



FSB Accord campaign nears major milestone

On the 26th November, Aylesbury Vale District Council will become the thirty-first council to sign-up to the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) Small Business Engagement Accord, this equates to 42 per cent of all local authorities in the South East now signed-up.

By the New Year the FSB is looking to reach the key milestone of having half the local authorities in the South East signed-up to the Accord.

The Accord, launched in March 2009, is a voluntary code of practice for local authorities to follow in order to encourage a more productive dialogue with local businesses.

The FSB, as a cosignatory of the Accord, makes a commitment to work with councils to successfully engage with their local small business community to promote greater business engagement in local democracy.

As the campaign has developed local authorities have asked the FSB to make it

clearer how we aim to help with the delivery of the Accord.

To provide greater clarity to the FSB's role the latest signings by Chiltern District Council and Aylesbury Vale District Council, include revisions to the key principles of the Accord. These revised principles provide greater clarity as to how the FSB will assist them in promoting improved consultation with local small businesses.



Roger House, Chairman of the FSB South East Policy Unit, said:

"The take-up of the Accord by councils has been truly amazing.

"It is only a couple of months since we celebrated reaching our first milestone of having a quarter of the councils in the South East signed-up, and now we are looking at starting the New Year by celebrating reaching our next major milestone of having half of the councils in the South East signed-up."

Accord signatories

Aylesbury Vale Council
 Basingstoke & Deane Council
 Canterbury City Council
 Chichester District Council
 Chiltern District Council
 Crawley Borough Council
 Eastleigh Borough Council
 Gravesham Borough Council
 Hart District Council
 Hastings Borough Council
 Havant Borough Council
 Horsham District Council
 Kent County Council
 Maidstone Borough Council
 Medway Council
 Mid Sussex District Council
 Reading Borough Council
 Rother District Council
 Rushmoor Borough Council
 Shepway District Council
 Southampton City Council
 South Oxfordshire Council
 Surrey County Council
 Test Valley Borough Council
 Vale of White Horse Council
 Waverley Borough Council
 West Oxfordshire Council
 West Sussex County Council
 Winchester City Council

Accord Signing Ceremony Gallery



Top row L-R West Sussex County Council, Crawley Borough Council, Mid Sussex District Council & West Berkshire Council, Bottom row L-R Chichester District Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Surrey County Council & Canterbury City Council



Promoting procurement best practice

As part of the SEPU public sector procurement campaign two conferences were organised to promote the benefits of engaging small businesses in the delivery of public sector contracts.

The two events (15 Sept & 14 Oct) attracted over 150 delegates from a diverse range of public and private sector organisations who came together to listen/share examples of best practice in terms of public sector procurement. The split was one third public sector; two thirds private sector with the aim being to:

1. To share best practice in SME engagement by public sector through public sector procurement.
2. To capture further examples of Good Practice through workshops with SMEs.
3. To examine some of the economic benefits arising from engaging local SMEs.
4. To explore how SME engagement can help public sector achieve performance targets.

The events featured workshop sessions giving delegates the opportunity for in-depth discussions on the following key procurement topics: Simplified Pre Qualification Questionnaires, Small Business Consortia, Local Supplier Clauses, Procurement Processes and Sustainable Procurement. The aim of the sessions was to:

1. To capture further examples of Good Practice through LA participation in workshops.
2. To communicate to small businesses the changes taking place in public sector procurement and to encourage them to take a more active interest in tendering and to allow them to view the Public Sector as an opportunity for business development.

Strong marketing of the conference enabled us to have a wide variety of public sector representatives at both events; these included procurement managers from within local authorities, NHS, Fire and Police services as well as representatives from BIS, Treasury, SEEDA and Business Link.

