



Winning team!

In November, the Corporate Procurement team travelled to London for the annual conference of the Society of Procurement Officers (SOPO). The team had submitted a report to SOPO on how improvements and change were being managed, including how we communicate and engage with stakeholders and with colleagues in departments.

The submission was reviewed by an expert panel of procurement peers, and against strong competition, Norfolk County Council won the Award for Outstanding Achievement in Procurement.

The team would like to thank all our colleagues in departments for their support and hard work without which this award would not be possible.

Didn't we do well!



L TO R: TIM HOWARD, COLIN BOTTJER, WENDY BAKER,
MICHAEL WOOD AND ANTON BULL

Procurement NVQs

For the past two years CPU have been running NVQ's in procurement, this is provided in conjunction with Leeds City Council.

The next enrolment session will be run in March, therefore if you would like to gain a qualification in procurement, please contact the CPU helpline on 01603 222820

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Editorial

We must constantly react to policy changes, i.e the new Race Relations (amendment 2000) Act, the need for continuous improvement, contract renewals, demand for new services and shifting markets, whilst remaining focused on the need for Best Value in service delivery to end-users.

Procurement is therefore ever changing and regular communication, especially from the "front line", is crucial to our continued success.

This newsletter is also available on the intranet. If you have any interesting articles or news items that could be included in future issues please let us know.

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Work in progress

New Contracts

By the time you read this article, the NCC Focus Groups for Office Furniture and White and Brown Goods should have agreed new ESPO contracts for a 1 April 2004 commencement date. The current state of play with these contracts is as follows:

ESPO Contract 282(N) - Office Furniture

Tenders have been received and ESPO have presented their initial analysis of the bids. The results of the analysis were due to be discussed by the Furniture Focus Group at the end of January.

At present, Millar West is the designated supplier for Lee & Plumptre desking and Chairplan office seating. In addition to this, Saber Daynes are listed as a supplier for Senator Invicta furniture to accommodate a requirement for the Education sector.

Early indications suggest that there may be a slight improvement in the terms offered on the current arrangement but exact details will be confirmed once the Focus Group has agreed the final contract. The new contract will be a three-year arrangement.

ESPO Contract 206(N) - White and Brown Goods

The deadline for the receipt of tenders for this contract expired on 8th January 2004. The ESPO buyer is currently conducting an analysis of the bids and will report his findings to the Focus Group in due course.

The current supplier is BDC Commercial Supplies, who have an office and showroom in Norwich. A mini survey conducted in the autumn of 2003 found that the main user departments were satisfied with the performance of the contract and the supplier. BDC also declared that they were happy with the way the contract had performed for them and reported a steady growth in business from the authority.

The new contract will be a two-year arrangement with the option to extend for up to a further 12 months.

If you would like any more information about these contracts, please call the CPU Helpline, 01603 222820.

Tim Howard

If you would like this newsletter in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact the helpline, 01603 223488.



Farewell

The NCC Head of Corporate Procurement is moving to a new job as Head of Strategic Procurement at the London Borough of Haringey.

Michael Wood set up the NCC Corporate Procurement Unit (CPU) in January 2000 and has been instrumental in developing our procurement strategies, raising the importance of procurement in the council as well as delivering significant best value improvements

Michael says: "I would like to record my thanks to colleagues in departments for fantastic support over the years and I am particularly proud of the CPU team for their professionalism and team strength.

I am confident that procurement in Norfolk will continue to develop and improve, and wish you all the best for the future".

Anglia Rail

CPU have been working, in consultation with departments, on reducing the number of ticket ordering accounts NCC has with ATOC (Association of Train Operating Companies)/Anglia Rail. This exercise has been prompted by the notification by ATOC that they are increasing the administration charges for each account held.

However, the exercise has highlighted a number of accounts that are not regularly used and others that can be centralised within departments. So far, we have reduced the number of accounts from 32 to 22.

If we can overcome some resource issues (for booking purposes) the next step will be to reduce the number of accounts to seven for the whole of NCC. Once the e-procurement system goes live we should be in a position to reduce the number to one account for the whole of NCC, as the e-procurement system will enable us to separate and report information on a departmental basis in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Staff may be aware, from recent press reports, that as of 01/04/04 National Express will be responsible for running the Greater Anglia Network franchise which will combine the operations currently being run by the Anglia Rail, Great Eastern and West Anglia rail networks. However, from a customer's point of view, the change may have little immediate impact - other than a reduction in the number of rail companies operating in the area.

It is expected that National Express will take on the staff currently employed by Anglia Rail, Great Eastern and West Anglia. CPU will continue to liaise with Anglia Rail and, in due course, National Express and keep staff informed of developments as they occur.



Focus on the Fire Service

In order to meet the challenges facing it in 2004, Norfolk Fire Service has reorganised many of its support functions. In mid-December 2003, Debra Dennis joined as Procurement Officer, to manage the procurement of core supplies and contracts essential to maintain an efficient emergency service.

