

their location away from the main population centres means that their full economic potential is untapped, and their ability to share in the region's economic benefits is threatened by poor internet connections and slow broadband speeds.

Enterprise Northern Ireland calls upon the incoming Assembly and Executive to eliminate the digital imbalance across Northern Ireland by ensuring full expansion of high speed broadband. We ask that politicians acknowledge the critical importance of superfast broadband to the enterprise support and small business sectors by extending its ambitions regarding broadband connectivity. We do not believe that the current plan to deliver speeds of 24Mbps to the majority of the country is ambitious enough, and would ask that every LEA is given – as a matter of urgency – fibre access which can then be rolled out to each and every unit on their managed workspace. We would also call for the ultimate delivery of speeds of 100 Mbps.

Enterprise Northern Ireland is already committed to these issues. We call upon all political parties seeking election to the next Assembly and Executive to demonstrate their commitment in party political manifestos and election pledges, and to work with Enterprise Northern Ireland to realise the potential of the microenterprise and small business sectors.



5. Reduce the cost of doing business

High business rates are impacting on the ability of Local Enterprise Agencies to deliver on their objectives of helping businesses start-up and grow. Following the revaluation of non-domestic properties in Northern Ireland, which took effect with the 2014/15 rates bills, many within the LEA network lost tenants who simply could no longer afford to run their businesses from the LEA managed workspace due to substantial increases in their business rates. The proposed shutdown of the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme, combined with fears arising from the recent review of the non-domestic rating system around the charitable and vacant rates exemptions enjoyed by LEAs, have Enterprise Northern Ireland and the LEA network concerned around the high cost of doing business. High costs are known to dampen entrepreneurial spirit. Enterprise Northern Ireland is calling upon policymakers and politicians to minimise costs associated with doing business.

The Local Enterprise Agency Network - a Key Regional Asset

The Local Enterprise Agencies represented by Enterprise Northern Ireland are a major regional asset, a national presence, an integral part of the region's successful social economy and a key driver of economic development. They are unique amongst other players in the economic development field in Northern Ireland as they:

- Provide a one-stop shop for aspirant or existing entrepreneurs, offering access to quality workspace on flexible terms, a suite of business interventions and support programmes and access to the Enterprise Northern Ireland loan fund products;
- Are locally-based, not for profit companies, many of which are registered charities, and are community partnerships, governed by voluntary Boards;
- Have national reach – located in every constituency; operating in both urban and rural areas and across divided communities; embedded within local communities and offering employment opportunities for local people;
- Make a substantial contribution in terms of social capital investments in their local area – by donating money, time and pro-bono services to local charities, schools, colleges, community groups and good causes.

Despite having an established portfolio of business premises, purpose-built to foster business start-up and growth, and decades of experience and expertise in the economic development arena, Enterprise Northern Ireland and the LEA network are not being utilised to their full potential. We have a unique offering and are ideally placed to work with the Northern Ireland Assembly and Councils to help deliver a rebalanced economy through private sector growth. We have a strong and demonstrable track record in supporting those who set up in business, grow existing businesses, or try again after an earlier failure. We have the skills, knowledge and experience to develop and deliver generalist and bespoke start-up programmes, as well as more intensive support for businesses with high growth potential.

We ask that politicians show cross-departmental support for Enterprise Northern Ireland and the LEA network, and would welcome the opportunity to work alongside Ministers, Assembly Members and policymakers to set the small business policy agenda for the future. We see particular opportunities for working collaboratively around ensuring that enterprise is at heart of both the new Department for the Economy and the next Programme for Government, the refocus of the Economic Strategy and the development of a Business Incubation Plan.



Aghanloo Industrial Estate Aghanloo Road
Limavady BT49 0HE

028 7776 3555 pa@enterpriseni.com
www.enterpriseni.com



Working together
to make local
enterprise happen

Enterprise Manifesto

Enterprise Northern Ireland is the leading agency for the promotion, development and delivery of enterprise support interventions in Northern Ireland. As the representative organisation for the region's Local Enterprise Agencies, Enterprise Northern Ireland is at the forefront of a dynamic network which provides aspirant entrepreneurs and existing businesses with access to the premises, programmes, finance and support they need to start and grow their business.

Enterprise Manifesto

Enterprise Northern Ireland has produced this Enterprise Manifesto to assist policymakers of all political parties as they draw up their respective election manifestos. This cross-party document outlines the key measures political parties should implement to assist enterprise support providers deliver economic growth, sustainable employment and a more entrepreneurial society, thus:

- rebalancing the economy by increasing the number of sustainable micro and small businesses;
- creating sustainable employment;
- helping people starting new businesses to succeed, reducing the number of business failures and cessations;
- ensuring enterprise is appreciated as a vital part of life in this region;
- reducing bureaucracy and red tape, and lowering the cost of doing business.

In a rapidly changing business environment, this Enterprise Manifesto seeks to encourage all political parties heading into the election period to consider within their own party manifestos the contribution and impact of the enterprise support sector and the businesses they assist through start-up and growth.

Enterprise Northern Ireland is committed to these policy proposals and looks forward to working together, with our political representatives, to make local enterprise happen.

Key asks:

1. Put 'enterprise' at the heart of the Department for the Economy;
2. Focus on microenterprises and SMEs;
3. Improve the entrepreneurial culture;
4. Better broadband provision;
5. Reduce the cost of doing business.

