

## Local SENs: What are they?

The term 'Network' can be confusing - with different kinds of organisations from umbrella bodies to specialist service providers using the term. It is therefore worth clarifying what Local SENs are and what they're not.

Local Social Enterprise Networks (SENs) are groups of active social enterprises who come together regularly with the intention of growing opportunities for themselves and the social enterprise (SE) sector locally and, in doing so, look to provide more effective services within their respective communities.

The SENs' purpose is to provide members with opportunities for:

- **Peer support; resource sharing; joint working and development of markets;**
- **A focal point for issues specific to social enterprise;**
- **A collective voice both locally and nationally;**
- **Raising the awareness and profile of social enterprise both locally and nationally.**

They also, when constituted/organised, can play an important role as a representative body connecting with other local agencies and, where appropriate, seek to influence policy at a local level. Local SENs vary in size and structure.

## Purpose

SENs exist to meet the needs of the local social enterprise community. It is not their purpose to evolve into intermediary organisations or deliver services which could and should be delivered by their members.

## Activities

SENs are those which help bring members together (hosting events); devolving opportunities to their members (brokering between members and procurement officers); helping towards their sustainability (offering backroom services such as shared IT, marketing, training, bulk purchasing etc). They can also offer opportunities for collaborative working and sharing expertise across members, building capacity and collective strength to secure contract opportunities and investment.

## What are the benefits?

SENs are examples of 'Communities of Practice' - groups of individual organisations with common interests and goals who recognise that by working together they can find solutions to the challenges they and their local communities face. Research suggests that by creating focused, active connections, it becomes possible to tap into and maximise the collective knowledge of a group. Among the many benefits of supporting and growing these communities are:

- **Sharing best practices**
- **Solving problems quickly**
- **Driving Innovation**
- **Capturing knowledge**
- **Enabling professional development**
- **Act as representative voice and influencing policy at a local level**

A number of SENs have now matured and it is recognised that the following criteria are central to the ability of a SEN to develop and grow:

- **Being social enterprise-led**
- **Being resourced**
- **Providing a co-ordination role**
- **Having the ability to build positive relationships with partners i.e. local authorities; wider third sector; private sector (as appropriate) etc**
- **Building links with national agencies – Govt; national intermediaries; national support orgs etc**

## Guiding principles of Senscot's network development

Senscot has a set of principles which have determined how the task of establishing new local social enterprise networks has been approached. The main principles have been and remain:

- **Responding to local demand – helping to set up SENs only when asked to do so by local SEs**
- **Preserving a focus on grassroots social enterprises**
- **Ensuring that SENs work for the benefit of their members and that any services provided will be strictly for the benefit of their membership**
- **The structure of any SEN should be wholly dependent on the aims and objectives of its members.**

## Achievement of SENs as a national community

SENs have made a valuable contribution to the social enterprise eco-system in Scotland since their introduction in 2004. Some of their achievements include:

- **Development of local strategies and action plans**
- **Contributing to local policy fora and advisory groups ie Vice Chair of Glasgow City Council SE Board; North Ayrshire Council SE Strategy Advisory Grp.**
- **Partners in Third Sector Interfaces (Borders, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow)**
- **Development and ongoing support for the SE Code in Scotland**
- **Active involvement of shaping the co-production of the SE Strategy and Action Plan**
- **1300 members/engaged – 1 in 5 SEs in Scotland are members of engaged with a SEN**

## Examples of activity during 2018/19 include:

- **Edinburgh Social Enterprises, [Social in the Gardens](#) with market stalls, live music, open air family ceilidh, art exhibition, food stalls and a bar all produced and run by social enterprises.**
- **Glasgow SEN launched a [Social Enterprise Pocket Guide](#) – a comprehensive guide is packed full of information on social enterprises in Glasgow.**
- **Dundee SEN launched a new [Network Directory](#) where you can find out more about what they do and who the members are.**
- **Argyll and Islands SEN developed a Local Social Enterprise Action Plan which focuses on several priority areas including: networking; inspiring young people; representation; data; recognition; collaboration and digital connections.**
- **Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee along with the Health SEN are participating in the [‘Unlocking Potential’\(U>P\)](#) project which is being piloted via the SE Action Plan.**
- **Edinburgh Social Enterprise developed [‘Buy the Good Stuff’](#) Marketing Campaign, which is being rolled out to Forth Valley SEN.**