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GPP In practice

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Collection & refurbishment of redundant ICT equipment

Durham County Council (United Kingdom)

Background

Durham County Council is the local authority responsible for County Durham, serving a population of over 500,000. Originally influenced by the United Nations Programme on Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) and the UK Government's 2006 report Procuring the Future, Durham County Council has focused on SPP for many years. The Council's current Sustainable Procurement Policy describes their specific commitments to each of 13 key sustainability topics, which range from biodiversity and land use to supporting small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and local business.

This policy supports the Council's overall Sustainable Community Strategy (2014-2030), which outlines the long-term vision for County Durham and defines objectives for the sustainable development of its communities. As a county, Durham has already achieved a 40% reduction in CO_2 emissions from the baseline year of 2011, and is aiming for 80% reduction by 2050, from levels in 1990.

Procurement process

In 2012 the Council wished to put in place a new contract to deal with redundant computer equipment. The principal GPP objective was to ensure that redundant computer equipment was re-used or recycled to the greatest extent possible, not only meeting the Council's obligations under the EU's WEEE regulations, but also minimising environmental impact by diverting waste from landfill. In addition, it was hoped that further social value would be delivered by making refurbished computer equipment available for community projects.

An open procedure was published in 2012 for a single supplier framework agreement. The open procedure was selected to allow the widest possible response from the market.

Criteria used

Subject matter of the contract: Framework for the collection, re-use/refurbishment, recycling or disposal of redundant ICT equipment and associated services for both corporate and educational establishments.

Technical specifications:

The technical specifications, as well as covering the legal waste disposal requirements, detailed the Council's proposed arrangements for community groups to access the refurbished equipment, stating that all equipment should be refurbished, tested for safety and recycled for reuse in the community wherever possible. The specification also stated that bidders are required to make reductions in the CO_2 impact associated with the contract, indicating the method or technology they will use for CO_2 reduction; although no specific quantification of CO_2 was required.

Award criteria:

The tender was awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender (MEAT), and included a total of five technical questions, which were weighted as follows:

- Skills and capabilities of the organisation - 20%
- Proposed solution - 20%
- Storage facilities - 10%
- Carbon reduction - 5%

- Community support package - 15%

The remaining 30% of points available was allocated to cost.

The carbon reduction question asked bidders to describe a technology or approach by which the CO_2 impact associated with the collection, refurbishment and delivery of ICT equipment could be reduced over the lifetime of the contract. The community support package question was intended to evaluate the quality of the community information and communication technology (ICT) support package that bidders would be able to provide to community groups, including post-installation advice and repairs.

Results

Four bidders responded to the open tender. All confirmed they could meet the social and environmental requirements in the tender specifications, which were the capacity to deliver an ICT advice and repair support package to community organisations, and the ability to provide a method statement for the reduction of CO_2 throughout the duration of the contract. All of the bidders obtained similar scores for the award criteria noted above (with the deciding factors therefore being other, non-sustainability related, quality and price considerations).

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As a result of this procurement, refurbished computer equipment is now available, at low cost, to local community groups. In terms of savings, the new contract returns an income to the Council of approximately £30,000 per annum, which were not realised through the previous arrangement. As of September 2015, 13 charitable organisations have purchased refurbished ICT equipment through the scheme and over 5,000 individual items of ICT equipment (laptops, desktop personnel computers, monitors, etc.) have been collected for recycling or refurbishment. Over 300 full computer systems have been provided to the community as a result. In most cases, these refurbished computer systems are being used to deliver ICT skills training and other learning to the community, thus delivering a further social benefit by helping people improve their skills and access economic opportunities.

The supplier has recently indicated to the Council that there may be an opportunity to reach a wider range of community groups, and to provide a wider range of refurbished equipment. They have become very successful in refurbishing, rather than recycling, redundant equipment, and are now in a position to offer refurbished printers and other equipment, as well as increasing the volume of refurbished laptops and desktop computers they can supply. Durham's Procurement Team will be working with the supplier and internal colleagues to identify new ways to market the scheme to groups who have not yet benefitted from it.

Environmental impacts

The United Nations Environment Programme estimates that up to 50 million tonnes of waste from discarded electronic goods is generated annually. The disposal of electronic appliances in landfill sites or through incineration creates a number of environmental problems. Firstly a considerable amount of resources that went into making the products are lost. Improper disposal of electronic waste can also release hazardous chemicals and heavy metals into the environment.

A key concern in the information technology sector is the current limited life-cycle of many devices and the need for regularly replacing devices. The design of the machine (that is, how easy it is to simply upgrade parts) is also significant not only because this sector is producing 'revolutions' every six months and therefore design is now crucial to address 'design for recycling or re-use.' It is important to ensure that sufficient warranty periods and spare parts availability are provided. Assessing the life-cycle of the product is also of key importance in reducing environmental impacts related to production processes.

Through Durham County Council's ICT refurbishment contract, over 5,000 items of redundant equipment have been either been re-used or sensitively disposed of via segregated recycling.

Lessons learned

- Engage with the market prior to the initiation of the tender process in order to fully understand its capacity to deliver the desired outcomes.
- Identify community groups who may benefit from the programme and help to maintain a regular dialogue between those groups and the supplier.

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For related information, please see European GPP criteria for Office IT Equipment (criteria and technical background report) and Imaging Equipment (criteria and technical background report).