Speakers at the both events were drawn from a range of organisations to give delegates a

complete overview of the latest procurement initiatives, these included:

- Naomi Davy and Peter Smith, senior members of the Glover implementation team updated the delegates on the progress of the "Access For All Programme" promising support and training for SMEs to help them bid for public sector contracts. Government have also set up a Supplier Feedback support desk, where SMEs can take any complaints they may have on procurement processes followed by the public sector that they are unhappy with. The Help Desk has already help to change PQQs that were previously not SME friendly!
- Steve Dunkerley from Improvement and Efficiency South East promoted the free South East Business Portal which currently offers up to 2000 contract loaded with between 90 – 100 opportunities to tender open at any one time.
- Deb Sen emphasised the FSB procurement lobbying focus would continue to push for changes to help SMEs. We should be asking for 10% more to be spent with SMEs year on year. A new FSB policy document will be available shortly containing the top 5 lobbying points. We will also continue to highlight examples of Good Practice on SME engagement by the public sector.
- Jonathan Campbell from East Sussex County Council demonstrated the commitment of his council to doing business with SMEs and in particular their approach to reviewing sub-contracting opportunities for SMEs, creating a single PQQ and offering better debriefings.
- Nicki Kavanagh of FSB member Juniper Communications indicated how she had been successful in the public sector and suggested some areas where the public sector could do better.

This paved the way for delegates to discuss 5 areas, in smaller workshops, where further good practice might be possible. The findings from these workshops will help shape future lobbying.

As part of the conference the FSB commissioned two procurement best practice videos, one featuring local authority case studies and the other looked at examples from small businesses. To view the videos go to www.fsb.org.uk/sepu



Naomi Davy OGC



Jonathan Campbell ESCC



Debasish Sen FSB



Steve Dunkerley IESE



Nicki Kavanagh
Juniper Communications



Sustainable procurement
workshop delegates



Local supplier clauses
workshop



Crawley conference
delegates

South East

Business Crime Forum

Crime forum looks to engage with local authorities

Crime against business is a problem that is not only affecting many companies' ability to do business but is also blighting the communities in which they are situated. Crime affects a business' ability to meet customer deadlines, attract customers and their profitability, ultimately risking businesses closing down and putting local jobs at risk.

This type of crime is not a 'victimless' crime as it affects business owners, their staff and wider community as employees feel at risk and jobs are lost as businesses are forced to relocate or close down. This is a huge concern to both the sustainability of our local communities and the national economy. It is estimated that crime against business costs the UK economy a significant £12 billion a year.

In order to address crime against business issues the business community have linked together with police forces from across the South East to create the South East Business Crime Forum. The forum establishes a new partnership focusing on four key goals:

1. Improve links between businesses and Police Forces.
2. Ensure that business crime issues are addressed in local strategies.
3. Identify and share examples of best practice in relation to business crime reduction.
4. Examine opportunities for linking into current crime reduction work, such as that on anti-social behaviour, Priority and Prolific Offenders, Acquisitive Crime and drug related crime, so that work benefits business as well as other elements of the community.

Andy Barter, FSB South East Policy Manager and Chairman of the South East Business Crime Forum said:

"We are very keen to open a dialogue with local authorities. They have a key role to play in helping to set the local agenda and businesses need to be encouraged to engage in local crime reduction partnerships in order to raise the profile of business crime."

"An effective response to business crime can only be achieved by action at the national, regional and local level, this is vital for the sustainability of our local communities and the national economy."

"To achieve this at the local level we invite councils to open discussions with the forum as to how we can work in partnership to cut the cost of crime to business."

FSB call for urgent help for village shops and pubs at risk of closure

The latest Keep Trade Local report by the FSB warns that our village shops and pubs are under threat unless urgent action is taken.

Single shops, pubs, post offices and petrol stations in small rural settlements are eligible for vital funds from the Local Authorities which could help them through the recession, but according to the FSB, 47 per cent are currently missing out.

Village businesses, such as shops and pubs, are entitled to 50 per cent relief on their business rates under a Rural Rate Relief scheme, which also gives local authorities discretionary powers to grant up to 100 per cent business rate relief.

However, many local authorities fail to offer significant relief above the mandatory 50 per cent to half of all small village firms, which could mean the difference to those firms between survival and closure.

The village shop network is losing between 300 and 500 shops each year, and 13 rural pubs close each week, yet the existing Rural Rate Relief scheme is not being fully used to help save these businesses, which form the heart of village life.

