

GREEN PROCUREMENT

London Borough of Lewisham's Environmentally Responsible Purchasing Policy

Introduction

As part of Local Agenda 21 and increasingly Community Strategies and Planning, local authorities are responsible for integrating sustainability objectives into their working practices. The London Borough of Lewisham aims to provide Best Value services, incorporating the Sustainability agenda, and has signed up to achieving accreditation to the European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS). The Council has developed an environmentally responsible purchasing, or 'green procurement' policy to help it meet these wider social, economic and environmental targets. As noted in the UK Government's Waste Strategy 2000, green procurement strategies can be an important lever for change when local authorities attempt to target the environmental impacts of their activities and indeed the activities of their suppliers.

Aims & objectives

The reason and need for undertaking green procurement is summarised by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), as "...green purchasing. It aims at helping governments achieve their environmental policy goals while meeting their budget lines." Spending some 11 to 12 percent of Gross National Product, public authorities play a key role on the demand side of the market and can thus help to modify not only their environmental impact for the good, but also that of their suppliers of goods and services. The Council's key policy statement on environmentally responsible purchasing is as follows:

"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, whilst meeting current needs."

This aim was supported by a series of objectives, namely to:

- Buy or tender centrally, for better quality, potentially at a lower price;
- Buy 'green' by using recommended green product and material purchasing guides;
- Make products last longer through maintenance to extend their life; and
- Recycle all old goods.

Who was involved

The project was put together by a group of purchasing officers and environment officers, in partnership with a consultant (Business Eco-network). The Borough's Head of Procurement, the Environmental Sustainability co-ordinator and EMAS co-ordinator worked with the Energy Manager, who was the catalyst and link between these two groups, due to his management of energy purchasing and the environmental impact of saving energy. This project followed on from the council's 100% 'green' energy purchasing initiative, which can be found in the further information section.

The approach

Lewisham's first environmentally responsible purchasing policy (green procurement strategy) was initially drawn up in 2001. In this document the borough set out the aim of the green procurement strategy (above) as well as key points of the policy:

- Promotion of the sustainable use of resources;
- Introducing environmental performance management and monitoring into contract procedures;
- Integrating the Council's procurement/purchasing standards and processes with its EMAS system;
- Forming partnerships with suppliers to apply the council's principles in corporate procurement / purchasing activities;
- Supporting staff in the delivery of this policy;

- Continually improving the Procurement and Purchasing Policy and guidelines by regularly reviewing contracts and suppliers and benchmarking this strategy with others;
- Use of environmental preference methods for the selection of materials, such as the Handbook of Sustainable Building, ISBN 1-873936-38-9;
- Effectively maintaining goods and assets during their usable life;
- Aiming to re-use, recycle or dispose of all end-of-life products, according to the waste hierarchy; and
- Effective recycling or disposal arrangements should be considered and initiated at the time of purchase.

This policy was widely distributed to boroughs in London and the South East to publicise Lewisham's efforts and to encourage others to develop green procurement strategies. The Greater London Authority has shown a particular interest, and Lewisham has written a committee paper on the issues on their behalf. Extending from this is Lewisham's guide to green procurement for local authority officers, which is currently in development.

Achievements

The Borough's achievements are 'acorns' at present in terms of what it hopes to achieve long term, however this is because moving comprehensively to an environmental / sustainable focus on all issues is a cultural shift that could take many years. Key achievements to date are that:

- The policy has been agreed and key staff have received basic training on the issues, as part of a larger training course on procurement;
- A Corporate Sustainability Board has been established to oversee environmental and wider sustainability issues;
- A Sustainable Construction Forum has been established;
- Environmental issues are included as a consideration in all contracts and a copy of the Environmental Policy and Energy Policy are issues as standard with the councils standard terms and conditions to contractors;
- Lewisham continues to buy 100% renewable electricity, three years after going totally green;
- Aggregates are routinely recycled wherever possible on construction contracts;
- It is likely that the council will move to chilled potable tap water for staff, away from expensive bottled water, for environmental and cost reasons; and
- The Greater London Authority has taken a keen interest in the Borough's strategy.

Next steps

In partnership with ICLEI, the Council contributed to a September 2002 proposal for European Union (EU) LIFE-Environment funding looking at Local Authority EMAS and Procurement (LEAP). The proposal intends to build on previous EU funded projects in the field of green procurement and the application of EMAS in the public sector. The purpose of the project is two-fold. Firstly to develop tools that will allow municipalities, large and small, to deal with green procurement in a systematic, effective and efficient way as part of their Environmental Management Systems. Secondly and as a key part of these tools to develop and test joint procurement approaches that have the potential of overcoming current market barriers in Europe for 'green' purchasing. This EU wide project has passed through the first stage of evaluation, but the final approval has not yet been given.

Lewisham will also incorporate points from the Improvement and Development Agency's (IDeA) recent 'Guidance on Implementing Sustainable Procurement in Local Government', highlighted in the further information section below. Following this, Lewisham will publish its officer guide to Green Procurement. Hopefully the wider ICLEI EU study will also go ahead.

Lessons learned

- It is critical to gain political and high level officer support to take the Sustainable Procurement agenda forward;
- Continuous improvement over time is required to 'green' the whole procurement chain, taking on board new issues as experience improves;

- The introduction of sustainable procurement can be linked to health and safety and risk assessments in that green products are likely to be the healthiest. For further information see the IDeA website; and
- 'Green' sustainable procurement is a developing area and there is still a long way to go to reach best practice.

Further information

- For a copy of Lewisham's Environmentally Responsible Purchasing Policy, please contact Richard Hurford, E: richard.hurford@lewisham.gov.uk
- An excellent guide on the issues around green procurement is available from the IDEA, W: <http://www.idea.gov.uk/procurement/sustainable.pdf>
- The consultants who assisted with this project were Business Eco-network, W: <http://www.eco.uk.com/network/>
- The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, W: <http://www.iclei.org/>
- The Practical help case study on Lewisham's response to the Climate Change Levy is available at http://www.practicalhelp.org.uk/casestudies/ccl/cs2_ccl.doc

Abbreviations used

EMAS	Environmental Management Audit Scheme
ICLEI	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives
EU	European Union
LEAP	Local Authority EMAS and Procurement
IDeA	Improvement and Development Agency

At the time of publication and to the best of our knowledge, the information contained in this case study was correct.

Practical help cannot vouch for any of the organisations involved.

Practical help

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