



Summary Minutes of National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group Third Meeting

**Online meeting
11.00 – 12.45, Friday 22nd May 2020**

Attendees :

Andrew Forde (AF) Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) CHAIR
Deiric O’Broin (DOB) Dublin City University (DCU)
Mary MacSweeney (MMS) Dublin City Council (DCC)
Senan Cooke (SC) Dunhill Ecopark
Ivan Cooper (IC) The Wheel
Tammy Darcy (TD) The Shona Project
Richard Deane (RD) Pobal
John Evoy (JE) Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI)
Larry O’Neill (LON) Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)
Therese Molyneux (TM) Department of Justice and Equality (DoJ&E)
Rónán Ó Dálaigh (ROD) Social Enterprise Development Co. (SEDCo)
Brendan Whelan (BW) Social Enterprise Task Force

Also in Attendance:

William Parnell (WP) DRCD, **Richard Gavin** (RG) DRCD, **John Ryan** (JR) DRCD,
Sam Dowzard (SD) DRCD, **Finola Moylette** (FM) DRCD, **Ciara Bates** (CB) DRCD,
Donal O’Sullivan (DOS) Department Of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI)
Vinnie Monaghan (VM) Department Of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI)
Lucy Pyne (LP) Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment
John Stewart (JS) Irish National Organisation of Unemployed

Apologies:

Michael Clifford, Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI)
Brid O’Brien, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)
Frank Maughan, Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment

Introduction:

AF welcomed participants to the meeting, and noted that it was the first meeting of the group online. He emphasised there is an opportunity to work together to support SE in a post COVID-19 environment.

1. Agenda

The Agenda for the Third meeting of the National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group (NSEPIG) was approved as proposed.

A request was made to keep mainstream access to enterprise support for SE on the agenda as a standing item. AF outlined work being done with LEOs and mentioned that the Department will be taking up an invitation to attend the next meeting of the LEO Centre of Excellence.

2. Minutes of the Second meeting of the NSEPIG, 28th February 2020.

The minutes of the Second meeting of the NSEPIG were approved with no amendments. It was suggested by DOB that, where possible, minutes of meetings should be made available online.

3. Presentation on COVID-19 Support Measures

Presentations were made regarding two packages of supports launched by DRCD in May 2020 under the DAF Fund, the COVID-19 Stability Fund and the Philanthropy 'Innovate Together' Fund.

FM made a brief presentation on the €35 million **COVID-19 Stability Fund** administered by Pobal to help organisations who have seen their traded and/or fundraised income drop significantly during the crisis.

The following points were made:

- There has been a significant level of interest with 1,200 groups passing the eligibility test and the majority of these have submitted an application.
- The breakdown in applications reveals 50% are from charities 40% from Community and Voluntary, and 14% are from Social Enterprise (140 groups approx.)
- All counties represented by charities, numbers from each county following in order of population.
- Applications are to be processed in batches with funding to begin to be provided to applicants in the next 2 weeks.
- RD provided some information from Pobal's perspective outlining some of the next steps, including due diligence requirements and the work required to establish those without previous state funding in the system. A survey is also to be distributed by Pobal to all those who engaged with the application process. This will include capturing data from those organisations who were deemed ineligible to apply for supports.
- An average of €35k will be provided to each successful applicant
- Approximately 33% of applicants haven't been funded by the State in the past.
- A communication is to be issued to applicants to the scheme outlining the timeline for funding.

CB provided brief details of the €5 million Government commitment to a **Philanthropy 'Innovate Together' Fund**, administered by Social Innovation Fund Ireland, which focuses on supporting responses to the crisis that require innovative and adaptive solutions to existing and emerging challenges. She commended the work being done by the sector in the crisis, and the following points were made:

- SIFI is administering the fund on behalf of the Department and an Advisory Group is also evaluating applications
- The same eligibility criteria applies as the stability fund and those judged ineligible will potentially be reviewed in subsequent calls for applications.
- The majority of requests are in the 20k category with an even split requests for 40k and 100k.
- There were 140 applications from social enterprises to date.

- JE outlined SIFI's efforts in administering the fund, estimating that further rounds of funding are likely to be larger as further philanthropy will have been raised by that stage. Further donation announcements are expected in coming weeks.

