

Sustainable procurement in a local authority: London Borough of Lewisham

Summary

The London Borough of Lewisham introduced an environmentally responsible procurement strategy in April 2001, but found that a policy alone was not sufficient to achieve its sustainable procurement goals. Realising that access to well-researched and consistent information is a key to success, this local authority decided to produce a comprehensive *Green Guide to Procurement*, which could be used by its staff, consultants and contractors who are involved in the procurement of all the authority's goods and services, from stationery for the Council's offices to new school buildings.

Background

Local authorities are in a strong position to make an important contribution towards sustainable development because of their considerable purchasing power. For example, in 2004/05 the London Borough of Lewisham's capital works programme for homes was worth £67.22 million, covering rewiring, heating systems, double glazing, cavity wall and loft insulation, kitchen and bathroom replacement, roof repairs and other essentials. The Council also oversees a range of PFI projects for leisure services, highways, and school buildings (including eight schools contracts worth up to £100 million).

The Council was aware that its procurement strategy has both immediate and long-term environmental benefits. In the short-term sustainable procurement results in better use of resources and less waste during construction; in the long-term, it ensures that work done today will minimise impact in the future – delivering healthy buildings that are fit for purpose, use less energy, and contain components that can be reused or recycled at the end of the building's life.

The London Borough of Lewisham has a track-record of environmentally responsible procurement, including an established environmentally responsible procurement strategy (ERPS) which states that "the Council aims to deliver services that are resource efficient, that minimise the generation of waste and which contribute to a more environmentally socially and economically sustainable society." In 2000, it became the first London borough to buy 100% green electricity; and in 2006 it signed a 12-year contract for wind-generated power from a named wind farm at a saving of some 6,500 tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) per year.

The need for change

The Council was concerned that perceived costs and lack of understanding of the issues remained significant barriers to the success of its policy. And although Lewisham's ERPS lays out the fundamental system that should be followed, Council staff had to undertake significant additional research work whenever a tender was prepared, in order to ensure that environmental issues were addressed effectively.

The solution

The Council's sustainable resources team devised the *Green Guide to Procurement* (GGP):

- to help staff understand the environmental issues surrounding the purchase of products and services across all the Council's activities (not just construction)
- to encourage officers who work on contracts to include sustainability criteria in the original specifications, so that the final purchased product or service will be as sustainable as possible
- to draw together all the best sources of information in one place so that Council staff, consultants and others could pool their expertise.

A skeleton framework for the GGP was produced after an initial review of Lewisham's existing procurement practices and the sustainable procurement work in other local authorities across the UK. Production of the GGP was then driven forward by the Council's Sustainability Officer in consultation with a large number of the Council's officers.

Implementation

Development work took two years, and Lewisham's *Green Guide to Procurement* was launched in 2006. Key officers from the Council participated in two training sessions which explained the principles behind the GGP and how to use it, particularly how to refer to it in specifications. With 50–100 major contracts and numerous smaller ones issued each year, training is expected to be on-going.

Results

The GGP is already being used during the development of new-build contracts. Officers and consultants use the guide to inform the output specifications for PFI tenders, and to evaluate bids. The relevant sections of the GGP are also issued to potential bidders so that they can understand the Council's expectations, which include the requirement for contractors to use whole-life costing techniques, i.e. to take into account contract length and the resulting payback period to justify designed decisions.

Examples of key requirements include:

- at least 10% of the overall materials value for construction projects to be derived from recycled content
- at least 10% of the expected energy demand of the building to be delivered by onsite renewable energy
- to achieve the BREEAM 'excellent' standard, including adopting energy and water consumption measures that go beyond current Building Regulations requirements
- to avoid moisture problems (to reduce the need for treated timber); and to use boron-based treatments where moisture removal is not possible
- to use timber and timber panel products carrying the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), or equivalent, trade mark or be from a known resource
- to use condensing boilers
- to separate timber and metals from other wastes and taken to a recycling facility.

In the refurbishment sector, progress is slower, primarily because this involves a larger number of smaller contractors. Council officers are requested to provide the GGP to their contractors, and additional aims for refurbishment projects include:

- window frames in need of repair should be replaced where single glazed by double-glazed and repaired over replacement where double glazed when parts are readily available
- the condition of double-glazed window frames will be assessed for repairs as a preference to replacement where parts are readily available.
- prices for windows should detail whole-life costs, including maintenance and life expectancy of the product.

Looking ahead

Lewisham's *Green Guide to Procurement* is about continuous improvement, and is a 'living' reference document, which will be updated as technology improvements, formal research and informal discussions highlight new information or successful strategies.

With this in mind, the Council has created a sustainable construction forum to gather ideas to feed into the GGP. It also aims to make the GGP available to other local authorities to help spread best practice in procurement.



For more information

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