

The Sustainable Communities Act proposal form

Using this form

This form should be used to submit proposals under the Sustainable Communities Act to the LGA for short listing. Please complete all sections and then **email a copy to** selector@lga.gov.uk. These must be received by **July 31st 2009**, and you will receive confirmation that the form has been received.

Once submitted, information within this form may be made publicly available, unless you request for it to be kept private. We will treat information submitted sensitively. If you wish to attach any relevant presentations or graphs etc. please attach them separately in the email.

For questions regarding the act or the role of the Selector, please see our [FAQs](#). Any further questions can be directed to selector@lga.gov.uk.

Section 1: Proposal Summary

Proposing Authority

Under the terms of the Sustainable Communities Act, all proposals must be submitted by a local authority, or group of authorities, in England. Any group, organisation or individual may originate or develop a proposal. However all proposals will require Local Authority endorsement and submission to the Selector.

Parish councils and other organisations and agencies must seek support and formal endorsement from a proposing local authority (defined in the Act as county councils, district councils (including metropolitan, non metropolitan and unitary authorities), the common council of the city of London or the Council of the Isles of Scilly).

1.1 Lead Authority name

Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

1.2 Is this proposal submitted by this authority alone, or is it a joint proposal with other local authorities? (If joint please list authorities)

Sole proposal

1.3 Who is the lead contact (s) in the authority for this proposal? Please provide email address and telephone number - The LGA will direct any enquiries to this contact.

Harjit Hunjan
Harjit.hunjan@rbwm.gov.uk

Supporting Organisations

Whilst proposals may only be submitted by a local authority, we acknowledge that local partners and outside organisations may wish to register support for the proposal. This is entirely voluntary.

1.4 Please provide details below of supporting organisations to your proposal. Please explain if the organisation is a charity, company, unincorporated association or other body. If a charity or company please provide registration numbers. If a local partnership please explain the relationship to the Local Strategic Partnership for the area.

Summary of your proposal

Please summarise your proposal. You may wish to include:

- The main elements of your proposal
- What issues your proposal is addressing and how it will promote the sustainability of the local community
- Who is affected by this proposal and how?
- Which public bodies might be affected?
- What are the main actions needed from Government?
- What do you expect this proposal to achieve?

1.5 Please enter your summary below (word limit 1000 words)

Small businesses make a significant contribution to prosperity in the local community. They provide employment. The taxes that they and their employees' pay contribute to the services that Central Government provide. They are very much part of a successful and sustainable community.

There are many schemes available to provide help and support to businesses, but this help and support is not being taken up to the extent that it should.

Business support is provided by Business Link, operating an Information, Diagnosis and Brokerage (IDB) model, with referral on to the publicly funded "**Solutions for Business**". Business Link is under contract to SEEDA, and will be provided on a regional basis from April 2010. This remoteness from the local community means there is a tendency towards a "one size fits all" approach, with little consideration given to local conditions or needs.

This proposal is to devolve the provision of Information, Diagnosis and Brokerage (IDB) services, and their associated budgets, to the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, the local authority. In order to be consistent with the Business Support Simplification Programme, they would use Business Link branding. These services would be accountable to a Local Business Board, which would include representatives of local business groups (eg Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, Windsor and Maidenhead Voluntary Action).

This proposal anticipates that local, democratic, control of business support services will lead them to be more sharply focused on business needs. It also anticipates that the relevance of Business Link will be increased by bringing it within the local authority, by including support in areas such as Business Rates, public sector procurement, environmental health and resource efficiency within the core offer.

The primary beneficiaries of this proposal would be small businesses in the Royal Borough, including the 10,000 people who are self-employed (NOMIS), the 7,970 businesses on the Inter-Departmental Business Register, and the estimated 40,000 plus employees of SMEs. This accounts for approximately half the working age population of the Royal Borough, and over two-thirds of the economically active population.

The benefits of this approach will be that businesses will find it easier and less time consuming to access the help they need / want. The take up rate will improve, leading to sustainable development. Local prosperity will improve which in turn will contribute to national prosperity. The whole community will benefit from improved prosperity, employment and skills.

Section 2: About your proposal

The form asks a set of questions to gather as much information as possible to allow for assessment and short-listing by the Selector. A word-limit is stated for each part of the form.

We appreciate that SCA proposals will vary in range and scope, and some questions will be more relevant than others for any one proposal. Please do not feel that answers are required for every questions or that the full word limit need be used in respect of each and every question box. If you are submitting a joint proposal, please include evidence for all areas.

