

RISE Business Support Project - Final Report April 2007

Introduction

This report was prepared by Co-active on behalf of the project delivery consortium. It is the conclusion to the regional social enterprise business support project, commissioned by RISE.

Over the past year a regional social enterprise business support project has been developed, piloted and evaluated. (For the pilot, it was known as the 'South West Social Enterprise Service' [SWSES]; the service being implemented is now known as 'Social Enterprise Link'.) It was the intention to supply evidence of the need for, and create a mechanism for the delivery of such a service within the framework of the new Business Link arrangements in the region, and to take account of the simplification agenda as it emerged during the time frame of the project. Periodic reports to the Experts Group have detailed the progress of the project in detail, and this final report sets out the evaluation findings of the project, together with a short update on additional work carried out between January and March. Also within this report we have described the outcome of the pilot, and an indication of future support for the social enterprise service.

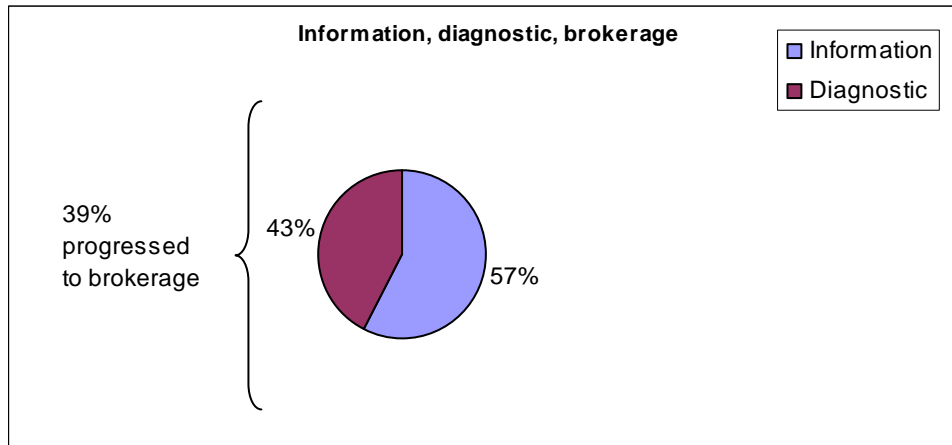
Evaluation Findings

The evaluation looked at both the numbers coming through the service, and the experience of both clients and the business advisors engaged in the pilot. We have analysed the stage of development of the enterprises using the service, and created a picture of the customer journey, together with some recommendations for the emerging full service. The pilot period extended for the three months October, November and December 2006. However, where appropriate we have also reported on outcomes post January 2007 (ie during the extension period of the pilot).

Pilot Evaluation

On closing the pilot at 31 December 2006 the number of clients receiving a service from the service was 195, of which 153 were new clients and the remaining 42 were clients already known to one of the partners but returning with a new enquiry.

Of the 195 clients advised 112 received information, 83 remained in the diagnostic stage and 33 were brokered to a local service.

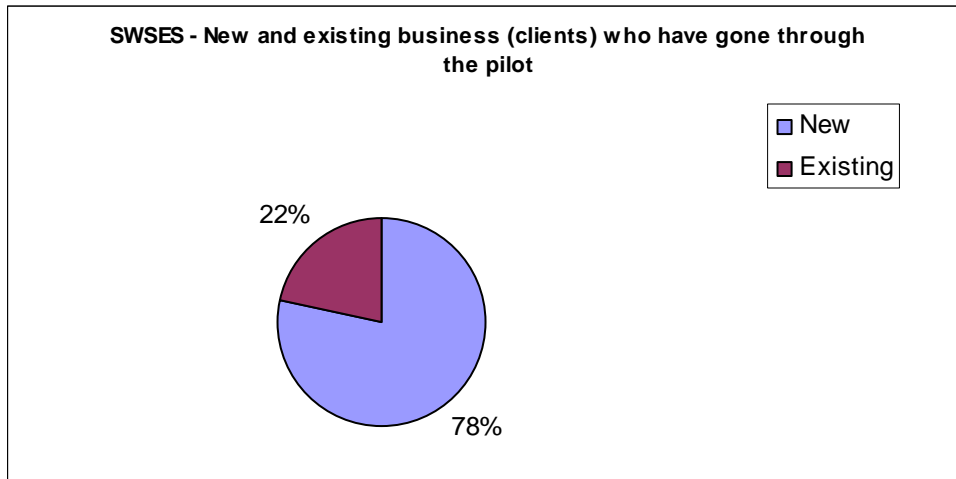


Since 1 January 2007 work has continued with 83 clients that were being advised through the diagnostic stage at the end of the pilot. Some of these clients received 2nd, 3rd and 4th sessions where they continued to move through their agreed action plans. It may be that in a 'full' service some of these clients would be brokered into a local service where one is funded. However where no locally funded brokered service exists we can evidence it is possible to support client progression via a telephone, email or online service.

