



By Morven MacNeil,
GO Features Editor

GO Interview – Ian Taylor

Ian Taylor, Commercial Director at the Department for Children, Schools and Families, speaks to GO Features Editor **Morven MacNeil** about current developments within the Department and the challenges facing procurement over the coming years.

The purpose of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is to make the UK the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up.

GO spoke to the DCSF's Commercial Director, Ian Taylor, on the Department's procurement remit and the challenges facing procurement in the years to come.

Could you give our readers an update on the major developments within the DCSF since you became Commercial Director in 2006?

We have two or three major programmes under way within the Department. The big one is rolling out our Online Procurement for Educational Needs (OPEN) marketplace – an eProcurement tool – to the schools sector; we are currently on target to get this to over 10,000 schools throughout the course of the year. OPEN will give us management information and clarity on what schools are buying. It will also help us to influence the way that schools buy goods and services, including pointing them in the direction of public sector contracts, and allowing us to increasingly aggregate spend so it can in turn obtain better deals for schools. This can be done by doing it ourselves or by working with local government consortia or other partners in the delivery chain, according to who is best placed to take advantage of the influence OPEN will give us.

We are also working with local authorities to implement the system and to provide support for schools with what we call 'health checks'. These checks look at what schools are doing and how well they are buying. They also offer



Ian Taylor, Commercial Director, Department for Children, Schools and Families

advice as to how they might improve the way they organise their purchasing and save money. This has led to a whole series of actions on such mundane things as photocopiers, where we have uncovered a near-universal problem with schools getting into poor quality photocopier contracts which are

costing them significantly more than they should. DCSF are currently working with various local authorities about how we might go about changing that situation. We are also increasingly working with some of the latest suppliers to turn that situation around and in doing so save money; and of

course the targets are increasing for the next financial period.

We believe we are building a platform for achieving very significant procurement savings – real cash savings – for schools into the next spending review period. I’m personally leading the pan-government collaborative category project on food procurement; there are also other Office of Government Commerce (OGC) collaborative projects under way, including for energy and fleet. I’m leading food because of the school food agenda, which will be a significant contributor to savings over the next year. This has several objectives – saving money, supporting schools in delivering our policy on offering healthy food for children, and sustainability. We are very conscious that schools are the source of 15 per cent of the UK public sector’s carbon emissions; that’s about two per cent of the country’s total carbon emissions. The distribution of the goods and services that schools consume is about half that again in terms of carbon emissions, so everything we do is policy, efficiency and sustainability related.

What is the most significant change that you have seen in recent years with regards to procurement?

I think the most significant changes are actually about to hit us. Procurement in the public sector has been doing fine over the last few years. We have been increasing our sophistication and influence and impacts, but I think we are now arriving at a point where public sector financial constraints are really going to be hitting corporate services, and procurement – along with HR and finance and everything else – will have to find significant cost reductions over the next year. While we have been getting more sophisticated, getting into collaborative procurement – which is the mantra of the moment – it is not going to be enough for us to be able to cope with what is about to hit us. I think at the moment we have competitive procurement – that is, different procurement organisations competing with each other for resources or even market share. We have been trying to build a collaborative procurement agenda, which is getting organisations to work together, and that’s really hard. Partly it is because very often organisations are competing with each other over different objectives, so no matter how much progress has been

made by the OGC with other departments on collaborative procurement, there is still a long way to go. That is absorbing resources, and in the very near future we will need something like committed procurement where we have shared services and joint working, making sure that we are getting the right deals for the public sector and making aggregation really work. I think that it might need a massive change in mindset and possibly even structures to make that happen.

There is a pressing need for some sort of national procurement strategy, so that we are all doing the right thing in the right area, but we do not yet have a clear view of where everybody fits into the picture. A lot of my thinking now is about how we might apply a national procurement strategy for schools and make that relevant to a national procurement strategy and to government procurement as a whole.


How important do you believe corporate social responsibility and responsible procurement are in delivering quality services?

When I became President of CIPS in 2004 I made sustainability my theme, and for about 18 months I spoke about its importance. I think I have been proven right – buyers have a significant contribution to make to sustainability and we are finally grasping the sustainability agenda. The public sector in particular has a responsibility to make sure that what it buys is sustainable in all the micro-senses of that word.

DCSF is a premier league performer in maintaining its own estates, so we are already doing well on energy conservation and waste disposal and the like. One of my other responsibilities is transforming the DCSF estates. We have already rationalised our estate in London into one building, and we are about to move into a new building in Sheffield in June 2010. We are also planning a new building for Darlington. All of this is about making more efficient use of space, and that saves us money and delivers real efficiencies. A lot of our older properties were not very efficient but we are now moving into new BREEAM excellent buildings in the North and doing our best to make sure our Whitehall headquarters in London is as energy efficient as possible.

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You are speaking at Procurex National 2010 in March. How important is it for the public and private sectors to attend events such as this?

Hopefully attendees will be able to consider my views about procurement as well as having the opportunity to meet supply chain partners. There are so many buyers out there – any mechanism that we have for spreading the news about what works in terms of releasing real savings is pretty central. 

Thank you for speaking to GO.

Profile...

Ian Taylor is Commercial Director for the Department for Children, Schools and Families, responsible for improving the performance of procurement across the education sector. This covers the Department itself, Higher and Further Education, schools and the children’s services sector. Mr Taylor is actively involved with his team in collaborative procurement across government and in developing the capability of procurement in the public sector as a member of the Public Sector Faculty Board (a joint OGC and CIPS initiative).

Before his present role, Mr Taylor was Head of Procurement at HBOS for ten years, and he has practical experience of change management in both the public and private sectors. He was President of the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply from 2004 to 2005, and is a lifelong procurement professional having worked with Unipart, the Post Office and BT across a wide range of procurement challenges. He has been particularly engaged in the use of technology in procurement and the supply chain and in promoting better corporate and social responsibility in procurement practice.

Further information...

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