

Underpinning  
Transformational  
Government

celebrating  
ten years of  
the NLPG

Case studies from the 2009 NLPG and NSG Exemplar Awards  
Demonstrating the importance of definitive data in transforming government

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# West Midlands Business Matters project

Lichfield District Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council,  
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and Business Link West Midlands

NLPG NSG Exemplar Award  
Winner Best Partnership Between Organisations

**Much of what is written about Transformational Government centres on driving efficiencies and improving service delivery to citizens; however, businesses are also customers and important to local economic prosperity. Improving the way the public sector works and interacts with businesses can also drive efficiencies and improve service delivery, but it relies on better data quality and the ability to share that data across organisations and agencies.**

Business Matters is a regional project that has been running for four years, involving Business Link West Midlands, Dudley and Solihull Councils, with Lichfield District Council acting as lead. It seeks to promote the idea of businesses as constituents which are important as wealth creators, and to introduce a standardised way of collecting and sharing information about them, in order to drive efficiency and to deliver better regulation and business support.

Businesses are notoriously difficult to track, occupy multiple locations, and have multiple contacts, so bringing together one true source of business data within a local authority and beyond has many potential benefits. Currently, business information is scattered across numerous databases, with no prospect of sharing. Business Matters introduces the concept of the Single Business Account (SBA), a platform for business process change. The SBA will be the basis for partnership working and multi-agency service delivery.

Behind the SBA is the Business Description Schema which provides

the foundation for data sharing. This follows a key principle of the 'Hampton Review' which states that businesses should only have to provide information about themselves once, and that this information should be capable of being shared. The UPRN taken from the NLPG was identified as the most critical field in the schema to reliably identify businesses. This provides the unique geographic location for each business, the business identity assurance, and forms the bedrock of the schema.

With all partners adopting the same schema, data cleansing and matching becomes much easier, and the prospect of a comprehensive Regional Business Index with a synchronised update process becomes a reality.

## Outcomes

Business Matters is now working on the fifth and sixth phases of its work, but there have already been significant benefits identified in some of the partners' pilot projects. The adoption of the SBA will facilitate process change and result in clear efficiencies and savings.

At Dudley, for example, matching their data across key databases internally and with Business Link identified that the number of businesses went from an approximate 10,000 in each database to a total of 16,000 overall – significantly changing Dudley's understanding of businesses in the area and their needs.

Across Lichfield and Solihull, internal efficiencies have seen up to 20% time savings with minimal changes to working practices.

Joint working between Environmental Health, Trading Standards, the Fire

Service, all of whom undertake planned inspections of a common retail 'client', is almost impossible without identity management and standardised data sharing. The Retail Enforcement Pilot demonstrated up to a 30% reduction in the number of planned inspections without loss of quality.

Each partner has carried out data matching exercises and been surprised by the improvements. With a single view of the customer; the project is now working on how to identify business characteristics that will enable better service delivery; for example, how to recognise head offices of companies where there may be an opportunity to discuss Primary Authority responsibilities.

This project, with little investment has produced the underlying technical and practical solutions to the complicated problem of accurate business identification and data sharing across the public sector. The Business Matters project lays the foundation for delivering better service to businesses, and creates the right conditions for prosperous and vibrant economic communities.

## Key benefits

- low cost technical solution that enables data sharing and joint working across different parts of the public sector
- pilot projects have already identified and delivered real savings and efficiencies
- has further raised the profile of the NLPG as a key business identifier
- starts to address the Varney and Hampton agendas for business