

CATALYST

Welcome

I'd like to welcome you to the first edition of **CATALYST**, a brand new publication designed to keep you informed about important developments from the Regional Centres of Excellence. You've said to us that you would like to be kept better informed about the big stories from the programme and the wider efficiency agenda in local government. **CATALYST** seeks to bring this information together in a cohesive package aimed specifically at national audiences.

We'll be publishing **CATALYST** every two months and I hope you'll find it an informative read. Please do let me know if you like it or if you don't, what we can do to make it better.

Peter Bishop

Programme Manager
Regional Centres of Excellence

Foundations laid for transforming local government procurement

Regional Directors have given the go-ahead for plans to secure major efficiency gains in the £38 billion spent each year by local government on commodities, goods and services. The plans are seen as a major driver to unlocking the door to better public services.

At the heart of the plans lies the creation of procurement action groups (PAGs) to deliver 'quick win' efficiency gains in key markets. Over the coming months, these multi-disciplinary teams will bring forward plans to make significant efficiencies in key markets. The focus initially will be on postal services and energy, while plans for other areas such as ICT hardware, telecoms and temporary staff are set to be considered by regional directors in the near future. The aim is to provide a suite of 'best in class' contracts and procurement options for local authorities which will be made available through each of the nine regional offices.

A small national procurement team, led by Steve Holland, formerly the East of England Regional Director, is being set up to co-ordinate the work of the PAGs. The team will also oversee the wider national procurement programme including e-procurement, which has already delivered considerable efficiencies, and the roll out of regional exemplars and best practice contracts across the country.

RCEs rolling out a common approach to measuring efficiencies

A common approach to measuring potential efficiency gains from RCE funded projects is being rolled out across the RCE programme. RSe Consulting have been commissioned by DCLG to review a sample of RCE projects and prepare a single efficiency methodology prediction tool. This has since been adopted and has received the backing of OGC.

RSe Consulting are now training staff in the regional centres to use the new methodology and apply it retrospectively to all those projects worth over £100k. The centres will then apply the methodology to the rest of their projects and use it going forwards on any new projects.

Another region announces closer links with the improvement agenda

The South West is the latest region to announce a closer alignment of its efficiency and improvement agendas. The South West Centre of Excellence management board has agreed to reform as the LIFT management board to oversee the strategy and direction of both the Centre of Excellence and the region's improvement programme.

It takes its name from the need to 'lift' the performance of public services across the region and seeks to focus the work of the regional agencies that support local authorities. The move follows similar developments in the West Midlands and East Midlands earlier this year while other regions such as the South East and the Yorkshire and the Humber are at various stages of discussions on their future arrangements.

Shared services conference

Angela Smith MP, Parliamentary under Secretary of State, DCLG and Lord Sandy Bruce-Lockhart OBE, Chairman of the LGA, will be the keynote speakers at the Shared Services in Local Government conference on 21 September in Central London. Other speakers include Tony Wiltshire, Regional Director, Yorkshire and the Humber RCE and Sue Reid, Head of the Modernisation and Efficiency Division, DCLG.

The conference, promoted by the DCLG in association with the Regional Centres of Excellence, will look at emerging examples of best practice and at sector specific guidance for local authorities and their partners. Delegates will have the opportunity to consider the different types of shared services and explore how shared services can be designed to respond flexibly to diverse needs.



Joint review of the Regional Centres of Excellence underway

A joint DCLG/OGC review of the RCEs provides an opportunity to highlight the value that the RCEs are bringing to local authorities, according to Tim Byles, Chair of the Chief Executives' Task Force. The review starts from the premise that the RCEs are likely to have a full role in securing even greater local government efficiencies in the future.

The scope of the review will examine how effective the RCEs have been and will look at how well the RCEs are set up to deliver the kind of efficiency support that local government will need in the light of CSR07. A review team of representatives from DCLG, OGC, the RCEs and local government is expected to report with its findings later this year.

Hold the front page!

It's not everyday that the work of the RCEs makes headline news but a groundbreaking car parking partnership funded by the London RCE made the front page of London's Evening Standard.

The Partnerships in Parking initiative, led by Westminster City Council, sees six Central London councils pooling their resources to trial the next generation of parking pay and display machines. These terminals will be the first installations on street in the UK to accept credit card payments via Chip and PIN modules.

First-ever regional framework for corporate services

Three bidders are in the running to provide a host of corporate services to councils in the South West under the biggest framework contract of its kind.

The project, which is thought to be worth potentially £360 million, is being led by Somerset County Council in partnership with Taunton Dean District Council. The South West RCE is part-funding and providing strategic advice to the councils involved.

A further 35 councils in the region plus a Fire and Rescue Authority and a Primary Care Trust have formally registered their interest in the framework. By registering, they avoid the lengthy OJEU tendering process if they need the services provided by the successful strategic partner at a later date.

The preferred provider will be chosen in the Autumn while the launch of the new service at Somerset and Taunton Deane is earmarked for April 2007.



Preparing the RCE vision

Work is underway to prepare a new vision and strategy for the RCE programme for the next two years and beyond. The aim is to give direction and focus to the work of the RCEs until March 2008 when the programme is due to wind down. Scenarios are also being developed for beyond this date to plan for emerging legislation and Comprehensive Spending Review 07.

The outcome will be a short, high level vision with a complementary set of deliverables and a number of post-2008 scenarios.

Local government minister visits NW Executive Board

Minister for Local Government, Phil Woolas, heard at first hand the progress being made to drive efficiency and improve services across councils in the North West. He was a guest of the Executive Board and heard Tameside Chief Executive, Janet Callender, emphasise that the efficiency agenda is about better services and thriving communities rather than making savings.

The Minister will also be keynote speaker at the North West RCE's stakeholder engagement event on 14 September.

CATALYST is published every two months by the Programme Management Team, Regional Centres of Excellence.

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