1. Put 'enterprise' at the heart of the Department for the Economy

Enterprise Northern Ireland is concerned that 'enterprise' has slipped down the Executive's agenda, despite being a prerequisite for delivering economic development and growth. For instance:

- The Accelerating Entrepreneurship Strategy, designed to increase levels of entrepreneurial activity in Northern Ireland, was released in 2004. The conditions which existed back then, which led to the development of the Strategy, still exist. More than a decade on, Northern Ireland still has low levels of entrepreneurial activity. Enterprise Northern Ireland is calling for the Accelerating Entrepreneurship Strategy to be revisited and reworked in order to stimulate economic growth. This is particularly important given the publication, in 2014, of the National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship in Ireland. If businesses in this region are to be able to compete effectively with their

Southern counterparts, and if Northern Ireland itself is to be effective in engaging in intense competition for FDI projects, it is crucial that the entrepreneurial culture of our region is improved. Enterprise Northern Ireland is committed to improving the entrepreneurial culture of the region but we require commitment from politicians to help transform the region's entrepreneurial fortunes;

- Entrepreneurship education has the potential to address levels of youth unemployment, long-term unemployment and economic inactivity by promoting enterprise as a valuable career in its own right. It also encourages graduates to seek employment opportunities in small, entrepreneurial companies, boosting the performance and fortunes of the microenterprise and SME sectors. Enterprise Northern Ireland is calling for the Entrepreneurship and Education Action Plan, which initially accompanied the Accelerating Entrepreneurship Strategy, to also be revisited. We ask that action is taken to ensure that entrepreneurship education is embedded throughout all levels of the education system, and that students are given access to entrepreneurial work placements. This will help encourage young people to become more entrepreneurial, a need acknowledged in DETI's 2014 Innovation Strategy.
- Entrepreneurship has not been an explicit priority within the Programme for Government since 2002-2005. Enterprise Northern Ireland is calling for this to be remedied,

with entrepreneurship placed firmly at the heart of policymaking and the next Programme for Government, thus ensuring that political support for entrepreneurship is demonstrated at the highest level. This will give the region the best possible chance at navigating challenging economic conditions through a growing private sector and sustainable job creation.

The new Department for the Economy presents political representatives with the opportunity to prioritise enterprise in order to help tackle historically low levels of entrepreneurial activity, and to ensure dynamic private sector growth by creating the necessary conditions to enable businesses to start and grow.

2. Focus on microenterprises and SMEs

In the past, economic development policies have viewed cutting corporation tax and attracting FDI to our shores as 'silver bullets' to solve our economic problems. However, it is an undisputable fact that Northern Ireland is a small business economy – the SME sector accounts for 99% of all businesses in Northern Ireland and approximately 75% of all employment and turnover in the private sector. It is this sector that will drive forward our economic recovery.

Enterprise Northern Ireland is calling upon political representatives to focus on growing the private sector by prioritising sustainable job creation through the SME sector – the backbone of the

economy – rather than focusing attention on attracting FDI. Whilst FDI undoubtedly has its place, indigenous businesses which create a substantial number of local jobs deserve equal attention from our political parties who have perhaps been too focused on securing preferential corporation tax rates for businesses that may, or may not, even come to Northern Ireland.

Enterprise Northern Ireland has the experience, expertise and track record to work with government and Councils to make the region's business environment conducive to job creation and increased levels of entrepreneurial activity through a focus on the indigenous microenterprise and SME sector.

3. Improve the entrepreneurial culture

GEM reports have shown that compared to other UK regions, Northern Ireland has consistently had one of the lowest levels of early stage entrepreneurial activity. The region has been shown to have an 'entrepreneurial deficit' compared to other parts of the UK, with evidence of a strong cultural resistance to entrepreneurship. For instance, risk taking is not encouraged, role models are not immediately apparent and lack of positive cultural support towards entrepreneurship is one of the main obstacles preventing a greater level of entrepreneurial activity in Northern Ireland. One way of improving the culture of a region is to ensure its people – specifically its graduates – have entrepreneurial skills. To this end, Enterprise Northern Ireland is calling upon politicians and policymakers to join with us in:

- promoting entrepreneurship and small business ownership as a career in its own right;
- embedding enterprise education throughout the curriculum;
- forming close tie relationships between educators, enterprise support providers and the small business community

– providing school leavers and graduates with access to entrepreneurial work experience placements and the confidence, skills and abilities that employers and small business owners need if the availability of skilled staff – a barrier known to impact on business growth and success – is to be tackled.

Enterprise Northern Ireland has established relationships with schools, colleges and universities and is ideally placed to help policymakers and politicians deliver substantial returns on investment in enterprise education and training with children and young people.

4. Better broadband provision

The internet has fundamentally changed how businesses work and compete. Access to reliable and high speed broadband is not a luxury but a necessity, and is integral to how many small businesses operate. Reliable connections and access to high speed broadband is a key area that would enable the enterprise support sector help grow microenterprises and SMEs, thus benefitting the future economy of Northern Ireland.

Enterprise Northern Ireland and our members were disappointed by the sudden shutdown of the SuperConnected Cities Broadband Voucher Scheme. We acknowledge that DETI's Superfast programme, due to be completed by the end of 2017, is a good start in bringing broadband speeds of 24Mbps to areas that are currently unable to receive superfast broadband, and appreciate DARD is currently funding broadband connections to rural businesses. This scheme, however, is not open to LEAs in rural areas. These LEAs are doubly disadvantaged due to their geographic location. Despite providing employment opportunities for the local community and supporting business start-up and growth,

