

## **National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022. Draft for Public Consultation**

COPE Galway welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on draft National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland.

COPE Galway's vision is an "Improved Quality of Life, in a home of your own for People affected by Homelessness, Women & Children experiencing Domestic Violence, and Older People".

COPE Galway employs over 130 people in a wide variety of roles including social care, childcare, community support, catering and administration staff. Our employees are supported in their work by a committed team of over 220 volunteers. We could not deliver the full range of services without the generous support of these volunteers.

COPE Galway operates 2 distinct social enterprises in order to provide services to beneficiaries/customers who might not otherwise receive that service; and also to generate revenue to support the cost of COPE Galway's services.

(1) COPE Galway's Community Catering service has been supplying food and friendship to older people in Galway City and its environs for the past 50 years. Based in Galway city, our community catering facility produces and delivers a varied menu of healthy, nutritious meals to older people through our meals on wheels and lunch club services. Beneficiaries receive good quality nutritional supports – and social contact – at a time in their lives when they most need this but may be least able to provide it for themselves. In 2018 we produced and delivered 43,258 meals for 350 clients across Galway City and some parts of the County through Meals on Wheels and 9,111 meals to 250 older people through our community lunch clubs. We offer traditional and ethnic menu options and also provide meals for clients with specific medically related dietary requirements or requiring a texture modified or fortified meal.

Community catering provides opportunities for training and skill building through community and social employment schemes and currently hosts 4 Community Employment Scheme employees, and 2 Tus Job activation personnel

(2) Meals4Health

Recognising that many older people do not have access to the type of food they need, and that malnutrition is one of the greatest threats to older people in Ireland, in 2018, COPE

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Galway established Meals4Health, with the support of the Social Innovation Fund Ireland. Meals4Health produces and delivers fresh ready meals designed to meet the specific nutritional requirements of older people and those living with chronic illness.

The meals are created in accordance with best practice in clinical nutrition, addressing individual needs and supporting older people with prevention and recovery from illness, the promotion of health and well-being and by helping to reduce social isolation. Meals are developed by a team of professional chefs and a consultant dietitian combining great taste with nutritional support, and each meal can be texture modified, fortified or modified to meet medically related dietary needs.

Meals are home delivered to individuals via an innovative community partnership model as well as by courier and direct delivery. As these models can be replicated anywhere in the country, Meals4Health has the capacity for national growth and scale. More information on meals4health can be found here [www.meals4health.ie](http://www.meals4health.ie)

COPE Galway also operates a charity shop at Saint Augustine Street in Galway city, as another source of revenue for our services. The COPE Galway Charity Shop is run by a paid manager and a team of around twenty volunteers who kindly donate their time and effort. One individual at the shop is on a community employment scheme, with a second individual due to start a community employment scheme shortly. The Charity Shop also serves as a public face of COPE Galway for enquiries and it facilitates referrals from services when clients require clothes at no cost to them. There are opportunities for work experience and skill building at the shop for some of COPE Galway's clients.

Charity shops are not mentioned in the draft National Social Enterprise Policy and it is not clear as to whether charity shops are considered social enterprises or not.

COPE Galway feels there is a need for clarity as to whether charity shops are social enterprises, and it would be helpful to have more comprehensive guidelines as to what constitutes a social enterprise in Ireland.

COPE Galway feels that having a recognised social enterprise sector, that is healthy, vibrant and playing an important role in the Irish economy is vital. We hope that interest in the sector will continue to grow amongst various stakeholders.

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We believe that having support from the government as a recognised sector, as well as having an integrated approach to building social enterprises and supporting them with the challenges they face, could benefit society and the economy. With this in mind, COPE Galway welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on draft National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland.

COPE Galway agrees with The Forfás Report that stated that “a coherent statement of policy for the sector aligning the interests and activities of all government departments is now required”<sup>1</sup>. While this draft is welcomed it lacks clarity regarding initiatives and actions. Clarity is essential for communication and policy success, with this in mind COPE Galway will base its answers on the questions for consideration section of each policy objective. COPE Galway welcomes the opportunity to take part in this consultation and would like to take the opportunity to invite any policy makers involved in the development of a National Policy on Social Enterprise for Ireland to visit our community catering and Meals4Health social enterprises and also our charity shop.

While the consolidation of responsibility for social enterprise has come under the remit of the Department of Rural and Community Development, it is the view of COPE Galway that the draft policy places the bulk of responsibility for social enterprise development and growth on the social enterprises themselves. Will the Government set ambitious social enterprise output targets and take a share of responsibility for meeting them?

Policy Objective One - Creating Awareness of Social Enterprise. Questions for consideration:

- **Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of raising greater awareness of social enterprise?**

COPE Galway believes that the social enterprise sector is poorly understood in Ireland, with terms sometimes being misinterpreted and misunderstood and the general public finding the concept difficult to understand. COPE Galway feels that it is important to differentiate between social enterprises and community/voluntary organisations as their objectives, operations and access to funding (amongst many other factors ) can be very different. COPE Galway also feels it is important to receive clarity on whether charity shops are social enterprises under this policy, as mentioned above.

