

Study attacks 'incoherent' aid for midlands social enterprise

Business support for social enterprises in and around Birmingham is 'increasingly fragmented, incoherent and patchy', a new report has revealed.

The study, from Birmingham and Solihull Social Economy Consortium, found the bulk of support was provided by just two agencies, one of which was suffering funding cuts.

Rising demand for services from voluntary sector groups and charities that had started trading activities to boost their finance was stretching support services even further, said the Home Office-funded study.

Business support organisations cannot meet demand, but several said they would cater for social enterprises if they could find the right funding.

Ranjit Bansal, research and strategy manager at social enterprise consultancy Cbc, which led part of the research, said: 'Our findings illustrate beyond doubt that business support for social

enterprise in the sub-region is now significantly under-resourced compared to even just two or three years ago. There are a number of reasons for this but declining public sector funding of support provision is top of the list.'

One example in the report showed support from Birmingham Council had reduced over the past decade from between £4m and £5m a year to less than £250,000.

Mr Bansal warned some agencies would not be able to keep going until new regeneration funds were available.

Graham Beaumont, chief executive of consultancy i-SE, which helped conduct the study, said: 'There may be training and other initiatives out there, but what organisations were telling us was that too much of it isn't flexible enough – it may have been designed months, even years, ago.'

Strengthening social enterprise, www.bssec.org.uk