

East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership



East Midlands
Improvement and
Efficiency Partnership

Northampton Borough Council: A new decade of successful procurement ▼

East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership Case Studies

The East Midlands Improvement & Efficiency Partnership (EMIEP) is committed to celebrating the successful, innovative and imaginative project work that exists in the East Midlands region.

The EMIEP Support Team publish case studies showing how East Midlands councils are improving services, and delivering significant improvements and efficiencies.

The case studies are intended to inspire councils in the region, and indeed nationally, to transform services and benefit from the processes developed by those councils that have pioneered the way forward.

Sharing in success in procurement ▼

Northamptonshire Area Procurement Service (NAPS) is a shared procurement team established in November 2008 between six borough and district councils and hosted by Northampton Borough Council.

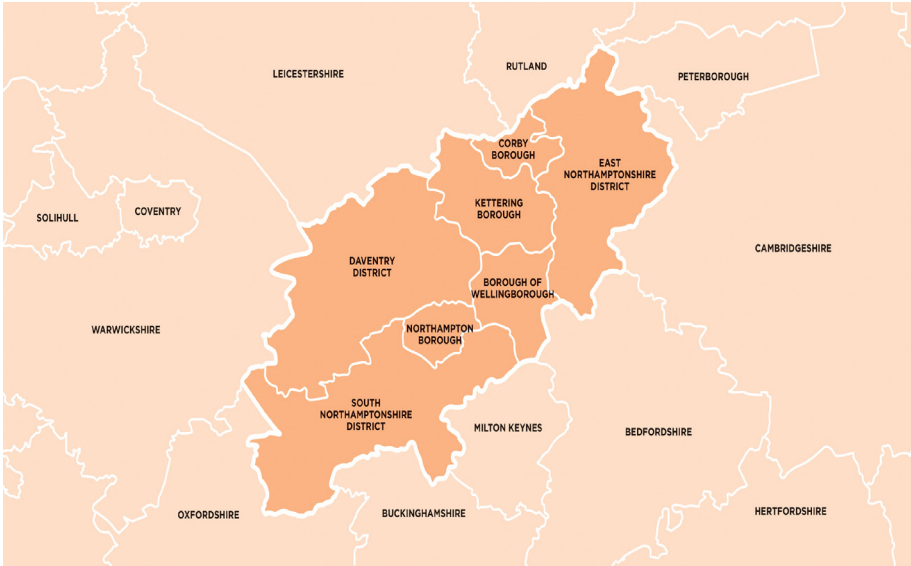
The creation of this new team, with its shared service ethos and a formalised structure of procurement across the six boroughs and districts is creating tangible benefits, not least the opportunity to deliver value for money whilst promoting investment in the local economy.

“By providing a consistency of approach and simplifying processes, the NAPS team have helped to remove some of the barriers faced by businesses, enabling more to respond to tenders and access public contracts. This in turn has helped sustain and grow local businesses, which is particularly important in the current economic climate.”

Cathy Martin
Northamptonshire Enterprise

Ensuring consistent good practice ▾

NAPS facilitates procurement across Northampton Borough Council, Corby Borough Council, Daventry District Council, Kettering Borough Council, South Northamptonshire Council and the Borough Council of Wellingborough.



Historically, there had always been a procurement team at Northampton Borough Council, but many of the other partners previously had either limited or no resource prior to the shared service being formalised. Therefore, the creation of NAPS provided both an additional resource and an opportunity for growth in the region.

It was identified that along with the opportunities came possible risks, two of which were:

1. Consistency - with a team of eight people spread geographically amongst six

districts and boroughs, there was a need for formalised structures and processes, to ensure good practice was consistent and to minimise the risk of discrimination.

2. Working with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) – creating a shared service has the benefit of delivering value for money through larger contracts. However, this increased ‘buying power’ runs the risk of discriminating against SMEs with the ambition of working with local councils.

Structured for success ▾

With Northampton Borough Council working to achieve Level 3 Equality Standard at a similar time, NAPS recognised that in creating the shared service ethos, common documentation and processes required of a Level 3 Council, NAPS would also have the opportunity to successfully present itself to market.

Undertaking an updated Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) assisted the team in determining 10 areas which may have an adverse impact on equality in procurement. From this, NAPS has implemented a variety of activities to contribute to good practise, including:

Embedding the processes

Ensuring that the team had both the knowledge and the tools to undertake good practise was fundamental to the success of the whole initiative:

- The entire NAPS team undertook Equalities & Diversity training, with the Head of NAPS completing a higher level of training.
- The Head of NAPS sits on the Corporate Equality Steering group.
- A new Guide to Equality and Diversity in Procurement was devised, detailing the team's responsibilities in terms of Equality & Diversity; this

is accessible from the intranet whenever required.

