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## Business Matters Project Overview

Business Matters is the West Midlands e-Partnership project focused on improving the quality and efficiency of interactions between Local Authorities and their business community.

Whilst much has been done to improve the service offered by councils to citizens, little focus has been given to the business community. Business Matters will consult with the business community itself to better understand needs and pilot new ways of working.

A key element of the project will be to develop the concept of the Single Business Account and deploy it in a number of controlled environments. By consulting closely with the business community the project intends to better identify the benefits of the SBA to businesses as well as to the Local Authority.

The key features of the Single Business Account are clarified overleaf. In essence it is a mechanism to allow all interactions between a business and its local authority to be captured and stored in a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system using a single account reference number. This should allow the business to engage with the authority more easily. Self service facilities will allow business representatives to interact with local authorities out of hours, at times more convenient to them. Local Authorities will have a more comprehensive and unified view of their business customers and be able to service them better.

Business Matters is led by representatives from a number of West Midlands local authorities, representing the District, County and Metropolitan authorities. Close working with other regions, especially the North West and London will help ensure that the outputs are of relevance and benefit to all English local authorities.

The **project structure** is designed to ensure that all objectives are met by March 31st 2006:

**Strand 1** will focus on consulting with the business community. It is being led by Solihull and Dudley Councils and will ensure that representatives from a cross section of businesses in different sectors are actively consulted. It is hoped that the benefits of the Single Business Account will be more clearly identified and that the process of communicating and promoting them more widely can commence.

**Strand 2** led by Redditch BC, is intended to help standardise the data fields that will inform the design and implementation of the SBA across all local authorities. This is needed to ensure economies of scale and also to allow businesses to be served equally well across geographic boundaries. A Standard Business Description Schema will be designed and agreed nationally.

**Strand 3** will focus on working on practical design and deployment issues with a selected number of CRM vendors. The Warwickshire-on-line partnership is leading this strand. The project has enlisted the active support of Oracle, Onyx and Northgate from the CRM supply side to assist design and deployment. Toolkits and implementation guidelines will be developed to help all other LAs.

**Strand 4** will ensure that the work of the project will be synchronised with the Government Connect project and identify requirements that GC should take forward and address beyond April 2006. Lichfield DC leads this strand as well as being overall project lead authority. As well as the design of the SBA itself this strand will address challenges such as role based authentication and single sign on using GC Connect.

**Strand 5** will ensure widespread communications and dissemination not only within the West Midlands but Nationally through regional partnerships. It is being led by the West Midlands LGA.

Project Management and programme support has been commissioned from rol solutions Ltd to ensure continuity from the Working with Business National project, the pre-cursor to Business Matters.

## Issues

Whilst the benefits of the Single Business Account are believed to be significant, (see overleaf), there is little practical experience yet of resolving design and deployment issues. Business Matters will address some of the more challenging, practical issues such as modelling a system to accommodate multi-site, complex organisations at the same time as small and medium businesses. The needs of a specific local authority to manage interactions with its business 'customers' will not be the same as the national need for a 'whole view' of a large trading enterprise. Some compromises may be needed. These potential conflicts and others will be addressed and practical lessons learned will be shared.

### **What is the vision for the Single Business Account?**

The Single Business Account concept is to allow local authorities to deliver private sector efficiency and value to the UK business community. It is envisaged that it will provide a framework to service businesses proactively, with time and cost savings for both business customers and councils. The SBA should allow businesses a single point of authenticated entry in all business interactions, ideally with local authorities, statutory bodies and Central Government Agencies and Departments in England.

All council services will be delivered and managed through the SBA providing a focal point of contact, reducing the need for multiple applications, storing frequently used data sets and giving business customers improved online tracking, information delivery and transactional services. The account information should be securely accessible online anywhere and at any time or via telephone, post, call centres or face to face. Businesses should be able to carry out online transactions and enquiries with councils on a 24 x 7 basis, creating real flexibility and added value.

The Business Account should allocate a unique and authenticated identifier number to all businesses the council interacts with, including suppliers from other areas, whether they take services from or undertake transactions with a local authority. It should enable the local authority to manage its interactions with business proactively and allow information about business customers to be held centrally within the council. It should also give business a 360% up to date view of all their current council interactions and information at any time.

### **Why is it needed?**

Research has showed conclusively that the provision of single point access to council services has been identified by businesses as a key consideration. They have expressed frustration and disappointment that in an increasingly online business environment, communications, delivery of services and transactions with their local council have not been available online in line with private sector experience. Too often it requires repeated telephone calls, personal visits or paper correspondence to clarify issues and achieve results.

The efficiency gains and financial benefits offered by the internet in the local government / business arena will be a contributing factor to improvements in national economic performance over the short, medium and long term.