

CATALYST

Our final edition of Catalyst

As the Regional Centres of Excellence programme draws to a close, welcome to the final edition of Catalyst. We hope you feel better informed about the major, programme-wide aspects of our work and the ways in which we have supported the local government efficiency drive.

However, it's not the end of the line for many of our activities. The successful foundations laid by the RCEs are contributing to the work programmes of the new Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) which bring together the improvement and efficiency agenda for local government and its partners.

We want to make sure you are kept informed about the RIEP programme and we will be looking at how best we do this. So, again, it might be the end of Catalyst in its present form but our commitment to keeping you informed about major news from the RIEPs remains. Watch this space.

Funding confirmed for the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships

Local Government Minister, John Healey, has signed off all nine regional improvement and efficiency strategies and in doing so has confirmed the first year's funding for the RIEPs and given an indication for years two and three. He announced the allocation of £185m over the next three years to help RIEPs pioneer innovative ways to transform and improve services and drive even greater efficiency. All nine RIEPs are now preparing detailed delivery plans.

Mr Healey also published a national prospectus outlining a new approach for supporting councils to make improvements and efficiencies. For the first time, the document draws together the services available from central and local government to make it easier for councils to find the support they need, when they need it. The prospectus also commits central and local government to simplifying the support for local government by making changes to the way they deploy their resources.

For more information about the RIEPs visit www.lga.gov.uk

Raising standards, delivering efficiencies in children's and waste services

Two more guides to help councils raise standards and deliver efficiencies in key areas of their activity have been published by the Regional Centres of Excellence. How to be Successful guides in procuring joint waste services and commissioning children's services bring together local government innovation and technical know-how in an accessible case study format. Each one draws out the benefits of a particular approach, the critical success factors and the lessons learned while the regional contacts are clearly signposted.

The guides form the basis of a growing repository of shared expertise that councils and their partners can draw upon. Seven guides now form the How to be Successful series which seeks to ensure that all councils benefit from the very best innovation and knowledge available so they can tackle the efficiency and improvement challenges with greater confidence.

The new guides are available at www.rcoe.gov.uk

Camden wins top procurement award

The London Borough of Camden has won the procurement category at the LGC Awards for Local Government 2008. The category was sponsored by the Regional Centres of Excellence. Chaired by David Jenkins, Chief Executive of Dorset County Council and member of the Chief Executives' Task Group, the judges were impressed by Camden's procurement transformation programme. It included a strategic procurement board, adoption of a category management approach, aggressive procurement savings targets and a purchase-to-pay system. They also noted Camden's emphasis on cultural change and visible senior management leadership. Gloucestershire County Council was highly commended.

The County Council also picked up top spot in the innovation category for its pricing tool to help determine the cost of social care placements. Development of the tool was funded by the South West Centre of Excellence and so far it has realised savings of over £1.65m. An adaptation of the tool is being rolled out nationally, the details of which can be found in the story below.

The full list of winners can be found at www.lgcawards.co.uk/Homepage.asp



Care Funding Calculator: fair care for a fair price

The national care costing toolkit, which helps councils strike a fair deal when they buy residential care for adults with learning difficulties, has a new name – the Care Funding Calculator. Picked from a list of 47 suggestions submitted as part of a competition to rename the tool, it was chosen by the piloting local authorities and the project board. The Care Funding Calculator will be officially launched in May (details to be announced soon) to help local authority commissioners improve the quality of care and make the best use of resources.

Over 70 authorities volunteered to take part in the pilot and so far, the returns show the majority felt the tool was extremely useful in helping to make decisions on placements. Lincolnshire reported enthusiasm from practitioners who found it helped them understand what a fair fee was for a placement. Somerset said that the tool was helpful in quantifying service users' needs in a way which could be tracked in future reviews. Care homes in Somerset said they liked the way the tool promotes independence while the London Borough of Hounslow noted that it had reduced costs in transition cases. The London Association of Directors of Adult Social Services is recommending its use to all London boroughs.

For more information, contact amanda.lloyd@sece.gov.uk

New guidance on sustainable construction

Three guides aimed at keeping sustainability high on the agenda of local authorities have been published by the Local Government Task Force on Construction. The guides, the first of their kind, show how to ensure sustainability throughout the whole lifecycle of a building from its inception through to construction and operation.

They tackle everything from how councils can champion sustainability by setting clear objectives to design out waste and use local labour on new build, to assessing their own office practices to save energy and make the best use of space. Each guide is targeted at those making key decisions at the different development stages of construction to encourage them to ask the right questions at the right time to secure sustainability throughout the project.

Peter Bishop, Director of the Local Government Task Force, said, 'Buildings, both in their construction and operation, contribute to 50% of the UK's carbon emissions, more than those from cars and aviation. It is clear that the industry needs to radically rethink the way it works. Local government, which spends over £14bn a year on construction, should be at the forefront of this change by championing sustainability, not just with new buildings, but in managing current properties too.'

The guides will shortly be available on the LGTF web site while hard copies are available by e-mailing agerm@constructingexcellence.org.uk



What's new on WIN

Since its launch in June 2006 the Waste Information Network (WIN) has gone from strength to strength with now nearly 80% of English councils registered as users. By constantly adapting to their needs, WIN is fast becoming the essential tool to share information on efficiency savings and good practice in waste management.

Recent additions to WIN include the SAVE toolkit which helps local authorities self assess their current performance by reference to proven case studies. The Local Authority Data Map provides access to the case studies, documents and other data of high performers while the Waste and Recycling Officer Mentoring Scheme is a programme of online conferences which enables staff to view live presentations on waste management topics from their desks.

For more information, visit www.win.org.uk

Minister to open national BPI conference

A major national conference aimed at sharing the latest thinking on how local authorities can improve their business processes will be opened by the Local Government Minister, John Healey. The one-day event, 'Transforming Your Business Processes' has been organised by the West Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership and is expected to attract over 500 delegates.

Taking place on 8 April at the National Motorcycle Museum in Birmingham, delegates will hear presentations from public sector practitioners, from suppliers and will be able to attend workshops on a range of related projects and current activities. The event aims to highlight the partnership's business process improvement programme (including its BPI framework agreement which is open to all local and regional bodies), the role of systems thinking and the importance of effective programme and project management, leadership and change management.

To register for the conference, visit www.wmcoe.gov.uk and to find out more about the BPI framework, visit www.wmcoe.gov.uk/bpiframework

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