

Social Economy Branch
Department Of Enterprise, Trade & Investment
Netherleigh
Massey Avenue
Belfast
BT4 2JP

9th October 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

DETI Consultation on the Social Economy Enterprise Strategy 2009-2011

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this policy consultation on the Social Economy Enterprise Strategy.

The role of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC)

The Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC) was established in 1991. We summarise our role as being an independent rural organisation, which plays a vital role in influencing rural development policy, developing and delivering practical programmes, sharing information and building effective partnerships.

We believe that rural communities play a vital and significant role in the economic, social and environmental life of the whole region of Northern Ireland and regard them as a valuable regional resource.

From its formation over 18 years ago, RDC has had a role in supporting the social economy sector in rural areas, both as a source of capacity building support and also project funding through the EUSPPR, Leader, the Rural Development Programme, and the International Fund for Ireland.

In addition to this experience, RDC now operates in a central role within the current Rural Development Programme, administering the Rural Network for Northern Ireland on behalf of DARD.

Within this role RDC is actively involved in supporting Local Action Groups (LAGS) in the developing their proposed actions on a variety of themes including Enterprise and Entrepreneurship.

This group will provide a forum for learning and best practice in enterprise and economic interventions in rural areas from both the private and social economy sectors, and is designed to assist in developing a co-ordinated approach to programme delivery among Local Action Groups for Measure 3.2 of the Rural Development Programme “Business Creation and Development”.

RDC RESPONSE TO POLICY CONSULTATION

General Comments

We welcome and support this strategy as an extension to the previous strategic plan “Developing a Successful Social Economy” and to inform the delivery of actions to support the social economy sector in the transitional period leading up to the implementation of the Review of Public Administration, expected in 2011.

As an organisation we recognise the potential of the sector to regenerate the economic and social fabric of the most disadvantaged and excluded communities and would commend the Department for maintaining a dedicated strategy for the development of the sector as an integral part of their vision for the development of the local economy.

It is welcome to see that the Department continues to recognise the importance of the social economy sector to Northern Ireland, not only to the economy but society in general, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas and among the most excluded members of our society. In particular, the continued support of SEN and the work with CPD and DHSSPS to open the market for the delivery of public services to the sector will be of significant importance to the both the sustainability and the social impact of the sector.

Objectives

Do you consider that the three strategic objectives are appropriate?

Yes

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

Whilst recognising that the document is developed as a “high level strategy” RDC consider that further detail is required in presenting an Action Plan for the period which expands on the strategic objectives detailing not only the actions to be taken and the actors involved but also providing quantifiable targets, timeframe and budgets.

The strategy acknowledges the need to support and encourage the development of new organisations which seek to meet the needs of deprived communities and/or address specific aspects of Governments Anti-poverty and Social Exclusion strategy. It does not, however, indicate if this will be targeted by any of the actions or actors identified.

The Programmes which are considered to form part of the strategy, e.g. the Social Entrepreneurship Programme, need to be explained in sufficient detail to allow an understanding of what these programmes will offer and what they are designed to achieve.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Are the proposed monitoring and evaluation mechanisms appropriate to ensure that progress is made and reported?

No

Are there others you would wish to see and how do you consider they would assist the process?

It is suggested that the Department may consider using the Outputs, Results, and impacts framework as often used in the monitoring of projects and programmes

within the sector. Such an approach will provide a strong framework for the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy which would therefore assist greatly in accountability and in establishing a baseline for future activity under the proposed new administrative arrangements.

Equality Impact

Are there any other issues that you feel should be included in equality considerations at this stage? Can you identify any further sources of relevant information?

The strategy has stated that an assessment should be required taking account of the impact of the proposed actions on rural areas. It indicates, however, that this is likely to be in the form of a summative evaluation. We recommend that care should be taken to ensure that the proposed and existing programmes are also assessed for their accessibility and impact on rural areas as early as possible in the design or implementation, i.e. They should also be rural proofed. Such an approach would facilitate the option of taking action to address imbalance during the implementation of the strategy.

We hope you find these comments useful. We thank you for the opportunity to respond. We would appreciate if you could let us know the outcome of this consultation.

Yours faithfully

Eamon McMullan

Project Officer