



Business link in London provision of business support in the London Borough of Hillingdon

Business Link in London (BLIL) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Hillingdon Borough Council's review of business support services, to be undertaken by the Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview committee in Spring 2010

Business Link in London is the free, impartial advice and support service for London's small and medium sized businesses (SMEs). Funded by the London Development Agency (LDA) and delivered by Serco plc, the role of Business Link is to help start-ups and established businesses survive, prosper and grow. This is achieved through the provision of high quality and practical advice and information as well as acting as a gateway to access other sources of business support available.

The service covers all areas of business support and works across all industry sectors. Designed to be the first port of call for London's small businesses, support is available 24 hours a day, seven day a week through the telephone enquiry line and web site. The service delivers more detailed, personal support from our business advisor team, who use a diagnostic approach to help assess a business' situation, identify options for action and offer straightforward guidance and action planning to help them move forward.

BLIL is part of the national Business Link network, but tailored and delivered at a regional and borough level. BLIL is committed to fully engaging with the business community in Hillingdon, both with the thousands of small and medium sized businesses as well as the wider businesses support network through our partnership team. Understanding what business support is available to Hillingdon's businesses, both within the borough and across London, is central to our role and allows us to quickly connect businesses in Hillingdon with the most appropriate specialist support.

In the 12 month period January 2009 to December 2009, over 3,600 Hillingdon-based businesses were helped by BLIL. This included support that ranged from registering for the Business Link newsletter, making use of the on-line support tools, attending one of our many information and networking events through to receiving intensive personal assistance through a full Business Review.

BLIL support is available to all small businesses, at whatever stage in their business life cycle they are - not just start-ups. Between January 2009 and December 2009 173 established businesses (trading for more than 12 months) undertook a business review with a Business Link Advisor, leading to the development of an action plan. All action plans include full referral information to appropriate follow-up sources of support, allowing us to raise awareness of the wide range of business support services available in Hillingdon. In fact between April 2009 and December 2009, we

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referred over 500 Hillingdon businesses on to a range of organisations and individuals offering specialised support.

The Business Reviews are normally undertaken by Business Link Advisors visiting the business-owners premises, so are totally 'local' in nature and take place within 10 days of the request. A 'Rapid Response' service is offered if the business is in a critical situation (e.g. considering redundancies or liquidation). Under the Rapid Response service, businesses normally talk to an experienced Business Advisor within 24 hours.

At BLIL we recognise that the quality of support provided is often down to the experience and expertise of the advisor. Business Link Advisors have either managed their own businesses, or have extensive business knowledge

Business Link is always seeking to develop a higher profile locally and would be very happy to provide 'surgery days' at the Civic Centre or other suitable venue. For a 'surgery day' BLIL arranges for an Advisor to be at the venue for the day and takes bookings for the Advisor to see 4 or 5 businesses in the course of the session.

In addition, Business Link has worked with local agencies to provide workshops for Hillingdon businesses. Most recently Business Link sponsored a workshop with West London Business and Hillingdon Chamber in Uxbridge.

A key change from April 2010 is that Business Link will provide introductory start-up and business planning workshops. Once attendees have completed these workshops and prepared a business plan they will be referred to the Business London programme for further workshops and, if appropriate, intensive start-up support.

The current Business Link contract in London is in place until September 2010. Discussions are taking place with the LDA over possible future contract extensions and service delivery models.

Follow Up

Rob Grover, Business Link Partnership Manager is due to attend a meeting of the Committee on the 14th April and will be happy to respond to questions either directly or after collecting evidence for the Committee.

Business Link In London would be pleased to offer any further information or support that Hillingdon Borough Council may require. Our CEO Patrick Elliott is also available to meet with senior members of the Council.