



Summary of online survey responses

1. The online survey received 93 completed responses. Of this group, 77 people (83% of respondents) agreed with the idea of there being a South of Scotland enterprise agency, 10 people (11%) opposed and 6 were unsure.

Agreement with the proposed agency in principle

2. Some of those respondents most positive about the creation of a new agency believe that the South of Scotland has previously been ignored by policymakers. The following quote sums up the views of many:

“I this type of enterprise is long overdue, as most people in the south west especially Dumfries and Galloway sometimes feel we are the forgotten part of Scotland”.

A sense of frustration is detectable in some responses, alongside a real pride in the area's potential, which many feel the new agency could help unlock.

3. It was felt that the area has a unique set of needs, as well as a range of assets and opportunities which a local agency would be best placed to support and promote. Many respondents feel that local people understand local needs best and should be empowered to make decisions on their area's economic and community development.
4. Respondents spoke about the need for more and better jobs in the region, and the “dramatic demographic change that is soon to become a crisis”. There is real hope and expectation that the new agency will attract investment into the area, which will create employment, encourage entrepreneurship, attract people and businesses to the area, and mean fewer young people leave to pursue education and work opportunities in other parts of the country.
5. The business population of the South is quite different to that of the Central Belt, therefore a new agency dedicated to the South should better understand the needs and ambitions of SMEs in the area. There is considerable expectation that local businesses and communities will be closely involved in the new body, indeed be a core part of its decision-making process.
6. A number of respondents highlighted the positive role Highlands and Islands Enterprise has played over the past few decades in supporting communities and businesses in the North and West of Scotland.

7. As well as supporting business and community development, some respondents expressed hopes that the new agency will address transport and other infrastructure/connectivity issues in the area.

Concerns

8. Despite obvious enthusiasm, a number of concerns were raised, even by those who broadly agree with the proposal. These include some fears that having an additional business support agency “will confuse the economic landscape even further”.
9. Some respondents understand the reasons why the agency is being created, but are unsure about the proposed solution. One succinctly summarised this in their view that “there are better ways to re-energise these places other than yet more officialdom”.

Geographical coverage

10. A few respondents felt that the geographical area covered by the new agency is actually quite diverse. Some believe that the Scottish Borders area has no particular relationships or similarities with areas of Dumfries and Galloway. One respondent asks rhetorically, “what does Stranraer have in common with Eyemouth?”.
11. Two respondents said the new agency should really focus on the West of Dumfries and Galloway, with this area having “very different needs from the Borders who are much closer to Edinburgh and Glasgow”.
12. Other respondents felt that the geographical area was too restricted, particularly when considering the similarities between some Ayrshire communities and those in Dumfries and Galloway.
13. One respondent felt that “strict adherence to local authority boundaries may inhibit fruitful cross-boundary working”, and East Ayrshire Council highlighted a number of economic and infrastructure links between their area and the South of Scotland. Furthermore:

“East Ayrshire shares a boundary with Dumfries and Galloway and many of our communities face the same challenges and have the same opportunities as neighbouring Dumfries and Galloway communities and we are keen to ensure that our communities are not excluded from support by virtue of being outwith the boundary of this new agency.

Issue with the Scottish Government consultation and young people

14. The Bill’s policy memorandum mentions that one of the Scottish Government’s main ambitions of the South is “more opportunities for young people so that they can see a future in the area”. However, one respondent (Michael Gowan) felt that “young people haven’t been meaningfully involved in

the (consultation) process so far”, especially people in the more deprived areas of the South”

“There was a consultation that included already engaged individuals, organisations and businesses with the capacity to respond... Despite the focus on the needs of young people, there seems to be almost no engagement with a range of young people across the region”.

15. Mr Gowan is concerned that the creation of the new agency, with an ambition to promote opportunities for young people, “will meet with the same apathy, or outright hostility, from young people as previous initiatives”.

Opposition to the idea of a new agency

16. Around 10% of respondents oppose the creation of a new agency in principle. Most of these respondents believe there are already enough agencies in Scotland, and Scottish Enterprise could/should simply improve or change what they currently do in the South. One respondent felt “we should be looking to merge agencies and not create another one”.
17. Some fear that the new agency will be a waste of money, especially at a time when public finances are being squeezed. There are concerns that most of the agency’s budget will go on agency running costs, thus diverting funds “away from delivery areas which could more directly benefit the economy.”
18. Some of those who oppose the creation of the agency believe it could become “just a talking shop wasting more public funds”.
19. Another respondent, with some experience of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, is concerned that the new agency won’t work for small community enterprises.

Response to proposals for the body’s constitution, purposes, powers and duties

20. Respondents were also asked about the specific provisions for the new body as set out in the Bill. 57 people (61% of respondents) were happy with the provisions, 18 people (19%) opposed the proposals and a further 19% were unsure.
21. Unsurprisingly, many respondents who disagreed with the provisions in the Bill were the same people who rejected the entire idea of there being a new agency.
22. However, some others who did agree with the broad principle had some specific concerns about various provisions. For example, one respondent was concerned that the Bill signifies “too much bureaucracy and too many rules all

couched in Council/govt/agency speak will frighten away or at best, not attract the very people who need that support”.

