



Effective
Procurement in
Cumbria (EPIc)

The Government's Comprehensive Spending Review in 2007 challenged local authorities to achieve 3% annual cashable savings.

With a high proportion of such savings expected to be delivered through smarter procurement and the downturn in the economic climate there has never been a better time for Councils to collaborate. EPiC was established in 2007 to fulfil this role.

Project Aim

To Work in partnership with Cumbria Local Authorities (County Council, the six District Councils and the Lake District National Park Authority) to deliver savings, reduce duplication between authorities and develop innovative and accessible procurement processes.

What we did and how we did it

We commissioned research on local government procurement from the perspective of the supplier – both existing and potential. Two key messages emerged.

- 1 Suppliers found it increasingly difficult to gain access to opportunities to do business with Council's.
- 2 A strong perception that contracts were awarded on price alone. This perception generated a feeling that small suppliers would be at a disadvantage when tendering.

Research showed that once suppliers managed to win a local authority contract, they viewed that contract as important for the security in cash-flow. EPiC has taken this research and developed a series of actions designed to:

- identify and deliver cashable efficiency savings for each participating authority.
- reduce duplication and provide consistency in procurement processes, policy and approach.
- ensure contract and tendering opportunities are accessible to all potential providers.
- use technology to improve efficiencies – for the authorities and suppliers.

Who was Involved?

Suppliers, Lake District National Park Authority and County/District Council Employees, Elected Members, Business Support organizations, Third Sector, Media (local and specialist), CIEP and NWIEP.

Results

- EPiC members worked with a range of business support organisations to run roadshows throughout Cumbria to promote the Chest (an electronic portal & tendering system, www.thechest@nwce.gov.uk) encouraging over 300 local suppliers to register.
- EPiC contracts are awarded on the basis of price, quality of the goods or services, and where appropriate, due consideration of social, economic and environmental criteria is evaluated, whilst still complying with the principles of the EU Procurement Directive.
- A consistent approach to procurement policy and sustainable Procurement both within Cumbria whilst aligning our policies with the other sub-regions in the north-west.
- A co-coordinated and accessible tendering programme, all new contracts are available for all member authorities. The County Council manage the tender schedule and only one procurement exercise is undertaken for each contract, This is key for small local and third sector organisations who do not have the capacity to undertake such a process several times.
- The use of standard documentation is also helping to improve the tender process.
- The EPiC collaboration has already delivered in excess of £2m in savings.
- Our electronic portal and tendering system (The Chest) provides suppliers with a free of charge one-stop shop for Tender opportunities and lower value 'requests for quotations' covering the majority of the North West region local authorities.



Lessons Learnt

Longer preparation time prior to holding roadshows would have made the process easier to manage.

Risks

- Reduced commitment by EPiC members could have impacted on delivery.
- Changes in how EPiC procure, could have exposed certain suppliers in the local economy to risk.

Benefits

Chair of EPiC, Alan Ratcliffe said "Thanks to the commitment of all participating authorities EPiC can now deliver efficiency savings and sustainable outcomes for Cumbria.

The use of the portal and a proactive supplier engagement process provides support for the local small and medium sized enterprises and third

sector organisations: A model which is being replicated elsewhere in the region."

With hindsight

Selecting a mechanism to measure improvements in performance and efficiency at an earlier stage.

Number 1 Lesson

Working with both external and EPiC partners e.g Business link, Chamber of Commerce enabled us to deliver to a wider audience, provide added value to the supplier whilst reducing impact of resource and costs incurred by the supplier workshops.

Contact

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