



Your South of Scotland

A Summary Of Our 2021/22
Engagement Tour

OCTOBER 2022



Contents

Foreword	3
Background	4
Our Action Plan	5
What We Set Out To Achieve	6
How We Engaged	7
How We Promoted What We Were Doing	9
'We Said, We Did' – Our Engagement Framework	10
Who We Heard From	15
What We Heard - Headlines	16
What We Heard - In More Detail	17
What We Intend To Do	21
What Might We Do Differently	22
What Next	23

Foreword

Listening and acting on what we hear is at the heart of what we – as South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) – have been set up to do. We are IN the South, FOR the South and BY the South. We were delighted to get out and about across our great region, as part of our 2021/22 ‘Your South of Scotland’ Engagement Tour, to meet with, talk and listen to people face to face once more. We appreciate and value the chance to have open conversations.

Our objective was simple – to hear from as many people across our region as possible about what matters most to them in terms of the economic opportunities and challenges facing the South of Scotland, with a view to helping us shape – SOSE’s – future priorities.

We recognise that the ongoing presence of COVID-19 presented some challenges in terms of how we ran our events, and that not all in our region had the confidence to venture out again which for many would have been the first time. This is why we ran a number of online events too, as well as making sure there were other ways to hear the voices of those who live, work and operate across the South beyond the events themselves.

We have always been clear that we are here to listen to everyone and ‘everyone’ means exactly that. Being inclusive is one of our core values and we are proud of the work we have undertaken, in partnership with others, to reach and enable seldom heard voices to speak up.

We want to thank all who took the time to come and meet with us at one of our events or who had their say in other ways. Time is the most precious thing we have so we were hugely encouraged by the numbers that turned up at each event and/or spoke out.

We hope that those who engaged with us enjoyed learning a little more about where SOSE has got to, what we are here to do and how we can help and support the region moving forward.

We found the rich feedback and open discussions our events gave rise to extremely insightful. It was valuable for us to hear ideas and reflections on our efforts to date and whilst encouraging to hear about the positive difference we have already made, it was equally valuable to hear where we haven’t got things quite right and how we can fix that.

This document is about sharing what we have heard and crucially what we are doing in response to that. What we have heard will help us to shape our future priorities which we will set out in our first ever Action Plan in early 2023.

We are always willing and ready to listen and ask you to not shy from reaching out to us if you have something – good or bad – to say. We are your Economic and Community Enterprise Agency and here to deliver what you need.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Russel Griggs'.

Professor Russel Griggs OBE
Chair, South of Scotland Enterprise



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane Morrison-Ross'.

Jane Morrison-Ross
Chief Executive, South of Scotland Enterprise

Background

As South of Scotland Enterprise, SOSE for short, we have been set up to bring a fresh approach to economic and community development in the South of Scotland. We were established through the South of Scotland Enterprise Act 2019, assuming our powers and launching on 1 April 2020.

Launching in the midst of a global health pandemic necessitated that our early focus was on supporting those businesses and communities in the South of Scotland most in need to adjust to the prevailing impacts of COVID-19, as well as those associated with adjusting to life outside of the European Union. Being here for the long term however, it is important to look to the future too – which we have been doing – recognising the significant contribution we can make to the vision for a Greener, Fairer and Flourishing South of Scotland by 2031 and the closely aligned national ambition for a Fairer, Wealthier and Greener Scotland.

Our Act requires us to make a plan of the things we intend to do to achieve our aims – an ‘Action Plan’. Looking up to five years ahead, our Action Plan will be critically important, setting out our strategic direction and the key priorities for us as an organisation.

Before publishing our Action Plan, our Act rightly requires that we consult with those living, working and operating across the South of Scotland. This is important given that listening and acting on what we hear goes to the heart of what we have been set up to do. This is because we want to focus our efforts and resources on addressing those issues that matter most to those in the South of Scotland.

To help inform what will be our first Action Plan, we undertook a significant effort to meet and hear from people across the South of Scotland during the latter part of 2021 and early part of 2022. These efforts were guided by our published engagement framework – which sets out key principles and related pledges we have committed to follow when inviting you to ‘have your say’. These principles seek to ensure that we engage consistently and effectively with the right people at the right times in a manner which follows best practice and is true to our core values.

We are committed to always reporting back what we have heard – and this is the primary purpose of this report. To ensure that as an organisation we are accountable to all of those that we serve, it centres around making clear how we engaged; who we heard from; what we heard; and what we plan to do in response to what we have heard. In striving to always improve, it also reflects on what we might do differently next time.

Our aims

Our **AIMS**, as set out in legislation, are to further the sustainable economic and social development of the South of Scotland, and to improve the amenity and environment of the South of Scotland.

Our vision

Our **VISION** is to drive inclusive growth, increase competitiveness and tackle inequality within the region.

Our mission

Our **MISSION** is to work together with people across the South of Scotland to grow its economy in a just and sustainable manner. We will provide investment, expertise and mentoring to people and businesses and by doing so, we will inspire the region to think bigger and unlock the great potential of the South.

Our values

Our **VALUES** are at the heart of all we do. We will be:
Inclusive; Responsible;
Bold; and Striving.

