



At the Charleville Chamber Business Conference at Charleville Park Hotel today were PJ McCarthy, chairman Charleville Chamber, Minister for Finance Michael Noonan, Yvonne Barry, **Quintas**, and Aine Collins, TD. Picture: Gerard McCarthy

Minister defends local fund plans

CHANGES to funding for local government development organisations are about “value for money” and efficiency, Minister for Finance Michael Noonan said today.

Local Development Companies (LDCs) across Cork, including SECAD and Cork City Partnership, have warned that plans to channel EU funding through local councils rather than the voluntary groups will cost jobs.

Quizzed on the issue as he arrived at a conference in Charleville this morning, Minister Noonan said that greater efficiencies in local government would lead to savings for the public and for businesses. He said there had been a total change in the way that local government was being run, and pointed to the merger between Limerick city and county councils as a real money-saver, leading to a 5% drop in commercial rates for 2013.

“There are benefits to the public when you reduce the cost base of things like that. There’ll be more cuts in the commercial rate next year,” he said.

By MARY SMITHWICK
Politics Editor

Today’s conference was on small and medium-sized enterprises, and Minister Noonan said that rebuilding confidence was important so that consumers who are currently saving would instead be encouraged to spend — and hopefully spend locally.

He also pledged that more would be done to make credit available to small businesses, stating that the banks weren’t doing as much as he would like, and adding that alternative financing would be looked at.

Meanwhile, the Minister also said that further cuts in the garda budget were inevitable as part of efforts to trim another €1 billion from spending on public services over the next few years.

The Minister was greeted by five protestors from the Mallow Groups Against Austerity who shouted “traitor” after him as he arrived at the conference.

● See Pages 7 and 18 for more.