In a poll of FSB members, 44 per cent said they relied on a sole pub, shop, post office or petrol station in their area. They cannot afford for these small businesses to fail.



The FSB's report, *A new approach to the rural economy*, calls for the Treasury to make more funds available to local authorities so they can grant 100 per cent rate relief for a fixed period of just 12 months to help these vital village business weather the downturn.

The report outlines a mixture of short term and long term actions the Government must take to relieve the prob-

lems of the rural business owner and plan for a successful rural economy of the future. These include:

- A planning system that encourages the development of a vibrant and diverse business community in the countryside
- Incentivising local authorities to encourage tourism
- Greater fiscal help for our rural small businesses

Linda Walton, Rural Affairs and Tourism Chairman, Federation of Small Businesses, said:

"Every week we hear of the death of village shops and pubs yet the Rural Rate Relief scheme, which was specifically set up to help these rural businesses, is being chronically underused. Village shops and pubs are at the heart of village life and the failure of such a business can devastate local communities, the Treasury must ensure our village shops and pubs survive by enabling our local authorities to give 100 per cent rate relief during this downturn."

Secure post offices by creating dedicated Small Business Hubs

The FSB is urging the Government to transform post offices into small business hubs around the country to secure the future of the otherwise under-threat Post Office Network.



Small firms are regular users of the post office, and a key customer base – FSB research shows that almost one in five small businesses visit the Post Office every day and almost half (47 per cent) say they visit a couple of times a week. Small businesses are a loyal customer base for post offices, yet they are not getting the service they need and the Post Office Network is in serious need of investment.

The FSB believes the Post Office Network must to be remodelled into small business hubs to respond to the needs of some key customers and to ensure the network is financially sustainable for years to come. The establishment

of business hubs, with business banking on offer, is the best chance the Network has of becoming financially viable. The FSB proposal to turn post offices into small business hubs includes:

- Establishing a business desk at each post office with specially trained staff, able to advise businesses on banking, Government services, insurance and sending and receiving parcels;
- Establish a regular Business Link service in each post office to give one-to-one advice to small businesses – similar to mortgage advisors in bank branches;
- Offer dedicated advertising facilities within the post office, to help small businesses reach other local businesses and potential customers;
- Establish a full range of financial services, including business banking; and
- Offer meeting room facilities to start-ups and micro businesses in as many post offices as is possible.

The Post Office is not just a place for small firms to send and receive mail, but is somewhere to meet other small firms and potential customers. It is essential to invest in post offices now to ensure they survive in the long term and are able to help communities continue to grow and thrive.

FSB lodges complaint against French Government for failure to prevent port blockades



The FSB is calling on the European Commission to take action against the French Government for its failure to prevent fishermen blockading ports in France and therefore causing disruption and financial loss to hauliers and commuters on both sides of the Channel.

These blockades are not a one-off incident; sadly, disruption of this nature caused by French fishermen happens on a regular basis – at least once a year. Perhaps the most visible symbol of this disruption are the thousands of HGVs that are forced to park

up on the coast bound carriageway of the M20 as part of Operation Stack, put in place by Kent Police to reduce traffic congestion close to Dover.

The FSB has therefore made a formal complaint to the European Commission under Article 226 of the Treaty Establishing the European Community. The French Government is in breach of its legal obligations under the EC Treaty, which prohibits restrictions on imports or exports of goods between Member States, and demands the European Commission takes action against the French Government to prevent such blockades in the future and to secure compensation for those haulage firms affected by the protests.

Roger House, SEPU Chairman won support for the campaign during a recent transport debate in the House of Lords held by Kent County Council. The FSB campaign was praised by Councillors and MPs attending the debate.

Thames Valley Policy Unit Contact Details

Oxfordshire: Barry Wheatley 01993 812093

South Bucks: Linda Walton 01494 864431

North Bucks: Allan Banks 01908 691934

East Bucks: Mary Flavelle 07778 970 668

Reading & West Berks: Brian Eastman 0118 941 9865