*“We are...
FOR the South,
BY the South and
IN the South.”*

Our Action Plan

Our Act requires us to publish an Action Plan setting out in detail how we intend to achieve our twin aims of “furthering the sustainable economic and social development of the South of Scotland” and “improving the amenity and environment of the South of Scotland”. Looking up to five years ahead, our Action Plan will be of critical importance:

- Telling people who we are and what we are here to do;
- Communicating our vision and long-term priorities – the difference we intend to make;
- Providing a framework to guide our short-term focus and investment decisions;
- Demonstrating how what we intend to do delivers both for the South of Scotland and Scotland as a whole;
- Setting out our approach to making it happen, including key partners we will look to work with; and
- Making clear how we will measure our impacts and judge our performance – enabling those who we are here to serve hold us to account.

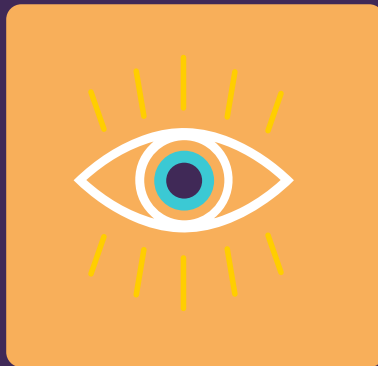
Whilst what we have heard from our engagement efforts will help shape our Action Plan, it will also be influenced by:



Work to develop our Action Plan is underway and whilst we had hoped to publish this Autumn, are now aiming to do so early in the New Year (2023). This follows a steer from Scottish Government to ensure we align our Plan with their emerging work on delivering the National Strategy for Economic Transformation as an important key influence.

What We Set Out To Achieve

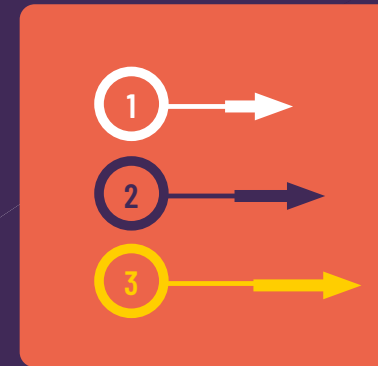
We set out to achieve three equally important objectives through our engagement efforts:



To **raise awareness** of what we as SOSE are here to do and how we can help - showcasing some of the things we have been doing to make a difference to businesses, social enterprises, community and other organisations across the South.



To **gather feedback** about our focus and performance to date understanding what we have done well and where we could improve.



To further explore - in looking to the future - what matters most to those who live, work and operate across the South of Scotland to **help shape our future priorities and first Action Plan.**

At the outset we were alive to the need to regard the outputs of, and build on the learning from, recent engagement efforts asking similar questions, including the:

- Ongoing [South of Scotland Business Panel surveys](#), the most recent of which was published in October 2022 having attracted 595 responses;
- Extensive engagement associated with the development of the first ever [South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy](#), which was launched in 2021, through which over 1,400 - including close to 400 young people - had their say; and
- The large amount of consultation work done through our predecessor - South of Scotland Economic Partnership - in the lead up to the establishment of SOSE, which similarly saw events held within a large number of the regions communities.



How We Engaged



Our engagement efforts were spearheaded by our **'Your South of Scotland' Engagement Tour**.

With support from the Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP), we held 25 events across 23 towns and villages across the South of Scotland, between November 2021 and March 2022.

Two of these events were online. These events were free to attend and open to all. Each followed a similar format, with some scene setting on who SOSE are, our purpose and achievements to date (tailored to the locality as far as possible) followed by open discussion.



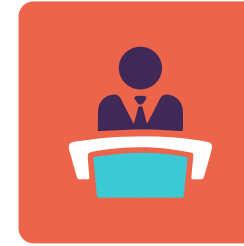
Building on our value of being inclusive and recognising the challenge of reaching and engaging **seldom heard voices**, we worked with Sleeping Giants Community Development CIC to design and deliver a significant outreach engagement with businesses, community groups and residents across the South who are (or who represent):

- Young people;
- Women;
- Other protected characteristic groups; and
- Those who experience financial exclusion and those who are economically inactive.

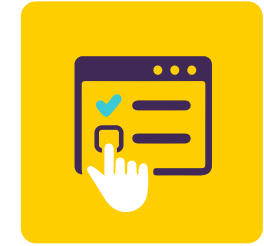
Much of this engagement took the form of discussions via targeted focus and/or self-led discussion groups, working with existing groups and networks where possible, in early 2022.



We held three **business breakfast events** - two in person and one online - targeting businesses and social enterprises based in and operating across the South of Scotland. The format of these followed closely that of our Engagement Tour events.



We met with and invited views from the **South of Scotland's MSPs** (Members of Scottish Parliament) and held separate sessions for **Councillors** in Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders.



We made a short **online survey** available, primarily to complement our work on reaching and hearing from seldom heard voices but which was open to all. Printed copies were also made available.



