



Department for the

**Economy**

An Roinn

**Geilleagair**

[www.economy-ni.gov.uk](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk)

# **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE ACTION PLAN**

**DECEMBER 2024**

## Ministerial Foreword

One of my first commitments as Economy Minister, was to harness the unrealised potential of the Social Economy.

This three-year action plan sets out how my Department will start to deliver on that commitment. It identifies 14 actions across five objectives; to raise awareness of the sector, support leadership and training, to improve access to support, provide investment, and overcome procurement challenges.

We will now deliver these actions at pace.

The co-design group will continue to review the implementation of the plan and will bring forward any further actions needed to promote social enterprise.

I'd like to put on record my sincere thanks to the members of the social enterprise co-design group for their contribution to this action plan.

Social enterprise offers so much in terms of inclusive economic development and together we will realise its full potential.



**CONOR MURPHY MLA**  
**Minister for the Economy**

## A foreword from the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Co-Design Group

Social Enterprise has never been more crucial. As the sector grows and the focus on social value intensifies, the time is ripe to support this vibrant industry in scaling its commercial activities to amplify its impact. At a time when communities face significant challenges, a thriving social economy is vital, with all sectors playing a key role in its success.

However, with these growing opportunities comes the responsibility to equip the sector with the tools and resources it needs to seize them. For this reason, we were pleased to collaborate with Minister Murphy and his department in the development of a Social Enterprise Action Plan. This plan outlines initiatives and support measures designed to enable the sector to thrive and maximise its potential.

The co-design process underpinning this action plan brought together diverse perspectives, ensuring a well-rounded approach to fostering growth. With the direction now clearly established, we look forward to continued engagement with the department as we work together to implement this strategy and unlock the full potential of social enterprise.



**Dave Linton**  
CEO and Founder - Madlug



**Maeve Monaghan**  
CEO - NOW Group

## Introduction

Based on recommendations from the Community Wealth Building report published in October 2022, Minister Murphy initiated the development of a three-year Social Enterprise Action Plan through a sector led co-design group. The department worked closely with sector representatives to ensure the action plan aligns with the Minister’s Economic Vision.

The group is comprised of members who have key knowledge and experience of the sector, and a proven record of delivering positive outcomes. It is chaired by Dave Linton, CEO and founder of Madlug and co-chaired by Maeve Monaghan, CEO of NOW Group. The group as a whole represents a wide range of perspectives from throughout the North.

### Members of the Social Enterprise Co-Design Group

Name	Organisation
<b>Dave Linton (Chair)</b>	Madlug
<b>Maeve Monaghan (Deputy Chair)</b>	NOW Group
<b>Celine McStravick</b>	NICVA
<b>Brian O’Neill</b>	Enterprise NW
<b>Cathy Keenan</b>	Belfast City Council
<b>Charlie Fisher</b>	Development Trusts NI
<b>Claire Ferris</b>	Workwest
<b>Amanda Johnston</b>	Social Enterprise NI
<b>Colin McCabrey</b>	Intertrade Ireland
<b>Georgina Grieve</b>	Workspace
<b>Jayne Taggart</b>	Causeway Enterprise
<b>John Logue</b>	Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland
<b>Ethna McNamee</b>	InvestNI
<b>Phelim Sharvin</b>	Community Finance Ireland
<b>Laura Bradley-McCauley</b>	Ulster University