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<sup>1</sup>Forfas. Social Enterprises in Ireland. Sectoral Opportunities and Policy Issues.2013. 4

As the suggested policy measures are vague and lack clear actions, it is difficult to gauge if these measures are sufficient. However creating awareness of social enterprise is vital if the sector fully wants to realise its potential, importantly research indicates that awareness of social enterprises helps people better recognise existing social enterprises and when people are able to identify social enterprises, they are more likely to become customers<sup>2</sup>. Raising awareness can improve access to markets and finance, reinforce their legitimacy and encourage other social enterprises. The more people are aware and interested in resolving a social issue through the purchase of goods and services, the more economically viable social enterprises become<sup>3</sup>.

The policy document mentions the establishment of an Implementation Group, it is important to have wide representation of social enterprise stakeholders involved in this group. These should be established and start up/early growth social enterprises, have regional representation, include a range of social enterprise beneficiaries and so on. It is also important to include other social enterprise stakeholders – funders, donors, etc. COPE Galway would welcome an opportunity to be part of this implementation group.

- **Are there other actions the Government could consider to raise awareness of social enterprise, and if so, what are those actions?**

The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) have a number of additional suggestions that could be considered to raise awareness of social enterprise<sup>4</sup>, COPE Galway would support these:

- Advance the creation of a Social Enterprise Brand, or branding of the social enterprise sector.
- Create a Social Enterprise Website that uses the social enterprise branding, and that provides information on the situation of the social enterprise sector in Ireland, the relevant initiatives and public supports that are available, a template for entering requests related to starting up or scaling a social enterprise and information on where and who to talk to regarding social enterprise.

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<sup>2</sup> Asia Centre for Social Entrepreneurship and Philanthropy, NUS Business School. Public Perception Study on Social Enterprises in Singapore October 2016

<sup>3</sup> OECD. Policy Brief on Scaling the Impact of Social Enterprises. 2016.11

<sup>4</sup> Hynes, B. Creating an Enabling, Supportive Environment for the Social Enterprise Sector in Ireland. 2016

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- While the policy document recommends holding an annual Social Enterprise Forum, ILDN recommends holding regional targeted social enterprise information seminars and workshops.
- Create a nationwide Social Enterprise Support Centre.
- Consider developing Social Enterprise Hubs that provide innovation space to help start-up social enterprises.
- The involvement of local media is vital in raising awareness of social enterprises.
- **Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of increasing social enterprise initiation?**

With any policy measures, it is important to recognise that a 'one size fits all' approach will not work. All programmes, initiatives and modules in the education and training system must be mindful of the various and differing audiences that will have an interest in learning or developing a social enterprise.

It is also important to ensure that all measures are constantly being reviewed and monitored to ensure that the best possible approaches are being utilised.

- **Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?**

Other actions that should be considered include linking with private enterprises to provide training, development and guidance for social enterprises as well as to explore opportunities for collaboration. Social enterprises should also be promoted overseas to raise the profile of Ireland's social enterprise economy.

Policy Objective Two - Growing and Strengthening Social Enterprise. Questions for consideration:

- **Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of improving access to finance and funding for social enterprises?**

As mentioned previously, with any policy measures, it is important to recognise that a 'one size fits all' approach will not work. Funding streams need to be reorganised to address the different social enterprise business models and the differing stages of social enterprise development. Supports need to be provided to ensure applications for funding and accompanying administrative procedures are simplified.

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It is Important to increase supports offered by Local authorities and LEO's to social enterprises – current supports are often restricted to 'for profit' enterprises (LEO's) or are very minimal in financial support (SICAP).

The draft policy places the bulk of responsibility for social enterprise development and growth on the social enterprises themselves. COPE Galway queries if the Government will set ambitious social enterprise output targets and take a share of responsibility for meeting them?

- **How could current government funding streams be improved to support social enterprises?**

Any Government funding streams must be available year round. It is also important to note that research by Forfás found that social enterprises are in “general not seeking additional State funding; rather, adjustments to some aspects of various policy areas including access to finance, procurement, capability building and ensuring supportive legislative frameworks, would help to reduce barriers to social enterprises participating more fully in economic activity”<sup>5</sup>. COPE Galway would recommend that any funding streams being provided are part of an overall package that supports all aspects of a social enterprise. These supports should facilitate a change in direction from being grant dependent to having the ability to produce, trade, generate revenue and reinvest surpluses<sup>6</sup>.

Business Supports should also be provided including: grant applications, access to finance and communications skills

**Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?**

Social Enterprises need to have a defined legal form; this could be as Community Interest Companies such as in the UK and other companies or as Benefit Corporations such as in the US.

