



2024 General Election Manifesto

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CEO's Briefing note:

Businesses in South Dublin County are operating in volatile times – Brexit, Covid, Russia, Energy, and Humanitarian Displacement have all impacted the county. For some issues, our members share those shocks with the rest of the country. Still, others disproportionately affect our region: With so many of the nation's large energy users based in the county, the volatility in the cost of energy has had a significant effect on the sector while, at the same time, the considerable energy demand is pushing the local grid supply to its limits, making it more difficult for businesses to grow and new businesses to get grid connections.

Given President-elect Trump's return to the White House, it is sensible to plan for continued volatility. In many areas, such as currency, tariffs, and trade, Irish domestic politics will not be able to impact the effects of changes that occur significantly.

The next government will need to focus on the areas where we can effect change, chief among which is effective and efficient governance. With the National Development Plan entering its final phase, it is clear that too much of that investment was left for too long. Now, many projects will compete for the same resources, which will inflate delivery costs.

With increased regulation from Europe across sustainability, data, and pharma, the multinational sector in South Dublin County is under significant pressure compared to those operating out of different regions globally. Various reforms, such as parental leave, sick pay, pension reform, and a living wage, are adding to our already high-cost economy and making it more expensive to hire workers in Ireland.

The new government will need to balance the scale again after the last government and ensure that Ireland regains its reputation as an attractive place to invest. We should be benefiting from our geography, green energy resources, stable governance, and highly educated population, but these are not being used to their full advantage. Our poor planning system disrupts every investment, we are 15 years behind our EU peers on green energy, and our housing problems make it hard to attract, retain, and develop talent.

Within planning, we see that inadequate investment by the State has imposed enormous costs on both the private and public sectors. With the delivery of the new planning bill achieved, the incoming government needs to focus on ensuring that robust decisions are made within fixed timelines if we are to ensure that the new infrastructure can be built on time and within budget and that the needed housing developments are delivered, and that businesses can continue to invest in our community so that people have the option to live and work here if that is what they want.

The next government will need to do a considerable amount of work, but it is achievable if the parties cooperate to see it through.

South Dublin Chamber calls on everyone elected to the Dáil in the upcoming election to support our policy agenda when they take their seats. Our problems today are problems of success: We achieved more growth than planned, created more jobs than planned, and more people made South Dublin County their home than planned. What we got wrong was our planning. We weren't ambitious enough for our county or our country.

In our 2024 Election Manifesto, South Dublin Chamber calls on our elected representatives to take this lesson from businesses and be more ambitious for our area.

Peter Byrne
CEO
South Dublin Chamber

Priorities for South Dublin County:

Our members face prohibitive costs and inadequate infrastructure, which hinder economic growth. These constraints are undermining our competitiveness compared to many international locations. To meet existing demand, our members need a secure energy supply, water, and housing. South Dublin Chamber is calling on all election candidates to push for their delivery.

The planning system needs continued reform. The recent passage of the Planning Act will likely see a significant increase in litigation as the new law is tested in the courts. If the National Development Plan aims are to be achieved, every planning agency of the State, from An Bórd Pleanála to the Local Authorities, needs to invest in people and skills. Decisions need to be made in a timely fashion, and these decisions need to be robust enough to resist the challenges they will receive in the courts.

On the ground, our members are increasingly concerned about the adequacy of the county's electricity supply and water infrastructure. Deficits in these systems constrain commercial and housing developments and have become a major drag on our local economy.

For our members' employees, we have found that commuting, childcare, and housing impact their employment choices. Public transport connectivity is inadequate in crucial business areas, with limited non-radial routes adding significant travel time and complexity for commuters. Childcare shortages further impact workforce engagement as parents struggle to find accessible care near their workplaces. Housing shortages and high costs impact employee retention, with some businesses even resorting to securing housing for their staff—an unsustainable practice. Increased housing delivery is urgently needed to improve housing security and shorten commutes.

We urge the next government to prioritise planning reform, security of supply, and practical labour-force supports to enable sustainable growth, job creation, and a thriving economy.

Planning reform:

Our courts see numerous nuisance cases and challenges against various projects, including housing, commercial builds and significant infrastructure projects. While it is hoped that the Planning and Development Act 2024 will remedy this, it is more likely that any restrictions on who can object and when they can do so will be challenged under the Aarhus Convention. While it is critical that the State, in regulating the planning system, adheres to the convention – the convention's requirements are far less onerous than how we have implemented it in Ireland. The convention emphasises the 'practical' nature of the provisions and 'opportunities for public participation' for those affected by public planning decisions – which is not the same thing as allowing anyone anywhere to challenge anything at any point in the development process. Individuals are using the current system to take projects hostage, using the courts as a lever to demand ransoms.

The new regulations which the next Minister of Housing will introduce to give substance to the Planning and Development Act 2024 must require that the planning authorities and the Planning and Environmental Court deliver their decisions within fixed timelines. Complementing this, these institutions must be resourced sufficiently to ensure these deadlines are meaningful. The National Development Plan will see at least €100 billion in spending by 2030, the expansion of the housing supply will see at least another €100 billion in public and private over the next ten years, and commercial investment will likely be in the same range. There is nowhere within the public service that state monies will see a better return on investment than in planning because the costs of our existing planning system are a massive drag on both state and private projects.

Security of Supply:

Businesses seeking to invest in South Dublin County are chiefly concerned about securing access to electricity and water so that their buildings can operate. The national infrastructure that feeds into the county limits licensing, connections, and the quantities available.

Electricity:

Our members in South Dublin County have raised several concerns about electricity. Ireland has some of the most expensive electricity in the EU, which makes it more difficult for multinational companies to compete internally with other business units for investment.