Engagement Tour

PHASE ONE

NOVEMBER 2021

- 1 Mon 8 DUMFRIES
- 2 Tue 9 SANQUHAR
- 3 Mon 15 HAWICK
- 4 Tue 16 NEWCASTLETON
- 5 Thu 18 KIRKCUDBRIGHT
- 6 Wed 24 STRANRAER
- 7 Thu 25 BALMACLELLAN
- 8 Mon 29 EYEMOUTH
- 9 Tue 30 WEST LINTON

DECEMBER 2021

- 10 Wed 1 JEDBURGH
- 11 Mon 6 COLDSTREAM
- 12 Wed 8 VIRTUAL

PHASE TWO

FEBRUARY 2022

- 1 Tue 1 LANGHOLM
- 2 Wed 2 ANNAN
- 3 Tue 8 KELSO
- 4 Wed 9 DUNS
- 5 Thu 10 SELKIRK
- 6 Tue 22 MOFFAT
- 7 Wed 23 WHITHORN
- 8 Mon 28 NEW GALLOWAY

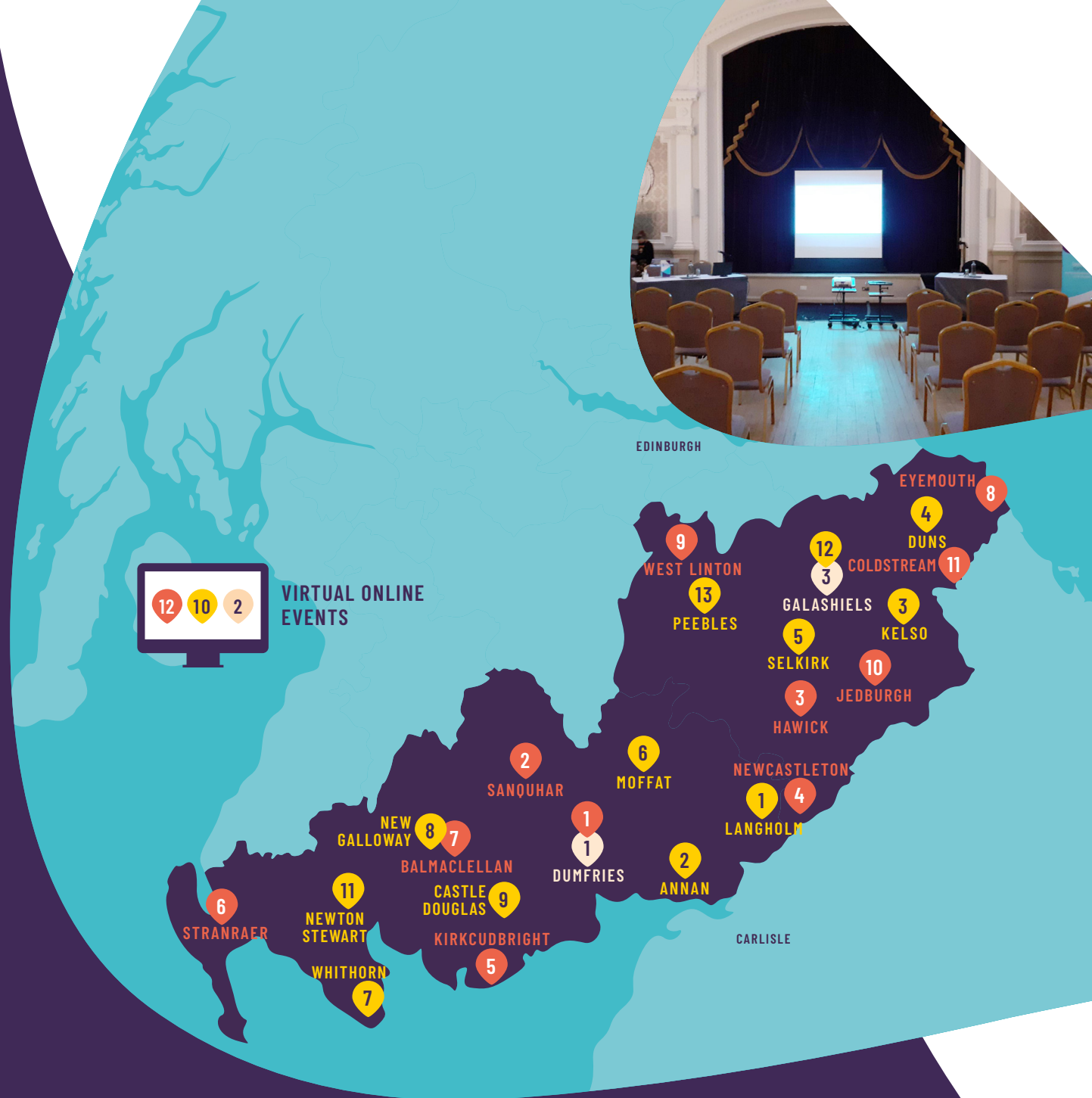
MARCH 2022

- 9 Tue 1 CASTLE DOUGLAS
- 10 Mon 7 VIRTUAL
- 11 Wed 9 NEWTON STEWART
- 12 Mon 14 GALASHIELS
- 13 Tue 15 PEEBLES

BUSINESS BREAKFASTS

MARCH 2022

- 1 Mon 21 DUMFRIES
- 2 Fri 25 VIRTUAL
- 3 Mon 28 GALASHIELS



How We Promoted What We Were Doing



We created dedicated webpages to make clear what we were doing and why. We also established an Eventbrite webpage through which people could sign up to our Engagement Tour events.

Our dedicated webpage had over **2,000 visits** with our Eventbrite content having **5,300 views**.



