
Meeting: Central Bedfordshire Schools Forum
Date: 25 January 2010
Subject: E-Procurement for Schools
Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children, Families and Learning
Summary: To update the Schools Forum on the electronic procurement tool available to Schools

Contact Officer: Dawn Hill, Borough Hall, Bedford
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. To discuss and comment on the latest update regarding E-Procurement for Schools.**

Background

1. In a white paper - Securing our future: using our resources well - schools secretary Ed Balls set out four main areas where schools' finances could be run more efficiently using a range of measures intended to cut schools' back office and administrative costs. These included making use of better procurement.
2. Currently schools do not have access to an e-Procurement system. Central Bedfordshire has made a commitment in their Corporate Commissioning and Procurement Strategy 2009/10 that the Council will work with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to encourage schools to implement OPEN (Online Procurement for Educational Needs).
3. OPEN was highlighted in the white paper as one of the resources available to schools to help them make efficiency savings and achieve value for money. The paper also outlines how information taken from OPEN will allow the Department to procure better deals for schools which will be made available via the OPEN system now and in the future. OPEN is part of the government's tailored support to help schools cut their costs.

4. The OPEN suite of products has been specifically designed for schools to make the buying of goods and services faster and easier, whilst maximising value for money. OPEN is being made available to schools across England by the DCSF.
5. The OPEN market place allows schools easy and secure access to suppliers' electronic catalogues for goods and services and has five key elements:
 - Hosted catalogues giving schools the ability to 'punch out' to external supplier websites;
 - Facility which allows integration with existing finance and sales ordering processing systems (RM and SIMS);
 - Ability to send and receive requests for quotations from suppliers;
 - A data warehouse with secure access to information that has passed through the system allowing schools to drill-down and interrogate data; and
 - A free text requisition, an electronic version of a requisition which is created in OPEN. Once submitted is sent electronically to the School's Finance Officer for importing and processing.
6. The DCSF are funding the implementation of this product and will deliver the training to School staff to maximise the use of this product. There will be no charges to schools for the use of OPEN up to the end of March 2011. Any possible charging would be reviewed as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. There will be some management time associated with the facilitation, launch and initial embedding of the product.

Update on Progress

7. Schools have been made aware of the availability of this product at a presentation by the DCSF, at the Schools Finance Seminar on the 4 November 2009.
8. At the end of the presentation schools were requested to complete a return to gauge expressions of interest. 66 Schools responded requesting to be registered with OPEN.
9. A steering group, consisting of officers from Procurement, Audit and Schools Finance has been set up to discuss the next steps and to formulate a timeline. The DCSF have also assigned a School procurement Partner and a Local Educational Procurement Centre Manager.
10. A meeting of the group took place on 2 December 2009, where a launch date of 1 April 2010 was agreed as most appropriate. This would be subject to the software companies ensuring full integration with the existing finance and sales ordering processing systems (RM and SIMS) and necessary financial controls in place.

11. A further update will be brought to the Schools Forum in due course.

Appendices:

None