

Sustaining the challenge

With an array of guest speakers focusing on the importance of sustainability within procurement, the forthcoming SOPO Scotland Annual Conference promises to impart valuable information, writes **Peter Howarth**.



Scottish public sector procurement has taken some major leaps forward over the last 12 months, including the creation of the National Procurement Centre of Expertise and the establishment of a formal programme of collaborative contracting through Scotland Excel. However, the agenda is expanding to recognise the impact good procurement and efficiency can have on matters of wider concern such as sustainability, collaborative working, the third sector and local businesses. The Society of Procurement Officers in Local Government (SOPO) Scotland Annual Conference, entitled 'Sustaining the Challenge', is intended to address some of the issues around the 'strategic fit' of procurement with the overall objectives of organisations, stakeholders and suppliers.

The Scottish public sector has successfully challenged the order of thinking with regard to procurement. However, the hard work has only just begun. There


is a need to sustain the challenge in a number of ways, continuing the tremendous progress that has been made not only in local government but also across the whole of the public sector in improving procurement processes and practices. There is the challenge of sustaining the improvement in costs and efficiency gains, while facing the threats of increased commodity prices and increased demand for products and services across the economy. Sustaining the move to improve skills and knowledge in procurement while finding other ways to meet the capacity gap, as demand for professional procurement officers grows unabated, is another challenge which we have to address collectively. This can be achieved by CIPS, SOPO and private sector providers who can together help meet a number of challenges by providing training courses, interim management and specialist knowledge which

the sector otherwise may not have access to.

Furthermore, procurement has to move on from addressing the need to obtain cost savings to addressing the need to add value in our organisations' wider business goals. This will only be achieved by improving our understanding of markets and supply chains, improving relationship and contract management and, most importantly, improving our approach to sustainability in the wider sense of the word. We also need to embrace the concept of whole-life costing and discover how procurement can add value to the environment, the economy and the community, all of which are areas that local authorities and other parts of the public sector have significant responsibility for.

Procurement units need to help their authorities achieve their goals in these areas by addressing sustainability in their supply chains, and by working closely with suppliers and colleagues in the rest of the public sector – who are also more than welcome to attend the SOPO Scotland Annual Conference. The event will look at current best practice, and feature speakers who are driving some of the solutions forward and who are willing to share their knowledge for the benefit of the wider procurement marketplace.

Speakers include Rory Mair, CEO of COSLA, who will discuss the importance of procurement as part of the overall strategic objectives of local authorities. Dorothy Cowie

and Ian Howie will be examining the objectives of the National Procurement Centre of Expertise and how wider collaborative working will impact on successful outcomes. A number of speakers will look at different aspects of the sustainability agenda, and Ian Moore will take a look at some of the emerging issues from EU legislation and case law with particular regard to sustainability. Importantly, there will be time for networking and discussion with suppliers and other organisations who have taken up exhibition space. 



Peter Howarth
CEO, SOPO

The 'Sustaining the Challenge' SOPO Scotland Annual Conference takes place on 11 March 2008 at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre

Further information

For further information, please visit: www.soposcotland.org