

Business Link Consultation Response Form

Name of organisation/individual responding:	Dawn Baxendale, PUSH Economic Development Director
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Please type your response in the box below each question. The box will expand to accommodate your text. Once you have completed your response please send electronically to businesssupport@seeda.co.uk or by post to

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The deadline to respond by is **Friday 14 November 2008**.

The Questions

Question 1 - Are partners clear on the repositioning of the Business Link brand and business and the scope of the IDB services? To what extent is the role of BL still confused and why?
PUSH (Partnership for Urban South Hampshire) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. With regards to the repositioning of the BL brand, we welcome the broadly similar branding with the opportunity for regional variations as identified within the variable elements. However there are concerns regarding the IDB model: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. For Information – agreed that this is ideally situated within BL, to provide the best customer service2. For Diagnostic, it is still unclear how this will be approached; as a BL in house service, but how far will diagnostics extend to further service provision within BL and how and who will define the distinction between diagnostic and further provision? There needs to be greater clarity on this point.3. For Brokerage; how do we ensure that sign-posting is encouraged to providers beyond BL to those who are fully qualified (SFEDI). In addition if it is “not the role of the BL service to accredit business support providers” (page 13 Consultation Document) how will the list of providers be selected and in consultation with who?
Question 2 - On the basis that the general principle of targeting clients for intensive support is accepted, to what extent are the identified client segments appropriate and

are they focused sufficiently on high economic impact?
With regard to targeting; the consultation paper is unclear what penetration figure is being used. It is likely that for some of the target clients, intensive assistance activity will be needed, but the claim of 14,631 is against which baseline figure? 340,000 (IDBR lists half of all trading enterprises in the region – page 5) or, therefore, 680,000? Targeting might best be directed towards, specific geographical need, sector specific need and start ups.
Question 3 - What are the appropriate mechanisms to capture different requirements from different client groups and ensure they are reflected in the Business Link service?
There are a number of existing business advice agencies, across the PUSH sub region, which would be able to supply specialist information regarding their clients. E.g. Enham Ability for those who have disabilities, SAFE working with those in deprived areas, Women's Wisdom etc. PUSH would be grateful of the opportunity to provide assistance in this particular aspect through the existing networking groups within the sub region. There are also a wide range of sector specific trade associations to provide introduction and support. In addition the future statutory role of local authorities will mean that they will be responsible for the collation of local economic intelligence and data which may inform the actions of BL.
Question 4 - Should a consistent segmentation and targeting model be applied across the region or should this vary according to sub-regional needs?
Inevitably there will be common need in all areas of the region and these it is anticipated would be catered for within BL's core portfolio of provision. Even so there will be areas of particular need, SOA's with disproportionately high levels of those on Incapacity Benefit as example, where a particular action or targeting will necessarily be varied. Within the PUSH areas there are areas which have rural needs and these too will need particular attention with a different model.
Question 5 - To what extent does the mix of access and delivery channels seem appropriate?
It would be more helpful if BL were able to define the PUSH partners' figures in this matter; that is demonstrating the table on page 12 of the consultation document but using the 11 partners' statistics. With this information we would be better placed to respond. Even so the current access channels in the main are appropriate except for those who have literacy or disability needs.
Question 6 - Notwithstanding SEEDA's responsibility to ensure compliance with the service definitions, does it appear credible that Intensive Assistance can be provided by the Business Link service without meeting the client or on a one-many basis?
Intensive Assistance may be perceived as a misnomer raising expectations; that is it may be presumed to be regular and long term. There may be a need to graduate assistance up to Intensive. This will depend on the local variable need. That is, some clients' needs will demand multiple, close, one to one meetings, where as, perhaps others will only need swift at a distance guidance. There is a danger that if Intensive Assistance (IA) is based on resource availability rather than the client need, that BL would, to achieve targets, "cherry pick" to success. In addition the success of a web based advice programme, would clearly be based on its user friendliness and its underlying ability to respond to the client with appropriate questions tailored to the clients level of education and or literacy ability. For those, lacking basic IT education and or perhaps a disability to which the written word is not appropriate, it is likely that IA is the only response that would prove inclusive and support BL's Equality Standard.
Question 7 - The cost of one-to-one/ Intensive Assists is higher than the cost of web based penetration, yet Intensive Assists offer the greatest impact to the region and sub region. With continued drives for efficiency, and where there is flexibility in

