

Date: 8th October 2009

Our Ref: RC/FR

Social Economy Branch
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Netherleigh
Massey Avenue
Belfast
BT4 2JP

Dear Sir or Madam,

Social Economy Enterprise Strategy 2009 – 2011 Consultation Response

Fermanagh District Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Social Economy Enterprise Strategy 2009 – 2011.

In relation to the particular questions posed by the consultation document, Fermanagh District Council wishes to make the following response:

1. Do you consider that the three key strategic objectives are appropriate? If not, what changes would you suggest and why?

Fermanagh District Council is broadly happy with the objectives identified. However, the Council is concerned that Objective 2, Develop the sector and increase its business strength, focuses solely on community businesses that have the capacity for growth. Social Economy Enterprises are traditionally established to provide services that the private sector will not provide as it is uneconomical for them to do so. The issue of access to services is of very great importance to Fermanagh's population. In the 2005 edition of "The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure", 10 of Fermanagh's 23 "Super Output Areas" (43.5%) were ranked in the worst decile on the "Proximity to Services" domain. It is not surprising therefore that there are a high number of Social Economy Enterprises in Fermanagh particularly in rural areas of the county. It is concerning that the draft

strategy does not make provision to support these SEEs particularly given the exclusion of support for these existing businesses through the Social Entrepreneurship Programme. Under this programme support for post start-ups is available only to those SEEs that demonstrate export potential. Therefore there is clearly a gap in provision between start-up SEEs and those with potential for significant growth.

2. Have we identified the right associated actions to meet these objectives? Are there other actions you would wish to see included and why?

Whilst Fermanagh District Council is supportive of the actions listed the Council is concerned at the lack of initiatives to support community businesses that exist to provide an essential service to the community but do not have the capacity for growth.

Action 1.1: Increasing our knowledge and understanding

Fermanagh District Council welcomes any initiative that will increase the knowledge and understanding of the social economy sector. The Council would propose that increased recognition of the sector is actively promoted also. In addition with the Social Economy Network having a low membership base from Fermanagh the Council would propose that the SEN aim to significantly increase the number of members from the Fermanagh District Council area.

Action 1.2: Measuring the impact

It is important to remember that many community businesses exist to provide an essential service to the local community. Whilst it is important to measure the impact of SEEs it is the view of the Council that this should not be done in such a way as to place extra burden on the businesses involved.

It should also be noted that in many cases the economic impact will be of a second hand nature, e.g. the existence of a community childcare facility enables parents to go out to work.

Action 2.1: Providing support for growth

Whilst Fermanagh District Council welcomes any support initiative to enable SEEs to grow where appropriate it is concerning to note the lack of support for other SEEs that do not have the capacity for growth but that are providing essential services to local communities.

It should be noted here that the Farm Modernisation measure of the Rural Development Programme is measure 3.1 and not measure 3.2 as listed.

Action 2.2: Building the business skills of SEEs

Fermanagh District Council supports this action to build the business skills of SEEs where applicable. The Council would be keen to see that such skills training would include capacity building and is delivered locally and tailored to fit the needs of all community businesses and not just those with potential for growth.

Action 3.1: Building the evidence base

Fermanagh District Council welcomes this action particularly the initiative to promote membership of the Social Economy Network. Given the high relative proportion of SEEs in Fermanagh it is concerning that the representative body of the Northern Ireland social economy sector, the Social Economy Network, has a very low membership base in Fermanagh and has no board members from the west of the province.

The Council would contend therefore that a particular focus should be given to increasing membership from Fermanagh based businesses.

Action 3.2: Fostering a SEE culture

Fermanagh District Council welcomes the commitment of government departments to foster a Social Economy Enterprise culture.

3. Are the proposed monitoring and evaluation mechanisms appropriate to ensure that progress is made and reported? Are there others you would wish to see and how do you consider they would assist the process?

The Council recommends that SMART indicators are established to enable more effective monitoring.

Given that it is likely that the strategy will only be finalised in late 2009 Fermanagh District Council considers that 2010 is too early a stage to conduct an evaluation of the strategy.

To conclude Fermanagh District Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Social Economy Enterprise Strategy 2009 – 2011 and is broadly welcoming of the strategy itself. However it is clear that the strategy focuses on supporting Social Economy Enterprises that have the will and capacity for growth. Whilst many of the community businesses in Fermanagh do not have the capacity for growth they provide essential services to communities and their value should not be underestimated. These SEEs should be given the recognition that they deserve and should be supported to ensure the sustainability of these organisations and services.

I trust that the views of Fermanagh District Council will be given due consideration in the consultation process.

Yours faithfully,

Rodney Connor
Chief Executive