

Cooperation, key to Limerick's Southhill regeneration



21/01/2014

Southhill Development Co-operative (SDC), recently renamed as 'Tait House', is a community-owned organisation supporting economic, social and community development in one of Limerick city's most disadvantaged estates.



299 shareholders

Southhill in the south of Limerick was developed in the 1960's and 1970's to provide social housing for families and an industrial workforce needed for the new jobs emerging at that time in the city. Jobs were created as a result of a successful strategy to attract foreign direct investment and manufacturing enterprises. But, as the industries closed from the 1980's and 1990's, this impacted on the local population resulting in very high unemployment. While the situation improved slightly in the years of economic growth – 2000-2006 – it deteriorated greatly from 2008-09 with the economic recession. In 2011, Southhill's unemployment rate was 47%.

Against a backdrop of high unemployment, SDC was set up in 1984 as a community-owned co-operative, with 299 shareholders. From 1986, its offices were based in Tait House, a listed historic building owned by the local authority that was in a state of disrepair. Over the years, the site has been transformed with the support of public agencies and the private sector.

Social enterprises

Over the last year or so, the organisation's strategy is in a process of change linked to new challenges presented by difficult economic conditions and the need to adapt its financial structure to rely much less on grants from public funding sources and more on income generation. As part of this process, it changed its name to Tait House.

The main services it provides are centred on information to citizens on rights, entitlements and legal issues, information and community development services, training for the unemployed and business development, with a strong focus on social enterprise and access to educational opportunities. This includes outreach, further education and training targeting the development of job opportunities for young people (e.g. car maintenance apprenticeships and a community garage operating as a social enterprise).

More recently its active employment schemes for the long-term unemployed have been expanded. Currently, it has 103 staff of which 50 work places are on active employment schemes. In 2012, it generated an income of some €1.5 million

from a mix of grants to implement specific programmes (20%) and from income from its activities (80%).

Focusing on social enterprises, it generates a surplus that is reinvested into its operations including a children's nursery, home insulation and retrofitting services for households in the city and surrounding counties, and estate management (e.g. landscaping, grass-cutting and home repairs).

Southhill Development Co-operative (SDC)

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