

Please see below the one page summary of notes from the January 2024 Social Economy ROUNDTABLE meeting focused on Achieving Net Zero:

Introduction

We have a national Government target to achieve carbon net zero by 2050 and a growing acceptance of the climate emergency which has resulted in the impacts of climate change being a major issue of recent times. A key difficulty for us today is that working towards net zero involves a very broad, cross-cutting agenda and it involves social economy organisations that have a overt environmental focus as well as SE's that contribute to net zero through their broader business activity.

The West Midlands Combined Authority has a 10 year framework for growth with the social economy growing-the-social-economy-in-the-wmca-area-report-1.pdf which describes a range of interventions and programmes of activity which they are supporting. The January topic considering Net Zero and the social economy is timely and the discussion was helpful in understanding the issues and practical needs by coming up with some solutions regarding how the ecosystem can be developed to support the sector to adapt, innovate and create change.

Attending the Roundtable were representatives from Local Authorities, business support, environmental specialists, Place based initiatives, policy and leadership and funders.

Through the discussion it was identified that the conversation needed to consider 3 levels of engagement with Net Zero:

- A. Internal practice within social economy organisations e.g. recycling, transportation policies, use of technology etc
- B. The part each organisation plays in the ecosystem e.g. collaboration to achieve impact
- C. Those social economy organisations which have a net zero purpose and the support they require.

What do we know?

- 83% of social enterprises believe that buying socially and environmentally friendly products is as important or more important than costs. [SEUK]
- 19% of social enterprises have a core mission addressing climate change. [SEUK]
- 65% of social enterprises have a plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. [SEUK]
- One in seven social enterprises delivers environmentally products and services that have a positive social impact. [SEUK]

It's a complex operating environment with organisations engaging with the agenda in different ways depending upon their size, mission and capacity.

Issues and opportunities for the social economy sector coming from the discussion.

- Poor data regionally and nationally.
- Poor connections between organisations, business support and finance.
- Financial insecurity, through short term resourcing and projects, access to grants, finance and research and development funding.
- Competition.
- Scaling up and or consortia working.
- Data, measurement and reporting.
- Procurement – access to opportunities and no common format.
- Capacity for innovation.
- Skills, entrepreneurship and people.
- Technology solutions.
- Time and capacity.
- No clear route map for support.
- Rising costs of energy and adaptations.

But we still need to value the activities that are working well! There is great work in communities and a rich seam of dedicated work within the Co-operative sector especially in energy. There is dedicated activity within the circular economy and there are good local examples e.g. Moseley Community Development Trust.

There are also huge market opportunities coming through for retro-fit, mending cafes, exchanges, place-based activity and adaptation.

Solutions for the social economy ecosystem to support net zero

Collect and analyse data and use this to advocate on behalf of the sector. It would be really helpful to know how much is being delivered by communities and social economy organisations. Data could give knowledge and support to challenge decision making, support developments and improve deep learning. It can be used to inform policy.

Improve connection to political institutions, especially in light of the proposed general election.
Provide information on the role SE's and communities can play in addressing Net Zero commitments.
Support umbrella organisations by giving them the information needed.

Engagement, communication and storytelling. Building a knowledge base of excellent practice within the region. Highlight case studies and evidence-based stories. Making information available of grants

and social finance, business support programmes and place-based initiatives to inform social economy organisations of the opportunities.

Acknowledge that some organisations are not ready for change and that there needs to be a range of interventions depending upon where organisations are on their journey. We need to consider affordability. Organisations can be reactive rather than making planned change. Larger organisations are more likely to be strategic in their approaches, however all organisations need to be supported to be strategic.

Organisations are confused where to go. We heard of a good example in London from Enterprise Nation of an online resource that is a 'wayfinder' with a single front door for business support.

The Roundtable agreed that the 'procurement system' could play an important role in this agenda. This could be through clear procurement guidelines and monitoring but also through training and capacity building social economy organisations. Tier one suppliers could take a responsibility and support understanding on supply chain readiness for Net Zero.

There should be a dedicated work stream on buildings and their procurement decisions.

Sector organisations have a key role in bringing the sector into work on Net Zero. They have the contacts and we should not be leaving people behind. These sector organisations need to be ready to support the agenda.

Navigation of support. There is some sector-based support which operates alongside SME mainstream support for environmental businesses. This navigation needs to be simplified.

There needs to be a programme of education and awareness raising that highlights how you can start small and takes little time.

Training and development for infrastructure support and social economy organisations. Development of per support initiatives, consortia development and dedicated innovation development programmes. A specific programme idea is 'Low carbon and leadership skills' for 3rd sector leaders. This would empower leaders to make their own decisions.

BSSEC has offered to share information on any programmes and activities around Net Zero.

Resources and useful links

- The WMCA Carbon Literacy course: <https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/environment/carbon-literacy-training/#access-the-training>
- https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50294/net_zero_grant_programme/2690/about_the_net_zero_grant_programme
- <https://www.goodfinance.org.uk/resources/social-investment-energy-resilience>
<https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/app/uploads/2022/07/Climate-Guide-2021.pdf>
includes a directory of products and services.

NEXT: Social Economy ROUNDTABLE as follows...

- **ROUNDTABLE 2: How do we make effective use of technology to grow the social economy? | 12th March 2024, online**

An email invite with the Zoom link will be sent to the Roundtable group by Sarah in the next week or so. If you have any questions about this Roundtable event, please ask, we're happy to help.