We placed 12 adverts across a number of South of Scotland newspaper titles reaching out to a collective estimated **readership of 60,000**.

We also issued press releases which generated **23 articles** across local press.



We ran four adverts per week for approximately one month for each phase of our Engagement Tour, including five adverts per week for two weeks for our business breakfasts.

Using Radio Borders and WestSound Radio, we had a potential reach of **82,000 people**.



We used our presence across Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to highlight and share what we were doing, generating just over **2,300 engagements** from **29 posts**.

We generated an additional **731 engagements**, via targeted advertising through Facebook, with key partners also acting to boost our reach through these channels.



Working with Sleeping Giants, and featuring people from across different backgrounds within the South of Scotland, we created and published promotional videos, generating close to **300 views** including **81 on a video** tailored for those who were deaf or hard of hearing.



We supported a wide breadth of partner organisations to promote our engagement opportunities through their established **networks**, including the region's two Councils, Community Planning Partnerships, Chambers of Commerce, other representative bodies and SUP and Sleeping Giants who we worked with.

We also used our own networks including our business and community advisors.



We supported business and community venues we were using to host our Engagement Tour events, to raise local awareness, through posters and making other **promotional material** available.

We asked those who attended one of our events how they found out about it...



Email
32%



Social media
24%



Word of mouth
21%

Other **23%**

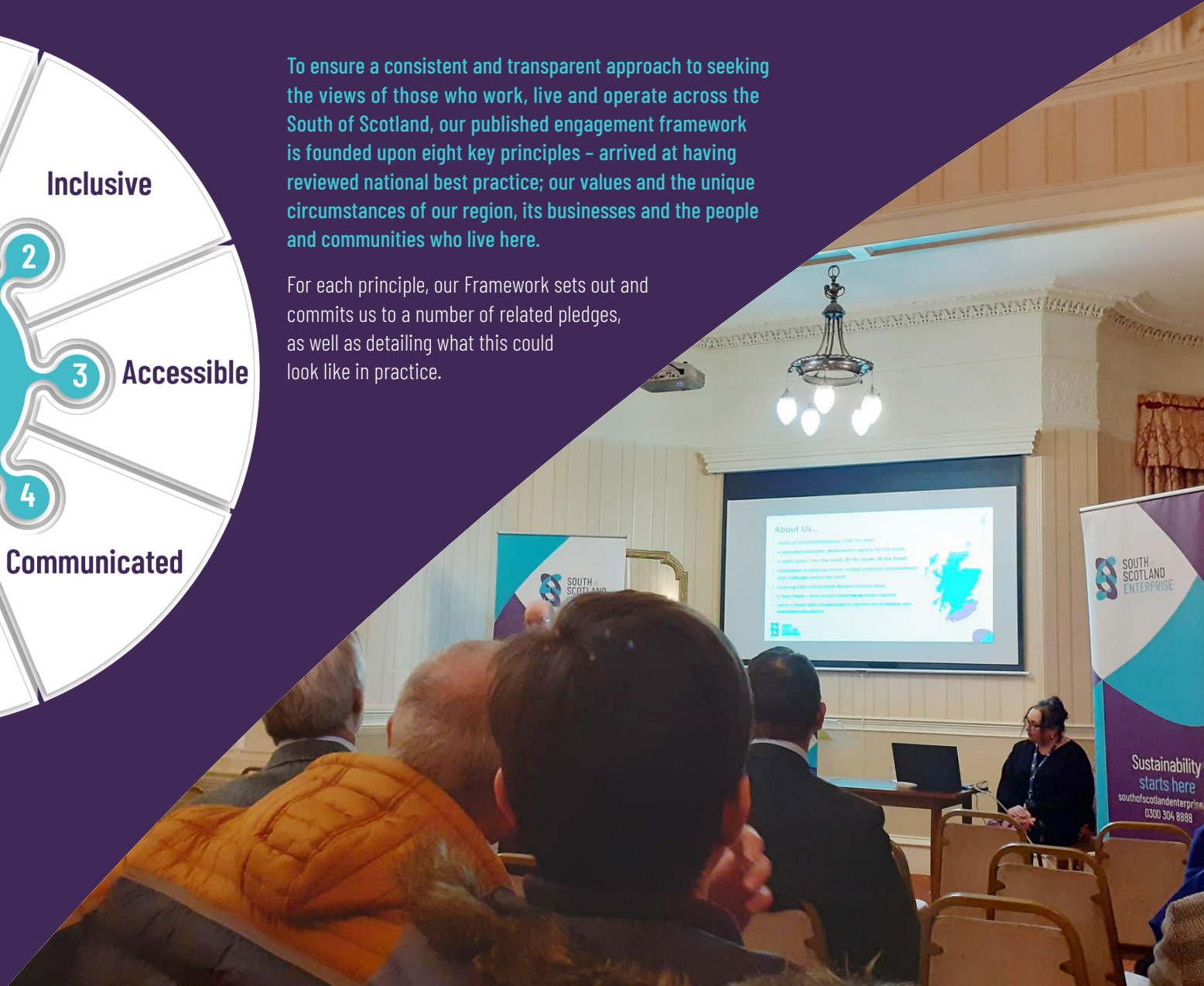


'We Said, We Did' – Our Engagement Framework



To ensure a consistent and transparent approach to seeking the views of those who work, live and operate across the South of Scotland, our published engagement framework is founded upon eight key principles – arrived at having reviewed national best practice; our values and the unique circumstances of our region, its businesses and the people and communities who live here.