During the January to March period we called a selection of clients as a part of the evaluation process. This activity resulted in a further 23 client being referred for diagnostic services. We also continued to receive information from clients responding to the pack by sending their initial information to the service. This activity resulted in another 35 clients being referred for diagnostic services of which 9 were also brokered to another service.

Stage of development of enterprise client

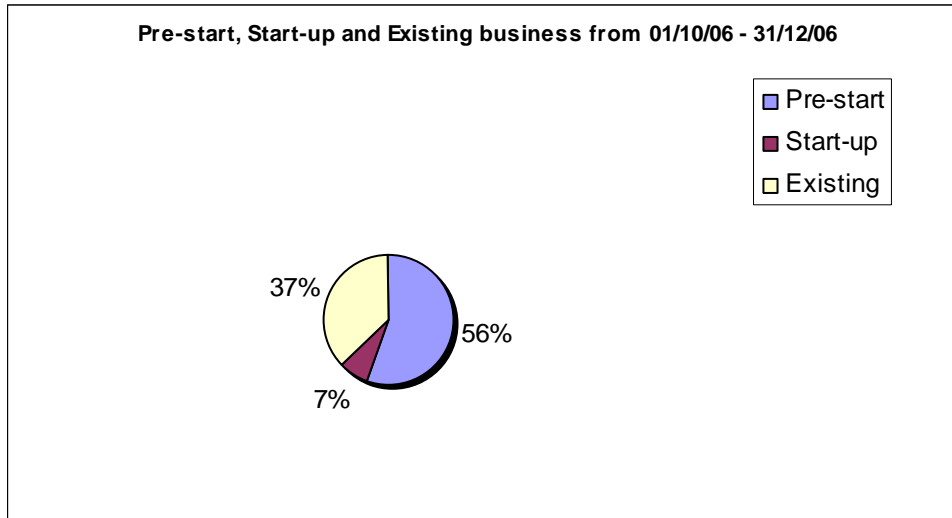
Total	New	Existing	
195		153	42
100%		78%	22%



The large majority of clients were new businesses (a further analysis is provided below). We would expect that in a full service, running over a longer period this would change as existing social enterprises worked through their initial action plan and returned for further help and advice.

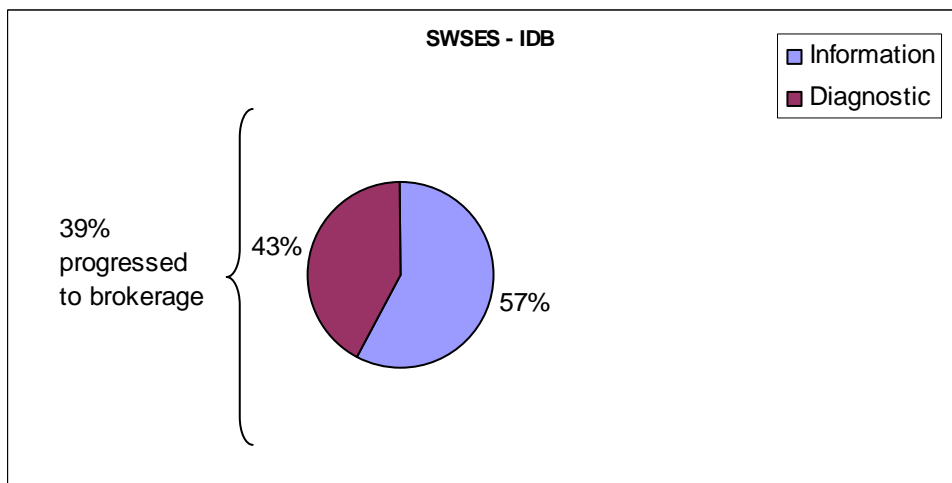
Pre-start, start-up and existing Businesses

