



Supply chain review of uniforms and public protection equipment

Who was involved?

The North West Centre of Excellence carried out the review of the supply chain for uniforms and public protection equipment

Aim of the project

The aim of the project was to investigate some of the north west's top suppliers, with a view to establishing their current position in terms of policies for the environment, sustainability and ethical practices.

Background

As part of a wider sustainability remit, it was decided to review the supply chain of the north west's top suppliers. The review would be in two parts, the first to establish the current position of suppliers and the second to recommend a way forward for future contracts.

What they did and how they did it

The NWCE firstly contacted other agencies, such as OGC and NHS Supply Chain to establish whether they had carried out, or were about to carry out, a similar review. The answer was no, so the NWCE drew up a questionnaire which was distributed to six of the top suppliers. They were asked if they had written environmental, sustainability and ethical manufacturing/purchasing policies and if they were ISO 14001* accredited or working towards accreditation.

Additionally the NWCE liaised with Cumbria CC who said they would test the exercise by including requests for information about sustainability policies in future procurement exercises

The results

Policies	Suppliers				
	JR ASSOC	Elite Industrial	Uniformity Clothing	Nalestar	Alexandra
Environment	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
ethical	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
sustainability	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
ISO14001	No	No	No	No	No

Initially the results looked promising but closer examination revealed that most policies are inadequate, few suppliers are looking to improve policies and there is little awareness of ISO14001*

*ISO 14001 This series of standards is designed to cover the whole area of environmental issues for organisations in the global marketplace.

Improvement through efficiency

Lessons learned

- Suppliers were generally wary of the process and the reasons for carrying out the review. Detailed discussions were necessary with each supplier before the process could start.
- Most suppliers were unaware of ISO 14001 and were unclear as to what 'sustainability' meant despite the increasing demand for companies to be certified to ISO 14001. Work will, therefore, need to be carried out with suppliers to improve the quality of their policies to enable them to compete for future business.
- Information needs to be shared to ensure there is no duplication of effort. Some suppliers have been prepared to share their policy development plans and have indicated that they may be willing to discuss these. Potentially, this could allow for the opportunity to influence the plans under development.

The benefits

A set of guidance notes has been produced for the purchase of uniforms and public protection equipment – see below.

Guidance note for the purchase of uniforms and public protection equipment

Future contracts

It is vital for any new contract that the pre-qualification questionnaire and tender documentation include a request for copies of the suppliers' environmental, sustainability, ethical purchasing and/or manufacturing policies. These should be submitted with each proposal and will be weighted and scored in the usual manner.

When evaluating, it is essential that the policies cover, at minimum, most or all of the following environmental/sustainability areas:

- A commitment to continuous improvement
- Recognition of compliance with relevant environmental/sustainability legislation as a minimum level of performance
- The education and training of employees in environmental issues and the environmental effects of their activities
- The monitoring of progress and review of environmental performance on a regular basis (usually annually)

Additional issues that may be relevant to the procurement could include:

- Transport
- Recycling of packing materials
- Minimising waste

- Efficient use of water and energy
- Use of biodegradable chemicals
- Expect similar environmental standards from their suppliers and contractors

In addition, it is essential the evaluation should cover the following aspects of suppliers' ethical purchasing/manufacturing policies.

- Employment is freely chosen
- Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are respected
- Working conditions are safe and hygienic
- Child labour shall not be used
- Living wages are paid
- Working hours are not excessive
- No discrimination is practised
- Regular employment is provided
- No harsh or inhumane treatment is allowed

The above headings constitute the minimum standards required. It is expected that companies will comply with national and other applicable law. Further information on this can be found on <http://www.ethicaltrade.org/>.

Current Contracts

Suppliers must be advised of the standards that will be required to win future contracts. They must also be encouraged to review and develop their policies to meet the above criteria. This may be particularly pertinent for SMEs to ensure that they will be competitive at the next round of tender negotiations.

Contact

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