

CATALYST

New national toolkit to deliver major efficiencies in residential care

An innovative toolkit which is already delivering efficiencies in the purchase of residential care placements for people with learning disabilities in some regions is set to become a nationally available service.

The South East Centre of Excellence is leading the project on behalf of the RCEs to co-ordinate the development of a national cost model toolkit. Essentially a sophisticated online spreadsheet, the toolkit calculates an indicative price to meet the care needs of an individual and to enable a match with suitable provision so that a fair price can be negotiated with a provider. It will provide an up-to-date database of providers and placements, based on extensive national research, to allow social workers to search quickly for appropriate vacancies and compare prices charged by providers to different authorities.

The national toolkit builds upon a number of existing tools which have been developed in the South West, South East and Eastern regions. The regional models have usually been applied by authorities to new high-cost placements, giving average savings on quoted prices of 10% although the cost of some placements has been reduced by as much as 30%. The South West Centre of Excellence, for example, has already achieved £1.2 million of savings for six local authorities in its region.

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e-Auction halves IT costs for councils and NHS trusts

Fourteen councils and six NHS trusts collaborated to save nearly £7 million in the latest IT hardware e-auction which was led by the London Centre of Excellence (LCE) and run by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC).

By combining their spending power, the councils and the trusts auctioned IT hardware requirements worth £13.7 million at pre-auction benchmarked prices. At the end of the five hour auction, they achieved a price of £6.9 million – an average saving of 50 per cent across the six lots. The e-auction was championed by the LCE which provided sponsorship and project management resources while the OGC assisted with technical and project management support, drawing on the lessons and successes of its previous six IT e-auctions.

Any local authority interested in making cash savings by participating in an OGC IT e-auction should contact their Regional Centre of Excellence.

Regional commissioning framework set to improve children's services

Children and young people's service partners across the East Midlands have signed up to the first ever regional commissioning framework designed to improve the way care services are commissioned in the region.

An ambitious project, a wide range of agencies collaborated, including health, social care, education, voluntary and community organisations. It was co-ordinated by the Regional Partnership and funded by the East Midlands Centre of Excellence. The framework, which was officially launched in May, is supported by a website and a handbook offering resources and materials and a step-by-step guide to support commissioning. The aim is to provide a consistent approach across the region by setting out key principles for commissioning which all regional partners commit to and apply in their work.

It gives guidance and support to those working to improve services for children, young people and their families, and is also relevant to providers, service users and others who need to understand how commissioning works.

Partners will be able to develop local commissioning strategies and achieve better value for money through improved efficiency and effectiveness. It will also allow better planning, more mainstreaming of specialist services, user participation and supports preventative measures, offering specific help for vulnerable children and young people.

To find out more, contact:

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or visit: www.regionalcommissioning.co.uk

Update on the future of the Regional Centres of Excellence

Talks have taken place between representatives of the Chief Executives' Task Force and the Local Government Association on the future arrangements for delivering the National Improvement Strategy and the merger of the Regional Centres of Excellence and the Regional Improvement Partnerships (RIPs).

Both parties recognise the need to build on the success of the RCEs and RIPs in order to help local authorities meet future challenges, not least the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. They also recognise that there needs to be regional flexibility in such matters as representation and governance. Hence, the talks agreed that, in consultation with all authorities in their area, each RCE/RIP will determine who should represent their region and the nature of their governance arrangements. It was also agreed to convene a small central working group to provide guidance on the development of regional efficiency and improvement strategies.

New regional arrangements for England will be operational by April 2008.



Scheme to streamline procurement documentation gets thumbs up

Doing business with local authorities is set to become easier with a national scheme that cuts bureaucracy and simplifies the buying of goods and services.

Four Regional Centres of Excellence are working together to produce simpler procurement documents, which should encourage more small and medium sized firms to compete for local authority contracts. The North West, North East, Yorkshire and the Humber and East Midlands Centres of Excellence are collaborating to design a clear set of standard documents to cover all aspects of purchasing goods and supplies. The new documents will be available to authorities across the country and should make tendering and contracting easier for both buyers and suppliers by streamlining the process.

New guidance to cut costs and save time on translations and interpretation

New guidance has been published by the Regional Centres of Excellence Procurement Programme to help councils cut the cost of translation and interpretation services. The latest On the Money guide promotes two framework agreements led by the Home Office which offer excellent value for money as the average costs of translations are reduced by 50% and telephone interpretation by 70%. And because both are open to all local authorities, councils can make substantial time savings by avoiding a lengthy procurement process of their own.

The guide comes at a time when evidence shows that many local authorities are paying too much for some commonly bought goods and services. And yet there are deals available which would help them to cut their costs, in some cases, dramatically. Unfortunately, councils aren't always aware of these deals or how they can access them – until now.

On the Money guides are part of the Regional Centres of Excellence Procurement Programme which is seeking to deliver major efficiencies in the £42 billion that local government spends each year on goods and services in order to protect front-line services.

To find out more, visit: www.rcoe.gov.uk



Making Direct Debit work

Councils could be saving millions of pounds on the administrative costs of their council tax collection, according to a report by Voca, the electronic payment specialists.

The report, commissioned by the Department for Communities and Local Government, revealed there is huge scope for local authorities to make major savings by increasing the take up of direct debit payment of council tax. It showed the annual anticipated savings for the North West region alone are £1.54 million.

The Institute of Revenues, Ratings and Valuation (IRRV) following their joint work with Voca, the Audit Commission and the Centres of Excellence, has now launched a self-assessment framework for councils. This allows councils to measure their current collection operations against best practice in a bid to improve electronic payment processes and achieve efficiencies. Funded by the Yorkshire and the Humber Centre of Excellence, Doncaster Council piloted the framework earlier this year. The authority experienced a 20% increase in take up of direct debit payments and anticipated savings of £125,000 per year.

The free self assessment direct debit framework was published in the May edition of Insight, the IRRV magazine and is also available at: www.yhcoe.rcoe.gov.uk

Bargain Hunt II

The North West Centre of Excellence staged its second Bargain Hunt event to show local authorities how to make annual savings of around £100 million a year. More than 160 delegates, including chief executives, finance directors and procurement officers, attended the event at the Manchester Central Conference Centre.

Delegates had the opportunity to participate in up to five out of 30 different workshops on offer which showcased a wide variety of procurement best practice and how to make efficiency gains. These ranged from Manchester City Council revealing how it made substantial savings by negotiating with social services providers to insider knowledge from the Centre for Construction Innovation on sustainable construction.

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