

It's not what you say – but what you do – that counts



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It has been commonly acknowledged that the strength of the response at a community level to this year's Covid crisis has been striking. There are countless examples from across the country of community-based organisations – working together – adapting their services to meet the immediate needs of those most vulnerable in their local communities. These range from the provision of food or ready-made meals; activities to address social isolation; and services to support the wider mental health and wellbeing issues within communities.

Whilst recognition of this invaluable contribution is welcome, it comes as no surprise to those who have been working with frontline organisations over the years.

In September 2019, the latest SE Census was published – providing an array of statistics and information on the social enterprise community in Scotland. As with the previous Censuses, it reflected a sector made up overwhelmingly of small, locally-based organisations – as did those in 2015 and 2017.

This reality tended to be overshadowed as many, in and around the sector, sought to promote the importance of growth. In numerous cases, this can be appropriate and work for particular organisations – but, for the vast majority, the primary aim remains to improve, extend and deepen the impact of their services within their respective communities. In order to achieve this, ongoing support is required to help build the resilience of these, often, financially fragile social and community enterprises.

It is ironic, therefore, that it has taken the Covid crisis for many, at a national level, to recognise the importance of local infrastructures and local delivery and the critical role it plays in reaching the most disadvantaged members of our communities.

SENScot, over the years, has sought to support local social enterprise networks (SENs) as best we can. Today, there are 20 local SENs across Scotland. Some are independently constituted bodies – others are supported by local TSIs. Between them, they have a membership of over 1000 locally-based social and community enterprises – playing a key role in connecting locally; offering peer support; and identifying opportunities for joint working. A number have also been working closely with local authorities and other partners to develop their own local Social Enterprise Strategies.

It has always been SENScot's belief that these organisations are the bedrock of our sector. All three Censuses (2015;2017;2019) confirm this. With the publication of the 10-year Social Enterprise Strategy in December 2016 (and its supporting SE Action Plans), Scotland is fortunate to have a long-term programme of support for the sector – and, in particular, these very organisations.

For this Strategy to have the impact we all seek and to make a genuine difference at a local level, the use of local intelligence (via SENs, TSIs and others) needs to be given greater weight in informing both policy at a national level and delivery at a local level.

Scottish Govt has sought to support the sector as best it can over the last 9 months. Locally-based organisations have demonstrated their value, beyond doubt, during this same period.

As we all seek to work together towards recovery from the current crisis, we have to hope the value demonstrated by the sector at a grassroots level will receive the recognition and support that it merits. As the old adage goes: “ It's not what you say – but what you do – that counts”.