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# Sharing knowledge

A group of Scottish councils recently carried out a collaborative procurement exercise for a new eLearning service – securing efficiency gains for each council.



The Clyde Valley Learning and Development Group (CVLDG) was set up to share approaches to learning and development

When a group of Scottish councils came together in September 2009 to create a new eLearning service, they led the way in two major areas for local government across the UK. The collaborative procurement process has secured both efficiency gains and cash savings; while the service itself has enabled the sharing of learning and development for more than 100,000 staff, which promises to save millions of pounds for training budgets.

The Clyde Valley Learning and Development Group (CVLDG) was set up to share approaches to learning and development (L&D) and, where appropriate, procure shared L&D services to maximise training budget value.

This particular eLearning service contract is the most

substantial of the CVLDG's activities to date, worth approximately £500,000 over three years. It was also the first major procurement undertaken by all eight councils – East Dunbartonshire Council, East Renfrewshire Council, Glasgow City Council, Inverclyde Council, North Lanarkshire Council, Renfrewshire Council, South Lanarkshire Council and West Dunbartonshire Council. South Lanarkshire Council acted as the lead member authority for the group and facilitated the procurement process.

*The benefits of the new Local Government eLearning Service for CVLDG members include:*

- access to online learning for all council employees
- providing councils with records of staff training and competencies
- capturing ongoing training needs across the Clyde Valley
- improving access to relevant expertise and resources, wherever they may be within the group
- increasing collaborative working and knowledge sharing

Gerry Farrell from South Lanarkshire Council was seconded to the role of project manager to see the procurement of the service through. In a process that took well over a year to conclude before the contract was won in September, it was his job to coordinate what he describes

***The collaborative procurement process reduced the time and cost of engaging with each individual council and their respective procurement departments***

as a 'loose affiliation of distinct organisations'. This was a crucial role, but one with little or no precedent that could be followed.

Mr Farrell said: *"The most important aspect at the start of this procurement project was to establish a Governance Structure, which was agreed by all councils and in place at the start of the project."*

*"We were in an unusual position of having eight separate sets of standing orders and financial regulations. Hence, one of the first jobs was to set up a binding agreement at the start of the project. We created a Joint Committee Structure with agreed processes and structures. This Joint Committee included representatives from each of the eight member councils, who meet on a quarterly basis."*

Brightwave was finally awarded the contract to provide the eLearning service on behalf of CVLDG. The tender was both comprehensive and exacting, but despite the substantial effort required, CVLDG's approach brought significant efficiencies and benefits to all involved.


In fact, from Brightwave's point of view, the collaborative procurement process clearly reduced the time and cost of engaging with each individual council and their respective procurement departments. That meant we were able to pass on substantial cost savings in the form of discounts. With all eight councils adopting the service, we discounted the price by 25 per cent, making a saving of over £170,000.

However, the benefits of collaboration go well beyond procurement. In many ways, eLearning is a model for public bodies seeking to work together and share resources. Our eLearning service enables council staff to access online training modules from work or from home. These modules can be created by experts within – or external to – the council.

The real gains, however, are from the ability of each council to customise these modules for their own purposes without having to start from scratch. For example, if one council developed an eLearning module on Confidentiality, it could make this available to all other councils using the service. The chances are that the content of this module would be just as applicable to one council as another. So, multiple councils can benefit from this shared approach, and still have the option of customising it – perhaps to include links to their own council policies and local information.

Three of the eight councils have already implemented parts of the eLearning service, while the remaining councils will be up and running by the start of 2010.

Several other councils are also interested in Brightwave's eLearning service. Fortunately, the way the CVLDG procurement has been set up, when additional councils sign up there is potential for further discounts.

In fact, the greater the uptake of the Local Government eLearning Service, the greater the benefits will be. It helps avoid duplication of effort – a massive opportunity for efficiencies as we face the prospect of severe spending cuts across the public sector. This really is an example of joined-up thinking and joined-up action that will maximise training budgets and benefit council staff, and ultimately the taxpayer. 

## Clyde Valley Learning and Development Group – Top Tips for Successful Collaborative Procurement...

### 1 Get governance

It was crucial to the success of the above project that an agreed structure was set up in advance with clear lines of authority and responsibility. Without such structure, you risk lengthy discussions, different opinions, alternative approaches, slow decision-making and extended timescales.

### 2 Build in contingency time

When planning a large procurement with just one organisation, there are many decision makers – with eight such organisations the number of decision makers multiplies by eight! It is therefore crucial, with so many stakeholders involved, that there is a clear time-frame set at the start to gather all information, make and collate decisions, and take the procurement forward. Include some contingency planning in that expected time-frame, as projects usually take longer than expected.

When building a time-frame work back from your implementation date and then plan each stage to create a detailed timeline.

Following the initiation of the above project (agreeing the service required, plus gaining approval from the Joint Committee), the collaborative procurement for the e-learning system from Brightwave took approximately six months.

### 3 Agree the decision-making and approval process early

Start as early as possible to agree the individual and organisational decision-making process. Each member council will have their own budgets and approval processes, so do ensure those processes are built into the timeline.

### 4 Learn from others' experience

While it is important to have a single project manager to pull a collaborative project together, it is also worth taking advantage of the experience of others within each member council – from an individual and organisational point of view. There is a lot of talent to tap into, which should be maximised to help ensure the best results possible.

### 5 Keep records

Keep a record of what worked well and what could have been improved, to ensure something can be learned for future similar projects. We learned a huge amount during the above process and would most certainly allow more time for similar procurements in the future.

### 6 One lead authority – one procurement process

With so many different councils involved in a large collaborative procurement, there is the potential for multiple processes and much scope for confusion. Having a single lead authority and agreeing to use its procurement procedures and financial regulations will help avoid overly complicating the process.

## In summary...

- Clyde Valley Learning and Development Group was set up to share approaches to learning and development and procure shared L&D services to maximise training budget value
- The eLearning service contract awarded to Brightwave in 2009 is the most substantial of the CVLDG's activities, worth approximately £500,000 over three years
- Three of CVLDG's eight member councils have already implemented parts of the eLearning service, while the remaining councils will be up and running by the start of 2010

## Further information...

For more information, please visit: [www.brightwave.co.uk](http://www.brightwave.co.uk)