For each principle, our Framework sets out and commits us to a number of related pledges, as well as detailing what this could look like in practice.



Key Principle

Purposeful

Related pledges – we will...

- Clearly explain the purpose and our objectives of seeking views and opinions so that individuals, communities and businesses can engage with us with confidence
- Be clear at the outset about what can and in some cases cannot be influenced
- Invite you to have your say at a stage when it can genuinely make a difference

Inclusive

- Be proactive in identifying and involving the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of our engagement
- Be proactive in maximising our reach and ultimately participation, working hard to empower previously unheard voices to speak up
- Listen to all views and be open-minded

What we did on this occasion...

- Clearly promoted the purpose of our engagement so that people could make an informed decision on whether to get involved – including having published a purpose of engagement statement on our website – outlining why and how we would be seeking your views.
- Sought your views at an early stage of the Action Plan's development, ahead of drafting it.
- We used a wide variety of different communication methods, looking to reach out into all communities.
- Worked with [Sleeping Giants](#) – a locally based social enterprise – to co-develop and deliver a strategy for reaching and engaging seldom heard voices.
- We enlisted assistance where necessary (e.g., sign language interpretation when we spoke to people who were deaf or hard of hearing)
- Designed our survey in an 'easy read' style to ensure it was accessible for all.

Key Principle

Accessible

Related pledges – we will...

- Set realistic timeframes to allow stakeholders enough time to provide a considered response to any formal engagement
- Design our engagements to be as easy as possible for the community in its widest sense to participate, being flexible in the timing of events so that as wide an audience as possible can be reached
- As far as it is cost effective and proportionate to do so, be proactive in taking engagement to communities and not expecting them to come to us
- Make our key engagement material as accessible as possible, in plain language and avoiding jargon
- Keep our learning on barriers to engagement under review, and be creative in identifying solutions to overcome these

Communicated

- Ensure that our communications are clear, simple and consistent
- Clearly communicate in advance and throughout consultation opportunities, so people know how to get involved
- Make clear how you can contact us to find out further information on any given consultation
- Encourage greater use of digital communication and social media (and support communities to embrace technology) as a real-time and cost-effective means of contacting large numbers of people
- Communicate what has happened as a result of what we have heard

What we did on this occasion...

- Communicated a range of dates and opportunities to the public with multiple weeks' notice.
 - We engaged across a five-month period, in two distinct phases, affording people a generous period in which to share their views.
 - Our Engagement Tour enabled local communities across the breadth of our region to engage with us face to face in their locality i.e. us going to them.
 - Online meetings helped offer an alternative way of engaging with us for those unable to travel or not confident meeting in person given the prevailing impacts of COVID-19.
 - We made pens and paper available to those attending events and promoted an email address, enabling those not comfortable raising issues in person to do so anonymously.
 - Feedback forms for each event were analysed – allowing us to consider the need to adapt our approach across Phase 2 of our engagement.
-
- Promoted our engagement opportunities through a wide variety of communications channels, giving plenty of advanced notice.
 - Designed and used simple graphics – including a map of the region showing where we would be and when.
 - Used consistent key messaging and branding across all of our promotion efforts.
 - Made contact details available on our Engagement Statement, as well as at all of our events **and across all of our promotions**, for people to find out more.

Key Principle

Tailored

Related pledges – we will...

- Use a variety of methods that are appropriate for the purpose of the engagement, tailoring these to the needs of the audience to help ensure a wide range of voices are heard
- Seek to employ creative methods of consultation that make involvement easier, faster and where possible fun and interesting to help maximise participation
- Allocate sufficient resources to support an effective engagement process proportionate to its purpose

Collaborative

- Work closely with our partners to help extend our reach and to ensure a cost and resource effective approach to engaging you
- Along with our partners, seek to coordinate the timing of engagements, taking opportunities where appropriate to run them side by side. This will help increase awareness and should avoid confusion and engagement fatigue
- Take opportunities to support participants to develop their skills and confidence

What we did on this occasion...

- Employed a variety of methods to enable people to have their say, either in person, remotely, in real time or in their own time.
 - For our tour events, we tailored our highlights of what we had been doing to the specific locality, helping to make our content real and relevant.
 - Worked with [Sleeping Giants](#) – a locally based social enterprise – to co-develop and deliver a strategy for reaching and engaging seldom heard voices.
-
- Utilised key partners to help spread the word through their networks on our behalf.
 - Attended other's meetings where relevant to engage readymade audiences, developing new relationships as we did so.
 - Helped distribute, at our tour events, consultation materials on behalf of NHS D&G to help them further their reach.

Key Principle

Two-way

Related pledges – we will...

- Publish meaningful feedback which is a true representation of the full range of views expressed in response to the consultation
- Make clear and publish the decisions and actions taken to progress work, making clear how consultation has informed these
- Only gather any personal information from you when absolutely essential and handle this data sensitively at all times

Assessed

- Assess the success of our engagement in terms of its reach, participation levels and importantly the quality of outputs
- Review our approach and processes and continue to examine ways of making them more effective for future engagements, share our learning with partners, and similarly look to learn from theirs

What we did on this occasion...