Both schemes were broadly welcomed by members of the NSEPIG.

BW was invited to discuss the recent announcement by Social Finance Foundation regarding a loan scheme for social enterprise. €72m in funding from Irish banks had been raised in late 2019, with a further €44m raised this year. Additionally a €25m guarantee from the European Union investment fund will help mitigate against any loan loss (EU to share 60% of any losses on loans and Clann Credo and Social Finance Foundation to equally share the remaining 40%). This will allow social lenders to take more risks.

There was a call for more flexibility with regard to schemes already in place, such as the Training and Mentoring Scheme. The need for 'people on the ground mentoring' to help organisations stay afloat was highlighted. AF assured the group that efforts have been made to ensure supports schemes are as flexible as possible to support the sector and if specific issues come to the fore they can be discussed. RG outlined how DRCD and Pobal gave notice to grantees of the Training and Mentoring Scheme that flexibility would be given.

4. Membership of Awareness Strategy Sub-Group

There was a discussion of the finalisation of the Awareness Strategy Sub-Group. Following a short-listing process there were 8 external members put forward for inclusion in the Sub-Group in addition to 5 members of the NSEPIG who had already expressed an interest in becoming members.

The discussion focused on whether the number of members should be reduced, with some members advocating for a small number of 6-8 and others advocating for a larger number.

It was agreed that in the spirit of inclusivity the following 13 members would be approved for membership.

NSEPIG Members of the Awareness Strategy Sub Group

Ivan Cooper	The Wheel
Tammy Darcy	The Shona Project
Richard Deane	Pobal
Rónán Ó'Dálaigh	SedCo
Brendan Whelan	Social Finance Foundation

External Members of the Awareness Strategy Sub Group

Bridget Carroll	UCC & Centre for Cooperative studies
Claire Downey	Community Reuse Network Ireland
Gerard Doyle	Technological University Dublin
John Gallagher	JG Consulting
Caroline Gardner	Quality Matters
Chris Gordon	Irish Social Enterprise Network
Clodagh O'Reilly	ReCreate
Darren Ryan	Social Entrepreneurs Ireland

It was noted that those selected for the group would be there to represent the collective interest of the sector not their individual organisations. Priority is to be given to the progression of the work with no

requirement for input from all members. Secretarial support for the Sub-Group is to be provided by DRC. AF noted that the work of the Awareness Sub-Group will be kept under review and revisited at the next meeting of the NSEPIG.

5. National COVID-19 Impact Survey of Social Enterprises – Preliminary Results

JR made a presentation on the National COVID-19 Impact Survey of Social Enterprises. The preliminary survey results had previously been available to members of the NSEPIG.

The following main points were made:

- 523 responses in total from all over the country
- 84% said organisations are Companies Limited by Guarantee (CLGs)
- In 2019 the median respondent had turnover of just over €100k, 33% had a turnover of more than 250k
- 85% have less than 20 full-time staff and 4% have more than 50 employees
- 81% rated the impact of COVID-19 as 'Severe', 97% rated it 'Moderate Impact' or higher
- More than 50% have seen a 75% drop in turnover (this includes those that ceased trading)
- Of those who have ceased trading 80% said they are likely to begin trading after the pandemic
- 43% have availed of Government COVID-19 supports
- 88% responded that 'Loss of Traded Income' was one of the most challenging issues, behind that 27% said 'Insurance' was one of the most challenging issues.

Positive developments arising from the crisis: 75% provided positive examples, including:

- A greater awareness of their organisation as a social enterprise within their community.
- It 'forced' some to begin to embrace technology or become tech aware
- Some are using the time to develop new products or diversify or expand services.
- Customers are more willing to engage in online services that they already provide.

Suggestions which should be considered by Government to assist SE return to normal:

- Certainty in regards to continuation of funding, Access to low cost loans, extended wage subsidy scheme.
- More IT support for social enterprises selling online, Procurement supports, promotion of the sector and making supports easier to apply for and retain.

