

How benchmarking process is benefitting Kent residents

Kent County Council wanted to unlock the potential of its procurement function in response to heightened challenges facing local government and to match the Council's ambitions to deliver best value for Kent residents. The CIPS Procurement Excellence Programme not only enabled the Council to evaluate and elevate the function's maturity. It also influenced the creation of a new 'centre of excellence' procurement function applying globally-recognised best practices from the start.



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We made massive headway through the Procurement Excellence Programme in helping the whole Council understand that procurement isn't just a process but can provide commercial expertise to save them money, give advice about working with suppliers and add value through experience and skills in negotiating and problem solving”

Michael Bridger
Commercial Standards and Improvement Manager,
Kent County Council



Open-minded exploration

Like all local authorities today, Kent County Council has to procure goods, services and works contracts from a broad array of suppliers in a difficult economic climate and competitive supply market - all with a sharp focus on achieving value for money and social value for residents.

The procurement team was keen to understand what actions would make the most significant difference to its performance in this challenging environment. It was also interested in taking things further and exploring ways of redesigning how procurement works, reimagining and resetting perceptions of the function's capabilities.

There was one more driver behind the team's decision to benchmark and bolster performance: wanting to be efficient and fully compliant from the get-go with incoming government legislation that will transform how public sector procurement is undertaken.



I've seen a lot of positive change in people who have engaged with our new governance arrangements before they progress any top tier tendering activity. They discover that board members can offer valuable procurement experience and extensive commercial knowledge and leave appreciating the benefits of the exercise and all the ideas they hadn't thought of”

Katie Smith

Commercial Policy and Governance Officer, Kent County Council



High impact improvements

The Council chose to work with CIPS to achieve these ambitions, rather than a governmental framework or commercial consultancy, believing that the Procurement Excellence Programme (PEP) accreditation stands out as an industry standard that carries notable weight.

The procurement team set about the PEP assessment in exemplary fashion, with one person assigned to work on it full time with interest and support from the Council's leadership. A working group of around 15 experienced individuals across the authority helped identify and gather all the evidence required, with the CIPS Assessor providing guidance along the way.

It soon became clear where the function and wider authority's strengths lay, from alignment of functional and organisational strategies to contract management and procurement processes. As the team had hoped, the process also revealed where it could focus efforts to have the greatest positive impact on efficiency, consistency and value delivery.

£1.6b

£1.6 billion annual organisation-wide spend with third parties

>50

50-60 people in the procurement team

9,000

9,000 people in the organisation



Resetting priorities and a new division

Two practices critical to achieving these objectives were identified as key priorities areas to be optimised after being flagged up for improvement by the assessment.

The first was category management. The previous approach, which saw pockets of good practice across the Council, was built on with a cross-Council commitment to effective category management and a structured methodology underpinned by digital tools. Similarly, in line with CIPS recommendations, the authority strengthened its approach to managing strategic supplier relationships.. Together, these practices will maximise value from pre-procurement activities and achieve wider benefits throughout the lifecycle.

These new ways of working were prioritised and embedded, along with other enhanced policies and processes, within the brand new Commercial

and Procurement Division, which was designed and set up during the PEP process. The central, strategic role of this division and its offering across the Council owes much to learnings from the assessment, which highlighted the importance of the procurement function having greater influence and oversight over and providing supporting across the full breadth of the Council's third party spend.

For the new operating model to work, it is vital that everyone involved in procurement and contracting across the Council sees the Commercial and Procurement Division as a source of commercial expertise, good practice, negotiation skills and support to resolve challenges . Achieving the PEP accreditation will go a long way towards building the trust and confidence to ensure this happens.

The benefits for Kent County Council

According to Kent County Council, the **Procurement Excellence Programme** has been highly influential in its implementation of industry-leading practices and standards for commercial and procurement activity at both strategic and operational levels, enabling it to:

- Deliver wider public benefit for Kent residents through the application of best practices across the function
- Reduce exposure to risks through greater clarity about potential risks and developing a comprehensive approach to managing supply chain risks
- Strengthen governance through, for example, a Commercial and Procurement Oversight Board which acts as a pre-tender gateway for high value/high risk contracts
- Increase spend influenced by procurement thanks to the remit of the new Commercial and Procurement Division
- Increase competitiveness and bargaining power through stronger negotiating skills
- Achieve efficiencies by streamlining sourcing and procurement processes
- Encourage and enable ethical and sustainable procurement by recruiting a dedicated specialist
- Open opportunities for collaborating on procurement with other local authorities as part of a new supplier management and partnering approach
- Raise morale through greater cross-team working during the assessment and greater understanding of what good looks like and how to deliver it thereafter
- Develop a roadmap based on information and insights gained through the assessment to continually improve over the coming years.

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The Procurement Excellence Programme process shines a light on what organisations are doing and enables them to learn in a structured and objective way to identify gaps and raise their game so that they are less exposed to risks and more successful at getting value for money.”

Peter Williams
CIPS Assessor



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- Demonstrates how well your procurement function is performing against an internationally recognised standard
- Helps your organisation build a function fit and ready for future challenges



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