Total	Pre-start	Start-up	Existing
195	108	14	73
100%	55.4%	7.2%	37.4%



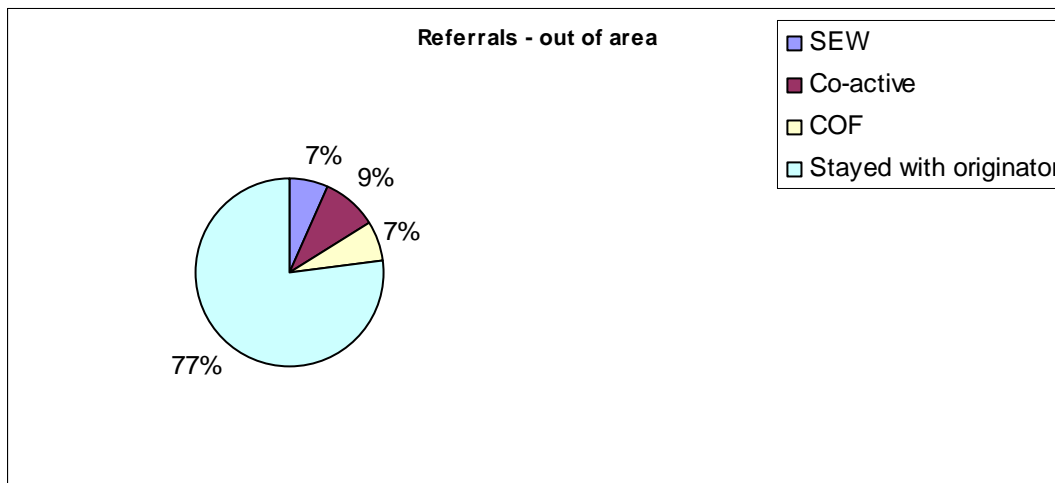
Breakdown of the stages reached by clients during pilot period

Total	Information	Diagnostic	Brokerage
195	112	83	33
100%	57%	43%	39%



Referrals for diagnostic or brokerage away from the original receiving organisation
(This was done to test the robustness of a distantly-delivered service)

Total	SEW*	Co-active*	CoF*	No movement
74	5	7	5	57
100%	6.8%	9.5%	6.8%	77.0%



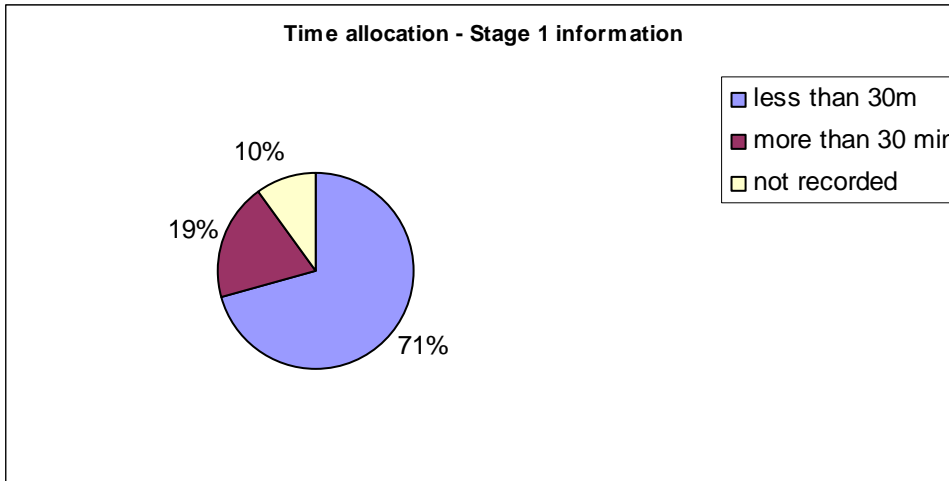
The process

At first contact (information stage) clients were sent an information pack, after a preliminary conversation with an advisor. In a full service situation this stage would be carried out by an information officer, and would probably take less time than recorded here. We do not think that information sessions should last longer than thirty minutes in general. The variation from this was largely due to business advisors' adaptation to changing practice. The diagnostic contacts resulted after a client had responded to the information pack by submitting some basic business information about their enterprise. A range of tools were used, and this is outlined later in this report. The next two charts look at the length of time these two stages of the process took to be delivered. (The timing is of each 'live' intervention with a client, and not the total diagnostic process, which would comprise a number of these interventions).

