



The premier business membership and support organisation for Birmingham and Solihull

Description

Birmingham Chamber is the premier business membership and support organisation for Birmingham and Solihull. With 3500 members in the area, we offer a range of services from information and advice to international trade assistance and training. The Regeneration team within Birmingham Chamber focuses on the needs of disadvantaged communities and BME businesses.

Who we focus on

We concentrate on entrepreneurs in the disadvantaged inner-city communities of Birmingham. The level of new business creation in these areas is half the UK average rate. Women are massively under-represented in new enterprises here.

There is a concentration of marginal and shrinking businesses in the area – many are in low value sectors and low margin businesses. For example, there are many small independent retailers here who are struggling to compete with the large multiples. The informal economy is very active in the area. Local businesses are mainly small – over 70% have less than 10 employees.

Black and Minority Ethnic Business

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F A C T S H E E T

Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry

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Barriers and issues

Entrepreneurs in this area face numerous barriers to success. Income levels are low, making it harder for residents to finance business start up. This particularly applies to young people who have even greater difficulty accessing credit. BME communities are below the average for enterprise also, although this varies between specific communities.

Attitudes to enterprise are a key factor – the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) highlights that the attitudes of BME groups are less positive with, for example, 67% of Bangladeshi respondents stating that a fear of failure would prevent them from starting a business and 36% of African Caribbean believing that they did not have the skills to set up a business.

The area has seen an influx of new communities in recent years, with growing numbers of Somali, Kurdish and other groups to add to the well established Asian and African Caribbean communities. These groups face additional barriers although enterprise is seen as a vital mechanism for them. Take up of support services is low – businesses do not readily identify with or seek out “mainstream” providers.

Support Provided

Business Support Network

One of the key barriers for micro businesses in Birmingham is knowing how to get help when they need it and a lack of trust or confidence in the business support agencies offering support. We have developed the Business Support Network to bring together 40 community-based traders’ associations, local BME business groups, neighbourhood groups and other business membership groups.

We support them by giving some development worker time and help with running meetings and communicating with

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members. We also provide information about business support services and act as the link into citywide agencies. The groups facilitate a two-way communication with BME and small businesses on the ground. Business owners are more likely to trust the groups to represent their interests and as a way to access help and support.

Enterprise

Birmingham Chamber offers advice, training and practical support to local entrepreneurs seeking to establish a new business. This includes a dedicated counsellor to work with them to help with putting together a viable business plan.

We offer subsidised access to legal guidance, advice on getting the right kind of investment for the business and practical help with finding new customers.

Masterclasses

Masterclasses offer BME and small businesses short tasters about key business topics. Over an evening they learn about such subjects as networking, employment law and how to win more customers from experts in the field.

This is delivered in a simple way with time for Q&A and networking and concludes with a hot buffet. Designed as an easy way to learn some basics about business issues, the majority of participants have gone on to take up more in-depth services afterwards.

Practical help for businesses

Whether it is finding new customers and markets, improving business premises or upgrading IT, Birmingham Chamber seeks to support local businesses. Traditional publicly funded business support services require both a lengthy time commitment on the part of the business owner but also a considerable financial investment.

Birmingham Chamber has developed a package of services that integrate with mainstream support and offer short sharp interventions targeted at very specific and tangible objectives. This has proved very popular with micro businesses in disadvantaged areas and has delivered good results.

Retail

A particular focus for support has been independent retailers, who face huge competitive challenge from supermarkets. Small shops are often a vital component of successful local neighbourhoods and in some areas are the only local economic drivers. Birmingham Chamber developed the Shoepasy programme to help small shops improve the quality of their retailing.

We have helped over 150 local BME retailers to learn from the methods of the supermarkets in terms of merchandising, layout and pricing. This has improved turnover and profits and made the businesses more competitive.