



Social Enterprise NI

EMPOWERING PROFIT WITH PURPOSE, INSPIRING LASTING IMPACT.

Social Enterprise NI Comments on draft Executive Budget for 2024-25

Social Enterprise NI is the representative body for the social economy sector in NI with a membership of almost 400 and have managed the Social Economy Work Programme on behalf of the Department for the Economy since 2012. The work of our members transverses all departments and therefore this response takes this into account.

Social Enterprise NI welcomes the publication of the draft Financial Budget and fully appreciates that it is a very difficult task. We understand that every Department has its needs in order to ensure that they meet stretching targets and demands. Ideally all Departments should receive as per their original proposal, however it is appreciated this is simply not possible and the Ministers task is therefore an impossible one. It will be necessary therefore to ensure that resources are applied strategically and address as many of the most key and underpinning challenges which NI faces. The position of the Health Minister is a stark reminder of the great need which has been caused by many years of single year funding along with the impact of the outbreak of the Coronavirus Covid 19 and the associated unexpected costs which that in itself delivered.

As stated above the social economy is not associated with any one department so the predicted shortfall will impact the sector as a whole. We have organisations who support their social mission across Health, Justice, Education, Communities, Economy, and others. The sector is already impacted by the uncertainty around UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Our call is therefore for Departments to work together, collaborate, and co-design with the sector to ensure that all monies spent are done so with the needs of the sector at the forefront. There should be no silos ensuring that funds can be moved across departmental barriers if and when needs be. We need to ensure that in doing so we review how contracts are currently procured and Social Enterprise NI has a Pilot Programme, co-designed alongside Ulster University, to upskill and train Commissioners as to the options available to them to spend better, not more, but to also ensure that social value is an important consideration of all government spend. The impetus under this has been halted due to a lack of budget but Social Enterprise NI firmly believes that it is initiatives such as this which can unpack so much spending power and enhance the current spending limits across the public sector. Social Enterprise NI is willing to meet and discuss this further.

Within the social economy sector there have been specific requests eg the childcare sector and whilst we are delighted to see £25m allocated for that purpose, believe that this isn't sufficient. This isn't just to support those operating childcare and their service

Social Enterprise NI, 5C Citylink Business Park, Albert Street, Belfast, BT12 4HQ

Tel: 028 9046 1810

Email: info@socialenterpriseni.org



Social Enterprise NI

EMPOWERING PROFIT WITH PURPOSE, INSPIRING LASTING IMPACT.

users but needs to consider the impact of forcing parents out of the workforce due to the rising costs, something which will have a real impact on the NI economy in the future.

We request long term support via a long term budget to ensure continuity of services and a realisation that the social economy isn't just there to pick up the work that private sector doesn't want or indeed need. The sector firmly believes that real consideration of how the social economy can deliver, will create better alignment with departmental priorities and also reflect that their work is supportive of the desired outcomes under the spending powers of the Assembly. By properly instigating a long term budget process, we can ensure a wider collaborative economy across NI and one that values the work of the social economy.

Social Enterprise NI would also welcome a new Programme for Government and whilst appreciating that this mandate is shorter and doesn't therefore provide as many opportunities as could be provided, work needs to commence as soon as possible to provide the framework for long term financial stability.

As mentioned we welcome the draft Budget, recognise the challenges in meeting the needs of everyone but would implore that we also consider that we shouldn't spend more, spend better and do so by ensuring social value is at the core of all government spending, enforced by bringing in social value legislation into NI and aligning it with other parts of the UK.

Colin Jess
Chief Executive Officer
Social Enterprise NI