Information Stage 1

Total	>30min	30min<	not recorded
151	107	29	15
100%	71%	19%	10%

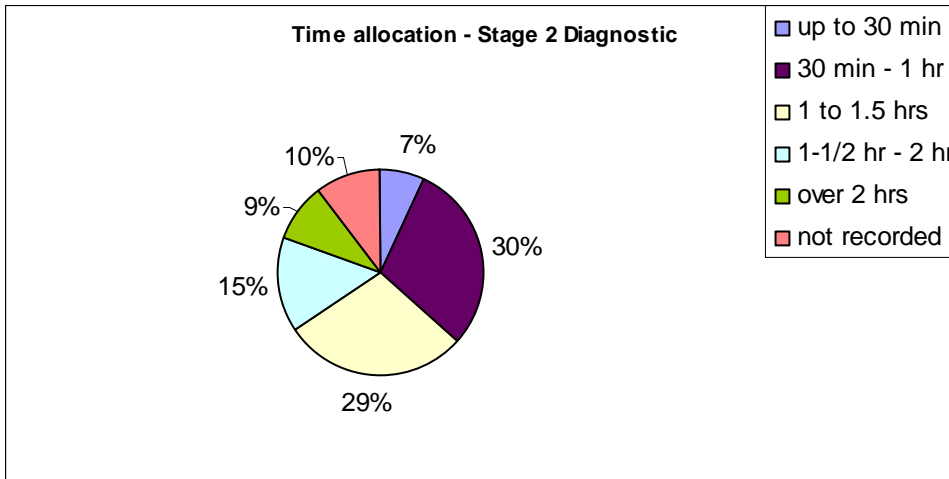
* Delivery partners: Social Enterprise Works, Bristol; Co-active, Plymouth; Co-operative Futures, Gloucester.



Diagnostic stage 2

Total	>30min	30min-1 hour	1-1.5 hrs	1.5-2hrs	over2hrs
87	6	26	25	13	8
100%	7%	30%	29%	15%	9%

(not recorded 9/10%)



Use of diagnostic tools

In advising the 87 clients that went through the diagnostic stage of the process, the diagnostic tools were used a total of 166 times – ie many clients benefited from more than one diagnostic tool.

The action plan was used most frequently and in most cases these were printed and sent out to clients to gain common agreement of the work to be done by both client and advisor. A total of 57 action plans were created.

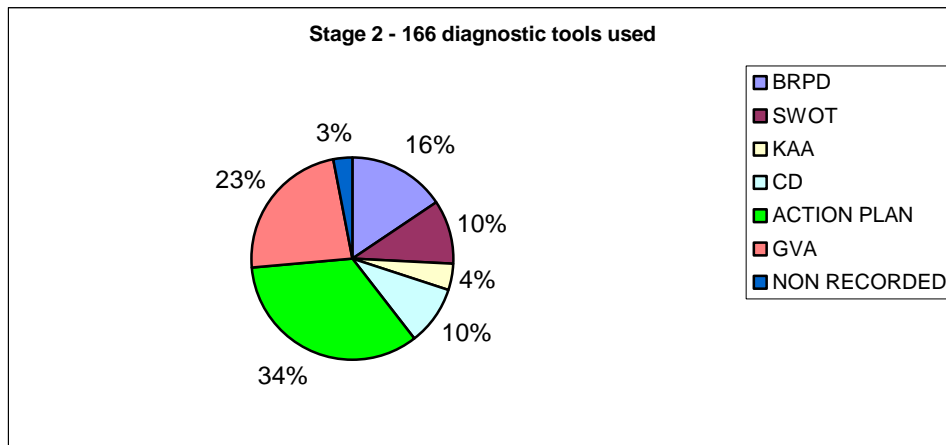
GVA was collected for 39 clients, although not all of these collected the GVA+. Advisors did comment that collecting GVA via a telephone call was quite a difficult process with some clients.