- Primary objective of publishing this report is to share what we heard and to make clear how we will use this to inform our emerging Action Plan.
- Published interim findings in January 2021 – at the conclusion of Phase 1 of our Engagement Tour.
- Avoided collecting personal information and made sure that notwithstanding this, our efforts were in keeping with our [published privacy notice](#) – which details how we process personal data where it is obtained and how we apply data protection principles.
- Captured and through this report have shared, our reach as well as the number of people who engaged with us – strengthening our ability to make informed assessments about how effective our efforts have been.
- Reflected and through this report shared what we would do differently in future engagements – drawing on feedback obtained from those who engaged with us as well as those who helped us deliver our engagement efforts.
- We appointed and worked with external partners to draw on their experience of organising and delivering inclusive engagement within the South of Scotland.

Who We Heard From

Close to

750 people  in total across **all our activities**

416 people across our **25** engagement tour events

54 people through our dedicated **business breakfasts** 

73 respondents to our **questionnaire** 

109 people through our **inclusive outreach engagement** work with **Sleeping Giants** 



Our Engagement Tour events were attended by a good **mix of interests...**

31% representing a **business**

23% representing a **community group**

17% representing a **charity**

29% representing **other interests** 


including:
 general public **14%**
 social enterprises **9%**
 and public bodies **6%**

In terms of our **inclusive outreach engagement**, we heard from...

39 young people who are **autistic** and/or have **additional support needs**

11 people who are **LGBTQI+** | **5** people from an **ethnic minority**

20 women in **business** | **6** people with a **chronic long-term condition**

5 people who are **deaf** and/or **hard of hearing** 

16 **armed forces veterans** and their **family members**

7 people who are **financially excluded** or **economically inactive**

As a percentage of the 258 attendees who completed a short evaluation survey.

What We Heard - Headlines



Enabling **infrastructure** is constraining the economy – lack of housing; poor connectivity (transport & digital); and lack of small business premises in remote rural areas.



More needs to be done to **retain our young people** and **attract others** to **learn, work** and **live here**.



We need to **establish equality champions**; be proactive in finding out the **needs of different groups**; and co-design our service offer to be **much more inclusive**.



We need to **work collaboratively with partners** and communities and avoid 'silo activity'.



Joined up and coordinated **development plans** are needed for **localities** – important to support localities to **define their priorities** and arrive at a **unified vision**.



SOSE need to provide **bold leadership** against a backdrop of unprecedented change.



SOSE should be at the **forefront of acting to realise the big economic opportunities** facing the South.



SOSE can and should help to **connect communities** and **interests**.

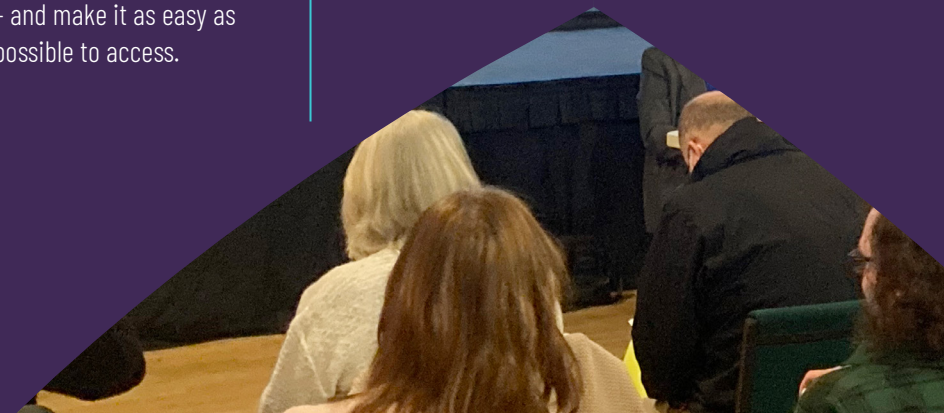


We need to help simplify, better promote and more effectively **signpost support** – and make it as easy as possible to access.



Ongoing **engagement** critical to **future success**.

General positivity about establishment of SOSE and the work we have been doing – although a need to raise our profile.



What We Heard - In More Detail



ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE

- Lack of housing consistently cited as a key barrier to living and working in the region
 - Demand for second homes and holiday lets is making it unaffordable for local people to live close to where they work in some parts of the region
 - Widely held view there is a need for more homes of all types - affordable and to buy - across most parts of the region
 - We heard about examples where the lack of housing had led some employers to abandon expansion plans and/or relocate out of the South
 - Improving the quality, energy efficiency of and increasing housing supply were all seen as significant economic opportunities for the region, as is the potential to manufacture modular housing in the centre of the UK
- Transport remains a key barrier to accessing employment and training for many - in terms of availability, access and costs
 - Some argued little progress has been made in overcoming the challenges faced, but many recognised the challenges posed by a rural geography
 - Relying on public transport adds costs and extra hours onto already long days for some
 - Improving transport links is seen as key to encouraging more people to visit and/or relocate to the region
 - The perception of safety whilst using public transport was identified as a barrier for some, including those who identify as LGBTQI
- Electricity infrastructure is a key constraint across the region, frustrating growth and ambitions
- Mobile and broadband speeds and reliability are still a constraint for some of the regions communities and are hampering growth
- There is a lack of suitable, available and affordable industrial units across many of our towns and villages, particularly in more remote rural settlements



OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

- We must find ways to help retain our young people and attract others to the region - our future success as a region depends on this
- More needs to be done to encourage greater apprenticeships and career pathways within the region
- We need to ensure there are more opportunities for young people in the region, and they are supported in building capacity and ambition
- We must afford young people a voice and the opportunity to help shape the future economy of their region
- We heard that lacking the experience needed to get a job was a particular barrier faced by autistic young people and young people with additional support needs - we must explore solutions beyond volunteering which doesn't always support these young people to live independently



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

- We must be at the forefront of acting to realise the big economic opportunities facing the South - including those associated with Natural Capital; Energy, Culture and Tourism
- We should support the delivery of existing Borderlands and other exciting established priorities and projects
- There is a key role for us in helping wealth to be retained locally, ensuring value is added to products produced in the region and strengthening the local supply chain
- We should take forward work to develop an effective strategy and a sustained effort to increase inward investment to the region
- We need to help ensure that the replacement for EU funds meets the needs of the region, that we maximise the share for the South and that what we secure can be effectively used

What We Heard - In More Detail



SUPPORTING ENTERPRISE

- Routes to funding and support can be confusing – we need to help simplify, make it easier to access and more effectively signpost where appropriate
- Not knowing what support was available or where to go for help finding a job or starting a business was commonly reported as a key barrier for seldom heard groups
- Need to support and not lose sight of the needs of traditional sectors within the region
- Non-financial support including capacity building can be as important as funding
- We must help overcome barriers to accessing private finance, convincing others that our businesses are worth lending to
- Support needs to be easy to access and relevant to needs



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES AND INTERESTS

- We must act to bring people and partners across the region together on the things that matter most – joining up, enhancing and enabling more effective, meaningful collaboration, supporting us all to think bigger
- There is a need for someone – and it is felt we are well placed – to facilitate some of the big debates needed to bring together different views on key changes and challenges facing the region such as land use
- We need to support communities to build capability and capacity, supporting local leadership and helping to bring community groups and businesses together to speak more strongly as a collective



SUPPORTING LOCALITIES

- We need to define and communicate what we mean by a place-based approach – vital to enable others to engage with us effectively
- There was a perceived need for more shops, restaurants, entertainment, youth groups and places for young people to meet – emphasising the importance of proper placemaking in helping to attract and retain young people
- We must continue to provide expert help to communities
- We must consider how we can contribute to creating thriving town centres across the region and help capitalise on opportunities for towns post COVID-19, as well as supporting wider regeneration
- We should help pilot creative solutions to planning constraints facing many of our communities and embrace the opportunity presented by the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) to support a transition to a more proactive, responsive and collaborative development planning regime

What We Heard - In More Detail



BEING AS INCLUSIVE AS WE CAN BE

- We must demonstrate equality and diversity within our organisation and also advocate for it and act to secure it more widely
- We must seek to build productive and supportive relationships with seldom heard groups and work with partners to consider how equalities infrastructure across the South of Scotland can be developed, supported and enhanced
- We must play a part in helping to overcome specific barriers constraining people's potential
 - Autistic young people and young people with additional support needs felt that there was a biased view of their capabilities and that their potential contributions were not valued
 - Deaf and hard of hearing people also described how expectations of them meant that self-employment opportunities, for example, were never discussed with them
 - LGBTQI plus young people described how perceptions of them made it difficult to access employment - fear of discrimination was common
 - mental health was commonly cited as a barrier preventing people from realising their potential
- We must recognise that for ethnic minorities and refugees, not speaking English as a first language remains a key barrier
- We must offer and advocate for flexible working to enable parents and particularly women to balance work and childcare - with flexibility to work from home important for autistic young people and those living with a chronic condition too
- It is important for us to recognise the critical role of the Third Sector in facilitating engagement with seldom heard groups and their role in acting as a gateway to help individuals access and navigate other services



COLLABORATION

- We need to make clear where we fit in and how we add value to an already busy landscape of 'key-players' in the South of Scotland
- We need to, working with partners, build our understanding of the South to support informed decision making - there are key gaps in data availability which SOSE could be well placed to address



BOLD AND STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

- We need to provide bold and strategic leadership against a backdrop of unprecedented change facing the region, on several fronts including:
 - Just Transition to Net Zero
 - Responding to the biodiversity crisis
 - New approaches to land use
 - Embracing Fair Work
 - Community empowerment
- We need to be a catalyst for raising ambition across the region and providing inspiration
- As a public agency we have a key role to play in ensuring that all people across the South of Scotland have equality of opportunity and the chance to thrive - being new and given our remit, we have a unique opportunity to drive up standards of inclusion across the region
- We need to be a strong voice for the South - we can and must shout louder still and must champion rural interests

What We Heard - In More Detail



US AND OUR PROFILE

- Our establishment and focus on communities as well as the economy is seen as a real opportunity for the region
- More people need to know who we are and what we are here to do – we need to raise our profile
- Awareness of us was generally low amongst seldom heard groups who commonly suggested that we should continue to engage with them to address this
- Having a presence across the region's towns, villages and communities will be important – we need to be recognised and approachable
- We must lead by example in procuring as far as possible from within the region, helping to grow local supply chains and retain wealth locally
- Effectively measuring and reporting on our performance and the impacts we are having will be key to developing trust and respect with partners and those who we are here to deliver for



ONGOING ENGAGEMENT...

