



SW FSB Policy Newsletter for August 2007

One of the benefits of an electronic newsletter is that it can expand.... And contract according to how much news there is – and August is a bumper edition.

Matters covered:-

Floods –

Stop Press – Great news that the RDA is to fund an ‘Open for Business’ campaign for Gloucestershire

Success!!!! - RDAs to implement FSB Policy.

New fire precautions – heavy handed inspections – what is your experience?

Health and Safety Executive’s myth of the month

Crime

Better Regulation – your chance to make the point

EU and Labour Law – more FSB success!

Do you sell to the EU? Have you had problems selling to the EU? And finally – competition for businesses with ideas that reduce greenhouse gases.

Floods – we are really pleased to see that the RDA and HMRC have picked up on the FSB’s comments and learnt the lessons from 2001 Foot and Mouth. As in 2001, the FSB setting up its own scheme helped us get the point over. We will be pushing to ensure that the County and other agricultural shows that have been hit across the whole SW by the weather are supported.

Stop Press – Great news that the RDA is to fund an ‘Open for Business’ campaign for Gloucestershire

Success!!!! - RDAs to implement FSB Policy.

In the Budget this year, Gordon Brown told the RDAs to help small businesses become more resource efficient. And that is exactly what the SW FSB called for in its Energy Policy published last August.

Hot off the press are plans to ensure that all providers of Business Link’s advice service will be looking at resource efficiency as a core part of the activity. It will take a month or so to get things set up – and then we will be looking to you to tell us how successful and/or effective they are – so watch this space!

New fire precautions – heavy handed inspections – what is your experience?

A very small Bed & Breakfast business in Devon – 3 letting rooms – has been inspected by the Fire Service and been told they need to spend in excess of £1000 on more fire alarms, smoke alarms etc. The owner has now been served with an Enforcement Notice. He was particularly unhappy with the attitude of the inspecting officers and it would seem that the requirements are 'overkill' to say the least. Has anyone else heard of any over zealous Fire Officers? We are concerned that if this Enforcement Notice is successful there could be an impact on many of our members, as well as loss of bed spaces for the tourism industry.

Health and Safety Executive's myth of the month

Some of the things we hear about Health and Safety are more the product of comedy script writers than reality. So check out this link to the HSE's Myth of the Month. It deals with myths about health and safety laws as well as providing some useful information www.hse.gov.uk/myth/index.htm. Enjoy!

Crime

At the SW level, the FSB has successfully pushed the issue of 'crime against business' up the agenda.

We are trying to get seminars organised for members on aspects of fraud such as credit card and internet fraud. If any branch would like to host such a seminar please contact Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk and she will make the necessary contacts.

We know that members have been active on this matter. An example is Chris Wykeham's work in Glastonbury. The owner of a taxi firm, Chris worked with the local council and police to bring together all the various 'watches', so their work is co-ordinated. This has dramatically reduced crime levels across all categories.

If anyone has an example of work in the area which has reduced crime levels and/or made people feel safer and so helped business, please do let Viv Rayner know.

Better Regulation – your chance to make the point

The Better Regulation Executive (BRE) is looking to meet businesses that struggle with red tape. A match made in heaven for FSB members! The idea is for the BRE to find out how government policy impacts small businesses on the ground and to achieve a real improvement in the time and money they spend in complying with regulation. If you want to talk to them about how regulation affects your business, please contact cassandra.kenny@fsb.org.uk with details and copy Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk

The SW FSB is having a round table meeting with them in September, so I need your feedback and comments for that too please. Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk

For the next 2 items on developments in the EU, we are indebted to smallbusinesseurope for the information. Full details at <http://www.smallbusinesseurope.org/en/>

EU and Labour Law – more FSB success!

Earlier in the year the EU Parliament decided to get involved in labour law and published a green paper for discussion. SW APU Chairman, David Ramsden was one of the FSB members who flagged it up as important to the FSB and its members.

A man from Mars reading the Labour Law paper would have thought that the EU's economy was made up of limited companies employing salaried workers! And that was the problem.

Concerted lobbying by the FSB and others has radically changed the EU Parliament's thinking. Rather than calling for job security, they now acknowledge the need for employment security. Encouragingly they seem to better appreciate that more flexibility is a requirement for employees as well as employers, and that the increasing weight of legislation is making employers much more reluctant to employ additional staff.

The report notes that collective labour law is only one of the means for ensuring security and that social dialogue is not inclusive, particularly in relation to the sort of workers who are the topic of the green paper and in particular SMEs.

A particular problem for small businesses has been the way the EU consults. The report as accepted by the MEPs calls for wider consultation than the standard social partners on these issues. As the 'standard social partners' are the Unions and big business, this is a great step forward.

MEPs also voted to delete a paragraph calling on the European Commission to initiate negotiations with member states aiming at 'establishing consistent criteria for determining the status of workers and self-employed persons'.

But there is still work to do. The report still assumes that atypical work is not good, and calls for a recognition that employment contracts of indefinite duration are 'the general form of employment'; concluding that non-standard contracts put workers at greater risk, with higher accident rates and poorer working conditions. The report also calls on the commission to establish a dispute settlement system to enable European social partner agreements to develop into a tool to foster a more effective regulatory approach at EU level.

So while the FSB and its colleagues from the Chambers, IoD etc have made considerable progress in getting the report changed, we cannot afford to let this one go. It still has the potential to cause grave problems.

Do you sell to the EU? Have you had problems selling to the EU?

The single market was supposed to make it easier for small businesses to sell outside their own national borders, but within the EU.

One of the ways it was supposed to help was over the vexed issue of 'standards'. For some goods, there are harmonised EU standards, often using the 'CE' mark. For many goods the principle of 'mutual recognition' operates. This principle is that where an item is legally on sale in one EU country, then it can be sold in another. Of course there is a get out clause which states that member states may override the mutual recognition principle,

by enforcing technical rules on products for environmental, national security, public health and safety reasons. These technical rules must be proportionate.

The EU Commission is aware that this get out clause has been used to prevent goods coming in to their country and want to try and improve matters.

So any information you have on how far it is a problem, on what goods or services and in what countries would be very helpful.

The EU has a system for rejecting mutual recognition. Are you aware of it and do you think it is effective.

Finally they are aware of some goods which have gained entry to markets claiming 'mutual recognition' clearance, which are in fact illegal in their country of origin. Again, does anyone have any knowledge of such an instance?

If anyone can help, please let vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk have the details.

And finally – for anyone who has a product or service that reduces greenhouse gas, this competition may well be of interest:-

WANTED – SMEs with Big Ideas on Climate Change

Shell Springboard is now open for a third round of applications, for small businesses who have a product or service that reduces greenhouse gases.

Tackling climate change is not just about to stand compliance; if you've got a great idea (and a sound business plan), it could be a huge opportunity.

The fund will make award of between £20,000 and £40,000 in early 2008.

You may be able to benefit from this, or know someone who could.

To be eligible:

Your product or service must reduce greenhouse gases, be innovative and commercially viable.

You must have been in business for at least three months as a sole trader or a company

employing fewer than 250 people.

Applications are made online and the deadline is 9th November 2007

To speak to us directly, join us at one of our 10 UK City, Shell Springboard Surgeries.

Go to www.shellspringboard.org to find out more.

Please feel free to forward this to interested parties.

Shell Springboard - for small businesses with big ideas on climate change.



Vivienne Rayner
10th August 2007