

Feedback from Rural SEN on the SE Action Plan 2024-2026

General

Funding

- Longer term funding – to enable more effective planning, to recruit and retain skilled and experienced staff
- Allow sufficient time to apply for funding in advance of the period the funding is required to be spent. Delays in funding mean gaps in service, condensed delivery periods, loss of staff and potentially poorer outcomes for the end user
- Fund core costs
- Whilst funding new initiatives/projects is important, it is equally important to focus on funding what we know works
- Simplify the application process (currently disproportionately arduous and time consuming)

Unhelpful or unclear language

- Using the word procurement is unhelpful when engaging with smaller, community focussed organisations who have no idea what procurement means for them. Instead focussing on increasing market opportunities for that organisation would perhaps be more appropriate.
- ‘Community Wellbeing Exchange’ did not clearly explain what the wellbeing grant programme was about – there was very little take up by Rural SEN members for this programme – perhaps because it was unclear why it would be relevant for them. There is the issue of SE teams not feeling that holistic support is relevant for them too. It’s not something that is integral to their core organisation goals. Could the programme be wider than mental health and wellbeing support.

Clearer definitions

- Wellbeing Economy needs a clearer definition - need to embrace wider definitions of Wellbeing – how well the organisation serves a community, for example. Fair Work is only useful if the SEs on the ground have the funds to actually employ people, but they may be doing great work in other areas.
- We need a clearer LEGAL definition of what a Social Enterprise is. There is confusion among organisations who identify/don’t identify as a SE and inconsistency across the delivery partner programmes which is unhelpful and complicates engagement. We need that legal definition to be FLEXIBLE and embracing of wider community organisations such as Development Trusts, Coops etc.

Stimulating Social Enterprise

Start It and Build It funding and support hugely beneficial. Additional support from Just Enterprise at start up stage vital to add capacity and expertise.

Central point/gateway to navigate the support landscape required – currently can feel completely overwhelming and confusing with many different programmes on offer and a wide variety of information and advice available. Better coordination and support needed for start up SEs

Easy guide to legal structures and their suitability for different ‘models’ of social enterprise

More work required to raise awareness of SE with the general public, and public/private sectors

Developing Stronger Organisations

Capacity & Skills Development

- Capacity and skills with a SE and their wider community can be a significant issue. There are not always the right people with the right skills, in the right place at the right time to support the development of SEs and their ambition to drive major projects/deliver transformational change in their communities.
- Long term support required (rather than time-limited) to develop the skills and capacity within communities and allow sufficient time to plan and deliver change
- Also important to recognise volunteer fatigue can be the reality on the ground with volunteers often feeling overwhelmed by the complexity they face. This is particularly important when considering strengthening governance
- Need to build access and progression routes for people, particularly young people (eg Graduate Apprenticeships) – it needs to be recognised that this is not a quick fix

Networking/Connecting

The peer support and local/thematic network learning has been excellent through programmes such as SEN network meetings and CLEs. We need to:

- Invest in/extend local and thematic networks and support
- ensure that SEs are aware of and engage with these networks and opportunities.
- Ensure strong connections between Third Sector and the Local Authority
- In person peer support is more difficult in rural/remote areas but is priceless
- Suggestion of cloudrooms.app – a safe online space for people to share information and learning
- Need to make sharing learning and experience more accessible, simple and straightforward

Virtual/hybrid sessions are key for rural, remote organisations and partners. There is a concerning move to more in person events - all events on offer should have an online element if they are supporting organisations across Scotland. The advantage of having online workshops and programmes is that we can involve specialists rather than relying on local expertise.

Fair Work

Challenge to implementing Fair Work practices for some organisations. SEs will aspire to pay the real living wage however the impact on for some organisation and their wage structure makes it challenging.

Training / Support

Current support structured around the individual, particularly around leadership. More focus required on collective leadership

Artificial Intelligence is an opportunity for smaller SEs in terms of capacity saving. Training on this would be helpful.

TSI-SEN-Delivery Partners

- More funding required for on the ground officers across Scotland – whether they are TSI/SEN or delivery partner organisation officers. Channel core funding in all geographical areas to organisations working on the ground. Making support organisations bid against each other is

unhealthy for supporting the ecosystem. The move to economy should bring more funding for these organisations and not less

- Variable support available currently for SE through the TSI network – a more consistent approach and quality of support required

There should be a recognition that the Census findings will differ by geographical area. Support and need by area should be taken into account.

Realising Market Opportunities

Procurement (note slightly different takes on procurement from the two breakout groups)

- More work needs to be done to help commissioners and procurement officials understand the impact of the procurement model. Annualised, often delayed funding results in condensed delivery.
- Give that in rural areas in particular, SEs often underpin critical services that the Local Authority is not delivering/market failure, it is critical to make procurement more accessible for SE
- Need to move away from the view/approach that SE is the 'cheap' option for service delivery
- Important to level the playing field for SE providers (eg in care provision where LA provision can pay staff more than SE provider within the funding envelope SE given)
- Frameworks – often require disproportionate insurance levels, not reflective of the contract value
- Majority of risk sits with SE currently; this is unfair and results in less SEs able to bid for contracts
- More effective referral pathways in relation to procurement opportunities. Often people who are referred to SEs are severely unwell and unable to engage with the support that SE offer
- Procurement is not the answer! There is far too much focus at the Government and delivery partner level on procurement and increasing procurement take up by Scottish SEs. For most SEs this is not something they would want or need.
- Even for SEs that are in a position to be part of a procurement process we need much clearer guidance on this and support. There are also rules within LA procurement, for example, which make it very difficult for SEs to bid.
- We should focus on the Wellbeing Economy /Circular Economy instead of procurement as a way of making a difference and changing the way SEs purchase and sell.

Collaboration

More support required to help organisations come together to deliver larger projects/contracts