



Carlow County Development Partnership CLG submission on the Draft National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022.

Carlow County Development Partnership CLG is the Local Development Company for County Carlow. As such, “development” is at the core of its mission, understood as covering all aspects of the life of each citizen in the county: social, economic, cultural and personal. Thus, our work is strongly aligned with the vision outlined in the National Planning Framework, Ireland 2040, which places an equal value on the economic and social development of the country, and strongly affirms that development cannot be understood as mere economic growth alone, but needs to support the potential of every person to play a full part in society.

Central to this work is the development of resilient and vibrant communities, and over the past 18 years Carlow County Development Partnership CLG has worked with communities throughout Carlow to develop answers to the issues that face them. Ireland has seen significant change since the late 1990s and this has impacted strongly on settlements, transport patterns, and economic bases, and altered the traditional rural/urban population balance. As a result of this shift, our rural and town communities are facing challenges to build sustainable economies, maintain public services, and retain young people. As the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Michael Ring said, when outlining the Ireland 2040 Framework, this has led to an *“imbalance which impacts on everyone’s quality of life. The Government has decided it is time to redress the balance by strategically directing a greater proportion of growth and investment to our regions and our rural communities”*

Carlow County Development Partnership CLG strongly supports this Government priority and the commitment it shows towards the development of vibrant rural communities where people can access services and find employment. We strongly believe that the best way to respond to social challenges is to support and encourage members of each community to come

together and identify solutions to the needs in their area, and we see the development of social enterprises as a key part of this work. Because of this we have supported social enterprises in many ways in our work over the past 18 years, including through the provision of mentoring and training, as well as funding support. We see social enterprises as an innovative response leading to the renewal of rural communities, and a crucial factor in the development of a more inclusive society. We concur with the many benefits which social enterprises can bring to communities as outlined on page 7 in the Draft, namely, their potential to *support those most vulnerable and those marginalised in society, foster and sustain local communities, both urban and rural, address social problems and boost social capital*. We also note their capacity to address market failures and provide employment.

Carlow County Development Partnership CLG welcomes the opportunity to make this submission on this Draft as part of the national public consultation process. It also strongly supports the Government's placing of social enterprise under the remit of the Department of Rural and Community Development, which signals the understanding of social enterprise as part of the rural and community development which is at the centre of our work as a Local Development Company. In this understanding we are pleased to notice the definition on page 6 which places the emphasis on the achievement of *"social impact rather than making a profit for its owners or shareholders"*.

As stated above, we see social enterprises as supporting the development of strong local communities and promoting social inclusion by responding to gaps in services, providing employment and ensuring that our towns and village remain alive and active.

1. We strongly support the understanding outlined in the draft which states that *"the country has a long tradition of non-State intervention in community and social life which is consistent with the ethos of social enterprise. Many social enterprises have emerged from the community and voluntary sector and build on the work of addressing social challenges in that sector"*. This recognition of the central role of the community and voluntary sector in the future development of the social enterprise sphere in Ireland needs to be built on and maintained in any future policy. Social enterprises are best understood in the light of a community development ethos, such as outlined in the *All Ireland Standards for Community Work* published by Community Work Ireland. Significant expertise and experience already exist in local community and voluntary groups and this needs to be at the core of any strategy moving forward. To ensure that this happens, a **Social Enterprise Steering Group**

needs to be established in each county with community and voluntary representatives at its core, though not its sole members. This Steering Group should develop a Social Enterprise strategy for the county in line with broad overall National guidelines. Where possible this Steering Group should develop strong links with research institutions and academic institutions to develop a local action plan.

2. Support should be provided to the Social Enterprise Steering Group at both local and national levels.

At local level, Local Development Companies have a significant role to play in the support of community groups and this role has been recognized in the Local Government reform of 2014. Thus, it is our view that **local Development Companies are best placed to support** the development of the social enterprise sector in Ireland and the local Social Enterprise Steering Group, as they have developed a consistent supportive relationship with communities all over the country over the past 30 years and have offered significant supports in the area of rural economic development through programmes such as LEADER. In Carlow we also have a strong track record in supporting community groups all around the county and in the development of wrap-around support and training to respond to social challenges in innovative ways. We support the measures outlined in the Draft under “Leadership and Governance” including information provision, business support and training and **recommend that this should be delivered at local level through the local Development Companies**, who can also develop further supports through synergies with the other programmes they deliver, such as LEADER, SICAP and Tús. We recommend that funding should be made to Local Development Companies to allow them to provide this support, including through the employment of a dedicated social Enterprise Support Officer, who will provide support to the Social Enterprise Steering Group.

3. At national level, we support the commitment shown in this Draft to recognise the distinctive aspects of social enterprise and to **provide centralized support and funding** for greater awareness of the sector and the unique contribution it can make. We **welcome the establishment of a unit with senior staff within the Department of Rural and Community Development** and recommend that funding be made available at the start-up stage of social enterprises to support communities in areas such as insurance. We also strongly emphasise that any supports should be offered in **as straightforward and non-bureaucratic way as**

possible, without the onerous application processes present in some other current supports. We support the measures mentioned under awareness-raising and recommend that this be best done at National level through awareness campaigns and Awards.

4. The social enterprise sector has a huge potential for local and community groups to take action on gaps in services which no one else is responding to and address social inclusion needs which they are in the best position to identify. However, we also wish to ensure that social enterprises do not displace existing businesses and would recommend that government support through incentives, where appropriate, private enterprises to respond to gaps in services in rural areas, **when this has been identified by a community as being the most cost-effective response to the needs of their area**, such as in areas like transport.

Carlow County Development Partnership are happy to provide any further detail on these ideas if required.

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