

DÚN LAOGHAIRE RATHDOWN COUNTY



**SOCIAL ENTERPRISE
STRATEGY 2024-2026**



Welcome to the first Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Social Enterprise Strategy

Having recently taken on the role as CEO of Southside Partnership DLR I am very excited to be involved in the launch of this new Social Enterprise Strategy for Dún Laoghaire Rathdown.

At a time of great interest nationally in this sector we are fortunate to have such a diverse and exciting range of fantastic local organisations providing their vital services and dedicated to making a true social impact and it is an honour for us to be involved in supporting these groups in whatever way we can.

As an organisation we are also very proud to be working with our partner stakeholders, such as Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, and we look forward to partnering with them, and others, to progress the recommendations of this strategy forward in the coming years.

Working together, in partnership, I have no doubt that great things can be achieved by all involved.

Sinéad G. Sherwin
Chief Executive Officer



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1. Introduction and Methodology

The definition of social enterprise used by the Department of Rural and Community Development in the National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022 is: *A Social Enterprise is an enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact, rather than maximising profit for its owners or shareholders. It pursues its objectives by trading on an ongoing basis through the provision of goods and/or services, and by reinvesting surpluses into achieving social objectives. It is governed in a fully accountable and transparent manner and is independent of the public sector. If dissolved, it should transfer its assets to another organisation with a similar mission.*

1.1 | Strategic plan

Southside Partnership DLR in collaboration with Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council commissioned Method to develop a strategy for social enterprise development for Dún Laoghaire Rathdown.

Southside Partnership DLR works to increase the awareness and understanding of social enterprise in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown and offers social enterprises and social entrepreneurs supports based on their needs, establishing these through conversations and conducting surveys throughout the year. Supports include:

- One-to-one and group mentoring, training, and networking opportunities
- Staff and board supports as appropriate
- Sourcing and promotion of funding opportunities, including application support
- Promotion of social enterprises and their activities, achievements, and information they wish to highlight
- Information offered on external supports offered by agencies, local development companies, social enterprise support organisations and others
- Specialised mentoring subject to funding

The aim of this strategy is to identify opportunities to further develop a vibrant, dynamic and sustainable Social Enterprise sector in the county.

Research was undertaken in 2023 on the status of the social enterprise sector, to identify the supports needed (at all stages of enterprise development), to explore opportunities to increase awareness and understanding of social enterprise, to identify opportunities for collaboration and to identify the short and long-term needs of the sector.



1.2 | Methodology

The strategic plan was developed as a result of a research process that included one-to-one discussions and desktop research.

Desk research

Analysis of 29 organisations which are either trading as social enterprises, have identified as social enterprises or are in receipt of Community Service Programme (CSP) funding was undertaken. Data was gathered based on CRO returns, and data published on the Charity Register returns.

Consultations

23 social enterprises which are in contact with the Southside Partnership DLR were contacted. 12 social enterprises participated in a semi-structured interview.

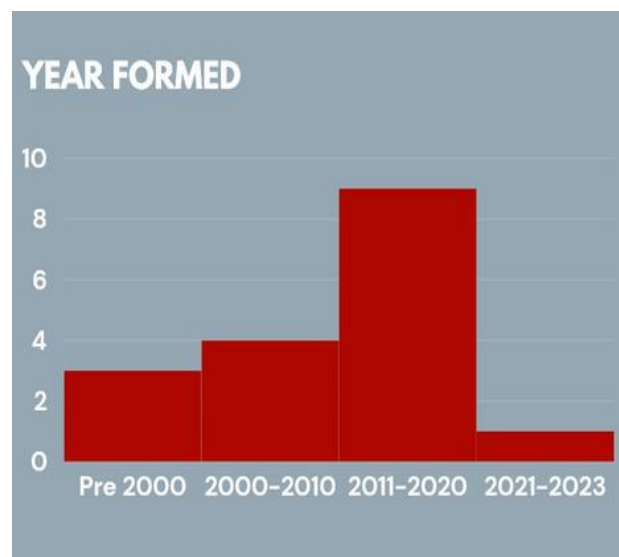
10 one-to-one semi-structured discussions were held with staff of the Southside Partnership DLR, officials in Dún Laoghaire County Council (including the Local Enterprise Office), Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), Rural Dublin LEADER, Dún Laoghaire Chamber of Commerce and Young Social Innovators.

