

# Commerce Decisions supports the Department of Finance & Personnel's Central Procurement Directorate in Northern Ireland to let financial services framework

## Customer profile

The role of the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) is to support the Northern Ireland Procurement Board in developing and reviewing procurement policy and to carry out an executive function in relation to the procurement of supplies, services and works for the public sector. CPD is responsible for disseminating approved policies and for monitoring their implementation as well as developing and promoting best practice in procurement within the Northern Ireland public sector.

Its success as a Directorate depends on providing its public sector customers with a service that delivers best value for money in the procurement of supplies, services and works, as well as high standards in providing a professional design, maintenance and advisory service.

In May 2008, CPD switched from its previous tendering system to corporate adoption of a new web-based e-sourcing platform, eSourcing NI. The eSourcing Managed Service is pre-competes by OGcbuying solutions\* and comprises eTendering, eEvaluation and eContract Management. It is primed by Bravo Solution. The BravoSolution/Commerce Decisions agreement with CPD will run for a minimum of four years and includes all Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) within Northern Ireland.

The eEvaluation capability is provided by Commerce Decisions via the AWARD® software. AWARD® was selected for its ability to reduce the costs of procurement, improve efficiency and competition, increase the proportion of public sector resources available for programme expenditure, enable monitoring of contracts and provide a range of management information. Project overview The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) on behalf of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), the Northern Ireland Office, its associated bodies and Non-Departmental Public Bodies, were tasked with establishing a framework agreement for a range of financial services. The financial services framework is worth between £4 million and £6 million, and encompasses seven categories:

- accounting
- audit
- business case
- internal audit
- accounting
- economic appraisal
- financial appraisal

All 11 government departments in Northern Ireland signed up to the two-year contract, with the possibility of one or two one-year extensions.

## Project procurement challenges

The key challenges of this project were:

- dealing with more than 40 responses
- coordinating and managing a large number of geographically dispersed evaluators
- being prepared for possible legal challenges relating to the award of the contracts
- managing the large amount of documentation generated by the procurement
- working to tight time pressures
- establishing an effective bid evaluation strategy



## Role and value of Commerce Decisions and AWARD®

In May 2008, CPD purchased a four year licence for a suite of web-based eSourcing tools via the Office of Government Commerce (OGC). AWARD® from Commerce Decisions forms the eEvaluation element of the eSourcing toolset.

**“The ability to see in real time how the evaluators were progressing made a huge difference and allowed us to identify evaluators who needed help and required our intervention. For a project manager, AWARD® is an excellent tool.”**

**Carol Keane e-Sourcing NI Project Manager, Department of Finance and Personnel, CPD**



At the start of the process, the project team received awareness training on the AWARD® system.

**“Following the training on AWARD®, I could see its potential and its flexibility. It can easily create bespoke templates to meet our requirements,” said Louise Thompson, Procurement Officer, NICPD.**

AWARD® was introduced into the procurement cycle when the responses from the bidders were received. These were loaded into the system and the 14 evaluators who had been recruited from the 11 government departments were trained on AWARD®.

“It did not take much training to get the evaluators up and running,” said Louise Thompson. “Getting buy-in from them was made much easier by the online availability of AWARD®. This meant that the evaluators were able to work around their busy schedules, logging into AWARD® to work when and where was convenient for them.”

Using AWARD® also made the project managers’ jobs easier. They could see the progress of the evaluators and the overall project in real time. AWARD® also enables reports to be generated at any time during the process, on any selection of information.

“The ability to see in real time how the evaluators were progressing made a huge difference and allowed us to identify evaluators who needed help and required our intervention. For a project manager, AWARD® is an excellent tool,” said Carol Keane, e-Sourcing NI Project Manager, Department of Finance and Personnel, CPD.

“I found the AWARD® system very user friendly in terms of the input into the system and also the reports that could be obtained to assess progress and outputs. I was pleased that it clearly reduced the volume of paperwork needed,” commented one of the evaluators on the project.

“The experience and expertise of the Commerce Decisions consultants really helped us to examine our evaluation process and to consider how we could use different approaches and methodologies to handle challenges,” said Carol Keane.

With support and advice from Commerce Decisions Professional Services, AWARD® was set up so that the evaluators could only see what they needed to see.

Another example of a benefit resulting from this support was that the project team changed their previous scoring scheme from a simple 1-10 scoring system to a 4- or 6point confidence scale. This generated much better results by focusing the evaluators on giving more insightful responses.

The project team were very aware of the need to be prepared for potential challenges. AWARD® provided them with a clear and transparent audit trail, which enabled them to demonstrate the process they had followed, and gave them the ability to provide any evidence required to support the decisions taken during the evaluation.

**“Because of the way AWARD® works and the fact that every action and input is captured, it makes it much easier to pull the data together in order to respond to any questions raised,” said Carol Keane.**

An important part of the procurement process is the final debriefing of the bidders. Using reports generated from AWARD®, the CPD team were able to send the bidders the relevant comments and scores relating to their bid.

**“We estimate that using AWARD® enabled us to reduce the time taken to do the evaluation by about two months, compared with the previous paper-based system. This represents a very significant time saving,” said Carol Keane.**

She added: “We are starting to use AWARD® across a wide range of projects as a result of our positive experience of using the tool on this project.”

## AWARD® Benefits

AWARD® delivers a transparent audit trail that underpins the bidder debriefing process and manages any challenges to the outcome of the procurement.

AWARD® is highly flexible, enabling full integration of the tender requirements and policies.

AWARD® enables project users to be managed centrally, optimising the time spent on evaluating suppliers.

AWARD® is delivered via a security accredited hosted service. Users can access AWARD® from any workstation with an internet connection and web browser.

Powerful reporting capabilities allow a range of selected reports to be generated quickly and tailored to your project.

Enhanced controls allow better management of tender stages leading to efficiencies and on time project delivery.

AWARD® provides a structured and compliant approach to the execution of a procurement.

OGCbuying.solutions is now Crown Commercial Services (CCS).

AWARD® and associated services are available via CCS’s GCloud framework