<p>funding, is it more important to focus on increasing the number of Intensive Assists, or is it more important to focus on a lower, targeted number and increase the intensity of the assistance?</p>
<p>Initially this would mean an audit of the potential client need within the areas in discussion. This, in line with a local and sub regional assessment, would give an indication of the best combination of need and number, to meet the funding available.</p>
<p>Question 8 - How can the Business Link service keep attuned to changes in the supply of business support locally and regionally?</p>
<p>PUSH responded to BL to provide information regarding business support, locally and sub-regionally. In addition PUSH and BL have a commitment which encourages interchange of appropriate information and BL providing resource to LAA's and the MAA. These activities of close co-operative, partnership working ensure necessary updates of business support.</p> <p>In addition dedicated officers in BL and local government with the task of liaising might prove useful locally and sub regionally by creating their own mutually beneficial networks, sharing information, ideas and best practice, possibly with a commonly accessed bulletin board hosted on the BL web site.</p>
<p>Question 9 - What role might the Business Link service play in helping to inform the provision of publicly funded business support at different levels across the region in support of SNR objectives? How could this be structured?</p>
<p>On the understanding that BL is the single portal to business advice, then it would be ideally placed to provide intelligence and data on business need and the areas and or communities requesting most help with regards to business start up.</p> <p>With 8 above in mind, the open opportunity for interchange of information at officer level to then be fed up the line management structure or cascaded to other internal or external agencies would appear to be a logical progression.</p> <p>There are also opportunities, aside from LAA and MAA's, for BL to influence and inform on Local Partnerships and sub regionally with PUSH boards or sub groups or similar.</p>
<p>Question 10 - How can the Business Link service best contribute to and support economic development locally and regionally?</p>
<p>By providing the best possible business advice, or sign-posting, in the most appropriate manner to the widest possible number of people. To inform those outlined in section 9 above. This would give BL the opportunity to give numerical quality and strategic value, thus not only providing opportunities to increase the sub regional GVA but also promote economic inclusion.</p>
<p>Question 11 - What is the current quality of partner engagement with the Business Link service, how can this be improved and how can Business Link Services be positioned to help organisations meet their objectives?</p>
<p>Please see 8 & 9 above</p>
<p>Question 12 - Should there be a presumption against brokering to brokers unless absolutely necessary? Are there any obvious examples or exceptions?</p>
<p>There needs to be when referring on to brokers a clear and transparent description of the relationship between BL and the broker.</p>
<p>Question 13 - Should the skill set of BL advisers be extended such that they can direct clients to appropriate end solutions either more frequently or completely (i.e. in the same way that a patient would not expect to be referred from a GP to specialist GP to a consultant)?</p>
<p>Following the analogy – GP's are not specialists they diagnose, treat where they can but refer to more advanced knowledge where appropriate. The most skilful GP's are those that, in addition to their medical training, have extra skills in dealing appropriately with their patients; encouraging and enabling to select and respond to potential treatments. With the wide range of people with diverse needs as the client base for BL, it is hoped that the skill set for their advisers would be in social and interactive skills and rather than in extending their technical knowledge update of</p>

<p>their existing knowledge might be more appropriate.</p>
<p>Question 14 - Is the idea of enabling additional investment for the Business Link service a good one and are there any early ideas?</p>
<p>Clearly any additional funds to promote start up businesses or advising existing businesses, would be welcome. Locally funding for expanding BL would be difficult to find, but ESF or INTERREG 4 funding has not been pursued as rigorously in this area and it might be that a sub regional bid might be a possibility.</p>
<p>Question 15 - How might local involvement in the Business Link service be shaped in the future? Are there existing structures that can be utilised in this function?</p>
<p>Please see 8 & 9 above</p>
<p>Question 16 - What are the key issues that local business groups might wish to consider and influence in relation to how the Business Link service is shaped and delivered?</p>
<p>Sub regionally PUSH has a disproportionate number of residents claiming incapacity benefit (exaggerated by the City statistics). This would be a key target to support into self employment, particularly as the recent IB rules have changed and it is likely that this particular group would see self employment as a preferable lifestyle option. In addition we have a shortage of higher skilled residents and so up-skilling while in employment would be of significant importance for employees, employers and the sub region.</p>
<p>Any Other comments?</p>
<p>At this time it is unclear as to the role of BL as a tool for economic inclusion; that is working within particular deprived areas to encourage generational change and attitude towards expectation and self promotion. SEEDA may wish to see this as an opportunity for BL, not for the immediate meeting of targets but for the long term economic and social benefits for the South East of England. It is important that there is a thorough process of alignment between the needs of the target business sector, the PUSH plan and SEEDA's approach. There is a danger that, in the fast pace with which the IGT business plans are being prepared, some mismatch might occur. For example, PUSH is rightly focused on the specific needs of its geographic sub-region, whereas SEEDA is understandably keen to ensure that each IGT also contributes across the whole region. PUSH needs to assure itself that the right balance is struck. The BSSP enforces Business Link as the primary access brand and this obviously makes sense. However, we must also realise that entrepreneurs and innovative businesses do not always see Business Link as the right contact point for them – and simple government rules will not change those attitudes in the market. Therefore, without undermining this core principle we will also need sufficient visibility of our local IGT for us to be a recognisable entity with whom local entrepreneurs and high growth, innovative businesses can identify. Finally; PUSH is broadly in agreement with the concept of a single regional contract but with the opportunity for the delivery agents, through local and sub-regional negotiations, to reflect their particular needs.</p>