Impact on sustainability (*word limit 2000 words*)

2.1 Please explain how your proposal promotes sustainability as defined locally (for example in your Sustainable Communities Strategy or LAA)

The Royal Borough Partnership's vision is - "we want the Royal Borough to be a place where everyone can thrive in a safe and healthy environment, take an active part in decisions and continue to learn and develop throughout their lives".

This proposal will improve the provision of business support services locally, leading to the general improvements in the provision of local services, through business growth and increased rates of business survival and increased local procurement. It would also provide positive feedback between the Community Partnership and business support services, driving the ambition for a thriving economy locally.

The proposal will also have positive effects on social wellbeing, by maintaining and growing the enterprise culture within the area, leading to sustainable economic growth and a stronger local economy. By specific outreach work to groups who face barriers to entry into enterprise (eg women, people with disabilities, certain ethnic groups) this proposal will advance equality, reduce social exclusion and promote community cohesion.

This proposal would have a direct effect on involvement in local democracy, as it would bring business support services under local control, when otherwise it would be directed at regional level. Through involvement of the business representative bodies (eg Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses) this would promote social inclusion and local democracy.

2.2 Over which geographic area will your proposal impact? (e.g. neighbourhood, town, city, sub-region)?

This proposal will improve business support services in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, comprising the towns of Maidenhead and Windsor, the rural town of Ascot and the rural parishes throughout the Borough.

2.3 Who would benefit from your proposal?

The primary beneficiaries would be small businesses in the Royal Borough, including the 10,000 people who are self-employed (NOMIS), the 7,970 businesses on the Inter-Departmental Business Register, and the estimated 40,000 plus employees of SMEs. This accounts for approximately half the working age population of the Royal Borough, and over two-thirds of the economically active population.

Currently, many small businesses are not aware of the range of help and support that is available because the schemes are administered by many different organisations. Finding what is available takes time, applying for help takes time, meetings take time and getting the help implemented takes time. By bringing business support services into local control, this will enable the services to be more responsive to, and appropriate for, small businesses needs.

The proposal will also benefit the wider population of the Royal Borough, by maintaining and growing the enterprise culture within the area, leading to sustainable economic growth and a stronger local economy. By specific outreach work to groups who face barriers to entry into enterprise (eg women, people with disabilities, certain ethnic groups) this proposal will advance equality, reduce social exclusion and promote community cohesion.

2.4 What steps will you take to mitigate any adverse affects on sustainability from your proposal (if relevant)?

The rationale for this project is to improve the sustainability of the local economy, so it will have a positive effect .

2.5 What project, activities and changes would take place in your area if your proposal was successful?

Business support services, provided by the current and future Business Link providers, would be provided by the local authority, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. So as not to undermine the principles of the Business Support Simplification Programme, services would use Business Link branding, and adhere to the guidelines for publicly funded business support in “**Solutions for Business**”.

Business Link provides Information, Diagnosis and Brokerage (IDB) services to businesses, and is the main point of access to **Solutions for Business** products. Businesses can access the national website, which can refer on to local providers, or call the national number to access Business Link – many customers receive the information they require this way. The most valued aspect of Business Link, however, is access to their skilled advisers, and one-to-one support (Intensive Assists).

Currently, business support is supplied by Business Link Berkshire, and this will move to delivery by a regional provider in April 2010. The current provision for Berkshire is 19 advisers (including 5 consultants), plus 10 support staff; **on the basis of SEEDA's estimates of expenditure** this gives an approximate allocation of 3.1 advisers for RBWM. This equates to one adviser to 2,544 businesses; below the Berkshire average of one adviser for 1,847 businesses. Through bringing Business Link into the local authority, **and with equitable access to funding**, RBWM will be able to generate efficiency savings and increase the numbers of advisers to **4.5** (including 1 consultant), equating to one adviser **to 1,771** businesses (a **30%** increase in resources).

Local businesses would still have access to the web-based and telephone IDB services, **and to the separately funded Solutions for Business products**. In particular, the availability of skills development support, through Train to Gain (Solutions for Business Product), BCA (FE provision) and Grow Our Own (RBWM project), would be more apparent, bringing benefits to businesses.

In order to maximise the benefit to the local economy of these increased resources, the service would be accountable to a Local Business Board, which would include representatives of local business groups (eg Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, Windsor and Maidenhead Voluntary Action). This would enable activities to be directed to sectors and businesses that would most benefit (eg tourism advice, high skilled workforce).

All businesses have an existing customer relationship with the Local Authority, and are highly likely to go to it for business support (eg 59% for advice on sustainable business practices). Bringing Business Link into RBWM would increase it's reach, with the possibility of improved marketing to local businesses. The value of Business Link advice would also be increased, by including support on areas such as Business Rates, public sector procurement , environmental health and resource efficiency within the core offer.