23. There was concern that the Bill does not place enough weight on the importance of including people with business experience in the decision-making process, whilst others disagreed with the geographic coverage (mainly stating that the agency should focus primarily on the South West).
24. Other respondents who expressed ambivalence about the provisions felt that more emphasis should be given to transport/infrastructure issues or education and skills needs. Another said there is a real need to decentralise government departments to rural areas to create skilled public service jobs in the South.
25. Newcastleton & District Community Trust believes the Bill lacks powers to influence infrastructure decisions like roads and transport improvements as well as connectivity: “all these factors have a direct influence on the positive outcomes it seeks to deliver”.
26. One respondent was happy with the idea of a new agency but felt the Bill doesn’t go far enough in ensuring accountability. This respondent suggests the following:

“The chief executive should not have a term longer than 2 ~ 4 years. The same person should not be eligible to stand for anymore than 1 term, unless all community groups engaged vote it through. There has to be some appraisal from the engaged community. A steering committee, made up of supported community groups (Industry, Creative Arts, Professional Services, Farming, Fishing, Food and Drink, Tourism etc) should be appointed.”

27. Joan Mitchell agrees with most of the Bill’s provisions, but has an issue with one of the aims set out in Section 5. Specifically, she felt that the aim to “improve amenity and environment” is weak and is concerned that the term ‘sustainable’ does not feature in the bill. The John Muir Trust also calls for the agency to have a role in protecting “our wildland and wild places from damaging land management practices and inappropriate development”, and the Solway Firth Partnership believes:

“It cannot be stressed highly enough that the natural environment including the marine and coastal environment plays a key role in the economy and cultural diversity of the south of Scotland and if it is not given due prominence in the new bill its importance is likely to be overlooked to the detriment of the region.”

The Partnership feel that ‘Sustainable use of the environment’ should be considered and mentioned within the Bill.

28. Muirhall Energy also believe that the aims for the agency should include a clear and explicit reference to increasing *sustainable* economic growth. They would like to see this inserted at the very top of Section 5.

29. Another respondent, Ann Johnstone, believes that the draft Bill does not reflect the Scottish Government consultation responses, especially regarding environmental and sustainability issues:

“I think those ‘charged with developing the new legislation to establish the new agency’ do NOT appear to have done what SG and Prof Griggs said they would do i.e. their work is not perceptibly informed by the outcome summary report and analysis report of the SOSEA consultation in respect to environmental and sustainability issues, and the resulting SOSE Bill shows little ‘understanding of the views and priorities of communities, businesses and organisations operating in the South of Scotland’”.

30. In a similar vein, Centrifuge Consulting Limited feels that the social remit of the new agency should be strengthened in the Bill, to reflect the powers and remit of HIE – “there could be greater emphasis on developing a sustainable economy.”
31. Michael Gowan feels there should be mandatory representation from disadvantaged groups on the board given the focus on social development. And Sue Dewar argues that members of the House of Lords should also be disqualified from membership of the agency’s board (Schedule 1 applies this exclusion to MSPs and MPs).
32. Ms Dewar also calls for South of Scotland Enterprise to have a “statutory duty to publicise and promote its existence and activities and performance in South of Scotland”. She feels this is important as more people are likely to then become engaged with the agency.
33. North Ayrshire Council argue that the Bill and framework documents should make clear that “activities and functions of South of Scotland Enterprise must not lead to displacement of investment or employment from Scotland’s other fragile regional.” Likewise, South Ayrshire Council believe the new agency’s region borders on East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire Council areas, and the challenges and opportunities of “the South” are not confined to the boundaries of the Borders and D&G:
- “It is therefore important that the strategic approach and programme of interventions promoted by the national agencies. Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland, are tailored to complement those of South of Scotland Agency to mitigate the post code lottery effect.”
34. However, it is worth stressing that the majority of respondents were happy with the provisions without going into too much detail about why. Many felt the proposals were in line with what they expected and didn’t anticipate any problems with the proposed constitution, purposes, powers and duties as set out in the Bill.

Any required additions to the Bill?

35. Respondents were also asked whether there was anything else that should be included or excluded in the Bill. In this instance, almost half (47%) of respondents made some suggestion about how the Bill could be improved. It is likely that many of the responses more relate to the contents of the agency's action plan, which will be determined by the Board; however, a few recommendations specifically mention some legislative strengthening.
36. For example, a number of respondents felt that there should be specific mentions/provisions relating to transport and connectivity.
37. Christopher Hopkin believes a more detailed description of what the scope of the agencies role will be in improving the amenity and environment of the South of Scotland is required. Similarly, Alistair Lings believes that aim 1(b) is too vague, and the Bill should provide more detail about what improving the amenity and environment of the area actually means.
38. Joan Mitchell also argues that the term 'sustainable development' should be added to the aims, and Muirhall Energy suggest more reference to increasing sustainable economic growth. Solway Firth Partnership also ask for "more robust referral to the 'sustainable use of the environment'".
39. Langholm Initiative calls for an increased involvement for third sector agencies in the development of the action plan, and Keith McElrea believes that there should be a requirement on the new agency to dedicate most of its time, energy, and spending in the most deprived areas.
40. Sue Dewar suggests amending clause 8 to require a duty upon the agency "to maintain staffed offices in each town so that it is as accessible to as many people as possible".
41. Ross Henderson asks for "some form of direct accountability to the people of the south of Scotland" to be considered in the Bill. And another respondent believes the Bill should require regular, formal meetings with community groups, to ensure accountability and engagement. Along a similar vein, the NFU supports "the creation of an advisory board made up of representatives of the established business sectors in the South of Scotland to identify opportunities and scrutinise spending".
42. North Ayrshire Council believes "the Bill and framework documents should make clear that activities and functions of South of Scotland Enterprise must not lead to displacement of investment or employment from Scotland's other fragile regional economies." Likewise, East Ayrshire Council and South Ayrshire Council feel the Bill should ensure that the agency works with neighbouring areas and partners to benefit all communities.