

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS FIRST

ORGANISATION SIZE / Small Business (up to 50 employees)

Sarah Randall

West Wing,
University Campus,
Queen Alexandra Road,
High Wycombe
HP11 2GZ

BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF YOUR CSR APPLICATION

Buckinghamshire Business First is a business-led, business-focused community for new, established and growing businesses across Buckinghamshire. We provide our members with knowledge, support and opportunities for growth. From our inception in 2011, when 10 local entrepreneurs and business leaders got together to discuss how to encourage business growth in Buckinghamshire, our 'doing-it-for-ourselves' mentality has generated a thriving business community of over 11,000 members – and growing. Since the very beginning, the Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF) Group, including our wholly owned subsidiary Ngage Solutions Ltd, has sought to conduct itself in an ethical, forward-thinking manner that puts a premium on:

- environmental best practice
- supporting its people and their wellbeing
- supporting the charitable sector with fundraising, volunteering and promotional efforts
- supporting the wider community

Examples of our CSR initiatives include:

- Delivering grant funding to help reduce CO2 and CO2e
- Reducing our carbon footprint, encouraging others to do the same
- Enabling and participating in voluntary activity
- Raising money for charity throughout the year
- Providing employees with flexible working arrangements and other perks to encourage a healthy work/life balance
- Reinvesting funds back into the business community
- Actively promoting local charity's news and events and bringing local businesses and charities together through a special Charity Newsletter
- Helping people to up-skill and have fulfilling careers
- Celebrating local charities and CSR activity at the Buckinghamshire Business Awards
- Offering free membership to local charities, giving them access to networking, training, learning and promotional opportunities
- Being a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant and promoting this to our membership

OVERALL SUMMARY

CSR Environment - Energy:

The BBF Group's dedication to the environment can be seen through the number of projects we have delivered. While our primary function is to support businesses to grow, we also encourage positive behaviour change such as waste reduction and a reduction in CO2 and CO2e.

Here are examples of such projects:

- Low Carbon Workspaces (active), which delivers grants of up to £5,000 to help SMEs implement energy saving

measures. In the first round of the Low Carbon Workspaces project, 55% of businesses involved agreed that their attitude towards energy usage had changed.

- Sustainable Routes (closed). A grant of £1,000 was available towards the cost of implementing initiatives to encourage smarter working practices, reducing business mileage and carbon emissions. 97% of participants in the Sustainable Routes project cut down on transport emissions.

- Grants for Eco Innovation (closed), a pioneering new scheme that helped promote innovative green products or services to get them to market.
- Woodfuel Woodland Improvement Grant (closed), which supported the sustainable production of woodfuel with the aim of reducing England's CO2 emissions by 2 million tonnes per year. In all, 150,000m3 of timber was harvested across the country.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS FIRST

Collectively these projects have resulted in a total of 186,968 tonnes of CO2 saved.

Through the aforementioned activity, we have developed a level of low carbon expertise and we are currently seeking further funding to continue this. New activity includes developing the support infrastructure for electric vehicles and integrated transport systems. We hope to enable a shift in the level of EV usage for key employment sites such as Cressex in High Wycombe and the Enterprise Zones throughout Buckinghamshire. Overall, we wish to create a local platform of strategic county stakeholders including representatives from higher and further education, housing associations and Enterprise Zone developers to help spread the knowledge and message of lowering the carbon impact and improving the air quality in the county.

Buckinghamshire Business First is located at the High Wycombe campus of Buckinghamshire New University; an institution with impressive low carbon credentials. The university has held the Carbon Trust Standard for Carbon Reduction since 2011.

We operate a mixed recycling system in our office, which the Low Carbon Workspaces team help to oversee to ensure it is carried out correctly.

We have recently helped local radio station Mix96 promote its upcoming Green Month through an email campaign and newsletter article that will reach 11,000-plus businesses.

Members of our team also volunteered for a day with Chiltern Rangers to help clear overgrown woodland areas to ensure they were fit for habitat for local wildlife.

<https://csr-accreditation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/vfb/2019/03/Environmental.zip>

CSR Workplace

We have a diverse group of employees who are at different life stages with differing needs, and we offer them flexibility in their working arrangements in order for them to be as fulfilled as possible. We find that

many of our employees are looking for part-time work. We are very happy to offer this working arrangement and have approx. 43% of part-time workers. We also enable one staff member to finish work early in order to volunteer as a mentor to school leavers and young adults, and we offer a Holiday Purchase Scheme providing staff with the opportunity for a better work/life balance.

