

Social Enterprise in Essex – A new approach

Dear Colleague,

The Essex Strengthening Communities Board, Social Enterprise East of England, 3rd Sector Futures and Voluntary Sector Training, are working on a new initiative to assist voluntary and community organisations and Social Enterprises to explore how to diversify their income and to consider social investment opportunities.

Over the coming months, we will jointly host a conference event called “Social Investment Unlocked” and deliver a development programme for about 20 interested organisations. In order to be able to design a programme and event that squarely meet the interests and needs of relevant organisations, we are first conducting a research study into the state of the local sector.

If you work in an organisation with a social purpose, that currently derives income from trading, or you may be interested in knowing how to do so, we are interested in hearing from you. Please can you complete our on-line questionnaire by clicking [here](#). Please complete the survey by **Wednesday, 1st February**.

Please will you also forward this email to any other organisations you think might be eligible? If you are a membership organisation or an umbrella group then please forward this email to any of your members that might be interested in getting involved.

Why social enterprise?

The Essex Strengthening Communities Board increasingly recognises the value of social enterprises for the significant economic and social benefits that they create. We are keen to understand the sector better and to work with you to identify opportunities where we can support ongoing sector development.

The UK is leading the global revolution in social enterprise. In 2015 741,000 social enterprises employing close to 2.3 million people operated in the UK. 31% of UK social enterprises are working in the top 20% most deprived communities in the UK and 59% of social enterprises employ at least one person who is disadvantaged in the labour market.

Whilst we have significant knowledge of social enterprise at a national level, currently, we know little about the local sector in Essex. We do not know how many organisations are aspiring to move towards generating income through trading, nor do we know what sustainability challenges more established organisations face.

In Essex, much work needs to be done to understand how we - the public and social enterprise sectors - can work together more effectively. But the Strengthening Communities Board is committed to building a new relationship and to developing a new approach to engaging with, supporting and learning from you. Following the current research, the next steps will be:

- In spring 2017 we will host an event where there will be opportunity to discuss these issues face to face, for networks and relationships to be built and we will also look to provide some learning opportunities to support you to grow your business through a series of talks and workshops.
- In early summer, we will start a programme providing a development opportunity for 20 organisations interested in exploring the possibility of taking on social investment.
- In the medium term, our goal is to create strong local relationships and networks as well as the best possible model of business support that we can provide. To do this we need to understand your needs and to use that knowledge to shape any support we can provide.

We would be extremely grateful if you could take the time to complete the linked survey. It should take you **no more than 10 minutes** to complete.

We hope to see you at our event in spring 2017 and look forward to working with you in the future.

On behalf of the Strengthening Communities Board