

Steering Group Update – May 2010

The purpose of this note is to provide a summary of developments on a range of matters that we've been working on. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me (godfreyj@dumgal.ac.uk or by telephone 01387 734007) or another member of the Lead Group. Contact details for the Lead Group are available via the website.

The Steering Group met on 7 May and a copy of the draft minute of the meeting is available on the CoP website:

<http://www.scotlandscolleges.ac.uk/organisational/communities-of-practice/finance-cop-steering-group-meetings.html>

Conference – 20/21 May

The conference has proved very popular with sponsors and delegates alike. So much so that we only have a couple of spaces left before we will be at full capacity. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support.

This year's conference is sponsored by the following organisations:

- Zurich Municipal
- Capita
- Wylie & Bisset
- Litmus Partnership
- APUC
- Lloyds TSB
- Professional Cost Management Group Ltd

As a result of the welcome support of our sponsors it has been possible to keep the cost to Colleges at a mere £30 (plus accommodation).

The Steering Group look forward to seeing you at the Conference.

Steering Group Vacancy

It is with regret that I have to advise that Ben McLeish has resigned his position on the Steering Group. Ben is a highly respected, and very committed, member of the Finance Community. The Steering Group are very grateful for Ben's support over the years and wish him every success for the future.

This does leave a vacancy on the Steering Group. Please contact Jim Godfrey if you are interested in this opportunity.

APUC AGM

A similar message was also provided by Angus Warren (APUC) and Alistair Merrill (Scottish Procurement Directorate) at the APUC AGM on 28 April 2010.

It is also pleasing to report that Alan Williamson was elected to serve a further term as a member of the APUC Board. Alan will continue to provide an important link between APUC and the Finance Community of Practice

Procurement Strategy Group

The second meeting of the Procurement Strategy Group took place on Friday, 7 May. A copy of the minute of the meeting will be placed on the Community of Practice website as soon as it is available.

An important announcement is expected shortly regarding the future shape of Procurement Capability Assessments (PCAs) and also Best Practice Indicators (BPIs). Work has been taking place in recent months to ensure that these exercises are tailored to the scale of institutions. A proposal will now be submitted to the Public Procurement Reform Board (chaired by John Swinney) recommending such changes. Hopefully, this will ensure that Colleges are able to demonstrate effective procurement whilst ensuring that the administrative burden is not disproportionate.

Public Procurement Policy Forum

A meeting of the Public Procurement Policy Forum also took place on 11 May.

The following issues will be of interest to CoP members:

- BPIs – it is very evident that achieving savings through procurement is high on the political agenda and a key component of each political party's manifesto. It is expected that this will achieve increased focus under the new Government but currently there is a clear gap in the information available which needs to be addressed.
- National Pre-Qualification Database – the intention is that there will be a single database of pre-qualification information in the future. This will avoid the need for companies to submit the same information every time they submit a tender – which makes perfect sense. This work is progressing but there are still some hurdles to overcome.
- Evaluation of Financial Standing of Tenderers – a working group is currently developing guidance in terms of how this function should be undertaken to achieve fairness and consistency. Potentially this could be incorporated into the national PQQ database.
- Serious Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency – as you will be aware Alan Moffat provided a presentation to our March CoP Event. The issue of serious crime and procurement continues to gather momentum. You may have also seen a number of press articles regarding public sector contracts in recent weeks (and you may also have received Freedom of Information requests along similar lines). I expect this issue to receive a lot of attention going forward.
- Disclosure of information – in the interests of transparency there are moves to disclose all public contracts greater than a certain value (possibly £25,000).

All of these issues are work in progress at present but expect to see them coming to fruition in some form or another.

Enhanced Community of Practice

Scotland's Colleges have been working closely with Communities of Practice in the last year. The project is geared towards enhancing the work of the CoPs. The work to share Finance Policies and Procedures is part of this project.

The project has a further two years to run and we are currently developing ideas for the next phase. Ideas include:

- Producing a series of topic briefings written specifically for Finance Professionals in Scotland's Colleges. Topics could include IFRS, Pensions and an analysis of SFC circulars. The first briefing will be published in the next few days.
- Purchasing publications and providing copies to Finance CoP Members.
- CPD sessions for finance professionals in Scotland's Colleges using external trainers, for example from Institute of Directors, CIPFA etc
- Induction materials – providing basic financial information available for use by all Colleges. This could be very useful as part of an induction programme for new staff.
- Joint projects with other CoPs, for example, environmental measurement.
- Best practice visits to other Colleges

Financial Forecast Return (FFR) – SFC Circular 16/2010

You might be aware that the above Circular was discussed at the Principals' Convention earlier this week. As I understand it there was consensus that Colleges should adopt a consistent approach, in terms of assumptions, for 2011/12 and beyond. An approach will therefore be made to SFC to seek clarification on the assumptions to be used by Colleges. In the absence of a clear steer from SFC it is likely that the Principals' Convention will look for a steer from the Finance Community of Practice.

Please contact Jim Godfrey, if you would like to put forward any comments or suggestions regarding this matter.

CIPFA

Don Peebles of CIPFA (Scotland) attended the last meeting of the steering group. This resulted in a very positive discussion about key topics, in particular, the introduction of IFRS. Don has offered to run a CPD workshop for the wider community of practice and we will look to incorporate this into our September Community of Practice Event

CIPFA Further and Higher Education Panel

The latest newsletter has been issued by the Panel and includes a number of items, including a seminar on 29 June that will be of interest to Finance colleagues. A copy of the latest newsletter is available via the following link:
<http://www.cipfa.org.uk/panels/fehe/download/spring10.pdf>

Jim Godfrey

On behalf of the Finance CoP Steering Group