

Case Studies



A recent and groundbreaking initiative is enable, a partnership between AtoZ Supplies, Warrington, Vale Royal and Macclesfield Borough Councils. The initiative provides a fully integrated e-procurement solution for the Councils' purchasing requirements that minimises the time and cost of everyone involved.

Link to Enable Website:
<http://www.atoz-enable.co.uk>

Interested in knowing more about how **Enable** works and how to join, [Click here](#)

[Click here](#) to view the **National e-Procurement Project Collaboration Case Study**

[Click here](#) to view a summary of Case Study **Delivering e-Procurement**

enable is an easy to use web based e-procurement service that enables users throughout the three councils to purchase a wide range of goods electronically from one supplier in the form of a one stop shop. The initial phase of the enable project begins in May 2003 and the first four months or so will act as a pilot period during which time enable will be progressively rolled out within the three councils.

The official launch of the enable e-procurement partnership project outlined the objectives of the initiative and how other local authorities could come on board as "new joiners". Yvonne Bottomley, Assistant Director of Corporate Resources at Warrington Council presented an overview of the aims and objectives of enable. As a cutting edge initiative, enable received £300,000 of central government funding which has been invaluable in realising the vision of developing an end to end electronic solution for purchasing day to day goods online through a single supplier, AtoZ Supplies. It is unique project as it offers a full commitment to integration with the local authorities' financial systems and is realising efficiency savings through business process re-engineering.

The previous manual procurement processes within the three local authorities partnering in this project (Warrington, Vale Royal and Macclesfield Borough Councils), were found to involve numerous steps and a considerable transaction cost every time something was purchased by anyone. With over 100,000 orders placed by the three authorities, the enable project was conceived to streamline purchasing processes and realise the predictions of the Audit Commission of 70% savings.

Yvonne Bottomley explained the steps that have been undertaken over the past two years from the initial vision and tender specification in October 2001, to the successful pilot and expansion of enable across the local authorities this year. Ricky Fuller, Commercial Director of AtoZ Supplies, the company chosen by the local authorities as its single source for goods and services within the enable project, outlined how the system works. He clarified that prior to implementing the enable system, research had revealed the lack of clear information the authorities had about the nature – and costs - of the products they were purchasing.

“Although the information available was patchy, there was clearly a commitment to change and a willingness to address the difficult issues involved in changing to a new online purchasing system,” he said. “With our technology partners, Ukprocure, we were able to offer a fully integrated system that manages the entire buying process from online searching of products through to consolidated weekly invoicing.”

The introduction of enable has involved managing 27 points of integration across the three authorities and developing an website portal as a focal point for users looking to buy products, take advantage of special offers and keep up to date with news of the system. The system also provides managers with detailed information on the products purchased and has enabled them to take advantage of bulk purchasing discounts and corporate contracts for key purchases.

The enable system offers more than 10,000 products, which have been subject to rigorous tendering and quotation processes by AtoZ Supplies. It provides products specific to the councils and a core list of discounted items. Another key aspect of the enable project is ensuring defined service levels and professional human assistance not just a faceless computerised purchasing process.

enable is a live and effective solution to e-procurement and the local authorities envisage that buying outside the system will soon become the exception. The system has eliminated all requirements for paper authorisation with every step in the procurement process conducted electronically. It now provides essential management information that can be used to co-ordinate purchasing and get the best prices and service across the three local authorities.

The focus on management information has also enabled the local authorities to understand the role their purchasing has on the local economy. Although it was found that few local businesses actually trade significantly with the local authorities, the project has provided a focus on how they can understand the processes involved and become e-enabled themselves.

The plan moving forward is to offer other local authorities the opportunity to join enable from January 2004. The benefits of joining the enable partnership include time savings and the opportunity to take advantage of a proven solution that can be fully integrated with the local authority's own back office systems. Joiners will enjoy economies of scale that are achieved from procuring through a partnership and be able to utilise the process maps that have been developed with consultants, Caxton Consulting, who provided a Business Process Re-engineering service within enable. It is envisaged that new joiners

will require a lead time of 3 to 6 months, depending on the level of integration they require.

The successful introduction and future expansion of enable clearly demonstrates how this e-procurement partnership project offers a winning formula for local authorities to buy goods and services online. They will be able to 'jump start' their own e-procurement programme and meet their obligations within the Government's national procurement strategy which necessitates the implementation of a web-based means of buying products and services by 2005.