2. Profile of social enterprises in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown

29 organisations were identified, and mapped in terms of activity, size, target group and other features based on data submitted in returns made to the Companies Registration Office (and Registrar of Friendly Societies) including annual financial statements, and data on organisations that are registered as charities, via the Charities Register.

2.1 | Features of social enterprise in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown

Social enterprises in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown are diverse in age, background, activity as well as size and turnover. They include large, well-established organisations and ones formed in the last 3-4 years. Some social enterprises have been established as initiatives of existing organisations, and so have access to an organisational infrastructure. Others have been founded by community groups in response to community needs, but a significant portion of the newer social enterprises have been initiated by individuals, many of whom have previous experience working in the sector that their social enterprises operate in.



€7.25M Annual turnover
Based on CRO returns for 11 trading social enterprises

This previous experience (along with a commitment to affect social change) has been an important driver for establishing the social enterprise. It means that there is both technical expertise in the sector-specific activities of these social enterprises and also that wider organisational aspects (e.g. volunteers, governance supports) is limited, and that the promoter-manager role, undertaken by one individual, requires significant effort and time.

The dominance of recently formed social enterprises in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown also means that the sector is largely at a start-up stage in the county.

Most of the social enterprises experienced increased demand for their services and identified opportunities for expansion in the short to medium term.

2.2 | Supports received

All social enterprises consulted had engaged with Southside Partnership DLR (and accessed one-to-one support from the social enterprise project leader, mentor support and training). These were highly valued, and the wide-ranging, bespoke and flexible nature of support from Partnership staff was noted. Support was accessed in the areas of business development, governance, acquiring charitable status, information and support around funding and signposting to other support organisations and resources. The responsiveness of the Partnership staff and supports, particularly throughout COVID, was noted as exceptional and was highly valued. According to one social enterprise founder:

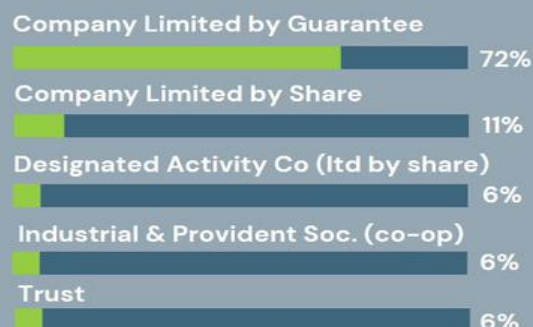
It gave me the confidence to develop my idea – I am not sure it would have happened otherwise. This was important as I did not know much about social enterprise and whether it was relevant.

A significant number of the trading social enterprises in the county had participated in programmes delivered by Rethink Ireland, which provided both finance and soft-supports, including mentor and training support, and one social enterprise had received support through Social Entrepreneurs Ireland.

Other supports (and trading opportunities) were accessed from the Health Service Executive in one case in the form of a Service Level Agreement), the Education and Training Board (Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB; Kildare and Wicklow ETB). The Western Development Commission contracted one of the social enterprises.

One social enterprise had accessed mentor support from the Local Enterprise Office (LEO).

LEGAL STRUCTURE



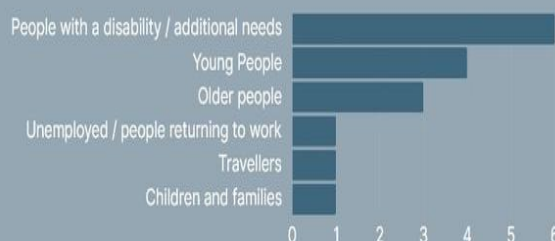
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Social enterprises are funded through the Community Services Programme (CSP).

