rates must not act as a disincentive for people to shop and socialise in town centres.

2. Support procurement policies that support local businesses

- All councillors should encourage contracting authorities to introduce procurement policies that do not simply focus on lowest price. Strategic procurement policies, which stimulate the economy, incentivise innovation, support local business and facilitate job creation, should be promoted.

3. Ensure Local Government reform results in benefits for business

Local Property Tax

- Money raised by the LPT should be retained by Local Authorities, to be spent on local services.
- Reductions in the cost of Local Government must lead to targeted reductions in business rates to support employment creating businesses.
- The discretion of the elected Council to reduce the LPT by up to 15% should not be to the detriment of business interests or job creation through a corresponding increase in business rates.

Rates

- In areas where Town Councils are to be integrated into County Councils with higher rates, the impact could be the difference between businesses in these areas remaining viable and having to close. If an increase in rates is unavoidable, Councillors must choose the maximum period of adjustment allowed to ensure the viability of those businesses and protect local jobs.

Municipal districts

- The funding model for municipal districts must not lead to increased charges for business.

4. Guarantee the rollout of Irish Water will not lead to increased charges for business

- There must be no increases in water charges for business.
- We encourage Local Authorities to work with Irish Water to produce a reliable, sustainable and efficient water supply for all residential and business customers and a clear strategy for securing future investment.

5. Make infrastructure and planning contribute to growth

- Councils must cost effectively deliver the infrastructure that business needs to support jobs. Planning decisions must support business development.
- Delays in planning applications can no longer hamper Ireland's competitiveness.
- Councillors must work with national politicians to support construction jobs by repealing the 80% levy on rezoning of brown field lands and support the business case for development in well serviced urban locations.
- Councillors should not implement a vacant land levy if enabling legislation is passed. Such a levy will not work to incentivise the development of lands if the economic case does not add up.
- Councillors must give consideration to changing local planning laws to enable greater flexibility in planning permissions already granted.