	Action	Detail	Owner	Delivery Target
<b>Initial Actions</b>				
1	<b>Social Enterprise Champions</b>	Introduce regional SE champions to Invest NI, InterTradelreland and in every local council who will act as a point of contact for the sector to support their journey within their organisation. Training will be required to ensure they are knowledgeable about SE and have the right skills and experience to provide dedicated support.	Invest NI InterTradelreland Councils	March 2025
2	<b>The Leader Programme for the SE sector</b>	(a) Reserve a ring-fenced number of spaces for SE on the current InvestNI programme  (b) Replicate a scheme specifically for the SE sector	InvestNI	March 2026
3	<b>Procurement frameworks</b>	Review the process of procurement frameworks in terms of frequency of renewal, ease of access for social enterprises, and make recommendations on how to make these more accessible, taking into account recent legislative changes.	DfE (skills)/DoF	June 2025
<b>Objective 1: Awareness of The Sector</b>				
4	<b>Promotion of social enterprise in DfE and InvestNI</b>	Raise the awareness of the social enterprise sector among economic policy teams engaging with the private business sector, to ensure social enterprise stakeholders are involved in business conversations; catered for in new initiatives as appropriate and able to access existing supports on an equitable basis. All DfE and InvestNI staff should have attended awareness raising events before March 2027.	DfE/InvestNI	March 2027

	Action	Detail	Owner	Delivery Target
<b>Objective 2: Leadership and Training</b>				
5	<b>Evaluate existing training provision</b>	<p>Evaluate existing training provision, including regional training initiatives, with a view to reshaping this towards sector needs, and determining if additional external training needs are required.</p> <p>Should the evaluation support it, a pilot training programme would be developed, similar to that used by School for Social Entrepreneurs, bespoke for NI and addressing skills gaps. This would either be a reshaping and uniting of training provided by public sector providers, or an externally engaged programme.</p>	<p>DfE</p> <p>InvestNI/ Intertradelreland</p>	<p>March 2025</p> <p>Financial year 25/26</p>
6	<b>InvestNI's Leadership &amp; Development</b>	<p>Following initial action 2, and the evaluation under action 5, identify scope to wider access from the sector to other leadership and development support offered by InvestNI and Intertrade</p>	<p>InvestNI/ Intertradelreland</p>	<p>Financial year 25/26</p>
7	<b>Peer learning scheme/ Social Value accelerator scheme</b>	<p>Encourage relationships between private and SE sectors and facilitate mutual learning. SE to share knowledge/experience in Social Value to benefit private sector. Private sector to share knowledge/experience in business acumen to benefit SE. This could involve an element of residential learning and aim to grow and develop social value in procurement partnerships.</p> <p>In year 1 this would involve a pilot residential programme with shared learning objectives of benefit to social entrepreneurs and private business entrepreneurs. If the pilot is successful, this could be rolled out further in years 2 and 3.</p>	<p>DfE</p>	<p>Financial year 25/26</p>

	Action	Detail	Owner	Delivery Target
<b>Objective 3: Investment support</b>				
8	<b>Finance</b>	Scope out existing financial offerings and access to finance for the sector from across government, to identify barriers and future needs. This will inform actions to address these barriers and needs in years 2 and 3 of the action plan.	DfE	June 2025
9	<b>Social Enterprise Growth Fund</b>	Explore the potential for a dedicated capital loan scheme for social enterprises that is dedicated to their growth, and which is focused on those organisations for whom existing market offerings do not meet their needs.	DfE	March 2025
<b>Objective 4: Procurement</b>				
10	<b>Commissioning awareness</b>	Undertake commissioning awareness across DfE and the wider NICS to increase understanding of commissioners on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the ability of NICS departments to use grants to the social enterprise sector as an alternative to contracting;</li> <li>2. the ability to use open and dynamic purchasing frameworks to deliver social value; and</li> <li>3. the ability to split contracts into smaller commissions to enable social enterprises to access contracts, and when this is appropriate.</li> </ol>	DoF/SIB	Financial year 25/26
11	<b>Local Government commissioning</b>	Engage with local government commissioners to encourage the maximisation of value to the social enterprise sector through effective procurement mechanisms.	BCC/Solace	Financial year 25/26

