



Social Economy Enterprise Strategy 2009-2011

Draft Belfast City Council response

1. Belfast City Council is pleased to have an opportunity to respond to the consultation on the draft Social Economy Enterprise (SEE) Strategy.
2. Belfast City Council has identified the development and growth of the social economy as a key element of its enterprise support plan for the period 2009-2011 and we are delighted that the potential of the sector has been recognised at regional level, through the current consultation.
3. We note that the SEE strategy is a three year transition strategy in preparation for the “enhanced role envisaged under the Review of Public Administration (RPA) for district councils in the delivery of social economy policy and programmes”.
4. We are somewhat concerned that the strategy is unlikely to be approved and operational until 2010. This limits the amount of time in which activities undertaken within the framework of the new strategy can be implemented. Equally, it lessens the amount of time available for discussion with local authorities with regard to the future management and funding of the social economy, post-2011.
5. In this regard, we are disappointed that no consideration has been given to the involvement of local authorities in the proposed Social Economy Policy Group (SEPG). We would strongly recommend that consideration be given to the representation of local authorities on this group. The rationale for district council engagement is two-fold. Councils are currently engaged in a range of support mechanisms for the social economy sector in their respective areas. In order to maximise the impact of this work and to avoid duplication, it is important that this information is shared with an appropriate grouping of other support agencies.

6. The second reason for justifying local authority input into this SEPG is that, as the document notes, responsibility for this policy area will transfer to councils post-2011. If this is the case, it will be important that councils are involved in shaping the future direction of policy rather than sitting on the sidelines while policy is made by other bodies.
7. The degree of local awareness which councils possess is critical if future policy-making is to be focused on the appropriate areas where there is most need. The nature of this sector is that it is still very much in its infancy and needs significant hands-on support. A centrally-managed, controlled and developed policy will not achieve those objectives.
8. In addition to involvement in the SEPG, we would suggest that local authorities may be involved in the monitoring process to ensure that actions are impacting effectively at a local level. With the responsibility of SEE transferring to councils under RPA it is preferable that local authorities are included in the management and monitoring structure at an early stage in order to engender ownership and ensure consistency of approach.
9. We broadly agree with the proposed approach set out in section 4 of the draft strategy, outlining the key strategic objectives. We have identified a range of direct interventions which we will undertake to improve the quality of business starts in the social economy sector. This is to be delivered by the Local Enterprise Agency (LEA) network in the Belfast City Council area.
10. We agree that there should be a focus on enhancing the business viability of the social economy sector. To that end, we have opened our range of business support initiatives to businesses from the social economy sector and endeavoured to ensure that at least one social economy business participates in each of our business development programmes.