Growing businesses are prevented from expanding because of capacity constraints on their local grid. To exacerbate this, many businesses find that they cannot get timelines for new premises to receive connections. High-tech industries, such as pharma, find that the stability of the electricity supplied in South Dublin County is below what is expected in peer nations. This instability necessitates additional expensive investment in Irish sites to compensate for voltage fluctuations.

At the national level, more renewable energy capacity needs to be available. We urgently need to build out more onshore wind capacity, commercial and domestic solar should be incentivised to a much greater degree, and the next government needs to ensure that we have an offshore wind industry before it leaves office.

To do this, we need to upgrade our local electricity distribution networks so that behind-the-meter electricity generation and storage technologies can scale up. Finally, the high-voltage transmission network needs to be significantly upgraded.

Water:

Both the supply of fresh water and the capacity of the existing wastewater treatment infrastructure in South Dublin County are constrained. The River Liffey is the only significant water source in the county, so if an incident occurs that undermines the water quality there (or if an extended drought period reduces the water available), businesses in the county will be severely impacted.

The connection of the Shannon-Dublin Water Supply Project is vital for ensuring the long-term viability of the Greater Dublin Region. It is also essential for South Dublin County to continue building on its commercial potential and expanding local housing availability.

Wastewater capacity is also a significant concern for our large industrial members. Given the narrow margin between the capacity of the wastewater treatment infrastructure and the demands placed on it by the existing commercial and residential outflow, industry concerns that should an, even relatively small, excess discharge incident occur, it could significantly impact a wide range of industries, which would have to curtail their activities to ensure that the wastewater treatment capacity is not overwhelmed.

Labour force supports:

Staff retention is becoming an increasingly pressing concern for many of our members. Life events, such as losing a tenancy, buying a home, or having a child, place extra strains on working people. Additional commuting or a lack of childcare can make previously viable roles untenable. South Dublin Chamber calls on all elected representatives to push for increased public transport investment, more housing, and greater access to childcare across the county.

Public Transport Connectivity:

Commercial business parks are often under-resourced in terms of public transport. More significant investment is needed to ensure that places with a high concentration of workers have adequate public transport service provision during periods of peak demand around shift changes.

Within South Dublin County, there are major connectivity problems along the non-radial routes, which make it difficult for people who don't use cars to navigate throughout the county from places such as Lucan to Citywest or Knocklyon to Ballymount without having to travel via the city centre or routes that can take three to four times as long as driving.

Childcare Provision:

Many of our members find that their staff who take maternity leave frequently cannot return to the workforce at a time of their choosing because childcare is inadequate, particularly for younger children and infants.

Where places for children become available, they are rarely co-located with places of work. This leads to an increased number of journeys for staff commuting during peak congestion and needing to drop off and pick up children, sometimes from various locations.

Housing Delivery:

Despite the large volume of housing in the county, businesses are finding it difficult to retain staff who need help with housing insecurity and long commutes. In some instances, this has resulted in our member businesses having to secure accommodation themselves for their employees.

While onsite or dedicated employee residences may have some justification for sectors such as teaching and medicine, where individuals are moved around the country for training purposes, private sector businesses housing employees creates inevitable conflicts of interest and is an inefficient use of capital for businesses.

South Dublin County would benefit from more dedicated accommodation for transient populations such as students, trainee doctors and nurses, and other professionals in fields, such as construction and engineering, which may require temporary relocations. This increase in the housing stock would have the benefit of reducing demand for the housing that serves the permanent population.



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Advancing business together

National Priorities:

The Chambers Ireland network of chambers of commerce across the country has identified a range of policy issues that will support our county and country if implemented over the next government term. These include:

Planning:

Our planning processes need urgent reform to ensure that essential infrastructure and other critical projects can progress without uncertainty and delays.

National Competitive Advantage:

Ireland has some of the best renewable energy resources worldwide, but physical limits on our transmission grid capacity mean that our renewable energy cannot be moved to where it is needed.

Our members need to shift to renewables to meet their ESG requirements, but the need for green generation capacity and the sparsity of the transmission network means that they are choosing to site new investments in other countries.

The new government needs to focus on delivering our national renewable energy potential.

Infrastructure and Investment:

Past underinvestment in infrastructure has led to unbalanced development at the national level, which has created systemic weaknesses throughout our economy.

We urgently need a planning system which adheres to fixed timelines for decision-making if our critical infrastructure projects are to be developed on time and on budget.

The uncertainty associated with our planning system discourages investment in Ireland.

Ambitious Housing Plan:

A new, more ambitious, housing strategy with revised targets and accountability is needed for the country, which quickly ramps up to at least 50,000 new homes being built annually.

Future-Proofed Electricity Grid:

Local and national investment in the electricity grid is needed to ensure that Ireland can continue to prosper socially and economically.

Sustainable Water Supplies:

Multi-year funding for water infrastructure is essential to ensure a reliable supply of clean water and sufficient wastewater treatment capacity. We must also speed up the delivery of the Eastern and Midlands Water Supply Project.

South Dublin County Factsheet:

- The total population is greater than 300,000, with more than 100,000 homes.
- Two Dáil Constituencies: Dublin South-West (5 TDs) Dublin Mid-West (5 TDs).
- Seven Council electoral areas with 40 councillors.
- With 140,000 people living and working in the county, South Dublin County businesses contribute €140 million in rates annually – at €1,000 per job, the highest rate anywhere in the country.
- 50,000 people (whose businesses operate out of South Dublin County) are self-employed, with Construction, Logistics, and business-to-business services constituting 60% of the businesses.
- South Dublin County businesses have an outsized impact on the rest of the country, with 511 large businesses registered in the county employing over 500,000 people nationally.
- Small companies based in South Dublin County employ a further 250,000 people across the region, while medium-sized firms (50-250 employees) employ almost 200,000 more.