

BUSINESS SUPPORT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How will BSSP enable local authorities to provide a better service to business?

Supporting and equipping businesses to meet the opportunities and challenges posed by globalisation and rapid technological change is a priority at all levels of government. But businesses find the current system confusing and they are put off applying for help. They expect the service they get from government to be joined-up and targeted on their needs. Streamlining business support will enable all levels of government to provide a better service to their business customers, while at the same time rooting out waste and driving-up efficiency.

Why have RDAs been given responsibility for managing the coordination and delivery of business support?

SNR focussed on the need for economic development interventions to be carried out at the most appropriate spatial level. Business support is an area where procurement makes more sense at the national or regional level to realise economies of scale. The regional level can also support joining-up between local areas and assist less prosperous areas in linking in to growth in neighbouring areas or regions, in order to maximise the efficiency and equity of economic policy.

Will local authorities continue to have a role in economic development and the provision of business support?

Yes. SNR encourages local authorities to take a stronger role in economic development, part of which will involve business support regardless of the spatial level delivering is managed. BSSP will support local authorities in promoting economic development by enabling them to better understand and influence the support provided by national and regional bodies, as well as identifying where local funding can be deployed to greatest effect.

How can local authorities ensure business support reflects local priorities?

Local authorities will retain a continued role in identifying business support requirements in their areas, including for products and services local authorities do not deliver themselves. The "duty to co-operate in the determination of targets" means RDAs will need to take account of local authorities requirements in terms of the delivery of business support.

In future the new, Regional Strategy will provide a firmer base for the co-ordination of business support across the region. RDAs will lead the development of the strategy but will need to agree the draft with a forum of local authority leaders. The Government is consulting on the implementation of Regional Strategies.

Will local authorities be expected to use the new business support products?

Yes. Government will expect local authorities, like other public bodies, to ensure that any business support they provide or procure will be from the agreed portfolio, and accessed via Business Link as the primary access channel. In the event that funding for business support is delegated, RDAs will need to be satisfied that plans for spending these funds are fully compliant with the BSSP framework and portfolio.

What if a local authority is undertaking business support that falls outside the BSSP portfolio?

There will be a period of transition as existing contractual arrangements run their course. New interventions should be procured in accordance with the BSSP portfolio, including marketing and branding guidance.

Will there be scope to enhance business support to meet local priorities?

Yes. Local authorities will be able to co-fund (with co-branding) business support delivered in their areas by regional or central bodies to enable enhanced provision to meet local priorities. This will be much easier and more effective than designing isolated programmes from scratch and while enable them to share the benefits from economies of scale.

Will there be any flexibility to meet the specific needs of local areas?

Yes. In most cases, businesses face similar issues across the UK so a standardised national portfolio makes sense. But the right solutions for an individual company will require a blend of the portfolio's products to meet its specific needs and circumstances. Government is continuing to talk to local authorities to ensure the portfolio will be fit for purpose.

What if circumstances change and new products are needed – will there be scope for innovation and responsiveness at the local level?

Yes. There will be scope for adding to the portfolio of products by making a business case to the national Transition Management Board through the Regional Board. Strong evidence will be needed to back each case as it will be important to ensure the system remains simplified going forward.

What about Business Link?

Business Link will sit at the centre of the local and regional provider network to make the customer journey as seamless as possible. Shared customer management systems will enhance this activity. This does not mean that Business Link will be the only access channel – some businesses may prefer a direct approach to a trusted adviser. However, it does mean all public sector organisations operating locally should avoid competing for customers or duplicating the Business Link offer.

What about Multi Agreement Agreements?

MAAs provides further opportunities to simplify, rationalise and join-up services to business across administrative boundaries. As with LAAs, business support proposals should be discussed with RDAs.