

**Solutions
for Business**

Funded by
government

Business Support and Comprehensive Area Assessment

Information Note

Provided by

BERR
Department for Business
Enterprise & Regulatory Reform



Introduction

1. This information note aims to help Local Authorities (LAs) and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) understand how “Solutions for Business – funded by government” (SfB), the new streamlined package of public funded business support, and the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will work alongside one another.
2. Local businesses, whether small or large, are the lifeblood of the economy. To succeed in a competitive global environment UK businesses need ongoing access to help and support. We know many are struggling at this time and responding to the economic downturn is a priority at every level of government. It is also important to have in place the foundation for the future so that companies can seize the opportunities of an upturn.
3. SfB brings together and simplifies the range of support offered to businesses by government departments, their agencies and local authorities in England. It streamlines thousands of publicly-funded support schemes into one, transparent, easy to find portfolio of products under the readily identifiable SfB banner.
4. CAA took effect from 1 April 2009 and is the final piece of the new local performance framework. CAA forms an important part of assessing and reporting on how well public money is spent on providing local public services and, making sure that local public bodies are accountable to the public for their service quality and impact. An initial focus for CAA will be to assess how effective local partners are in acting to mitigate the impact of the downturn in their areas.
5. References to detailed information and guidance about SfB and CAA are at the end of this note. This includes to the ‘Real help now’ campaign explaining the full range of support available now to respond to the economic downturn.
6. This note complements Business Support at the Local Level published in May 2008¹ which set out how SfB supports the aims of the Local Performance Framework and the Review of Sub-national Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR) by encouraging greater collaboration, co-ordination and co-investment between central, regional and local government to support business and local economic growth.

¹ <http://www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/enterprise/simplifyingbusinesssupport/page46305.html>

Solutions for Business– funded by government

7. SfB is the cross-government package of products to simplify publicly funded business support and deliver real help for business at the national, regional and local level. SfB has emerged from the Business Support Simplification Programme (BSSP) to ensure that publicly funded business support is:
 - Easier for business to understand and access
 - Better value for public money
 - Has a measurable impact in achieving economic and social policy goals
8. The SfB support package responds to the request from business for a simpler framework that provides a quick, easy and direct route to effective products. This is important at all times, but particularly so in the present economic circumstances, to help businesses start and grow, and to help communities prosper and flourish. The package is based on:
 - A range of around 30 targeted support products and services, used consistently across local, regional and national government.
 - Business Link as the main route to support, offering impartial assessment and access to bespoke packages of support.
 - A 'Solutions for Business – funded by government' look and feel to provide instant recognition to publicly funded products.
9. The programme covers any business support publicly funded activity that benefits a business or potential business through grant, subsidy, advice or other service. This includes local activity. It also includes public business support resourced through European funding streams.
10. Each of the SfB products aims to help businesses with common problems such as starting, growing, exporting, finance, skills, innovation and the environment. The support is targeted to where public intervention will have the greatest impact and designed to be sufficiently flexible to be responsive in a changing business climate. A list of all the SfB products is attached to this note and further detail can be found on the Internet.
11. The expectation is that future business support activity will be delivered from the SfB portfolio of products in the knowledge that this will be the most efficient and cost effective means to provide business support. All the SfB products are strongly evidenced based and only feature within the overall portfolio because they address a clear market failure and there is a justifiable case for Government intervention.
12. Business Link is the main access channel to the SfB portfolio and should be a first point of contact for any business seeking support and advice. Business Link is a national service, managed regionally and delivered locally. All businesses who contact Business Link are offered an assessment of their support needs and then brokered to suitable schemes

whether they are from SfB, private sector or the third sector.

13. All levels of government are part of the programme. The Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) provides the lead, with active involvement from Communities and Local Government (CLG) and other Government Departments, the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Local Authorities (LAs).

Comprehensive Area Assessments

14. CAA is the new system for the independent assessment and inspection of local public services in England. It also represents a fundamental change in the approach to inspection, reflecting the changes in local public services in recent years and in the environment in which they work.
15. CAA aims to be more relevant to local people by focusing on issues that are important to their community. CAA will provide a shared inspectorate view about the challenges facing an area, such as local economics and community cohesion, and creates a more joined up and proportionate approach to public service regulation. It will assess the effectiveness of how well local public services work, together and individually, to improve outcomes for local people and local businesses.
16. CAA will have two main elements, which will inform each other.
- An area assessment that looks at how well local public services are delivering better results for local people in agreed priorities, such as economic prospects, and how likely they are to improve; and
 - Organisational assessments for councils, combining the external auditor's assessment of value for money with a joint inspectorate assessment of council service performance.
17. The area assessment will form the heart of CAA. Taking the Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and Sustainable Community Strategies as its starting point it will include assessment of performance and prospects for improvement in local areas against local priorities and the wider National Indicator Set. It will focus on notable and innovative practice which inspectorates will highlight using green flags. As well as assisting those responsible for local services to identify where more or something different needs to be done to improve the quality of local people's lives where inspectorates can draw attention with red flags. In some cases, it may identify situations where priorities have not been reviewed to reflect significant changes in circumstances, such as the economic downturn.
18. The CAA area assessment will be a qualitative assessment drawing largely on available evidence sources, including LAAs, Sustainable Community Strategies, the National Indicator Set, findings from inspection, nationally available surveys, such as annual business surveys. Additional investigation will be carried out where initial analysis shows this is needed.

