

SE Action Plan Reference Sub-Group
Scottish Youth Theatre, Glasgow - Thursday 22nd March 2018
Note of Meeting

Introduction (Aidan Pia, Senscot)

Aidan gave a short introduction explaining that Scottish Govt had set up the SE Action Plan Reference Group last year – holding meetings in June (in Edinburgh) and December (in Glasgow). Whilst appreciating this was a first step. It was felt in some quarters that the make-up of the Reference Group was not as representative of the intended recipients/beneficiaries of the various SE Action Plan Programmes as it could be. This sub-group is intended to redress this imbalance. It will look to inform the Reference Group of new ideas and approaches as well as issues that may be of concern. Aidan also stated that there may be other sub-groups – i.e social investment; business support etc.

Those invited to attend were representative of membership-led organisations – both local and national – as well as from frontline SEs who also have an active role within membership-led orgs. Together, they support over 2,500 social and community enterprises – which is around 50% of those identified in the 2017 SE Census.

The outcome/findings from this meeting will be shared with Scottish Govt and fed into future SE Reference Group meetings. It is intended that this new Group will meet on a quarterly basis.

It is also fair to say that grassroots social enterprises recognise that having its own bespoke SE Strategy and supporting Action Plan, sets Scotland apart from many other countries. They are also keen to ensure that their contribution is a positive one and one that acts in the best interests of all participants.

A list of the ‘actions’ being delivered during 2017/18 was shared - amounting to circa £7m in expenditure.

Group Discussion

SE Action Plan 2017/18 - views on programme to date

The meeting broke into small groups to share their respective views of the SE Action Plan after its first twelve months. Below are some of the main themes that emerged from each of the discussion groups.

Process

- There was a strong sense that the Action Plan needs to be demand led – with customers/beneficiaries having a greater say in shaping programmes.
- It would be helpful if the processes around agreeing what and how specific ‘actions’ were to be funded/support was more transparent.
- It is important to create an environment where there can be an honest dialogue with ‘providers’ – there is absolutely no wish to create a ‘them and us’ scenario.

- Information on the impact of the ‘early actions’ would be welcomed.
- A breakdown on annual SE Action Plan expenditure should be readily available
- In time, SENs to be allocated funds in a fashion similar to the Participatory Budgeting model – to deliver/commission specific ‘actions’ identified within their respective local SE Action Plans. (see **proposed action 4**).
- A recurring theme was how to devolve more to a local level. This includes not just ‘strengthening and extending’ SENs but also, in time, looking to devolve funding and commissioning of services/programmes to a local level (see **proposed actions 2 & 4**).

Content

- Does Action Plan fit needs of sector? To what extent are the findings of the SE Census 2017 used to influence this?
- How do new ideas get into the ‘mix’? (See **proposed action 5**).
- There was agreement that a gap exists re support for those organisation that are in the post start-up phase – but not yet ‘established’ enough to access or afford ‘social investment’. More thought to be given to support/funding for SEs looking to expand/diversify/ or explore new areas of activity – along the lines of the Growth Fund or Social Investment Fund (50% grant/50% loan).
- It was strongly felt that Action Plan should not support Mission-led activity.
- There was also some concern re the international SE Strategy. There is a recognition that it is, politically, considered significant – but the funding and attention given in relation to the number of SEs active in this area is disproportionate – and can lead to some resentment.

Roles

- National support organisations need to consult with local partners wherever possible in delivering national programmes. There is a clear benefit for all concerned. Sharing information will assist all parties – and help build trust.
- Some clarity around the role of TSIs in relation to SE support and also in terms on Just Enterprise provision would be helpful.
- All local authority areas need to develop their own Local SE Action Plans – this should be a priority as part of the SE Action Plan/SE Strategy. These should be led by SENs – where they exist. (see **proposed action 3**).

Branding/Buy Social

Duncan Thorp (SES) reported on a couple of meetings that have taken place with regard to exploring the potential to roll out the Buy Social Model in Scotland. Scottish Govt has asked SES to lead a consultation across the sector looking at feasibility of such a model. SES will work with Social Value Lab in facilitating this consultation.