32

The number of full-time jobs supported in DLR by the CSP.

TARGET GROUPS



ACTIVITIES



2.3 | Supports required



Mentor Supports

Social enterprises highlighted the relevance of mentoring that they had received (e.g. through the Partnership's SEED programmes and Rethink Ireland). The following points were made:

- Social enterprise managers would benefit from ongoing coaching support as they often work in isolation.
- Many social enterprises do not have access to resources that would be available in large organisations, and many promoters and managers have sole responsibility for all aspects of enterprise start-up and development.
- Mentoring is very useful when it is bespoke to the needs of the organisation, and available on an ongoing basis (rather than part of a time-specific programme).
- Mentor support for leadership roles within social enterprises (including co-operatives) was noted – mentor support every 4-6 weeks for a period of six months would be beneficial.

Training

Many social enterprises had previously participated in training programmes (including through the SEED programmes and Rethink Ireland). Most were of the view that they had received sufficient training and their priority was to put into practice the knowledge that they had acquired in training.

Specific areas of need included:

- Attracting volunteers
- E-tenders and accessing new markets, grant applications (one-to-one)
Strategy and business planning advice and expertise around business models for diversification and planning for growth and expansion
- Need for general awareness of social enterprise among other sectors
- Governance and corporate supports (e.g. role of company secretary, financial management and oversight functions, Charities Regulator compliance, organisational policies and procedures, IT, digital marketing). Support accessed through Southside Partnership in relation to governance was very highly valued.
- Funding support, including capital funding and funding for staffing.
- The lack of funding in the pre-trading phase was identified as a significant challenge. An option would be for an expansion to the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance to explicitly state that founders of social enterprise could be eligible for the programme.

"You invest your time and money but you cannot get a return"



2.4 | Networking & Collaborations

A number of social enterprises saw the benefit of networking with each other, with those within the same sector including among social enterprises on a cross-county basis, and with similar organisations in the mainstream economy.

The approach to supporting networking by the Southside Partnership (networking opportunities linked to events, rather than scheduled regular meetings) enabled social enterprises to network beyond their sector, including with state agencies and others.

This approach provides an optimum networking opportunity and the point was made that networks should not be formed for their own sake, and provide a tangible benefit.

Dún Laoghaire Chamber of Commerce has engaged with the Southside Partnership as well as with individual social enterprises (Cycling Without Age, Airfield and the Great Care Co-op were all shortlisted for 2022 Chamber Business Awards). DLR Chamber also participates in a Skillsnet programme (with Fingal Chamber) which provides training programmes for members, some of which are without charge. There is potential for social enterprises to avail of this training.

2.5 | Space needs

Access to space was an identified need: in particular, scaling and expansion plans mean that space for many social enterprises would become more acute in the medium term. Space for outdoor sporting activities was also highlighted.

The value of a social enterprise dedicated enterprise centre was noted by a number of those consulted. This could act as a ‘social enterprise hub’ which could provide workspace with centralised resources, e.g. accountancy services, central payroll supports, etc.

Options to acquire space in public, community or voluntary ownership that is under-used or the acquisition of a privately-owned building could be considered as a long-term measure, if a sufficient need was identified. Future developments in the south of the county or in LEADER areas could incorporate an enterprise element. In addition, private enterprise initiatives (such as the proposed space in the Harbour) could potentially have a community or social enterprise dimension to them as part of a community benefit policy or corporate social responsibility (CSR) strand of activity, and discussions could take place to this effect.

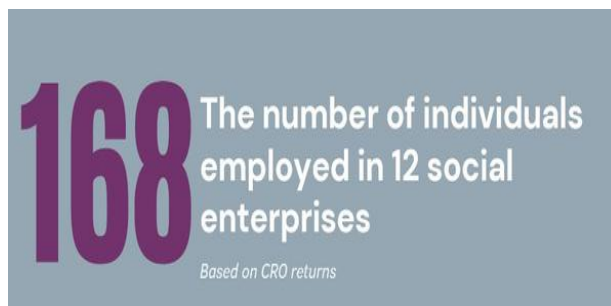


2.6 | Staffing

Social enterprises at various stages of development noted staffing needs and challenges: for early-stage or pre-start up social enterprises, there are limited supports available. One early-stage social enterprise noted that *“we are running to stand still”*.

