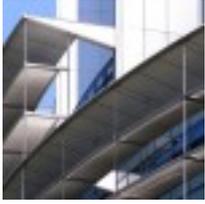


## Decentralisation Drum Beats Again



As our in-depth coverage of recent weeks has welcomingly demonstrated, the Michael Street/North Quays development is now a matter of 'when' as opposed to 'if'. However, there remain some missing pieces when it comes to our city and region's economic future and if they could be tracked down, sustained and meaningful recovery would surely be both aided and abetted. With average incomes in Waterford still below both the Dublin and overall national average, it's clear that the de-industrialised city and county needs more high-end employment.

Back in the early 1980s, Waterford city's average wage was bettered only in Dublin and Cork. But since then, Galway and Limerick have experienced greater wage increases per worker. With our higher unemployment rate (despite some welcome recent deductions on that front), we don't have disposable income at a level which would clearly create greater retail buoyancy. The academic brain drain is also a negative factor given the vast numbers of Leaving Certificate recipients who pursue their third level careers beyond the region.

Taking this into account, the delivery of a Technological University of the South East (TUSE) and the decentralisation of a Government department to the city, Tramore or Dungarvan could bring as many as 700 jobs into the city and county.

During his lengthy Q&A session with City and County Councillors on Thursday last, Ferrybank TD and Minister of State John Paul Phelan spoke in fulsome support of the TUSE bid, and also floated the prospect of regional decentralisation. During a frank and welcome exchange with Councillors, Minister Phelan said: "Because of the pressure that Dublin and the Greater Dublin Area is under at the moment, there's actually a strong case for another round of decentralisation...and I hope that it will come on the political agenda again."

After all, well-paid Government jobs in Waterford would create a fresh stream of disposable income which would, in turn, safeguard and serve to create new employment in both the retail and hospitality sectors.

Such an innovation, in addition to the delivery of a TU would lead to a fresh housing demand and, as an estate agent put it to this newspaper last week, would give fresh confidence and incentive to build new estates on the back of credit it could then surely access. High-end, three to four-bed homes, will also be required, and while the merited focus for now is deservedly on the building of public housing, the aforementioned will also swing into focus before too long.

Affordable decentralisation is desirable, makes eminent sense and is wholly possible given the current economic cycle, coupled with the overheating of the Dublin economy. In addition to the North Quay site, there are other sites in the city, such as the former Waterford Crystal plant in Kilbarry, which would be suitable for such a development. We have lobbied hard for hospital services – and rightly so – so why not develop some similar momentum into a campaign to see a Government department brought to Waterford?

One suspects a politician with the foresight Sean Lemass demonstrated in transforming our economy in the 1960s would need little prompting in delivering a meaningful decentralisation policy as we look towards 2020. Leo Varadkar, looking beyond the lifetime of this current Government, would be well advised to live up to the aspirations of 'Project Ireland 2040' and to take the revival of our regions fully and fairly into account. It can and should be done.