Points raised in discussion:

- Some consideration has to be given to how SE can be ‘branded’/ ‘marketed’ better.
- Important for public to know – quickly and easily – what SE is.
- Some concern that Buy Social is being promoted by those with a vested interest – without any evidence of it making a noticeable difference.

- There is a perception that the English model is very much about an elite group of SEs – overwhelmingly London-based.
- Feedback from Canada; Northern Ireland; North West and North East England – suggests very different experiences.
- If tailored/ badged to reflect Scottish SE – may be worth consideration.
- To roll out – promote – market etc – would require considerable resources. What initiatives would lose out?
- The main issue was that, at this stage, this should not be considered a priority – there are more pressing and immediate needs to be met via the Action Plan?

Business Support

Pauline Graham (Social Firms Scotland) gave an update on the current position with Business Support and the Just Enterprise Programme. The current Just Enterprise Programme (subject to Ministerial approval) will be extended until May 2019 – but the tender for the follow on Programme will be available from September 2018.

Points raised in discussion:

- Any of the national programmes are easy to criticise – it's about focusing on constructive comments – how we can improve things. It is not easy delivering a Programme that satisfies all parts of the sector
- Greater consultation at a local level is critical.
- Greater sharing of information between deliverers of Programmes and local/national membership-led organisations
- Acknowledgement that JE Programme is delivered by a sector-led consortium – and a much better option than others available at the time
- There may be some duplication etc with programmes/services being delivered (i.e. Just Enterprise/TSIs/Business Gateway etc). Some attention needs to be given to this.
- In longer term – need to look at local commissioning – different needs in different areas.
- With new tender being prepared over the summer – need to engage with Govt to influence this. (see **proposed action 1**)

Next Steps; Headline issues; and 'Proposed Actions'.

It was agreed that the Group would now meet on a quarterly basis – and look to extend invitations to other membership-led bodies. A note of this meeting will be shared with Scottish Govt – and points highlighted will be raised at future SE Reference Group meetings.

Some of the headline issues raised during the meeting included:

- Greater engagement from providers/deliverers of programmes with national and/or local membership-led organisations. To include sharing of information/knowledge - bringing benefit to both parties – as well as providing a more cohesive and informed service to intended recipients.
- Greater clarity from Govt on what is being funded and by whom.

- Greater transparency around the process of commissioning/approving programmes or services to be delivered.
- Action Plan decision-making etc needs, in time, to be devolved down to a local level. Funding to be devolved to local level by the end of this Action Plan - becoming the default position – along with local decision-making in commissioning/programmes etc becoming the norm in the next Action Plan (2021-24) – see [Local Governance Review](#).
- Perception that the ‘international programme’ has both a disproportionate profile and receives disproportionate funds – in terms of the percentage of Scottish SEs engaged internationally?
- A gap in provision seems to exist between post start-up SEs and those not ‘established’ enough to access/afford ‘social investment’. Previous initiatives such Growth Fund/Social Investment Fund need to be re-considered.
- SE Action Plan funds should not be used to support mission-led activity.
- The Action Area ‘Public Markets’ needs strengthened to promote new and effective activity by public sector agencies (and funders) to increasing the proportion of spend directed towards social enterprises. It is clear that ‘community benefits’ are not sufficiently targeted or weighted.
- Funders (e.g. Lottery etc) should be encouraged to include community impacts, social enterprise suppliers in their delivery esp in capital projects

The following ‘**proposed actions**’ were identified as being brought to Scottish Govt’s attention – with a view to implementation during 2018/19.

1. A meeting to be held with Scottish Govt Third Sector Division in advance of tendering document for Business Support Contract is finalised. Also, may be worth considering sector representation on the assessment panels for future contract – assuming there would be no conflict of interest
2. During 2018/19, the SE Action Plan has to implement its plans to ‘extend and strengthen’ local SENs. In the longer term, local SENs need to be allocated bespoke resources – in a similar fashion to TSIs.
3. Local Authority areas are to be encouraged and supported to develop local SE Action Plans for their respective areas.
4. On back of point 3, local SENs are to be given a dedicated budget with which to commission specific actions within the respective local SE Action Plans – in the model of ‘participatory budgeting’. See [Local Governance Review](#)
5. Govt to hold back 10% of annual SE Action Plan (circa £800k) for new initiatives – agreed upon by panel including Govt and membership-led orgs.

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