- The Equalities policies are embedded in every relevant document within the service planning process, for example the Commodity Strategy document; ensuring both NAPS and its suppliers are open and transparent about their Equalities policies in a measurable way.

Sharing the knowledge

Post-Equalities Impact Assessment, NAPS undertook a series of consultations with suppliers' representatives in the region, including Chamber of Commerce, Business Link, Tenders UK and Northamptonshire Enterprise.

This raised the issue that SMEs could often find it difficult to be sufficiently prepared for the councils' tender process. In response, NAPS attended three events during 2008/9 run by suppliers' representatives, including 'Meet the Buyer' and 'Assistance through the Recession.' These events help to inform SMEs about how the council works, for example how it buys in services and the boundaries of NAPS' remit.

By increasing insights available to potential suppliers NAPS has already seen a reduction in the

amount of 'cold calling' into the procurement department, therefore reducing unnecessary admin in the team. NAPS is now committed to participating in at least one similar event per financial year.

Communicating effectively

In January 2009 a stakeholder survey allowed NAPS to clearly identify its customers and how best to communicate with each group. This then drove a Communications Action Plan now in the process of being implemented. Elements of this include:

- Ensuring a greater presence of shared procurement service on the web for all to access, for example, the introduction of an e-tendering system.
- Advertising details of contract opportunities on www.sourcenorthamptonshire.co.uk.
- Publishing a forward plan of when particular contracts are due for renewal on www.sourcenorthamptonshire.co.uk to enable all companies, including SMEs time to prepare.
- Internally, wherever the team sits geographically, they have access to all the shared service's documentation via the intranet.

Poised for a new decade of success ▾

Perhaps the biggest testament to NAPS' success so far is that just one year after the creation of NAPS and its undertaking of the Equality Impact Assessment, the processes put in place have already contributed to Northampton Borough Council being accredited with its Level 3 Equality Standard.

Many of the initiatives NAPS has devised are due for full implementation early in 2010, with measurements already planned to determine their success and future actions.

In 2006/7 Northampton Borough Council spent 56% of their procurement budget with SMEs and 42% of spend was with suppliers within the East Midlands region - 31% with suppliers within Northamptonshire. A key measure of success in the future is that these figures will have at least been maintained, despite the greater economies of scale available through shared procurement.

Garry Pyne, Head of NAPS said *“By ensuring we do not discriminate against SMEs during the procurement process, we are not only abiding by the law, but we have the potential to contribute both financial and social benefits for the region. SMEs can often prove better value for money with their lower overheads, but in addition, in working with councils, SMEs may invest in the area – for example through employing local people or setting up an office within the region.”*

Shared lessons ▾

NAPS found that in creating a shared service that demonstrates good practice in Equality & Diversity it experienced surprisingly few challenges and barriers. The two main challenges have been:

- The resource required to identify the areas of risk and then ensure all the policies and procedures are in place to minimise them.
- Ensuring that policies for the larger contracts of a shared service do not unwittingly discriminate against the smaller financial standing of many SMEs.

Having now spent a year creating a shared service culture with fundamentally sound equalities practises at its core, NAPS has learnt some valuable lessons:

- The team itself must embrace the Equalities practises and processes; they are executing procurement on a daily basis, so they need to recognise what is required, adopt the processes and understand the potential benefits from doing so.

- In introducing the formalised structures and processes, it is essential to enlist the support of the Equality and Diversity Officer; they are the experts and can offer invaluable advice in terms of how to approach the project and censor check any resulting policies and accompanying documentation.
- Undertake the project section-by-section – executing good practise in Equalities requires an ongoing programme of activity. In order to manage the significant workload involved, and continually generate enthusiasm within the team, NAPS would recommend teams embark upon it ‘step by step’.
- Embrace the communications opportunities offered by the web; NAPS believes the web has been essential in communicating effectively both to the shared service team and the community at large, ensuring a smooth and non-discriminatory approach.

With many of NAPS' initiatives due to launch in 2010, there will undoubtedly be further insights and lessons to learn and share in the future. However the team believe that as long as they continue to

employ an open and transparent approach, it will be able to address any forthcoming issues effectively, for the continued benefit of the Northamptonshire community.

Notes ▾

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