Key

- BRPD Business Review and Development Plan
- SWOT Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats
- KAA Key Areas of Assessment
- CD CD-based financial planning tool
- Action Plan Resulting from other diagnostic processes
- GVA Gross value added

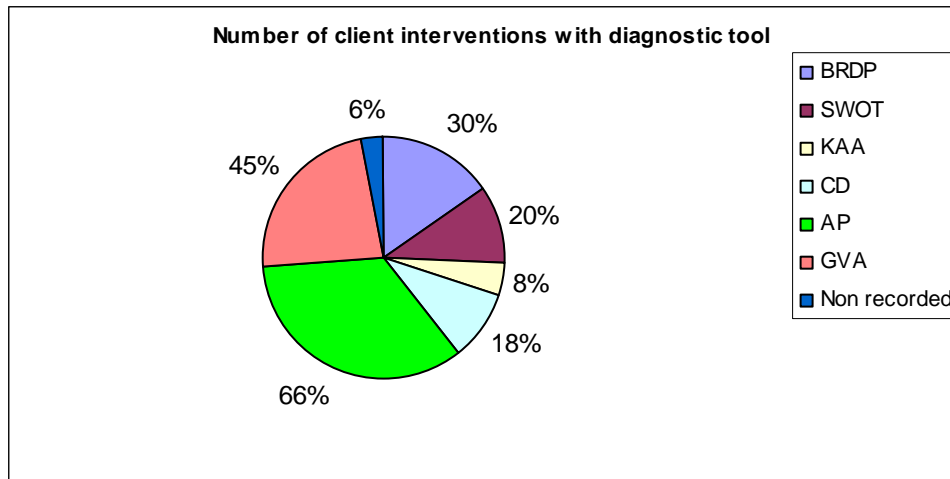
Diagnostic tools used

Total	BRPD	SWOT	KAA	CD	ACTION PLAN	GVA	N/R
166	25	17	7	16	57	39	5
100%	16%	10%	4%	10%	34%	23%	3%



Total Diagnostic interventions
Total 87

BRDP	SWOT	KAA	CD	AP	GVA	NR
30%	20%	8%	18%	66%	45%	6%



Views of Business Advisors and Information Officers

All advisors and information officers have been interviewed for their feedback on the road test model and the practicalities of delivering a service through the IDB model. All were asked to comment on their experience with clients, the Information Pack, the tools made available for the diagnostic stage, the referral process and if there were any particular difficulties when advising a client outside their own geographical area.*†

The following comments represent common themes discussed in the process:

1. The Information stage - It is important to manage the client expectation at the information level and to ensure that the client understands (a) what the service offers and (b) that they can access more of the service if they respond to the letter in the pack.
2. Small number of enquiries could be dealt with by answering a question or sending a fact sheet. Information officers need information at their finger tips so they can deal with some straight forward enquiries. Training for information officers would give a more efficient service.
3. In general and for most enquiries asking a client to send information before accessing an advisor works well and saves advisor time.

† see attached interview schedule

4. In some cases advisors carried out information stage. They found it difficult to not give advice and keep to the model. It would be much better in the future if only information officers take first line calls.
5. The pack - the content was good, although everyone thought it would be improved with more detailed and specific social enterprise content.
6. Diagnostic tools – not all advisors used all of the tools made available to them. In general all advisors thought the tools available were about right and a wide enough range to cover all enquiries.
7. There are a number of suggestions for additional resources that would be useful at this stage. The list of suggestions made will form the basis of planning for a full service, each suggestion can be developed as individual resource packs and either posted or emailed to clients with the purpose of informing and moving clients forward. Areas such as choosing a legal structure were cited.
8. Advisors felt the IDB model means the advisor is more detached from the client than when a meeting is held.
9. GVA difficult to collect at this stage and may be better collected at brokerage level.
10. Advisors all felt concern that they are dealing with only one person representing a group at the diagnostic stage. Worried about the person passing on and sharing with the rest of the group.
11. Referral system – worked well with information from client forwarded with each referral.
12. Out of area clients – in a full service it will be important to have local knowledge of local CVS, other social enterprises in the area, local colleges.

Views of the Road Test Manager

1. A key to the success of this model is the role of the information officer and the management of the client's expectation of the service in the first instance. They must be clear at the first contact point why we ask for information to be sent in to the service. This must then be backed up with clarity of the clients presenting issue and help requested at the first point of enquiry.
2. Service packs on a wide range of subjects are essential and must be developed in preparation for a full service.
3. It is essential that the advisor records good detail of the diagnostic stage on the Pivotal system as the next time the client calls a different advisor might answer the call.
4. The evaluation has shown that a follow up call will reactivate a percentage of client enquiries, so where no information is returned by the client one follow up call will benefit.
5. The burden of paperwork throughout the pilot was large but will easily be replaced by an internet based CRM system.