There are a relatively small number (four) Community Services Programme (CSP) funded social enterprises in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown. Some CSP-funded groups noted the need to ‘top-up’ the wage grant to attract employees which can place a financial burden on the social enterprise. The point was made that staff who can take up CSP places also often require a significant amount of personal support, which places additional demands on management staff.

For those who are promoting or leading the establishment of a social enterprise, they often do not acquire an income from their social enterprise work in the early, pre-trading stages. A suggestion was made that some form of basic income for social enterprise promoters should be available (similar to the basic income for artists pilot, as outlined above).



2.7 | Opportunities for social enterprise development

- Trading opportunities with state agencies, to deliver services based on unmet needs in areas of counselling, care services, training for target groups, support to migrant communities
- Trading opportunities could be supported by innovative approaches such as integrating social value in the procurement processes
- Climate action related measures and initiatives, including Sustainable Energy Communities programme which could develop social enterprise-type initiatives
- New programme opportunities including those delivered by Southside Partnership via SICAP. These may arise from the upcoming 2nd National Social Enterprise Policy, and through LEADER, for example.

3. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT Analysis)

STRENGTHS

- Strong social enterprise sector in growth areas with strong policy fit
- Emergence of a number of social enterprises in recent years
- Growth and new opportunities for social enterprises Southside Partnership DLR and the role it undertakes (support, advocacy and networking) is an important asset for social enterprises
- Willingness among social enterprises to collaborate and mutual supports

WEAKNESSES

- Limited capacity of start-up social enterprises (lack of staffing)
- No strategic and coordinated approach across state agencies
- Lack of awareness and understanding of social enterprise and its potential can impact on growth
- Limited availability of start-up / incubation enterprise space and suitable premises for developing social enterprises

SWOT ANALYSIS

OPPORTUNITIES

- New SICAP programme places a greater emphasis on social enterprise
- Potential for strong local policy (DLR County Council and LECP) for social enterprise development
- Favourable national policy context for social enterprise
- Relevance of social enterprise to advance key policy areas (climate action, SDGs, etc)
- Large corporate sector in the county – potential source of support
- Urban nature and attractive landscape should offer opportunities for market based social enterprise activities
- New LEADER programme may be relevant for a limited part of the county

THREATS

- Minimal capital, staffing and financial supports available across the social enterprise life-cycle
- Limited staffing resources within Southside Partnership DLR to support social enterprise development (one part-time staff position)
- Lack of access to funding for pre-start-up and early-stage social enterprises could undermine the sector's development
- Lack of incentives, including financial, for social enterprises among social entrepreneurs
- Post-COVID decline in volunteering could impact on new social enterprise development and sustainability of existing ones
- Labour market conditions – access to and retention of staff

4. Recommended Strategic Objectives

These recommendations are directed at Southside Partnership DLR and Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council in the first instance, as collaborators of this strategy. However, the implementation of specific recommendations may be led by other agencies and partners. They are aligned with the National Social Enterprise Policy broad objectives.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

Develop a social enterprise development group

1.1 Southside Partnership DLR and relevant local partners to assess the potential for a dedicated social enterprise development collaborative structure. This could be convened by Southside Partnership DLR initially, in collaboration with Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council. The structure could focus on implementing the strategy and include key staff and decision-makers who would work in partnership to champion social enterprise and lead out on individual actions. Potential members include:

- Southside Partnership DLR
- Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council (including the LEO and key departments and functions)
- Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Chamber of Commerce (and other corporate interests)
- Fingal LEADER Partnership
- Social enterprises in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County
- Young Social Innovators
- Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology

The implementation structure would determine lead responsibility for each of the agreed actions. Meetings could take place regularly, as agreed, to report on progress. Members of the implementation group would be asked to commit resources (time and/or finances) to the delivery of the actions. The dedicated structure could put in place a monitoring and evaluation process for the strategy and report on its progress and outcomes.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

Build awareness of social enterprise and its relevance to local economic development

2.1 Southside Partnership DLR to explore potential to undertake awareness raising actions in partnership with DLR County Council and social enterprises in the county.