- We must reach out beyond the usual suspects and draw more new and harder to reach voices in if we are to be truly representative of and deliver for all in the South
- We should adopt an outreach approach, developing a 'personal' rather than corporate presence across local places and within communities of interest - attending their events and meetings
- We must establish mechanisms for ongoing interaction to enable relationships to be developed and genuine, meaningful engagement to take place

What We Intend To Do

There are a number of obvious actions we will take – in many instances in collaboration with partners – in responding to the key issues that our engagement has highlighted, including:



Advocating for better infrastructure – using our position to shout louder about the specific needs of our region and our economy to secure greater investment



Seeking to influence Scottish Government – to elevate the importance of addressing critical issues such as the housing and transport challenges that are constraining our economy and disadvantaging many within our communities.



Strengthening the youth voice – exploring and putting in place measures to empower young people to help shape a future economy that they desire.



Connecting communities and interests – recognising much can be achieved by simply bringing the right people together and through the power of a collective voice.



Leading the way – in a number of critical areas including Net Zero, Fair Work, Community Wealth Building – where there is a need for us to champion and drive immediate and practical action to support people on these important journeys.



Raising ambitions – across all that we do but particularly through creating an entrepreneurial culture that enables new ideas to be brought forward.



Driving up standards of inclusion – through establishing ongoing and meaningful dialogue with seldom heard groups and co-designing solutions to break down barriers to secure greater equality of opportunity for all in our region.



Raising our profile – including extending our reach, providing greater clarity about what we are here to do and making us and the support we offer more accessible.

What Might We Do Differently

Our 2021/22 Engagement Tour represented our first significant engagement effort since our launch back in April 2020. Having drawn on the learning from similar engagements which came before – led by the South of Scotland Economic Partnership in the lead up to SOSE’s establishment – we are similarly keen to learn from and build on these most recent efforts to improve the effectiveness of how we engage in the future.

To aid us in this learning we sought feedback from those who attended our events – having asked participants to complete a very short and anonymous survey, in response to which 258 people did.

We also took the opportunity to meet with our partners who helped us deliver key elements of our engagement – Southern Upland Partnership and Sleeping Giants – to reflect together on what if anything we may do differently in the future.

Whilst we considered our efforts a success, particularly in having to contend with the challenging circumstances presented by a resurgence of COVID-19, we nevertheless concluded that in planning future engagements consideration should be afforded to:

- Holding larger engagement activities and events across Summer months, when its lighter for longer in the evenings and the weather is more favourable for travel;
- Extending in person activities into the weekends, creating greater choice for people;
- Making more of technology to increase our reach and accessibility – for example online streaming of live events with the ability for online users to pose questions in real-time;
- For online activities, considering how we can offer support to people in advance, boosting their digital skills and giving them the confidence to be able to engage in this way;
- Providing more informal engagement opportunities – for example via a pop-up presence at events, high streets, markets etc;
- Making materials available in advance or to takeaway – recognising some people like to have something tangible to reflect on;
- Giving ourselves as long a lead in time as possible, to aid organisation and promotion; and
- Building on our efforts to reach and hear from seldom heard voices, developing new and ongoing relationships.

“The event was open and honest, it was easy to follow and the speakers were capable and willing to listen to the views of those attending and keep the program flowing”.



83%

Survey respondents who rated our Engagement Tour Events as **good** or **very good**.

What Next

Our engagement gave rise to rich discussion and constructive feedback – all of which is already proving invaluable in helping us to shape our future focus and efforts.

We heard many things that we could and have already acted on, including for example efforts to raise our profile and to make it easier for people to access us and the support they need. Where we can, we will continue to use feedback in this way to drive immediate and positive change.

Whilst some of the things we have heard strengthen what we already know, hearing them from those that we are here to serve is of great value. It lets us know that our efforts on specific issues, including for example those to help address the housing and transport challenges facing the region, is the right focus.

Positively, we also heard about lots of new opportunities and challenges too, and helpful suggestions about our future priorities – things that warrant a bit more exploration which we will do through the process of developing our first Action Plan, due to be published in early 2023. As our plan emerges, its likely we will look to share and test it with a focussed number of key stakeholders, inviting external challenge including on the extent to which we have responded to what we have set out in this report.

We will share what we heard with other public bodies and partners too. This reflects that many of the issues we heard about, including for example the barriers faced by those from seldom heard groups, are equally relevant and important for others.

Importantly, we are committed to continuing to listen, recognising that the world in which we live seems to – more so than ever – rarely stand still.

Our efforts across and surrounding our Engagement Tour have helped us establish new relationships and started conversations we are keen to keep going so we can listen in real-time, ahead of larger, planned engagement opportunities. Only through doing this and reaching out to more people – including the seldom heard voices we are yet to get to – can we be responsive to the needs of the South, and deliver what is needed to realise the vision for a fairer, greener and flourishing region for all.



Contact Us

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Correct as of October 2022

