

# CATALYST

## Work underway on regional improvement and efficiency strategies

A series of events has been organised to support the production of regional improvement and efficiency strategies. The events, which are taking place throughout November and December in all nine regions, mark the latest chapter in the merger of the regional partners to create a sector-led approach to local government improvement and efficiency.

They follow the recent CSR07 announcement and will allow senior local authority personnel to consider how regions should best respond to the challenges thrown down by the announcement and the forthcoming national improvement and efficiency strategy. Each event will also provide an opportunity for CLG and the LGA to communicate national perspectives of CSR07 and the Local Government VFM Delivery Plan which was recently published by CLG.

Regions themselves will determine the shape and content of their strategies according to regional priorities. It is expected that regions will have produced their draft strategies by January and adopted in March prior to all Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships going live in April.

Please contact each RCE directly for more information. Contact details can be found at: [www.rcoe.gov.uk](http://www.rcoe.gov.uk)

## RCE Procurement Programme gets into full swing

A set of seven guides promoting existing framework agreements and contracts for commonly-bought goods and services which are open to all local authorities has just been launched. The On the Money guides are designed to help councils save money and time in the £2.5bn they spend each year on energy, fleet, fuel, ICT hardware, print, telecoms and translation services.

The guides mark the latest in a range of products produced under the banner of the Regional Centre of Excellence Procurement Programme, a unique initiative designed specially for councils to generate savings and improve services in the main categories of local government spend. It brings together tried and tested projects pioneered by councils and Regional Centres of Excellence with a range of new initiatives under one national work stream so that all councils can benefit from local and regional innovation.

A timetable of product launches between now and March 2008 has been prepared which is supported by a marketing plan to ensure that councils have every opportunity to take advantage of the benefits the programme offers. Products and services include:

- > A document harmonisation service, called the Docking Station (see below), which offers standard, legally watertight tendering and contractual documents to save councils time and money on their procurement exercises
- > Joining up contract databases held by Regional Centres of Excellence to give councils access to hundreds of open contracts and launching a price comparison service via each Regional Centre of Excellence to allow councils to compare and benchmark prices
- > Publishing a new series of How to be Successful guides covering the procurement and commissioning of consultants, children's services, construction products for social housing, construction frameworks, waste services and insurance for smaller councils
- > Rolling out successful regional tools onto a national stage, including the national toolkit for purchasing residential care (see below for details), the children and young people's regional commissioning framework and enhancing the Waste Information Network, the website for waste professionals seeking the very best advice on efficiency and improvement

For more information on the RCE Procurement Programme, visit: [www.rcoe.gov.uk](http://www.rcoe.gov.uk)

## National scheme to simplify paperwork goes live

Doing business with local authorities will now be easier thanks to a nationally available service that cuts bureaucracy, reduces duplication and simplifies the buying of goods and services. The North West, North East, Yorkshire and Humber and East Midlands Centres of Excellence have combined to develop a set of standard documents which are available to all authorities to make tendering and contracting quicker and fairer for both buyers and suppliers.

The new service, called the Docking Station, aims to encourage more small and medium sized firms to compete for local authority contracts as existing paperwork is often seen as a barrier to many potential smaller suppliers. It also overcomes the problems of older contract procedure rules which do not allow for modern procurement methods such as procurement portals or e-tendering. As such, the Docking Station should be of particular benefit to district authorities who may otherwise have struggled with the time and resource commitments of e-tendering exercises.

The Docking Station is available at: [www.nwce.gov.uk/docking-station](http://www.nwce.gov.uk/docking-station)



# Half of all councils piloting the national care costing toolkit

Almost half of all councils that provide adult care services are piloting the national toolkit for purchasing residential care and supported living. The toolkit, which is based on projects pioneered by the South East and South West Centres of Excellence, aims to help commissioning staff improve outcomes for service users and achieve the best use of resources. It gives both local authorities and providers a better understanding of the market for accommodation-based care for adults with a learning disability.

The pilots will continue until January 2008 to test the toolkit in a working environment, its cost assumptions and to identify any improvements or changes needed. A number of councils in the pilot will also be carrying out further research into the costs with their local providers in order to develop a more detailed understanding of regional variations in cost. While a focus group for private and voluntary sector organisations is being run in December to generate detailed feedback from providers.

It is anticipated that the final version of the toolkit will be rolled out to all local authorities in March next year. It will also include a version for service users and their carers to use under individualised budgets.

For more information, contact: [amanda.lloyd@sece.gov.uk](mailto:amanda.lloyd@sece.gov.uk)

## Prescription for transport

The North West Centre of Excellence's national transport project is about to launch an in-depth guide to promote the benefits of councils working with NHS agencies to manage their non-emergency transport needs. The report says that councils and NHS agencies recognise the benefits, especially in terms of financial savings, of an integrated approach to passenger transport planning, procurement and provision, and should establish partnerships to make this a reality. It also recommends that government departments should actively encourage and support local authority/NHS agency partnerships with pump-priming funding where necessary.

For more information, visit: [www.nwce.gov.uk](http://www.nwce.gov.uk)

## South East projects in the frame

Two innovative projects pioneered by the South East Centre of Excellence are in the frame for national awards. The Waste Information Network is a finalist in the e-Government National Awards 2007 and has been shortlisted for the excellence in procurement category. The winners will be announced at the awards ceremony in January 2008.

While the SECE major framework has been nominated for the Guardian Public Services Awards 2007. The Centre has been working with Hampshire County Council to pioneer a new approach to procuring and managing a wide range of public construction projects, from new civic offices to a new swimming pool, using framework agreements. Over £800 million worth of projects are already under the framework. It has been shortlisted for the finance and procurement award and the winners will be announced on 27 November.

For more information, visit: [www.win.org.uk](http://www.win.org.uk)  
and: [www.society.guardian.co.uk/publicservicesawards](http://www.society.guardian.co.uk/publicservicesawards)



# Business Improvement Package updated

Launched earlier this year by CLG and the Regional Centres of Excellence, the Business Improvement Package (BIP) has recently been extended to include a mass of new information drawn from good practice in business improvement and transformation nationally.

BIP is an online resource to help councils understand service transformation, improve performance and reduce costs and is seen as a key tool to support councils deliver better services and greater efficiency in CSR07. Techniques such as business process improvement, transaction costing and opportunities to share services are brought together under the package. Using the BIP, which takes users through the stages of business transformation, it is possible for a council to gauge where it is in its transformation process. It then allows the council to quickly locate relevant material and understand how it can be used in their own collaborative programmes.

The LIFT South West Centre of Excellence has extended the BIP to include a mass of new information drawn from good practice from across the sector and industry standard experience. The BIP now provides unparalleled access to over 150 good practice tools and techniques from organisations such as CLG, IDeA, 4ps, OGC, the private sector and councils themselves.

To find out more about BIP, visit: [www.bip.rcoe.gov.uk](http://www.bip.rcoe.gov.uk)

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

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