2.6 Does your proposal involve transfers of responsibilities between public bodies in the area? If so what are these? What budgetary implications might be involved?

Business Link is the sole point of access for business support, and is provided under contract to SEEDA. This responsibility would be transferred to the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. SEEDA is unable to provide a budget figure for business support in RBWM, but indicates it approaches £400k per annum.

SEEDA is currently tendering for a regional business support contract, which will be operational from April 2010, and a decision on the provider will be taken in the next few months. There is therefore great uncertainty about the future budgetary provision for business support in RBWM, as the tender notice indicates a range between £18.8m and £32.07m for business support, and between £0.8m and £1.4m for Enterprise Coaching and Intensive start-up support for under-represented groups. Using the 2008 IDBR register, 2.35% of businesses in the SE are located in RBWM; this could imply budgetary levels of between £440k and £750k for business support, and £19 - 33k for Enterprise Coaching and Intensive start-up support for under-represented groups.

In the absence of useful information in the Local Spending Reports we will carry out a process of due diligence, which we are confident will support our assessment of the benefits of this proposal. With the Royal Borough directly running most of the service it is expected that the ongoing budgetary implications would be broadly cost neutral, providing equitable access to funding for the Royal Borough is assured.

Local authorities are required to 'have regard' to a set of specific issues when deciding whether to support SCA proposals. These are matters listed in Schedule 1 of the Act, as passed by Parliament. It is worth noting that the issues listed in the Act are not supposed to be exhaustive and that ideas can cover anything that promotes the sustainability of the local area.

Many of these matters may not be relevant to any one proposal. If you are submitting a joint proposal please include evidence for all areas.

2.7 Please identify which, if any, of the issues authorities are required to have regard to, are relevant to this proposal and include any data and information which you feel would be helpful in the assessment process.

- a) the provision of local services /
- b) the extent to which the volume and value of goods and services that are- i) offered for sale, ii) procured by public bodies, and are produced within 30 miles (or any lesser distance as may be specified by a local authority in respect of its area) of their place of sale of the boundary of the public body.

This proposal will improve the provision of business support services locally, leading to the general improvements in the provision of local services, through business growth and increased rates of business survival and increased local procurement. RBWM has a sustainable procurement strategy, and has worked with the local Chambers of Commerce to promote procurement from local businesses. The proposal will also lead to more co-ordinated services for skills development, and is strongly supported by Berkshire College of Agriculture (BCA), a local provider.

- c) the rate of increase in the growth and marketing of organic forms of food production and the local economy
- d) measures to promote reasonable access by all local people to a supply of food is adequate in terms of both amount and nutritional value

There is evidence of a continued demand for organic produce, with Maidenhead Farmer's Market increasing in activity, and Transition Town Maidenhead developing a local food project. 21 businesses in agriculture are located within the Royal Borough, (March 2009) and improved business support locally is likely to have a positive impact on organic forms of food production.

- e) the number of local jobs

Increasing the availability of local business support will lead to business growth and increased rates of business survival, having a protective effect on the number of local jobs.

- f) measures to conserve energy and increase the quantity of energy supplies which are produced from sustainable sources within a 30 mile radius of the region in which they are consumed
- g) measure taken to reduce the level of road traffic including, but not restricted to, local public transport provision, measures to promote walking and cycling and measures to decrease the amount of product miles

By bringing business support services into the local authority, which has a Carbon Management Strategy and a Sustainable Travel Plan, this proposal will increase awareness and positive actions among SMEs in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

- h) the increase in social inclusion, including an increase in involvement in local democracy

This proposal would have a direct effect on involvement in local democracy, as it would bring business support services under local control, when otherwise it would be directed at regional level. Through involvement of the business representative bodies (eg Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses) this would promote social inclusion and local democracy. The proposal would also strengthen links with Grow our Own, which aims to promote skills development among excluded groups, for the benefit of local businesses.

i) measures to increase mutual aid and other community projects

RBWM is aware of several nascent social enterprises, which could benefit from locally focused business support.

j) measures designed to decrease emissions of greenhouse gases

By bringing business support services into the local authority, which has included targets to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases within its Local Area Agreement, this proposal will increase awareness and positive actions among SMEs in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

k) measures designed to increase community health and wellbeing

Increased business growth and business survival will have positive impacts on community health and wellbeing, as the protective effects of employment are well documented. Increasing the availability of business advisers to small businesses struggling for survival will also have protective effects on the mental health of enterprise owners.

l) planning policies which would assist with the purposes of this Act, including new arrangements for the provision of affordable housing

n/a

m) measures to increase the use of local waste materials for the benefit of the community

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is pioneering an incentive based recycling initiative (residents receive vouchers which can be redeemed in participating businesses); by bringing Business Link into the authority it would increase awareness, sign-up and maximise benefits to local businesses.