Where a social enterprise provides a service to government or in place of a government department, consideration should be given to reclassifying this income as fee-for-services rather than a grant.

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<sup>5</sup> Social Enterprises in Ireland. Sectoral Opportunities and Policy Issues.3

<sup>6</sup> As recommended by Hynes,B. 2016

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Enabling market opportunities. Questions for consideration.

- **Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of improving market opportunities for social enterprises?**

As mentioned previously any policy measures must be constantly monitored and reviewed in order to ensure they are achieving their objectives. Training opportunities should be provided to encourage social enterprises to develop into other areas such as community-led renewable energy projects and energy co-operatives.

Irish Social Enterprise Network, highlight some steps that should be taken to unlock public sector commissioning and procurement opportunities: by using current legislation which allows for community benefit clauses in contracts. This benefits both contractors and social enterprises. However contractors need to be trained and educated about community benefit clauses and Social Enterprises need to be trained in securing contracts and entering into the supply chain of private companies that would benefit from partnering with a social enterprise.

Where a contractor considers a current tender being ran by a social enterprise is performing well, and can continue to benefit from that work, it is possible to reserve contracts for social enterprises<sup>7</sup>.

- **Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?**

Mentoring opportunities should also be provided by industry professionals.

Measures should be introduced to promote the use of social enterprises in the supply chain for the delivery of next phase of infrastructure investment<sup>8</sup>.

Encourage the use of local 'Meet the Buyer' events that bring together public service and local authority commissioners and social enterprises to build business relationships<sup>9</sup>.

Supports should be developed locally and anyone should be able to access these supports regardless of location.

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<sup>7</sup> Irish Social Enterprise Network. Social Enterprise Strategy.2017.5

<sup>8</sup>Recommended by Social Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Taskforce. Unlocking the Potential of Social Enterprise & Entrepreneurship. 2012. 15

<sup>9</sup>Recommended by Social Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Taskforce. Unlocking the Potential of Social Enterprise & Entrepreneurship. 2012. 15

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- **What should the Government's priority be in working towards achieving this objective?**

Government priority in working towards achieving its objectives for enabling market opportunities should firstly focus on cultivating relationships between the private sector and social enterprises.

Policy Objective Three - Achieving Better Policy Alignment. Questions for consideration:

- **Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of achieving better policy alignment for social enterprises?**

A clear statement of policy for the social enterprise sector that aligns the interests and activities of all government departments is needed<sup>10</sup>. It is important to note that until Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sectors in Ireland and a new National Volunteering Strategy are published it is difficult to comment if suggested policy measures are sufficient. It is important to develop a better understanding of the interaction between social enterprises and relevant policy areas, and engaging on social policy developments internationally is vital in ensuring Irish Social Enterprises are benefiting from international supports and can influence international policy development, but it also ensures Ireland can learn from what other countries have done to ensure policy is supporting the social enterprise sector.

- **Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?**

NA

- **Are there specific areas of Government policy which are causing difficulty for social enterprises, or which could be improved?**

Currently there is a lack of coherent policy, coherent policy must be developed, this policy must ensure that measures are introduced that support social enterprises operating outside of Dublin.

- **What should the Government's priority be in working towards achieving this objective?**

Social Enterprises play an important role in providing supports and employment opportunities in rural areas, supporting social enterprises in rural areas must be a priority.

<sup>10</sup>Social Enterprises in Ireland. Sectoral Opportunities and Policy Issues. 2013. 4



The government must look what has been developed internationally in terms of best practice in supporting rural social enterprises.

Social and community employment schemes offer opportunity to individuals in training, development and upskilling whilst providing valuable human resources to social enterprises during development and start-up stage. Social enterprises should be supported to extend CE, Tus placements beyond 12 month contracts. Another important and vital resource for social enterprises, especially in the development stage, is the use of relief (casual) and part-time staff. These staff ensure that there is always sufficient people for the enterprise to operate, and can boost staffing numbers when there is increased workloads. However in our experience, these staff can feel pressure from Seetec/Intreo to get full time work. This is a concern for us as, regardless of their employment status, we must invest a considerable amount of time and resources into training these staff and the pressure to get fulltime work puts this investment at risk. COPE Galway would recommend discretion and support be provided to part-time and relief staff of social enterprises who are working in meaningful employment, which benefits both the staff member and the social enterprise.

- **Are there other actions could the Government consider to establish a reliable evidence base for social enterprises?**

The Irish Local Development Network highlights that it is important to involve educational and research institutions building a body of practical and applied knowledge in the social enterprise area, creating a co-learning experience with and from the community of practice<sup>11</sup>.

- **What should the Government's priority be in working towards achieving this objective?**

The Government's priority as regards Data and Impact should focus the realities of the operations and milestones of the social enterprise, rather than the meeting of targets and measuring of outputs.

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<sup>11</sup> Creating an Enabling, Supportive Environment for the Social Enterprise Sector in Ireland. 70