

Government wants more social enterprises to run children's services

By Ross Watson
Children & Young People Now
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Cabinet minister Liam Byrne has said he wants to see social enterprises run children's centres, schools and youth centres.

The government has pledged to boost the sector by 25,000 extra businesses, to help this vision become reality.

In a speech made at yesterday's Voice 09 Social Enterprise conference, Byrne set the government the target of growing the sector "over the months to come". Byrne said the "time has come" for more businesses set up to tackle social needs to support local communities in the running of children's centres, schools, health and youth services.

He said: "Over 10 years, we have rebuilt the institutions of our communities - Sure Starts and new schools, new colleges and bigger universities, new health centres and new surgeries, new neighbourhood police teams and new youth centres. Over the next 10 years, we have to hand over the reins to local people. And we will need help to do this. So when we publish our plans for accelerating public service reform in a few weeks time, we'll set out how we we'll put [social enterprise's] energy, innovation, ideas, enthusiasm, expertise, into the new institutions we've built. "

The minister has promised the government will do all it can cut some of the red tape that often blocks new business but Anne Longfield, director of charity 4Children which runs youth centres and children's centres, believes Byrne's vision will require a genuine local shake-up to become a reality.

"It will take more than a central will to boost the social enterprise sector. It must absolutely permeate though local funds, structures, guidance and expectations," she said.

Byrne has promised a more detailed plan on how the government will involve social businesses more in public services will be forthcoming next month.