Talking to clients

Gathering feedback from clients was achieved informally, using telephone contact. Approximately 15% of clients were contacted, and were uniformly positive in their responses. In fact this telephone contact resulted in a further 23 requests to continue with a further stage of the service. The evaluation has provided good evidence that a regional business support service can deliver a high level of client satisfaction for social enterprise clients.

Recommendations

1. That the pilot be extended in partnership with the Northern Zone Business Link operator until the autumn to enable the development of a fully funded service thereafter.
2. That the funds to be used should include the monies from the Office of the Third Sector, other regional monies and European Funding where appropriate.
3. That alongside the IDB service, a brokerage 'pot' be developed, together with the means of managing such a resource, so that social enterprise will also be able to access further support when the diagnostic process indicates this.
4. That the Northern Zone information personnel be given training so that they are able to recognise a potential social enterprise, and to refer them to the service appropriately – this will obviate the need for a separate 0845 number. This system should be kept under review.
5. That other social enterprise specialist organisations are involved in the information element of the service to improve market penetration, and an appropriate diagnostic carried out by social enterprise specialists.
6. This integrated model of delivery would also allow social enterprise clients to be recorded onto the main PIVOTAL system used by Business Link and the specialist organisations should have operational access to that system.

Interview schedule

SWSES Evaluation and Feedback from advisors

The IDB Model

Information

Info Officer - did you become comfortable requesting client information before referring to advisor
Business advisor - Is it difficult to resist using BA skills at info level

Did you experience resistance from clients who were reluctant to send info before talking to an advisor

Any comment on the content of the pack

How long do you think the average call is at this level

Diagnostic

Did you use all the tools available to you - please comment on the tools ability to move a client forward

CD

SWOT

KAA

BRD

Action Plan

Could you become more effective in the use of this model with -
more practise
more training
different tools
other ...

**Out of area
clients**

Were there any specific issues or difficulties

Referral

On receipt of a referral to diagnostic did you find the accompanying information effective

Brokerage

How far into the development of the business do you think an advisor can take a client if no brokerage is available

Did you find the information available from the diagnostic stage suitably informative

Examples of client feedback from telephone contact

1

Preparation makes for successful process
Referral from BL (Info)
Client sent information to SWSES
Diagnostic referred to Co-active business advisor
BA prepared well, telephone intervention 1+ hour

Client was delighted with the result, asked if there was anyone she could feedback her satisfaction with the service. Suggested she email SWSES (never received)

2

Not keen to wait for pack and send info
Client called Co-active
Not keen to give information and didn't want a pack sent
Information officer suggested the introductory letter should be emailed so the client could make a quick reply. An advisor call was promised as soon as information received.

Feedback from client – “asking her to think about the questions was really good”. “It was so good, it made us think about it properly and made us focus on areas we have not done before”

Referred to advisor following receipt of information.
KAA complete, action plan, referred to VCS as no obvious trading element.

3

The Pack is a Marketing Tool
Client came to us because friend has showed him our pack
BA asked him to send info to SWSES

Called for diagnostic session, completing Form 2, action plan, draft SWOT, letter to client. 2nd discussion on telephone, further actions
Brokered to local service to progress with company registrations (charity + trading arm)
Client happy with process and delighted to have found us through friend

4

Fast Tracking
Came as a fast track request from BL as client was needing legal structure advice and working to a deadline for funding/finance packaging. Client in Bristol.

Business advisor (Plymouth) initial discussion (1 hour) and requested client send information to SWSES. It was quite a complex picture the information was to confirm understanding.

2nd discussion with advisor following receipt of information. BRD completed,

Client very happy with support received, expressed thanks for prompt and good advice

5

Response from client who registered company as a result of diagnostic process

Hello Sue,

I have attached a copy of the CIC 36 Declaration which you kindly offered to have a look at for me.

If you find you can not open either file then please let me know and I'll send over another version.

Thank you so much for all your help and vital support.

With many thanks and best wishes,

Holly.