

PROCUREMENT

‘Procurement Connection’ Online Toolkit



Summary

Procurement Connection has been developed by Derbyshire County Council’s Procurement Services Team in collaboration with the University of Derby’s Business School. It is an excellent resource containing up-to-date procurement information, template documents, training guidance, details of best practice, and toolkits that are all designed to assist councils with their procurement activities.

Councils in the East Midlands - and nationwide - can tailor a bespoke website for their own council based on the **Procurement Connection** template. **Procurement Connection** is already being used by over 10 Councils in the East Midlands.

Procurement Connection is a web based platform that enables users to follow simple process flow charts which in turn provide guidance on specific processes; template documentation also ensures compliance and consistency within the Council.

Improvement through efficiency



East Midlands

emce.gov.uk

Project background

In an environment where both the EU and the Government are constantly introducing new rules and procurement regulations, coupled with a requirement for a consistent good practice approach to documentation and processes across the authority, the question Derbyshire County Council asked was, how could the Procurement Team disseminate best practice in procurement to everyone responsible for procurement across all of their offices and schools?

The solution was to develop an online resource called '**Procurement Connection**'. This web-based toolkit enables dedicated procurement professionals, and those involved in procurement on an ad-hoc basis, to follow simple process flow charts which, in turn, provide guidance linked to template documentation to ensure compliance and consistency across the Council.

To deliver the solution the Procurement Team built upon an existing and very successful partnership arrangement between Derbyshire County Council and the University of Derby's Business School. The two had previously worked together to develop training programmes covering a number of areas, including: strategic thinking; 'Procurement Cycle' awareness courses for schools; and several other tailored courses in contract management, project management, commissioning and collaborative working, and service redesign.

Benefits achieved

Procurement Connection has enabled Derbyshire County Council to eliminate grey policy areas, and provides a framework of resource which allows employees to access information that will in turn enable them to develop their competencies, work more efficiently, and adhere to Council policy.

The web based learning platform was designed by Terry Fox for the University of Derby's - Innovation 4 Learning (i4L) corporate operation which provides top companies, and many local authorities (including Nottingham City Council and Rotherham MBC) with a tried and tested online 'Intelligent Shell' which is ready to go with a rapid authoring platform based on a MS Word style content editor. This results in a website that web content managers and visitors find very easy to use. Limited navigation options ensure that visitors are able to find key information with less than three clicks of the mouse button, or three steps from the home page.

The design of the website also benefits the content provider. A simple content management system allows procurement professionals with limited technical experience to act as guardians and authors of the websites content.

Role-out across the East Midlands

During 2006, the East Midlands Centre of Excellence (EMCE) established a group of officers under the banner of the 'Standard Documents Group' to develop a set of template documents covering, PQQ, ITT, Contract Terms and Conditions, Financial Thresholds, and Contract Procedure Rules.

The Standard Documents Group recognised that developing the template documents was only part of the task, and they needed to have available a means by which councils could adopt the consistent use of the documents across their authority, exactly the same challenge that Derbyshire County Council had already addressed.

Thus, the Standard Documents Group worked with Derbyshire County Council and the University of Derby to develop a package based on the Derbyshire model which could be offered to all authorities in the East Midlands.

The success story that is **Procurement Connection** is something that the EMCE is keen to promote to authorities in the region and nationwide. **Procurement Connection** has been showcased to local government professionals at EMCE procurement workshops, via the EMCE website and in the EMCE news bulletin.

Transferability

The principles of Derbyshire's Procurement Connection can be tailored according to an individual council's needs. Council's wishing to invest in a Procurement Connection website of their very own can take advantage of the following three low cost options:

Option 1 - The 'Basic' **Procurement Connection** package is hosted by the University of Derby and contains 'generic' content only; content management is limited to the Bulletin Board and the site can be branded with a relevant logo. This option can be shared with other local authorities as part of a partnership using a 'profile' login which directs visitors to the generic information, visitors from different authorities will see the partnerships logo and 'shared' Bulletin Board information.

Option 2 - The 'Standard' **Procurement Connection** package comes complete with an easy to use Content Management System (CMS) that allows the Council's own staff to make changes to the templates, links and bulletin boards. This will enable 'non' IT skilled administrators to maintain these areas of content, without needing to refer back to the developer or supplier. The CMS comes with administrator access controls.

Option 3 - The 'Advanced' **Procurement Connection** package comes complete with the easy to use CMS that allows Council staff to make any changes to text, images, templates, links and bulletin boards. The CMS will enable 'non' IT skilled administrators to maintain 'ALL' content as required and without any need to refer back to the developer or supplier. It has strict administrator access controls.

Procurement Connection: How does it work?

The **Procurement Connection** website is managed by the Council's 'Procurement Team'. The site is continually updated and all of the information can be accessed from the **Main Menu**, which has limited navigation buttons that guide appropriate users to the required information with minimal effort.

This **Procurement Toolkit** page sets out the various procurement processes and includes useful documents, templates and timetables associated with each of the processes. The following chart (Figure 1) appears on the toolkit page, users simply follow the flow chart - and using the estimated value of the project – discover which process to follow. Users are able to click on the required boxes to find out more information about each stage of the procurement process.

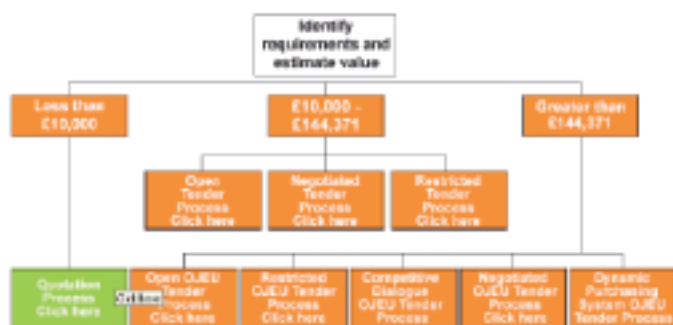


Figure 1 – Procurement processes

The **Training** page features the Procurement Skills Staircase (Figure 2) which represents the different steps of training available to help people procure goods and services more effectively. Users can click on each step - according to their skill level and what they want to achieve – to find out more information, the staircase offers advice concerning basic awareness of the procurement cycle through to achieving CIPS qualifications and how to continually develop professionally.



Figure 2 – The Procurement Skills Staircase

A selection of **Templates and Documents** are available to download from the East Midlands Procurement Hub and based on the work of the East Midlands Standard Documents Group. **The Purchasing Cycle** outlines an illustration of each stage of the purchasing cycle, and includes a video of Gino Franco, University of Derby, explaining each stage in greater detail. Frequently asked questions are dealt with on the **Questions and Answers** page, which is complemented by an opportunity to provide **Feedback** and follow **Links** to other resources of interest.

Quote

“This is a good example of what can be achieved in partnership, by bringing together a range of knowledge, skills and technologies to improve service for the benefit of all.”

Gino Franco,
Senior Lecturer in Purchasing and Logistics,
The Derbyshire Business School

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