Existing Barriers

(Please do not write more than 1000 words for 2.8 and 2.9)

2.8 What are the existing barriers to implementing your proposal?

Business Link services are directed by SEEDA, and are currently provided by Business Link Berkshire. SEEDA are moving to a regional contract for Business Link, which will further remove Business Link from being locally relevant.

SEEDA's view is that business support services are generic, and that there is no need for local determination of business support services. It has indicated that Business Link will prioritise on a regional basis, with some (unspecified) scope for local flexibility. It has identified particular sectors as priorities:

- Environmental technologies, engineering and construction sectors;
- Advance, high-value R&D based engineering
- Life sciences and health
- ICT and digital
- Creative industries

SEEDA also states it will address the business development needs of the 50% of businesses that start off as micro- or home-based. Although this will address some of the needs of businesses in RBWM, it fails to recognise local conditions, and there is a tendency towards a "one size fits all" approach.

There is uncertainty over the level of funding that business support services should, and do, receive in a local area, as SEEDA budgets on a regional basis. SEEDA is able to provide costs for Business Link services in Berkshire, as they currently contract on that basis, but is moving towards one regional contract. Without clear determination of the funding levels for business support services in the Royal Borough, it is difficult to consider basic questions over equity, effectiveness and affordability.

There is a presumption that Business Link being brought into the local authority will increase cost and complexity, and is counter to the Business Support Simplification Programme. This proposal challenges this, as local authorities are seen as an important source of advice by local businesses, and so it will provide one point of contact for businesses in RBWM.

2.9 What actions are needed by Government to make your proposal possible?

Government needs to provide the Local Authority with the power to provide business support, and to transfer responsibility for Business Link in RBWM, and budget, from SEEDA. It also needs to confirm that these proposals are not counter to the Business Support Simplification Programme, and that access to the **Solutions for Business** portfolio would be available.

Part 3: Local Authority Endorsement

This section should be completed by the proposing local authority. (Under the terms of the act this means a county council in England, a district council (including metropolitan, non metropolitan and unitary authorities), a London borough council, the Common Council of the City of London or the Council of the isles of Scilly)

3.1 Have consultation requirements been met? (500 words max)

Please confirm that your authority has met the statutory requirements for consultation on this proposal, via one or more panels of local representatives and persons from under-represented groups constituted in accordance with the Act and statutory guidance as set out in [Strong Safe and Prosperous Communities](#).

You may wish to describe who has been involved in discussions and development of the proposal (*e.g. council, local community organisations and residents groups, parish or town councils, local partnership bodies, local or national organisations, political parties, church and faith organisations, local businesses or chambers of commerce and others.*

If you have not done so already please give brief details of relevant panel meetings.

Please note if you are submitting a joint application please provide details of consultation and local support across all areas.

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead has met statutory requirements for consultation

This proposal has originated from the representative bodies for businesses in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. There is overwhelming support for these proposals from local businesses and community groups.

A survey has been sent out to local businesses, including those registered with the Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses. It was also sent out to via the distribution lists of the Maidenhead and Windsor Town Centre Managers, and the Tourist Information Centre. The combined reach of these is several hundred businesses, including many sole-owner and micro-businesses.

The proposal has been presented to a cross party panel on the 6 July, and following comments and amendments, to a panel of representatives on Wednesday 15 July. This includes representation from the following:

Maidenhead and District Chamber of Commerce
RBWM Community Partnership (Local Strategic Partnership)
Windsor and Maidenhead Voluntary Action
Windsor and Maidenhead Community Forum

3.2 What are the views from this consultation? You may wish to provide evidence of local support for your proposal? This might include petitions or letters of support from the public, local councillors, Members of Parliament, businesses, public bodies and agencies? Please describe this evidence below. *(The local authority submitting the proposal is likely to wish to review such material and to summarise its content. Onward submission to the Selector of all original documentation will not normally be required).*

The views from this consultation can be summarised as follows:

This proposal is supported by Maidenhead and District Chamber of Commerce and Windsor District Chamber of Commerce, as they believe it will improve the support to their members, adding value to the local economy.

Individual businesses have indicated that their main concern is the quality and availability of business advisers, and having simple access arrangements. Some concern has been raised about confidentiality of a Local Authority service, which would be addressed by accountability to the Local Business Board. Most respondents expressing a view (66%) support the transfer to the Local Authority.