Debra's role will involve developing and maintaining procurement practices and systems at the highest level and providing professional advice and guidance on all related issues.

With a degree in Commerce and experience of managing contracts, a flexible work approach has led Debra through a varied career within the private sector, encompassing a number of disciplines and management roles.

Based at Fire Service Headquarters in Hethersett, Debra heads up a small team with specific responsibilities to:



DEBRA DENNIS

- develop procurement practices and systems in line with County Strategy and Best Practice;
- set performance standards and quality control procedures for procurement and asset management;
- assist in the preparation, tendering, monitoring and control of major contracts;
- establish and manage Brigade-wide inventory systems.

Coming soon! Updated ICT procedures

Appendix D3 of the Guide sets out the procedure you must follow when buying ICT. The procedures have not fundamentally changed (you still have to seek approval for purchases over £50,000 and there may be special EU requirements) but they have been updated to cover changes relating to Charles House Services and the E Services Directorate. The updated procedures will be emailed out to guide holders when they are accepted by Members. Any queries, please contact Wendy Baker, 01603 223861.

The procedures touch on the subject of G Cat and S Cat. There may be situations where ESPO cannot meet our need. We must, however, go to them first to allow

them to work for us as we know any contract made through them will establish best value for money.

G Cat and S Cat are only approved government lists and value for money is NOT established – the suppliers has just been accredited. You need to establish a competitive price by seeking competitive quotes when using these lists. In some circumstances people wish to use G Cat or S Cat suppliers to avoid EU tendering. This is not advised. If you have a requirement over the EU threshold you must seek advice and may be advised to do a tender exercise to ensure best value.

You should allow enough time to do this – so plan ahead!

Green electricity

The current demand for “green” electricity (i.e. electricity that the UK Government classes as being produced from renewable sources) is so great that when new sources of green electricity come onto the market the extra capacity is usually snapped up in a matter of hours.

If NCC is offered new sources of green electricity we have to make a decision very quickly and, prior to December 2003, we had no method of making a quick decision on behalf of any, or all, NCC sites.

Similarly, when current contracts come up for renewal suppliers will only hold price offers open for a very limited period - due to the fluctuating nature of the energy markets - so, once again, there is a need to be able to make a decision quickly.

With this in mind, CPU have obtained agreement from Members to issue a mandate to our ESPO energy buyers with regard to buying green electricity for NCC. The mandate will allow ESPO to purchase green electricity for any NCC site on a “price-neutral basis”¹. This will allow ESPO to react quickly to offers of green electricity, when it is appropriate to do so.

As you may be aware, the Government has set targets that local authorities should obtain 10% of their total electricity requirement from renewable sources by 2010. At the moment NCC is very close to that figure, mainly due to the fact that two large sites - County Hall and Castle Museum - are supplied with green electricity for 100% of their requirement.

However, there is no guarantee that the same level of green supply will be available as and when contracts are renewed.

Therefore, in order to safeguard our current levels of green electricity, CPU have gained agreement from Members to allow ESPO to purchase green electricity for these sites within pre-set price parameters (in relation to the price paid for “brown” electricity). These price parameters will be the subject of regular reviews to ensure they are achieving the desired objectives.

Reminder:

There are still a number of school sites that have not joined the ESPO contracts for energy. ESPO have previously issued “Benchmark Reports” to all Norfolk schools that are not currently on the ESPO energy contracts, indicating the potential savings that would be achieved by joining.

In order to transfer to the ESPO contracts all schools have to do is sign the transfer request on the ESPO “Benchmark Report” and return the form to ESPO, who will then arrange the transfer of supply at the earliest possible date. It is, of course, entirely understandable that this matter is not necessarily top of any school's priority list.

However, it is a relatively easy way to achieve budget savings in the vast majority of cases. I would, therefore, urge those schools who are not currently on the ESPO energy contracts to retrieve the benchmark report and complete and return it to ESPO.

(Footnote)

¹ “Price-neutral” refers to price of green electricity in relation to brown electricity, taking into account that Climate Change Levy is payable on brown electricity but not on green electricity. The current rate of Climate Change Levy is £0.0043 per kilowatt-hour.

Alternative Fuels Conference

On Monday 3rd November Norfolk County Council hosted a conference on alternative fuels at the Assembly House in the centre of Norwich. The event was jointly organised by CPU and P&T.

Over one hundred fleet and transport professionals attended the event including vehicle manufacturers, fuel suppliers, private sector fleet managers and representatives from other County, Borough and City councils from around the UK.



