

Plymouth Social Enterprise Network

Social Enterprise in Plymouth

Plymouth is a medium sized city (pop ~ 250k) in the South West of England which has a thriving combination of social enterprise activity and infrastructure. It is the UK home of the Erasmus+ ESSE (Increasing students' employment skills & economic growth through social enterprise) Strategic Partnership project led by City College, Plymouth. Other partners in the project are Plymouth Social Enterprise Network (PSEN) and Plymouth University.

This document sets out some of the key features of the social enterprise infrastructure in Plymouth and the development of the social enterprise network.

Plymouth: Social Enterprise City

Plymouth became the UK's first [Social Enterprise City](#) in September 2013. Factors which contributed to this recognition included

- An active member-led [social enterprise network](#) (PSEN)
- Strong relationships between Plymouth City Council and the sector
- Major public service providers, such as [Plymouth Community Homes](#) and [Plymouth Community Healthcare](#) are social enterprises
- [Plymouth University](#) is a social enterprise, the first University to be awarded the [Social Enterprise Mark](#) and the home of the [University Enterprise Network for Social Enterprise](#)
- Community Economic Development Trusts such as [Millfields Trust](#) and [Wolseley Trust](#) have contributed significantly to community development and economic regeneration over an extended period
- Newer social enterprises such as Real Ideas Organisation have demonstrated the impact of a social enterprise approach to regeneration through the restoration of key historic city buildings
- The social enterprise concept was attractive and inclusive enough to generate momentum and buy-in across the city

In addition to this, Plymouth is the first UK city to have a city-wide Social Enterprise Investment Fund which has seen over £1M of public money invested in social enterprises over the last two years. Three quarters of this is in the form of repayable loans. PSEN publishes a [directory of social enterprise](#) and commissioned the UK's first [social enterprise app](#). Currently, Plymouth is an active member of the growing network of social enterprise places, home to the pilot of the national [Power to Change](#) community enterprise programme, and is working with the [Sustainable Earth Institute](#) at Plymouth University to deliver a social enterprise research manifesto.

We estimate that there are around 150 social enterprises in Plymouth, employing 7000 people, and with a turnover of £500M. Some are very large, but many of these are small social enterprises. The median turnover is £100,000 per year.

PSEN today

Plymouth Social Enterprise Network (PSEN) is the focal point for social enterprise activity in Plymouth. It is a member-led network with around 80 members. Members are either Full members (Plymouth-based social enterprises) or Associate members (everyone else). Only Full members have voting rights.

PSEN's vision is of a city where social purpose is integral to business activity and profits are reinvested for social and environmental good. A key question for the Network relates to the creation and maintenance of the social and economic "ecosystem" in which this type of enterprise can flourish.

PSEN organises an annual Festival of Social Enterprise, bi-monthly networking events and publishes a weekly newsletter. Other events and activities happen in response to current activities and opportunities. The Network has a website and app and is active on social media, including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. PSEN is a contributor to the national and international social enterprise debate. We regularly attend events and speak at conferences.

Management of the Network is via an elected and unpaid Executive Committee which meets at least bi-monthly. Some management tasks and project delivery are commissioned from and delivered by network members, local businesses or self-employed individuals. This is paid for by a combination of membership fees, small grants, and earned income. Taking a light touch and an enabling approach has allowed the Network to keep management costs to a minimum and maintain a flat management structure, thus avoiding some of the challenges often faced by infrastructure organisations.

History of PSEN

- 2010 An initial research project and consultation led to a series of projects to develop third sector networks and anchor organisations. The brief to set up PSEN was one of these and a consultant was employed over a period of one year. From the beginning, the consultant input was light-touch and delivered with aim of creating an independent network.
- 2011 PSEN formally constituted, with eleven members and the following aims:
- The Plymouth Social Enterprise Network aims to be a focal point for the social enterprise sector in the city and its travel to work area. The network is a vibrant marketplace for exchanging information, ideas and expertise. It promotes enterprise, learning, collaboration and commercial opportunities for social businesses in Plymouth. It represents the interests of social enterprises and gives them the chance to have a say in the development of their sector.*
- 2011 First Social Enterprise Trade Fair held by the network at Plymouth University.
- 2012 RSA event held to explore the idea of a social enterprise city.
- 2012 The Trade Fair becomes a week-long Festival of Social Enterprise. The term Social Enterprise City is coined. The first directory of social enterprise is published. Membership exceeds 30.
- 2013 PSEN introduces membership fees. Membership of over 100 falls and settles at around 70.
- 2013 Plymouth gains Social Enterprise City status.
- 2014 PSEN CIC formed.

Keys to success

Factors that we believe have contributed to the success of the Network so far include

- Committed Executive team, with new members elected at each AGM alongside long-serving members
- Excellent relationships with stakeholders such as PCC, Plymouth University, and the Local Enterprise Partnership
- Member involvement with regular member surveys, network development days and lively AGMs
- Lean and enterprising approach to managing the network with new ideas welcomed. Members and Executive team supported to pursue their interests and passions in the interests of the Network
- Profile & persistence – keeping on reminding influential stakeholders of the value and contribution of social enterprise
- Holding Festivals of Social Enterprise and proclaiming Plymouth a Social Enterprise City early on
- Regular events & newsletters creating a reliable presence