Changes that have been made by the respondent's organisation in response to COVID-19:

- 142 responded with either Closed premises/trading online/working from home
- 78 said they had adapted or changed their product or service
- 31 had reduced staff or working hours

Online Trading Vouchers

There was some discussion on the interest outlined in the survey towards online trading. There is still some confusion in relation to Online Trading Voucher supports available to social enterprises with a charitable status. DOS said the criteria for Online Trading Vouchers is administered by the Local Enterprise Offices and should be available to all micro enterprises including social enterprise, and that he would take the query back to the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation on behalf of the NSEPIG. A number of other soft-supports were mentioned including Business Continuity Vouchers and the ReStart Grant available through Local Authorities.

6. Benefacts Social Enterprise Data Gathering Project

RG gave a brief overview of proposed data collection Project with Benefacts, who hold data on 33,000 Not-for-Profit (NFP) groups.

Some issues with this approach were noted, including social enterprises that are not CLGs may not be captured in Benefact's data, and an issue with many NFPs not publishing full financial accounts. DOB urged caution in compiling and evaluating data and voiced concern that there may be confusion at Benefacts as to what constitutes a social enterprise. AF assured the group that the Department is moving cautiously and the need to avoid counting non-social enterprises was being considered.

MMS said she is involved in a group in Dublin 8 which is commencing mapping exercise on social enterprise in survey format which will be shared with the group when completed.

7. Work of implementation group

RG provided a brief outline on the progress on implementing the National Social Enterprise Policy since the last meeting of the NSEPIG. Despite the significant challenges facing the country at present, progress continues to be made on implementing the policy. The following points were made:

- Awareness Raising Subgroup established
- Social Enterprise Online Networking and Support events
- Planning has started for 2020 **Virtual** National Conference on Social Enterprise – 19 November
- 14 Projects (400 participants) funded under the €800k Training and Mentoring Pilot supported by the Dormant Accounts Fund. (Covid flexibility)
- 220 projects nationwide were supported under the €2m DAF Small Capital Grants (Covid flexibility)
- Draft working document listing both business and financial supports for social enterprises
- DRCD played a lead role and gave the key note address at this year's Procure X event
- Irish Research Council - Phase One Evaluation Stage of applications for the Post Doctorate research project on social enterprise in Ireland and their impact.
- International Engagement - GECES, BIC, ILO, North-South Cooperation (keynote at SENI Annual Conference, PEACE Programme)
- Feeding into Government Policy on Justice, Health, Education, Circular economy, and Post Covid Economic Recovery
- DRCD are about to start participating in the International Labour Organisation, the UN agency with responsibility for employment and labour market issues, through an Inter-Departmental Group.
- DRCD provides inputs on draft policies across Government, which highlight the role played and potential of social enterprises in delivering Government policy in areas such as health, education, circular economy, and now post-Covid recovery.

8. Planning for National Social Enterprise 2020 Conference

JR gave a brief overview of the preliminary work on the National Social Enterprise Conference 2020. The following points were made:

- The online conference will take place on Thursday 19th November 2020, European Social Enterprise Day.
- The members of the NSEPIG were asked to be on the lookout for examples of online conferences and meetings that worked well, and to provide suggestions and ideas on

hosting online events with a view to developing an interesting, engaging and inclusive format for our conference in November.

- More detailed preparations will be available for discussion at the next meeting of the NSEPIG

9. AOB

Details of the fourth meeting of the NSEPIG will be circulated to members in the coming weeks.

There was a query as to whether there was anything the NSEPIG could do ensure SE is promoted in the new programme for government (PFG). AF reminded the group that this goes beyond our remit but it would obviously be welcomed if there was a strong remit for SE present in the new programme. WP stated there is nothing to prevent individual organisations in their own right highlighting the importance of social enterprise to the authors of the PFG.

There being no other business the third meeting of the NSEPIG was brought to a close.

Actions as a result of the third meeting of the Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group:

Action No.	Action Description	Responsible	Target date
Action 1	NSEPIG Minutes and agenda to be published online	AF	ASAP
Action 2	Send confirmation of acceptance to each external member of the Awareness Strategy Sub-Group with details of first meeting of the Sub-Group.	JR	2/6/2020
Action 3	Query on Online Trading Vouchers to be brought to DBEI	DOS	ASAP
Action 4	To provide suggestions and ideas of innovative ways of hosting online National Social Enterprise Conference to JR	All Members	Ongoing
Action 5	Date for next meeting of the NSEPIG to be finalised	JR	ASAP