ROY BANHAM, MEMBER FOR WASTE AND THE ENVIRONMENT, SPEAKING AT THE ALTERNATIVE FUEL TRIALS CONFERENCE

Delegates listened to presentations on a wide range of subjects related to alternative fuels including: the Government's perspective, climate change, agricultural opportunities and current research and development being undertaken by fuel suppliers and vehicle manufacturers.

Feedback from delegates was positive with the vast majority finding the event very useful. The success of the event was encapsulated by delegate Steve Jones, Director of Advanced Research Associates, who said; "Having worked in the automotive industry for over 20 years, I have attended many technical seminars arranged by professional organisations such as the IMechE and SAE and your Alternative Fuels event compared very well. The speakers were of a good standard and the audience represented not only East Anglia but also other regions, which added a lot of value to the event. Well done!"

The general public were also catered for by Norfolk County Council's exhibition at The Forum in Norwich (also held on Monday 3rd November) which enabled members of the public to view a variety of alternatively fuelled vehicles, speak to manufacturers representatives and obtain information on the Council's Alternative Fuel Trials.



THE PROTON JUMBUCK, ONE OF THE VEHICLES TAKING PART IN THE NCC ALTERNATIVE FUEL TRIALS

Stuart Hutchinson, Project Manager for the Alternative Fuel Trials said; "We were extremely pleased with the attendance at both the conference and the public exhibition, which demonstrates the high level of interest in alternative fuels and the reduction of emissions pollutants. The next step will be to visit some local schools to speak about the trials and tie-in with the syllabus work that schools are undertaking in environmental studies and design and technology."

In early 2004, CPU are planning to produce an interim report (for internal NCC use only) giving an indication of the results from the trials so far.

Furnishings Contract - Curtains and Blinds

Attention to Safety

ESPO has long championed the use of Flame Retardant Fabrics for curtains for use in all areas.

We do this both to conform to current legislation and to make it easier for you to observe best practise. This does not mean that you have to compromise on style, design or function. ESPO offers a tremendous selection of fabrics to meet virtually all your requirements.

Attention to Choice

ESPO has just produced issue 4 of the **Soft Furnishings Catalogue** which features **Flame Retardant** fabrics. It shows a selection of the ranges available and includes many **new designs**. This has been produced to show how fabrics look in a long drop and to help you make a choice at your leisure.

Fabrics from Ranges A and B are included to enable you to make sense of your curtain estimate before a final selection has been made. Feeler samples are available, on request, for all designs and qualities.

All fabrics are also available to buy by the metre. (Some are subject to minimum order quantities.)

Attention to Variety

We aren't able to illustrate the full collection available so please feel free to contact us if you can't find your ideal design.

Attention to Product Development

We've recently introduced Rooflight Blinds and Pleated Blinds for use in those awkwardly shaped areas.



They are available in 2 fabric ranges; both with a reflective coating (SPC) on the reverse to help reduce glare.

Attention to our Customers

Free estimating service: A fully comprehensive, no obligation measuring and estimating service is available to you from our contractor, The Custom Group, which has tendered against fierce competition to win the business. All prices quoted include installation (unless stated otherwise).

Attention to Professionalism

By utilising the expertise of our contractors and the buyer, you can rely on the best advice and up to date product knowledge.

Fire certificates are available on all fabrics, simply request one at the time of order.

Order your free copy of the Soft Furnishings Catalogue by quoting code number 35580 on your next espo order.

For further information, contact the buyer, Marian Simpson, on 0116 265 7881.

Legislation on Mobile Phones and Driving

In a new regulation that came into force on 1 December 2003, it is a specific offence to use a hand-held phone, or similar device, when driving. The penalty is a £30 fixed penalty or up to £1,000 on conviction in court (£2,500 for drivers of goods vehicles, buses or coaches). Drivers still risk prosecution (for failure to have proper control) if they use hands-free phones when driving.

Below is a summary of what is legal/not legal under the new law:



What is not legal

It will be an **offence whilst driving to use a handheld device without a car-kit** to:

- Speak or listen to a phone call
- Use a device interactively to access any sort of data – including Internet, text or other images
- To hold a hands-free phone **at any point** whilst driving. This also applies to all mobile devices, ie. BlackBerries, PDAs etc.

The use of a hand-held phone, even when stationary (i.e. in a traffic jam, at the traffic lights) will remain an offence.

In addition, drivers who use a hands-free phone could also face prosecution for failing to have proper control of their vehicle, if their driving is considered to be dangerous or reckless because of the distraction.

What is legal

- To use a hands-free kit, providing the phone is being held in a 'fixed' cradle.
- To make or receive calls whilst the phone is being held in a cradle (pushing buttons whilst in the cradle, or operation via buttons on a steering wheel would not breach the new regulation).
- Make a call on a hand-held phone for a genuine emergency call to 999, if it would be unsafe for the driver to stop.
- Continued use of Push to Talk (two-way radio) devices - it was deemed this presented a lower risk. (Walkie-Talkies etc).