Proposals may include a change/transfer of functions from one person to another. If this is relevant to your proposal please confirm that the duties under clause 2, subsection 3 of the act (consulting with organisations affected by a change in location of a function) have been carried out.

3.3 Please give brief details of consultation with any affected organisations

SEEDA and Business Link have been consulted on the proposal, so we can confirm that the duties under clause 2, subsection 3 of the act have been carried out. Officers of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead met with SEEDA's Area Director, Surrey & Berkshire and the Head of Economic Development, Business Link Berkshire on Friday 26 June 2009, to discuss the proposal. SEEDA and Business Link have been invited to the Community Panel of Representatives on Wednesday July 15 2009.

3.4 Confirmation of council support

The process for formal endorsement is a matter for local discretion; however we anticipate that authorities will wish to gain political endorsement and clearance for the proposal through the relevant processes at local level. Please give details of how formal approval has been attained.

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead has formally approved this proposal and is acting as the sole sponsor. The proposal has been scrutinised and endorsed by a Cross party panel, chaired by the Leader of the Council, with delegated authority.

3.5 General comments

This is an opportunity for the local authority to express any additional comments or views on the proposal: This may include: (1500 words max)

- the council's view of levels of local support for the proposal
- any local opposition or objections that the Selector should be aware of
- relevance of the proposal to the area's Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement
- outcome of any local authority discussions with agencies or public bodies affected
- potential regional/national significance of the proposal, if replicated elsewhere
- any major resource implications for the council or its local partners
- any other factors influencing viability and achievability of the proposal

During the Panel of Representatives meeting, Business Link Berkshire and SEEDA raised the following points:

1 - Business Link Berkshire is already supplying an appropriate service for RBWM, with 20% of their delivery being provided to businesses in RBWM, and a 92% satisfaction rate.

Response: RBWM has 23% of the business stock in Berkshire, and has the lowest percentage of businesses assisted of all the Berkshire authorities – a business in RBWM has less chance of receiving support than any other business in Berkshire. The local Chambers of Commerce have identified dissatisfaction among their members over the level of support available locally, and two-thirds of businesses consulted, who expressed a view, supported localising Business Link services.

2 – There is no evidence of an options appraisal and risk assessment.

Response: RBWM has followed the procedures laid down in the Sustainable Communities Act, and is presenting proposals from the local community to the LGA Selector Panel. If this proposal is put forward to the Secretary of State there will be a robust due diligence and transition planning period, which will ensure that business support services will be available and improved.

3 – Localisation will not enable the service to take advantage of economies of scale, reducing the resources available to delivery.

Response: this argument does not recognise the economies available through RBWM's infrastructure, including a Customer Service Centre, functional and accessible website and secure GSCx compliant MIS, while local direction will enable best use of available resources. SEEDA acknowledges that regionalisation involves a tension with being responsive to local needs and maintaining local delivery (Consultation response).

4 – RBWM does not have the expertise to deliver a business support service.

Response: the Local Business Board will oversee the localised service, meaning it will be clearly directed to meeting local business needs, while RBWM has considerable experience of successfully managing complex projects.

5 – It will be impractical for RBWM to deliver a service, as it will not have all the associated infrastructure and links to the regional service.

Response: RBWM has a sound infrastructure, including a Customer Service Centre, functional and accessible website and secure GSCx compliant MIS. The local service will have clear protocols for access to national, regional and Solutions for Business products, and for referral on where appropriate, as part of the Information, Diagnosis and Brokerage (IDB) model.

6 – The proposal runs counter to the Business Simplification Support Programme.

Response: Although Business Link is expected to be the main point of access to Solutions for Business, it is not required to be the only point of access. The proposal has taken account of the demands of the Business Support Simplification Programme, and has been explicitly designed to support it. Given that the local authority is already often approached for business support, combining this with the Business Link brand will lead to there being one point of contact for publicly funded business support locally.

Part 4: Assessment by the Selector

SCA proposals will be assessed by the LGA as Selector. This will include consideration, short listing and negotiation with the Secretary of State via the LGA Selector panel made up of councillors from the four parties represented on the LGA

The LGA Selector Panel is committed to undertaking the role in a transparent manner; as such reasons for decisions on proposals will be made available.

There will be no appeals process in relation to decisions of the Selector Panel.

4.1 Do you confirm your agreement to abide by the outcome of the Selector's assessment and decision-making processes?

Yes

4.2 Would your council, accompanied by the originators of the proposal, wish to make a short verbal presentation to the Selector Panel, should this opportunity be available?

Yes

Thank you for completing this form.

Please email it to selector@lga.gov.uk by 31 July 2009.