	Action	Detail	Owner	Delivery Target
<b>Objective 5: Access to Support</b>				
12	<b>A pathway for the social enterprise sector</b>	Create a road map for the sector to highlight support at various stages of an organisation’s strategic goals and provide a high-level view of where support is available to achieve them. E.g. Signpost to GoSucceed – work through their programmes – refer to InterTradelreland – reach higher turnover – refer to Invest NI. This would build on the work within the existing social enterprise work programme to map out existing sources of funding in one place. This would build on the work within the 24/25 work programme to have all funding information for the sector centrally located in one place on NIBusinessInfo.	DfE	Financial year 25/26
13	<b>Review criteria for business supports</b>	Review access criteria to ensure social enterprises are not unnecessarily excluded, either directly or indirectly, from business support programmes	InvestNI and Intertradelreland	Financial year 25/26
14	<b>Future planning</b>	In year 3, use lessons learned to look ahead at strategic direction for the SE sector	DfE	Financial year 26/27



## Social Enterprise Action Plan Co-Design Group Terms of Reference

### Vision statement – To oversee the development and implementation of a Social Enterprise Action Plan

#### Background

1. It is recognised that social enterprises are of vital importance to Northern Ireland's economy and they require greater more cohesive support. The department proposes that key stakeholders should come together to collaborate and co-design an action plan that can be quickly implemented to support the sector.
2. Social Enterprises are generally seen as part of a wider social economy, however, there is no agreed definition of what a social enterprise is consistently applied in NI. The Department for the Economy's remit and focus is social enterprises who are self-sufficient, or are on a planned journey to becoming self-sufficient, through income generated from the trade of products or services. The business should be for-profit, and the majority of profit contributed to the social purpose of the business.

#### Department for the Economy

3. The Minister has set four key priorities as part of a new economic mission. These include promoting good jobs, promoting regional balance, raising productivity, and reducing carbon emissions. The Minister hopes to harness the unrealised potential of the Social Economy to help achieve the good jobs objective.
4. Additionally, DfE fund a Social Enterprise Work Programme which is delivered by Social Enterprise NI to provide strategic support to the social enterprise sector. This action plan should not be seen as a duplication but instead will work alongside the current work programme, and its outcomes will hopefully shape future work programmes.

#### Objectives

5. The group will develop a plan to support new trading social enterprises and the scaling of existing social enterprises within NI and identify opportunities for support beyond NI.
6. The plan should align with Social Value with the group identifying ways to build supply chain collaboration within the sector and with the private sector that will, in turn support the department's economic objectives of good jobs, increasing productivity, addressing regional balance, and decarbonisation.
7. The group's plan should aim to be innovative, and ambitious with roles and responsibilities identifiable. Action points should be realistic, clear, easily understood, and measurable.
8. The group will develop a plan that will identify current barriers that are inhibiting the scaling and trading of social enterprises and recommend action to remove or reduce those barriers.
9. The group will guide the development and implementation of the plan over the next three years.

### **Funding and Secretarial Support**

10. The social enterprise branch of DfE will provide secretariat support and cover costs associated with arrangements of meetings, such as venues or hospitality.
11. The Secretariat will be responsible for:
  - General administrative tasks including scheduling Group meetings, organising meeting accommodations, and recording minutes of meetings.
  - Agreeing meeting agendas with the Chair and preparing papers as agreed with the Chair for each meeting.
  - Circulating group papers, a minimum of five working days before the meeting.
  - Issuing minutes no longer than five working days after the meeting.

### **Membership**

12. The group will be comprised of members who have key knowledge and experience of the sector, and a proven record of delivering positive outcomes. The group should represent a wide range of perspectives from throughout NI, with the chair and deputy chair drawn from differing organisations.
13. Members agree to contribute actively to the development of the action plan and attend all meetings and participate in relevant events.
14. Members have been chosen for their experience and skills and represent their sector as a whole.

### **Timeline**

15. The group aims to develop and recommend a draft action plan by September 2024 and thereafter guide implementation for the next three years.
16. The group will meet monthly prior to developing the action plan. Therefore, meetings should take place on a quarterly basis with full group membership taking part.
17. Alternatively, a member who is unable to attend may provide written comments in advance of the meeting to the secretariat.
18. An annual review should be undertaken against the developed plan to assess its outcomes with an annual report made to the department.

### **Documentation**

19. All meetings will be fully recorded, and records relating to the group will be retained within DfE record management systems.