

## AT A GLANCE

### | Accessing Public and Private Sector Contracts through Procurement (24<sup>th</sup> October 2023)

**Welcome:** The second West Midlands Social Economy Forum came together to consider the theme of accessing procurement opportunities and share knowledge and expertise. There was mixed experience in the session from complete beginners to those who wanted to add to their experiences of procurement.

**Themes:** National Context: The government wants to buy from small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs and VCSE's) when they are the best value for money. The government has made changes to help VCSE's bid for public sector contracts. These include:

- requiring the entire public sector supply chain to be paid within 30 days.
- buying in a simpler and quicker way eg abolishing pre-qualification questionnaires for low value public sector contracts.
- use [Contracts Finder](#) to find a contract, using key words, the public sector are required to publish its contracts on [Contracts Finder](#).

**Complaints:** If you have any concerns about procurement practices, including late payment, you can contact the [Public Procurement Review Service](#). You can find details of [recent procurement reforms](#), including Contracts Finder, on GOV.UK. It's important to know about the Crown Representatives Network: [Crown Representatives and strategic suppliers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) Claire Dove CBE is for VCSE. They work across Government departments to: **A]** ensure a single and strategic view of the government's needs is communicated to the market. **B]** identify areas for cost savings. **C]** act as a point of focus for cross-cutting supplier-related issues. Crown Representatives cover all sectors of service provision including small and medium enterprises, voluntary sector organisations, mutually owned organisations, large suppliers and specific sectors.

The government is committed to doing business in new and innovative ways and the team of Crown Representatives is at the heart of this work and the reforms currently underway. Each Gov Dept has been asked to have an Action Plan. Eg [Meet the Buyer DFT 16th November 2023](#) in Birmingham.

**Training:** The Department for Culture, Media and Sport funded VCSE Contract Readiness Programme has released more dates for programmes running between November and the end of March 2024. School for Social Entrepreneurs teaming up with Social Enterprise UK (SEUK) and Voice4Change England to run three years of programmes to help social enterprises and charities bid for and win public sector contracts. Funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) the [VCSE Contract Readiness Programme](#) is a free series of webinars, workshops, and longer programmes for voluntary, community, and social enterprise organisations in England. Courses are pitched for organisations at different stages of contract readiness.

**Supply Change:** use to become an accredited supplier and get access to contract information. [The Best Contracts Finder | Access to Procurement Opportunities | Supply Change](#)

They are a social enterprise supporting both parts of the procurement process bringing together buyers seeking to buy from the social economy and sellers from the social economy. Requirements to become a supplier: **A]** Sell products or services to other companies. **B]** Have a central social or environmental mission. **C]** Produce an annual impact report. **D]** Have appropriate insurance for carrying out its work. **E]** Provide a reference from a customer. Currently, suppliers [can onboard for free](#). They will then need to pay fees when the new platform is launched to maintain their Trusted Supplier status and access to [benefits](#).

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**SEUK Social Procurement:** Every purchase your organisation makes is an opportunity to create social value. By bringing social enterprises into your supply chain you can make a direct investment into supporting local communities and a more sustainable planet. Social Procurement Connect is a new service from Social Enterprise UK which supports buying organisations to unlock the power of their everyday spend for wider societal and environmental benefit. [Social Procurement Connect | Social Enterprise UK](#) It provides the resources, tools and connections needed to build an effective social sourcing initiative. Participating organisations benefit from: **A)** Premium access to our [Social Enterprise Directory](#), giving you exclusive insights into 'Recommended suppliers'. **B)** Online resources providing guidance and tips on how your organisation can successfully work with social enterprise suppliers. **C)** An annual supply chain review to provide visibility of your existing social enterprise spend. **D)** Online and in-person networking opportunities to share ideas and learning with peers and connect with potential suppliers. To discuss how Social Procurement Connect can support your organisation, please get in touch at [socialprocurement@socialenterprise.org.uk](mailto:socialprocurement@socialenterprise.org.uk).

**Buy Social Corporate Challenge:** challenges Corporates to spend £1bn – this creates opportunities for SE organisations to sell to them! You can also become part of SEUK's Recommended Supplier Network which supports leading business-to-business (B2B) trading social enterprises with a track record of delivering products and services to corporate clients. Members of the Network benefit from a Recommended Supplier badge, which publicly marks them as trusted suppliers, boosting their brand visibility and credibility with current and potential buyers.

See separate presentations from **Carol Glenn [Solihull MBC]** and **Darren Robertson [WMCA]**.

**Living Well Consortium** provided a great overview of delivering public sector services through a consortium. The consortium does the bidding, manages the contract and reporting enabling the delivery partners to focus on delivery. This consortium focuses on NHS contracts but potentially consortiums could work on contracts from anywhere. [Free Mental Health Services Solihull | Therapists in Birmingham \(livingwellconsortium.com\)](#)

**Wants and needs from the WMCA:** support to form consortiums and underpin the early stages of consortia forming, building trust and establishment of partnership agreements and advice on contracts from contract specialists. Training on consortia working.

*Could Clusters and social economy places be advised to support access to procurement opportunities?* Meet the Buyer events to introduce procurement officers from across the region to social economy organisations who could provide some of their services. Training to complete procurement processes and to develop contract management systems. Support for developing IT systems to capture data on contract delivery and to be contract complaint. Recognition that some organisations are at the very early stages of thinking about contracts and so support needs to accommodate different levels of need.

**Next West Midlands Social Economy FORUM will focus on PARTNERSHIP WORKING as an in-person session – Date TBC. [REGISTER YOUR INTEREST HERE](#)**