19. The results of the CAA will be reported annually to help inform local people and businesses, local partnerships, and central government about local performance and delivery. The Joint Inspectorates will use the knowledge gained through CAA to better target future work and to coordinate their activity to better manage the impact on local organisations and services.

How do CAA and SfB support one another?

20. The delivery of economic policies, social policies, and value for money are key issues at all levels of Government, including local communities where these issues may feature within local priorities. Simplifying publicly funded business support contributes to the delivery of each of these. The economic prospects for an area and social and community cohesion are aspects that inspectorates can also look at. Furthering these policies whilst ensuring value for money are shared aims of both agendas.

21. Following the SNR, LAs are being asked to play a stronger role in promoting economic development by working more effectively in economic decision making. This requires a close partnership both between LAs, their partners in the LSPs, as well as with RDAs.

22. SfB will help LAs promote economic growth and strengthen social policies by ensuring access to the most effective means of supporting business and enterprise in their areas. How a LA makes use of the SfB portfolio, including how it works with key partners to deliver business support, might therefore be considered by the inspectorates in the CAA.

23. LAs should be able to make use of the opportunities that the new SfB portfolio provides to help demonstrate the value of their investment in business support services. The SfB package can:

- Help LAs support economic growth by ensuring they have access to effective quality business support, which should be more efficient and effective than creating new locally-based schemes
- Provide ready-made, flexible, high impact business support products that can be deployed quickly and cost-effectively to serve local needs
- Provide targeted support products that achieve wider take up of services from hard-to-reach groups and others
- Enable better partnership working between the regions and LAs
- Help identify and exploit opportunities to improve value for money, for example through economies of scale and the removal of unnecessary duplication and back office administration costs
- Contribute ultimately to sustainable and growing local economies creating wealth and jobs, satisfied customers and increased value for money.

24. When the portfolio is fully established it will include some products which can be procured under co-procurement arrangements. These arrangements will enable LAs to deploy business support from the contracted frameworks to known price and quality levels (deriving benefits of scale from the frameworks). This should avoid the need for individual areas to use resource to tender and manage local contracts and should also mean that business support can be deployed more quickly (by saving the time required to procure support from scratch).

When will rollout of the SfB be complete?

25. The BSSP is nearing delivery of the Government's commitment to reduce the number of publicly funded business support schemes to 100 or less by March 2010, alongside making Business Link the primary channel for business to access government support. Initial rollout of the SfB portfolio is now complete and the work to ensure all previous business support activities which do not align to the portfolio are marked for closure by March 2010 continues.
26. For the longer term it is important that public business support continues remains relevant to meet business needs, particularly in a dynamic, global economy. The range of products will be regularly assessed to make sure it stays fit-for-purpose. Where there is a sound business case, proposals for new products will be assessed for inclusion. Equally, those products not having the desired impact can be withdrawn.

Further information

A. Solutions for Business

Website: www.businesslink.gov.uk/solutions

Address: BERR Business Support Simplification Programme
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Tel: 020 7215 5000

Email: sfb@berr.gov.uk

B. Comprehensive Area Assessment

Further information on CAA can be found on the Audit Commission website:
www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa .

C. Business Link

Local businesses looking for help and advice on the packages of support available should get in touch by visiting the Business Link website: www.businesslink.gov.uk or by contacting their local Business Link adviser by calling 0845 600 9 006.

D. Real help now

Practical information and advice to help people and businesses through the recession is available from www.realhelpnow.gov.uk, as well as the Business Link and DirectGov, www.direct.gov.uk websites.

Annex: Products

Solutions for Business products are:

Starting Up

- Enterprise Coaching
- Starting a Business
- Intensive Start-Up Support
- Starting a High Growth Business

Grow Your Business

- Coaching for High Growth
- Business Collaboration Networks
- Business Premises
- Manufacturing Advisory Service

Employing People

- Train to Gain

Finance and Grants

- Finance for Business
- Understanding Finance for Business
- Small Loans for Business
- Grant for Business Investment
- Enterprise Finance Guarantee
- Rural Development Programme for England

Exploit Your Ideas

- Innovation Advice and Guidance
- Networking for Innovation
- Innovation Vouchers
- Designing Demand
- Business Growth: Specialist Facilities and Environments
- Collaborative R&D
- Knowledge Transfer Partnerships
- Grant for Research and Development

Environment and Efficiency

- Improving Your Resource Efficiency
- Low Carbon Energy Demonstration

International Trade

- Accessing International Markets
- Developing Your International Trade Potential
- Export Credit Insurance
- Maximising Foreign Direct Investment

Real help now Products are:

- Automotive Assistance Programme