

ALONE Social Enterprise Policy Submission – January 2024

Background

ALONE is an organisation with a national footprint which has the proven experience, capacity, expertise and existing strategic national and international relationships, and a commitment to deliver on our specialisation – Ageing and the Older People – for the past 30 years. In our strategic plans and programmes of work, we commit to and have a track record in safeguarding, protecting the interests and well-being of Ageing and Older People in Ireland. The process of ageing affects all the population, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, beliefs, abilities or context.

In order to best recognise and realise the contributions of older people to our society, as well as recognising their economic and financial contributions; ALONE services and innovates for a society and environment in which our Older Population can live well and age well and where the best quality of life experience is available throughout every person’s entire life cycle.

Across the ALONE organisation, and across our partnership network, we leverage our national leadership to bring stakeholders together from across the quadruple helix, in order to innovate and to collaborate on strategic projects. This allows us to widen the reach of ALONE competencies and specialisation, while diffusing our expertise and experience across the national infrastructure, and to achieve synergies.

We are learning from international best practice, where collaborative leadership makes better use of existing capacity. We know from experience that meaningful interaction, cooperation and openness between corporates and charities, between the policy makers and charities, between academics, research community and the charity sector can deliver practical actions and continue to refresh and build deep infrastructure for the Ageing sector. The collaboration, partnerships and trust within the system for ALONE allows us to achieve and deliver efficiency in achieving social and economic impact nationally. In ALONE our collaborative leadership and innovation delivers impact that is greater than any individual player. Our approach will deliver social enterprises into the landscape, tackle social and ageing challenges and provides a platform to Ageing Person to flourish and contribute in their community.

As the social economy landscape consists of industry, local, regional and national policy makers, we understand that numerous legal forms are required: cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations - including charities, foundations, and social enterprises to achieve a 21st century robust Ageing infrastructure. Our commitment to the key principles of Older Person, social impact, the reinvestment of profits and surplus and good governance, proposes ALONE as a key national innovative organisation, who can deliver social, sustainable and economic impact across the national Ageing Sector.

Policy recommendations

ALONE broadly agrees with the five key policy objectives set out in the consultation, namely: building awareness of social enterprises, growing social enterprise, climate action contribution, national and international engagement, data collection and social impact measurement. However, we have some recommendations to be added to these sections, as below.

Building awareness of social enterprise

- *Develop a communications strategy* to include development of a website to enhance communication about social enterprise. This should be aimed primarily at the social enterprise sector and those interested in developing a social enterprise. A website should provide a resource for information sharing across the sector (regarding funding and training opportunities, etc) while also improving awareness among the general public as to the role of social enterprises in our communities.

National and international engagement

- *Improve understanding of social enterprise across the civil sector.* While it is important that the general public is aware of social enterprise, it is perhaps even more important that potential partners, funders, and other stakeholders have sufficient knowledge of the strengths of the social enterprise sector. This is particularly the case within the civil service and those involved in local and national government, who may procure services from social enterprise, and should be prioritised.
- *Ensure the new social enterprise policy aligns and integrates with other Government strategies and departments,* particularly those where bodies already exist which may already fall under the definition of a social enterprise. For example, Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) also fall within the definition of a social enterprise, and a regulatory body (AHBRA) already exists for these. Further consideration may therefore need to be taken regarding different 'types' of social enterprise and how they may interact with proposed policy changes. Strategies such as the National Philanthropic Strategy and the National Volunteering Strategy should also be consulted, in addition to the White Paper on Enterprise.
- *Develop communication forums for social enterprises at local (LDC/LEO) and national levels,* to enable enhanced communication and learning opportunities between social enterprises themselves. This can be achieved by enhancing structures at local and national levels to improve opportunities for interaction between social enterprise staff and stakeholders (for example quarterly stakeholder meetings, expansion of national conference, etc).
- *Enhance international engagement* by reviewing social enterprise strategies in other jurisdictions and establishing collaborative partnerships and knowledge sharing opportunities. For example, the region of Navarra in Spain has a highly successful social enterprise strategy.

Climate action contribution

- As well as consideration of the role of social enterprise in climate action goals, the bioeconomy and renewable and community energy, *the role of social enterprise in combating energy poverty and enabling a Just Transition should be included as a central purpose.*

Growing social enterprise

- *Make the most of resources already developed in this area* by reviewing already-existing networks and resources (such as <https://socialenterprisetoolkit.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Social-Enterprise-Toolkit.pdf>) and where beneficial, update and facilitate broader-scale engagement with these.
- *Enable social enterprises to access funding from already established State sources*, such as Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland, in the same manner as for-profit businesses. As mentioned previously, consideration will need to be given to how different types of social enterprise will best engage with this.
- *Encourage engagement at Departmental level* with innovators in areas proving challenging nationally (housing development, healthcare access, support for older people etc) and *improve procurement processes* to more easily facilitate engagement. For example, some social enterprises have been identified as offering innovative supports for our ageing population. These social enterprises should not only be facilitated, but engagement with such organisations should be prioritised to enable improved public services.