
County Waterford Local Development Strategy 2023-2027

Early Cycle Evaluation



Rialtas
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Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040

Arna chomhchistiú ag An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail agus Gaeltachta
Co-funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht

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Comhpháirtíocht Leader
Phort Láirge
Waterford Local Community
Development Committee



Purpose of the Evaluation

What Is It?

A high-level, early-stage evaluation of the Waterford Local Development Strategy (LDS) 2023–2027, reviewing the first two years of delivery under the LEADER Programme.

What Does It Cover?

Programme set-up, budget allocations, targeted calls, expressions of interest, project applications, stakeholder feedback, and recommendations for the remaining period.

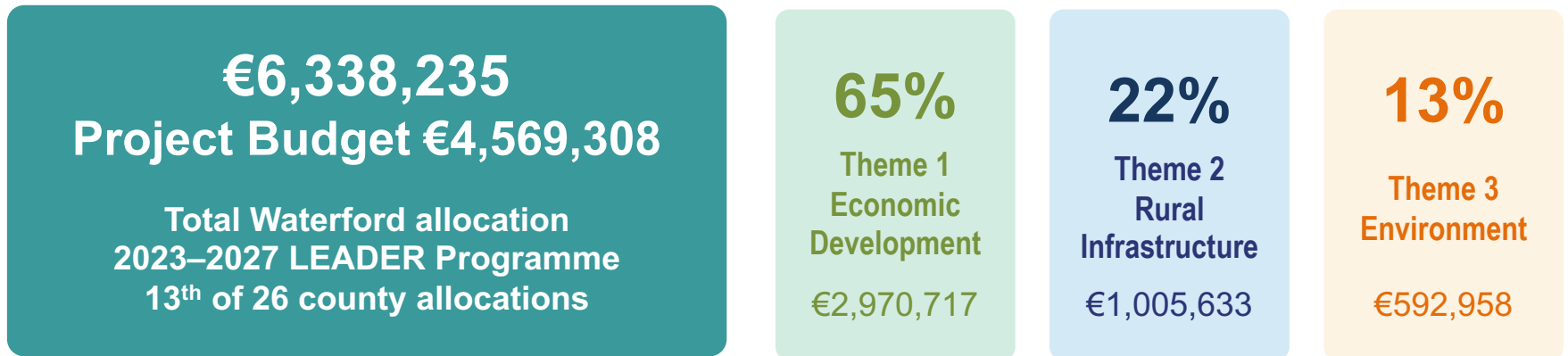
Why Now?

The LDS specified reviews at two points – after two years and at programme end. This review focuses on progress and delivery rather than long-term results.

Who Is It For?

The Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), the Local Action Group (LAG), the Implementing Partner (Waterford LEADER Partnership CLG), and the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht.

Programme Budget



National LEADER budget trend (€ million total)



Budget Allocations 2024 and 2025

€1,097,178

Allocated in 2024
24% of total LDS budget

€981,828

Allocated in 2025
21.5% of total LDS budget

€2,079,006

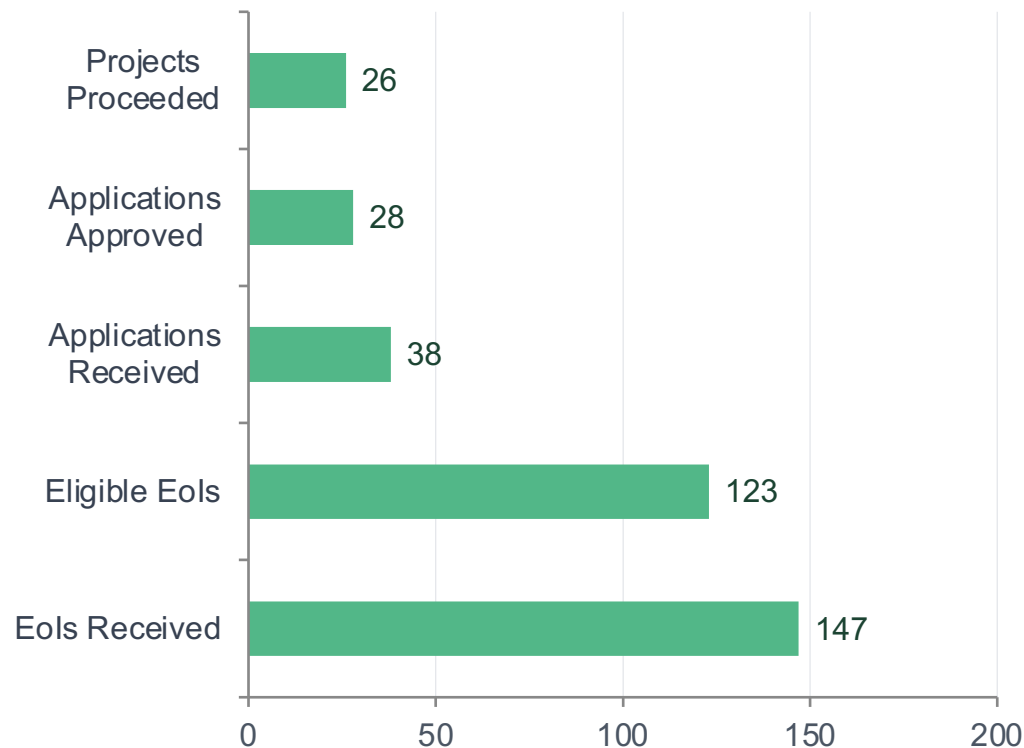
Cumulative 2024–25
Across 8 of 11 strategic actions