2.2 Public bodies to consider undertaking a policy-mapping exercise on the potential role and contribution of social enterprise across a range of functions and departments (e.g. waste management, bio-diversity, integration, enterprise development, environment and others).¹ The exercise could include emerging policy or practice areas of the County Council (e.g. future circular economy activities) and could be used as a basis for generating ideas for social enterprise.

2.3 Community development workers in Southside Partnership DLR and DLR County Council to be engaged as part of awareness raising actions. Community development workers have a frontline engagement with groups and communities and potentially play an important role in promoting social enterprise among communities (including migrant and Ukrainian communities, and International Protection Applicants (IPAs)). Examples of social enterprises involving refugees or those in direct provision could be used as examples in awareness-raising actions.²

2.4 Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council to explore assigning responsibility for the internal coordination of social enterprise supports to a staff role. This role would have responsibility for coordinating internal communications and for championing social enterprise across various local authority departments and functions and among elected representatives.

2.5 Case studies of social enterprises operating in different counties (and jurisdictions) to be compiled as a resource for social enterprises, as models in other areas are likely to have transferability. Case studies and information about practice elsewhere could also support cross-county networking and could be used in awareness raising actions with public bodies and other stakeholders.



¹ Potential ideas and initiatives could take the form of, or be similar, to the 'Register of Opportunities' as being developed by Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) throughout Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County.

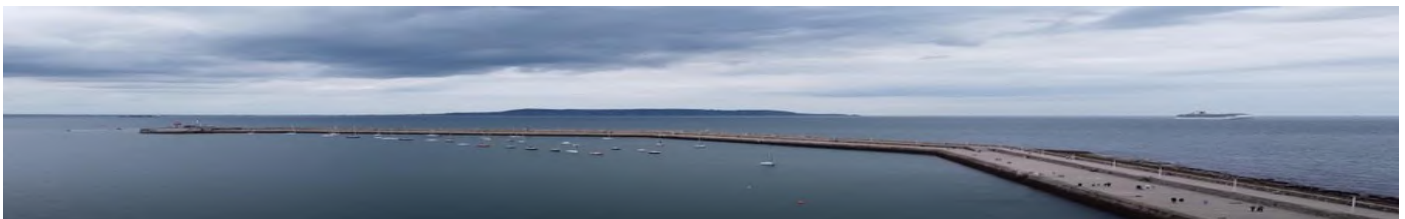
² For example, the Cork-based social enterprise Saoirse-Ethnic Hands on Deck is a cooperative formed primarily of women asylum seekers in Direct Provision Centres, together with other local migrants. The members create high-quality craft products. Its mission is to foster a sustainable economic enterprise that amplifies the creativity and determination of migrant women.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

Continue to support social enterprise development

3.1 Southside Partnership DLR to continue to be the primary source of information, support and signposting in the county for individuals, groups and organisations regarding social enterprise development. This will involve the following actions:

- Exploring opportunities to create a dedicated full-time position for social enterprise development
- Developing a promotional strategy for social enterprise
- Developing referral pathways with other relevant service providers and agencies
- Using networks to raise the profile and to advocate for social enterprises at local and national level
- Engaging with partner organisations to promote social enterprise development within communities



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

Build and strengthen the capacity of social enterprises

4.1 Assess the need of social enterprises for support to prepare tenders (including e-tendering). If a sufficient need is indicated, consider providing supports to social enterprises in the county (or possibly on a cross-county basis or with small private enterprises). This could be explored by Southside Partnership DLR with Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Local Enterprise Office (LEO).

