

Prioritising Our Cities is Critical for Sustainable Economic Growth

National Competitiveness Council launches Statement on Cities

The National Competitiveness Council (NCC) today called for the prioritisation of investment in Dublin and our other main cities to enhance and ensure Ireland's long term competitiveness. Launching the report *Our Cities: Drivers of National Competitiveness*, the Council highlighted the increasingly crucial role that cities play in enhancing competitiveness in modern knowledge-based economies. It is vital that Irish cities are enabled to achieve their full potential and thereby enhance national competitiveness.

Speaking at the launch of the report, Dr Don Thornhill, Chairman of the National Competitiveness Council said "The harsh new fiscal realities which Ireland now faces necessitate a rigorous process of prioritisation and sequencing of public expenditure to position Ireland to take advantage of the global economic recovery when it occurs. As a nation, we need to recognise fully the importance of cities as drivers of national competitiveness. The evidence clearly demonstrates that cities improve economic growth and living standards with significant benefits for national living standards. It is critical that both national and regional policies support the development of Dublin and our main cities."

"The challenge here is not the redistribution of resources between Dublin and the rest of the country, rather of enhancing the competitive advantages of Dublin and other major urban centres as drivers of overall national prosperity and contributors to social cohesion and wellbeing."

"Coherent planning and strong leadership which learns from the successes and shortcomings of the past can greatly improve the competitiveness of our cities. Improving the way our cities work requires action across a range of areas including city governance, transport policy and urban branding. Prioritising investment in our cities and developing the links between them is essential. "

"As a society, we have in the past tended to view cities as mere necessities of the modern world. It is time for us to embrace our cities as drivers of positive economic, social and cultural change. "

Launching the report, Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Eamon Ryan, TD, said “I welcome this report published by the National Competitiveness Council today. Ireland’s cities are thriving and with targeted investment, there is no doubt but that they will develop as international centres, not just economically, but socially and culturally too.”

“There are a number of factors working in our cities’ favour. They are home to young, educated, multicultural populations; internationally acclaimed educational centres, and financial districts that continue to attract multinational investment.”

“Now more than ever is the time to focus investment on improving the infrastructure, planning and vibrancy of our cities. This will guarantee continued success in the future.”

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Background to Report

Given the current economic climate and the likelihood of future investment cuts, investments in cities must be protected to ensure our long term competitiveness. Since enhanced city performance has positive spill-over effects on surrounding regions and ultimately on the country as a whole, prioritising investment and initiatives that develop the competitiveness of our cities presents an effective use of Exchequer funds

The Council has identified four cornerstones of city competitiveness; ‘enterprise’, ‘connectivity’, ‘sustainability’, and ‘attractiveness and inclusiveness’. These cornerstones reflect the core objective of government policy which is to deliver sustainable improvements in the social, economic and environmental spheres.

Key Recommendations:

Prioritising Investment in Dublin and Our Other Main Cities

- As Ireland’s only city of international scale, continued investment in Dublin is necessary to maintain and improve its position as an internationally competitive location. A competitive Dublin can serve to strengthen the performance and attractiveness of other Irish cities and provide them with opportunities that may not be accessible otherwise.
- It is vital that we develop the potential of individual cities, enhancing their competitiveness through policy actions. At the same time we should seek to make the most of opportunities for sharing specialised assets rather than duplicating resources (e.g. education and research activities, health facilities etc.)

Improving City Governance

- City leadership is critical to the development of competitive cities. To achieve and retain competitiveness, key policy decisions need to be made for the city region by

a strong leader or leaders. This leadership must be responsible for providing a coordinated approach to tackle the issues faced by the greater city area. Transparent and accountable leadership facilitates efficiency and greater competitiveness.

- The introduction of a directly elected mayor for Dublin must be supported by a clear demonstration of how this office will improve the efficiency and democratic accountability of local government and deliver value for money. It may be prudent to postpone assessing the merits of directly elected mayors elsewhere until the office of the directly elected mayor of Dublin has been established and trialled.
- Evidence suggests that successful cities benefit and thrive from the coordination and cooperation of existing governing local authorities with shared responsibilities. However in cases where such cooperation is not attainable, the NCC recommends reviewing other methods of governance including the possibility of altering boundary lines or the merging of local authorities.
- The current funding model for local authorities is unsustainable and over-reliant on direct revenues from enterprise and the central Exchequer. In the context of reforming local government, alternative methods of raising revenue should be considered including charges for all users of local services such as water.

Improving Urban Land Use and Planning Policy

- The NCC recognises and supports the identified need for higher residential density in Irish cities
- An integrated approach to land use and transport policies in our cities is critical to allow the efficient movement of people and goods and to improve the viability of public transport.

Enhancing Social Cohesion

- Support for social, cultural and sports infrastructure and sustained assistance at national and local level for urban regeneration projects are necessary to enhance social cohesion and the potential for positive change in traditionally socially excluded urban areas

Building a City Image

- It is essential that the relevant stakeholders in each city work together to develop a unique and comprehensive city brand to ensure the city's attractiveness.

Developing a Better Understanding of Our Cities

- The individual performance of each city should be monitored on an on-going basis using relevant indicators in cooperation with the CSO and the local authorities active in each city area.