

Welcome to the September SW Policy Newsletter.

Apart from information about 'the rates' and more ways to promote your business, there's help on training and requests for feedback on things like Broadband.

Should your council be doing more to help the local economy? - How to make them!

New rating valuations on the way – beware scammers!

FSB Green List

And if you help others become more energy efficient – here's a free marketing opportunity.

Have you used Train to Gain? Your chance to deliver the bouquets as well as any brickbats!

And more help on the skills front – 'Talentmap' could be the guide to help you improve your business.

How's your Broadband – 'not' or just slow? - you tell us so we can campaign

Should your council be doing more to help the local economy?

Find out what they can do and how to improve matters for small businesses at the SWAPU Study day on Sunday, October 18th at Cribbs Business Centre, Junction 17, M5 near Bristol.

Hear from Bill Cotton Head of Economic Development for Swindon and Richard Sheard, formerly CEO for Salisbury now with Government Office, about things now as well as the changes in the pipeline.

Ask questions of our panel of senior councillors from the 3 main parties.

To book your place, email Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk.

The agenda is on line at www.southwestfsbpolicy.co.uk

New rating valuations on the way – beware scammers!

If you own or occupy business premises you should check the details of your business rates valuation as soon as you receive it to ensure you pay the correct amount in business rates. The valuations will be sent out to all business and non-domestic property in England and Wales during October by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) and will be used by local councils to calculate next year's business rates bills.

The VOA has carried out its five-yearly revaluation of all rateable values – this keeps the business rates system in England and Wales fair and up-to-date, ensuring that it reflects changes in the market. The new valuations, which are effective from 1 April 2010, clearly show the details of the business property, whether it is a shop, an office or a warehouse, including the number of rooms, their description and size, and the value applied to each area. For pubs, and other licensed property, the valuation will show the levels of fair maintainable trade, instead of floor space.

Checking the details is easy – the valuations are clear, and are sent with a fact sheet to answer most of your questions. The VOA has set up a new website – www.voa.gov.uk/2010 - where you can compare your valuation with others and make contact if there are any issues. All of this can be done without any professional knowledge of the business rates system.

And if anyone offers to get you a reduction provided you pay them a fee up front – ignore them.

Talk to the VOA first. Compare your property with others you think are similar. If you still think your property has been over valued there are a number of well established professional bodies whose members will be happy to help. Yes it will cost money – but their fees are based on the amount they save you and you only pay when the saving has been achieved.

FSB Green List

The FSB is compiling a 'Green List' of businesses demonstrating energy efficiency and environmental awareness in the workplace. Share your good and bad experiences.

And if you help others become more energy efficient – here's a free marketing opportunity.

Does your business offer energy efficiency products or services to small and medium-sized businesses, large companies or public sector organisations? If so, Regen SW would like to hear from you.

Regen SW is the sustainable energy agency for south west England, and we are currently producing a guide to energy efficiency products and services for businesses in the region.

The guide will include information on energy monitoring, metering, heating, cooling, heat recovery, motors, drives, lighting, insulation, glazing and more.

If you want to be listed in the guide, or if you have a product or service that you think would make a good case study, then why not get in touch? It won't cost you a penny.

To be listed in the guide or if you have successfully implemented energy efficiency measures within your business and are prepared to be a case study, please contact Tim Loe at tloe@regensw.co.uk

You can also get your energy-saving products and services listed by registering with Regen's online directory at www.regensw.co.uk/energy-directory/index.php

Have you used Train to Gain? Your chance to deliver the bouquets as well as any brickbats!

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills is consulting with employers about their views on the skills system in England. An important part of this consultation is understanding the views of small businesses on government funded initiatives such as Train to Gain and their experiences of using these services. Their findings will inform a report to Ministers on the simplification of the skills system due to be published in December.

They'd be particularly interested in your answers to the following questions:

1. Are you aware that Train to Gain covers skills at all levels from basic literacy and numeracy through to intermediate and higher level skills? Is this relevant to your business?
2. Train to Gain aims to be 'business needs based'. From your experiences do you think this is true? Do you have any suggestions as to how this aspect of Train to Gain can be improved?
3. If you have used Train to Gain and had to contribute towards the cost of your training, were the costs involved made clear to you at the start?
4. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the publicly funded skills system and Train to Gain in particular?

I will be away for the next few weeks, so please send your views direct to Victoria.Smith@ukces.org.uk by September 25th.

And more help on the skills front – 'Talentmap' could be the guide to help you improve your business.

Talentmap is an online tool developed to simplify the task of how and where to get skills advice. To grow and prosper all businesses need work out the skills required and how they are going to make sure those skills are in the business – whether by recruitment or training existing staff.

For many years, FSB members have complained bitterly about the complexity of all the initiatives for skills, education and employment and how they needed to be collated and simplified. This is what **talentmap** is all about.

To learn more about talentmap, visit : <http://www.talentmap.ukces.org.uk/> or www.businesslink.gov.uk/talentmap

And as ever, let me know how you get on at Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk

How's your Broadband – 'not' or just slow?

The SW is second only to London in business use of the internet. Yet we have the worst connection of all the English Regions – only Wales and Northern Ireland are worse.

To help us campaign we need more evidence of the problem – and this is where you come in.

If you are in a 'not' spot, please let me know your post Code and the name or number of your premises. If your broadband is slow, please check it at www.broadbandperformance.co.uk , letting Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk know the speed, your postcode and the name or number of your premises.

Some members report that the speed is fine – until about 4pm when the children get home from school and log on – again if this is the case for you, please let me know at Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk

Thank you for all your help - your feedback is absolutely invaluable helping us to make the case.

If you enjoy these newsletters and would like to get more involved, please drop me an email. Apart from the Economic development day on October 18th, we are having a Policy Weekend, February 19th to 21st as well as other events and activities that you may find interesting.

Best Wishes

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<http://www.fsb.org.uk/>

For South West Policy webpage <http://www.fsb.org.uk/default.aspx?id=0&loc=sw>