4.2 Social enterprises require mentor and coaching support, particularly for promoters and managers, who often work in isolation. Alongside the mentoring provided by Southside Partnership DLR, eligible social enterprises (those with less than 10 employees and based in the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown area) to be able to access up to six hours of mentoring support (free of charge) from the Local Enterprise Office. This would recognise the additional contribution of managers and promoters of social enterprises to the sustainability of their initiative, usually with no additional return to them.³ Southside Partnership DLR could identify the need (and eligibility) for such supports and provide information and details of the application process to the Social Entrepreneur.

4.3 Explore opportunities for delivery of ‘corporate services’ supports to social enterprises on a coordinated basis. This could include services such as IT, HR, marketing, governance and compliance-related supports. Carrying out these functions can be a significant burden for social enterprises.

³Staff and promoters of social enterprises usually acquire no shareholding in their social enterprise and many interviewed in this strategy are developing social enterprises deriving little or no income from this work.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5

Explore the need for enterprise space among social enterprises

5.1 Explore current and anticipated space needs for social enterprises (and small enterprises). Consider current and anticipated physical space needs, as well as the advantages that incubation space could provide to social enterprises (shared knowledge, resources, ancillary services and peer support). Based on the space needs identified, a longer-term strategy could include:

- Approaching existing or planned enterprise space, with a view to ring-fencing space for social enterprises.
- Identifying unused or under-used space (including industrial or commercial premises) in public, education, community or voluntary sector in the county which could be used as enterprise space for social enterprises.
- Identifying future infrastructure opportunities through engaging with Forward Planning Department of Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.
- Exploring the potential for new enterprise space development or support in LEADER areas.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6

Develop new collaborative relationships

6.1 Fingal LEADER to consider collaborating with Southside Partnership DLR and DLR County Council with a view to undertaking an analysis of social enterprise opportunities in areas which are eligible for LEADER funding in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown. This could include:

- Analysis of community group activity in these areas, and of community needs.
- Exploring opportunities for awareness-raising, developmental type supports or short-term training for community groups or individuals to consider social enterprise activity.
- Awareness raising activity could be undertaken with the involvement of community development workers or existing social enterprises.

6.2 Continued development of exchanges and networking between the social and mainstream enterprise sector (including raising the profile of social enterprises among the broader business and corporate sector) in partnership with the Dún Laoghaire Chamber of Commerce. This action could pilot opportunities for support from the private sector. Social enterprises in the county to join the Chamber.⁴ Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Chamber of Commerce has previously incorporated a dedicated 'social enterprise award' category in its annual County Business Awards.

The corporate sector can potentially play an important role in supporting social enterprises through corporate social responsibilities.⁵ However, the role of social enterprises as a potential support to the corporate sector in meeting their reporting obligations under the new EU Directive on Corporate Sustainability Reporting (e.g., through support by the corporate sector for social enterprises) could also be highlighted and could be explored as a basis for engaging the corporate sector in the work of the sector through technical and other supports.⁶



⁴ Some social enterprises consulted already engage in networking activities with similar private sector organisations and noted a value in this, developing social enterprises deriving little or no income from this work.

⁵ Dún Laoghaire Rathdown is the location of significant corporate sector entities which could contribute to the sustainability of social enterprises through trading, or the delivery of technical supports to social enterprises as part of Corporate Social Responsibility strategies.

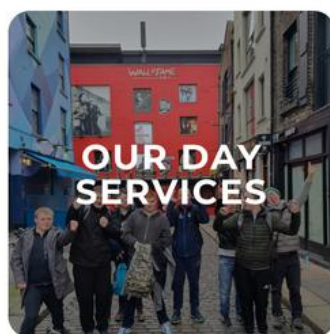
⁶ In January 2023, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) entered into force. This provides that large companies, as well as listed SMEs, will be required to report on sustainability. Investors and other stakeholders have access to the information they need to assess the impact of companies on people and the environment and for investors to assess financial risks and opportunities arising from climate change and other sustainability issues. The new rules will be applied for the first time in the 2024 financial year, for reports published in 2025.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 7

Embed social enterprise into the eco-system of enterprise infrastructure

7.1 For any new corporate procurement strategy of Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council to explore the potential for a pilot action around social procurement. This could draw from the experience of Dublin City Council and other public bodies which have explored practice in this area and could also engage social enterprises in other administrative areas that could avail of trading opportunities in the county.