Drivers may continue to receive data on their phone when on the move, providing that the driver does not hold the device whilst in operation – there is no requirement for the handset to be switched off when in the vehicle. Employers providing phones to employees will not be an offence, but to force an employee to use phones will make the employer liable.

Section 3.3 of the NCC Corporate Motor Policy stipulates the following:

Mobile telephones should not be used when driving a vehicle. This applies whether the telephone is a 'hands free' system or not. Instead the driver should find a suitable place to stop and then make the call or return the call.

Further guidance on the new law is available on the Department for Transport website:

www.dft.gov.uk.

A full range of car kits that comply with the legislation are available from the Vodafone accessories price list. These range from the easy fit cradles to the fully installed professional car kits that will require an engineer to install. If you need advice on car kits that comply with the new law, please contact the Vodafone ESPO/OGC Team on 01635 664946. Alternatively, you can contact the CPU Helpline on 01603 222820 if you would like to receive the latest price list.

Tim Howard

This newsletter is produced by the Corporate Procurement Unit (CPU),
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Race Equality and Procurement in Local Government

This leaflet highlights some of the procurement procedures to help eliminate discrimination. As an insert it can be removed and kept for your future reference.

The Council has a legal duty to eliminate racial discrimination and promote racial equality and good race relations. Its race equality standards are set out in the NCC's Race Equality Scheme, obtainable from the Policy Unit or view at www.norfolk.gov.uk/council/equalops/docs/race_equality_scheme.pdf

The NCC Scheme states that our strategic aim is to positively demonstrate, in all aspects of our activity, that everyone who comes in contact with the County Council, from whatever racial back-ground, is treated in an open and respectful manner and in accordance with our values and principles. This means ensuring that they are not excluded in any way, have equal access to services and that services meet their needs.

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) has recently issued a booklet about how procurement should contribute to the Council meeting its statutory duty.

The booklet shows clearly that we need to be pro-active in building equalities into procurement and not just reactive. A copy of the CRE booklet has been sent to all departments and should be available from your departmental procurement manager.

What we need to do falls into two categories:

1. Ensure our suppliers understand the issues and have good racial equality policies and are following them.

The CRE has published guidance for suppliers that can be ordered free of charge from CRE or viewed at www.cre.gov.uk/publs/cat_duty.html#procure

2. Ensure that we build the need for racial equality into all stages of the procurement process.

A very good overview note may be obtained from the CRE free of charge or viewed at www.cre.gov.uk/duty/pdfs/proc_local.pdf

The CRE undertook a large consultation exercise before issuing their guidance and it really is excellent.

All procurement staff are encouraged to read it. I can only give highlights here.

Some pointers as to what needs to be done are featured overleaf.

This document is also available on the intranet

Purchasers need to consider the relevance and proportionality of race relations to a procurement (a race equalities impact assessment) and build in appropriate non-discrimination and equality of opportunity requirements into the procurement process.

What is the impact of the contract being procured? If the contract is for services direct to the community or supplies to service users, then equalities may be an important issue. Simpler requirements may be appropriate for smaller contracts but the needs of minority groups should not be ignored. Some requirements may be obvious, e.g. providing kosher food where there is a significant need, but others may not be so obvious.

Purchasers need to consult potential users and suppliers and ensure there is a level playing field relating to the needs of customers and access by appropriate suppliers.

We must ensure public money is not spent on practices that lead to unlawful racial discrimination but, instead, is used to support and encourage equality of opportunity and good community relations. Some suppliers may understand minority needs better than others. Consider where you advertise contracts and if documentation should be available in other languages, e.g. through the INTRAN service.

Decide whether equality issues affect how you present your requirement to the market. Is a one-size-fits-all large contract really beneficial or will a diversity of contractors meet specialist needs better?

Although the CRE booklet specifically relates to racial equality, purchasers may feel that race is not the only issue for improvement they need to focus on - the CRE advice could equally apply to eliminating discrimination of any type.

The EU are currently looking at all equalities issues and the Government is intending to amalgamate the bodies that manage the various equalities areas.

The Council need to ensure its suppliers have good equalities policies and can support the Council's standards when delivering the contract. Purchasers need to check supplier's ability to promote racial equality in employment and in service delivery.

We need to assure suppliers that promoting good racial relations is good business sense, improving the quality of the service by making it more appropriate to service users and more responsive to their needs. There is no doubt that we will be monitored on our performance in this area – departments should record improvement in procurement leading to improvements in service delivery to minority groups.

The standard tender questionnaire Appendix C13 of the Purchasing Guide has been brought up to date recently by the Corporate Equalities Officer and should be used for all contracts. Further questions related directly to the contract specification and best value can be asked, where relevant.

Our pre and post contract award documentation must clearly set out our requirements, both in relation to the need to follow our racial equality policy but also in relation to the particular service specification.