Targeted Calls Summary

Four targeted calls issued 2024 - 2026, total advertised budget: c.€8.6 million

	Date	Budget	Eols	Applications	Approved
Call 1	Feb 2024	€2,266,324	63	22	13
Call 2	Nov 2024	€2,032,254	47	10	9
Call 3	Jul 2025	€2,101,124	37	6	4
Call 4	Jan 2026	€2,193,606	—	—	—

Application Funnel – Calls 1 to 3



147

**Total Eols
received
(Calls 1–3)**

31%

**Conversion: Eol
to application**

74%

**Approval rate
(of applications)**

Project Promoter Consultation

✓ Implementer Staff

Staff consistently praised as excellent, approachable, helpful and positive. Strong relationships developed across multiple applications.

✓ Funding Value

All promoters agreed that funding was essential for rural businesses and communities, particularly for capital and equipment investment.

✓ Promoter Support

Promoters recognised that strict procedures are part of managing public funding and noted that the Implementer's staff made strong efforts to support applicants.

✓ Process

The incremental stages (information sessions, expression of interest and application requirements workshop) helped applicants decide whether they are ready or should consider other funding options.

✗ Application Process

Widely viewed as overly difficult and time-consuming. Extensive paperwork, repeated verification checks, and a perception of operating in a spirit of mistrust were cited.

✗ eTenders Procurement

Particularly negative feedback received. Promoters reported difficulty registering and confusing guidance. One applicant withdrew after losing significant time using the system.

Project Promoter Consultation

Roll-out Proceeding Well

All consultees noted the programme had proceeded well, with effective cooperation among the Financial Partner, Implementer, Independent Evaluation Committee, and the LAG.

Targeted Calls Effective

Targeted calls were seen to focus efforts on strategic areas and explain the programme's purpose, contributing to higher-quality submissions.

IEC Process Open & Transparent

The project evaluation process was open and transparent. Decisions were based only on information provided and assessed against job creation, sustainability, and value for money.

eTenders a Significant Hurdle

For those unfamiliar with eTenders, this was considered a significant challenge often requiring the engagement of professional expertise, adding cost to applicants.

Claims Expected to Rise

Consultees agreed that an increase in claims is expected over the next nine months, with two targeted funding calls planned for 2026 compared to one in 2025.

Competition for Funding

LEADER operates in a crowded funding space. Other available supports (including from the Local Authority) make it challenging for some promoters to identify the correct avenue.

Administration and File Management

A random sample of application files was reviewed spanning multiple themes, promoter types, and geographic areas

- Well-structured, consistent administrative process across all reviewed files.
- Clear evidence that procurement procedures were followed throughout.
- Business plans present where required, demonstrating consideration of long-term viability.
- Very high level of compliance with LEADER Programme requirements confirmed.
- IEC decisions arrived at by agreement, with a broad range of sector expertise represented.
- Thorough paper trail: minutes and evaluation reports of consistent, high standard.
- Files stored securely; no recorded security breaches to date.

Promoter Challenges & Programme Performance

Co-Finance

Securing sufficient co-finance is one of the main reported challenges. LEADER funding is paid retrospectively, necessitating bridging finance and creating cash flow risk.

Public Procurement

eTenders must now be used for supplies contracts over €50,000 ex VAT and works over €200,000 ex VAT. Many promoters are unfamiliar with the system.

Statutory Permissions

Many projects require planning permission or other statutory approvals, causing delays that can affect funding deadlines and add professional service costs.

Competing Grants

Other grant programmes with less demanding application processes are more attractive to some promoters, contributing to a decline in Eols.

Programme Performance after Call 3 | As of December 2025

7th

National expenditure ranking (of 33 LAGs).

21%

Total programme budget claimed by January 2026.

€2.49M

Remaining to allocate by programme end.

25

Projects supported across Calls 1–3.

€1,824,146.93 remaining after 4th Call. 5th Call advertised on 30th June 2026 (€1,820,310.93)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Finding: The Waterford LDS is being implemented professionally. The approach to project identification and selection is appropriate, and all partners – the Implementing Partner, IEC, Financial Partner, and LAG – are effectively carrying out their respective roles.

Business Sentiment

Encourage smaller-scale, lower-risk projects in current conditions. Monitor rising energy costs as a potential driver of interest in Theme 3 (Environment). Consider inflation impact on grant values.

Programme Structure

The national sub-theme structure is considered overly prescriptive; not possible to change within the current programme but should be raised for future iterations.

Programme Performance

Waterford ranks 12th nationally (31/03/26). Close monitoring of allocations and claims is essential: €2.49M must be invested over the remaining programme period through targeted and open calls.

Application Process

Consider additional support for promoters unfamiliar with LEADER requirements. Explore simplification with DRCDG, particularly for community groups and small businesses.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Finding: The Waterford LDS is being implemented professionally. The approach to project identification and selection is appropriate, and all partners – the Implementing Partner, IEC, Financial Partner, and LAG – are effectively carrying out their respective roles.

Promoter Challenges

Targeted actions needed on co-finance access, eTenders support, statutory permissions awareness, and earlier signposting of competing grant schemes.

Budgetary Allocation

€2,491,451.97 remains to be allocated. Continued vigilance through targeted calls and potential open calls as the programme approaches conclusion in 2027 is essential.

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