7.2 Explore the potential for a training or awareness programme on social enterprise methodologies for trainers and mentors that deliver mainstream enterprise training. This training could explore how viability and enterprise development can be achieved outside of strictly commercial criteria. The role of social enterprises in the delivery of this training could also be explored.



4.1 | Resources



The implementation of the 7 recommended strategic objectives will require additional resources from all parties involved.



For Southside Partnership DLR, the social enterprise function is undertaken by one part-time staff member. It is estimated that delivery of the above actions will require a minimum of one full-time role.



For Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, the role of a champion to promote the sector will require staff resources, particularly as social enterprise does not come within the remit of a single department or function.



For the Local Enterprise Office (LEO), mentor supports are already available for social enterprises, on an ad-hoc basis, and ring-fencing a portion of supports is unlikely to require significant additional resources.



Additional finance may be required to deliver on some of the research actions identified, as well as additional budgets.



4.2 | Key Performance Indicators

Increased awareness of social enterprise among public, private and community sectors

Evidence of additional resources and supports made available to social enterprises

Evidence of increased collaboration among stakeholders and social enterprises

Number of new jobs created by social enterprises

Increased turnover of social enterprises in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown



Social Enterprises in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown



www.actsltd.ie



www.cyclingwithoutage.ie



www.whatmattersmost.ie



www.bluediamonddrama.ie

together:academy

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The Great Care Co-op
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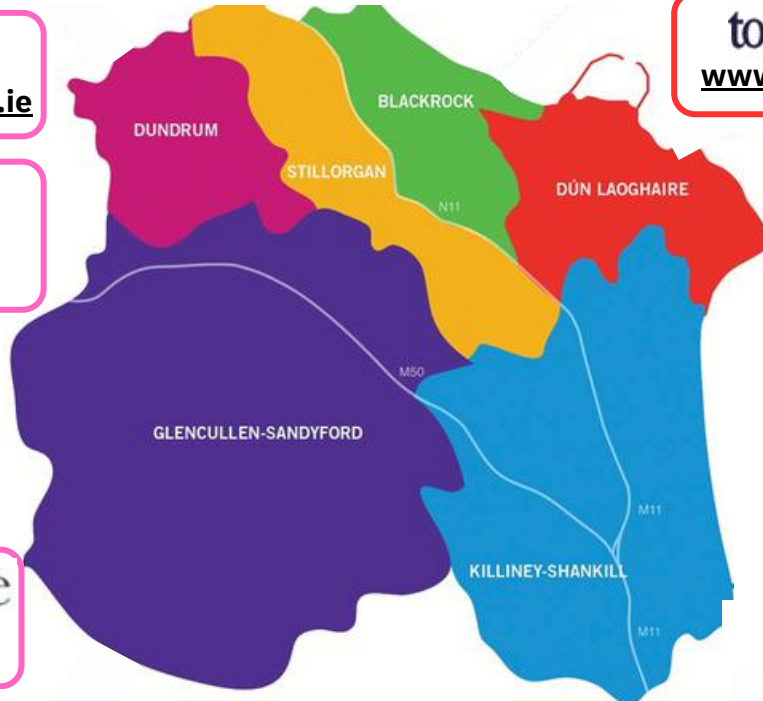
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Southside Partnership DLR and Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and the Dormant Accounts Fund in part-funding this strategic plan, and of Tanya Lalor, Method, the consultant who researched and developed the DLR Social Enterprise Strategic Plan on our behalf.



THE SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY ACTIVATION PROGRAMME (SICAP) IS CO-FUNDED BY THE IRISH GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND, PLUS UNDER THE EMPLOYMENT, INCLUSION, SKILLS AND TRAINING (EIST) PROGRAMME 2021-2027

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