Employees have the option of working from home on an ad hoc basis, which helps them to fit work around any personal commitments and has the added bonus of reducing business mileage. We also actively encourage employees to use the Park and Ride facility in High Wycombe and help to facilitate this through flexible working patterns that fit around bus times.

Employees can also take advantage of discounted gym membership by virtue of our location at Buckinghamshire New University and had the option to use the facilities for free in the month of January.

The BBF Group is committed to equality and diversity. We have an equal opportunities policy and monitor its effectiveness.

Our team are encouraged to join a proactive social schedule, with funded activities taking place twice a year. Members of the team have formed a Social Committee to brainstorm and organise activities and to rally the rest of the team to take part.

Employees are encouraged to pursue training and promotion opportunities within the organisation. An annual appraisal process keeps track of a development plan for each employee, with training needs analysed and any appropriate training arranged.

We are committed to supporting our employees through any difficulties they may face, and are keen to promote mental health awareness throughout the organisation. We have plans in place to provide mental health first aid training for employees.

We worked with local business Thomas International to benchmark our level of employee engagement and scored highly.

<https://csr-accreditation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/vfb/2019/03/Workplace.zip>

CSR Community

The BBF Group is itself a not-for-profit organisation committed to reinvesting funds back into the business community. The effects of our work can be felt through increased employment and skills opportunities for people and the growth of businesses throughout the country.

Since 2015, we have published quarterly a dedicated Charity Newsletter. These newsletters act as a bridge between businesses wanting to increase their CSR activity and the charitable causes that need their support.

The BBF Group includes partners that work to improve the life and career prospects of young people. The Buckinghamshire Skills Hub runs two projects:

WANNABE helps local young people into work, whether via an apprenticeship, work placement or full/part-time work. Businesses with work opportunities are connected with those looking for what is often a first career step.

Opps in Bucks connects businesses with schools and colleges in Buckinghamshire in order to create 'interactions' between businesses and students. These interactions include workplace visits, CV writing workshops, help with interview techniques, mentoring and more.

Managing Director, Philippa Batting, is a member of the steering group of many charitable organisations, including Action4Youth, LEAP, the Clare Foundation and Community Impact Bucks.

It can often take 3-6 months to recover the cost from our funders of the grants paid out through the various projects that we deliver. This has cash-flow implications of in excess of £100,000 per quarter and so is a high opportunity cost for the BBF Group. This opportunity cost is one which we are happy to live with for the good of the local SME community.

We have worked closely with Buckinghamshire New University to develop a new £1.4m programme of support to assist local graduates to gain the skills they need to start and grow a business. Along with a structured start-up programme,

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS FIRST

the project features the opportunity of spending time on placement. A grant to support a new enterprise as it starts to grow is also available.

We have also supported the university with an application to the Office For Students for a project that will seek to improve the rate of progression of students from graduation to employment, particularly those from minority ethnic groups.

We are currently looking at a range of project activity that will improve the accessibility of tourism businesses in the county.

<https://csr-accreditation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/vfb/2019/03/Community.zip>

CSR Philanthropic

The BBF Group has strong links to and partnerships within the charity sector. We celebrated charities through the Enterprising Charity of the Year category at our Buckinghamshire Business Awards, and continue to raise the profile of CSR activity in Buckinghamshire with the Corporate Social Responsibility Award.

The Buckinghamshire Business First membership includes 174 charities and 263 not-for-profit organisations. This provides them with access to networking events, training opportunities and funding opportunities, as well as promotion via our online member directory, social media channels and newsletters. This unique blend of businesses, charities and not-for-profits within the same membership creates ample opportunities for partnership building across the sectors.

Each year at Christmas we make a donation to a chosen charity, and we also donate boxes of useful items to Wycombe Homeless Connection and One Can Trust. Our Christmas jumper day also raises money and spirits!

Raising money for charity isn't just for Christmas though, and we hold various Macmillan coffee mornings throughout the year to keep our fundraising levels up. We also hold fundraisers in support of staff member's personal fundraising efforts, such as those running marathons in aid of charity.

Buckinghamshire Business First is a proud signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant and we have promoted this great cause

to our membership. Indeed, a former employee was the partner of a services personnel member stationed at a nearby RAF base.

We have a charity represented among our group of Board Members, with the Director of Lindengate taking his place among the group of 12.

One of our employees has been working free of charge with a local charity on a major funding application.

We maintain a CSR Register to document our activity which is updated monthly. This register helps us to track our CSR progress and identify potential future activity.

Please see the uploaded files for further information, including examples and recognition of our CSR activity.

<https://csr-accreditation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/vfb/2019/03/Philanthropic.zip>