



Subject:	Social enterprise call for evidence – draft Belfast City Council response
Date:	11 October 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager, Economy

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
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1.1	The purpose of this report is to advise members of a consultation exercise that has recently been launched by the Department for the Economy (DfE) regarding support for the social enterprise sector and to secure committee approval to submit a response on behalf of Belfast City Council.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree to submit a response to the DfE call for evidence on social enterprise • Note the draft response attached as Appendix 2 and approve the current draft or advise of amendments that they wish to see incorporated in the final version.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Members will be aware that – similar to enterprise support – the policy responsibility for social enterprise remains with DfE. Delivery responsibility for social enterprise support transferred to local authorities in 2015 as part of the wider transfer of entrepreneurship support. Since then, councils have supported social enterprises to start and grow both through the Go for It programme and through various ERDF-funded business growth programmes at an individual council level.
3.2	The new Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Service (NI ESS) includes a target of 10% businesses engaged/supported to be social enterprises. As a result, delivery partners are developing a programme of targeted support to increase the number of social enterprises accessing support.
3.3	Outside of council-funded activity, there has been very limited direct support provided to social enterprises from other government departments. DfE currently funds Social Enterprise NI (SENI) to undertake a range of networking and good practice support. The financial allocation to this work is very limited in scope and has not increased since LGR. SENI performs an important network and engagement function but it does not have capacity for significant service delivery and relies on councils to play that role. Their current three-year work programme comes to an end in March 2024.
3.4	In early September 2023, DfE issued a call for evidence and is seeking responses to a draft one-year action plan, to go live from April 2024. This action plan includes a greater focus on the outcomes that the Department would like to see, particularly those aligned to the 10X economic vision. The deadline for responses is 31 October 2023. The department has

indicated that they then plan to commission delivery of many of the services outlined in the consultation in November 2023.

3.5 The proposed workplan includes four themes:

- Theme one: Promotion of social enterprises to promote individual business growth
- Theme two: Strategic sector growth
- Theme three: Cooperation and coordination
- Theme four: Research.

3.6 An initial review of the work plan (Appendix 1) suggests significant overlap with the work planned as part of the Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Service.

3.7 The consultation is focused around four key questions, namely:

1. What are your views on the overall approach of the work programme – connecting a smaller number of objectives to the activities required and the outcomes that would demonstrate success?
2. What are your views on the four proposed objectives?
3. Do you have any comments on any of the objectives in the proposed work programme?
4. Are there other measures of success you would like to propose for any of the activities?

3.8 A draft Belfast City Council response is attached as Appendix 2. The response is structured along the lines of the four questions set out above. The key points, in summary, include:

- Opportunity for greater alignment with NIESS work – with a proposal for additional engagement to consider how this can work more effectively, including an opportunity for DfE to provide additional resources to councils to carry out this work
- Agreement around scope and focus of the social enterprise work – and potential to give this greater visibility through a joint work plan
- Potential to take more coherent approach to considering how social enterprises are supported across government (e.g. social value in procurement; increasing social enterprises in the supply chain).

3.9 Belfast City Council has, for many years, delivered a dedicated programme of work to support social enterprises. This work is led by Work West. In the last financial year, we delivered 27 workshops and outreach sessions for the sector, attracting more than 320 attendees. 45 people received one to one mentoring support totalling more than 1500 hours. We also supported the creation of 93 jobs in both social enterprises and cooperatives. We won the “council of the year” award at the Social Enterprise NI Awards in 2022 and are in the running for the same award this year.

3.10	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no specific financial or resource implications associated with this report.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The Department for the Economy will be responsible for screening their proposed workplan to take account of equality, good relations and rural needs issues.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices - Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1: DfE Draft Social Economy Work Programme – April 2024 – March 2025</p> <p>Appendix 2: Draft Belfast City Council response</p>