

Another first for Cornwall as Council and LEP use webinars to help local businesses win public sector contracts

19 February 2014

Businesses in Cornwall can now discover how to become more competitive when tendering for work without leaving their desks – thanks to a new initiative from Cornwall Council and the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership who have become the first in the country to use webinars to support local businesses to win more contracts from public sector organisations.

The webinars are the latest in a series of measures developed by the Council as part of its Cornwall Supplier Development Programme to help small and local businesses to become more competitive in winning contracts to supply goods, works and services to the public sector.

In 2012 / 2013 public sector organisations in Cornwall spent £1.5 billion purchasing a wide range of services ranging from social care to waste management. Cornwall Council spent around £460 million of this total, with contracts varying in value from a minimum of a few thousand to many millions of pounds.

The Cornwall Supplier Development Programme was officially launched by the Council in April last year and since then the programme has provided would be local suppliers with a wide range of development opportunities and new guides, including a highly successful “**Meet Cornwall’s Buyers**” event held in September. So far around 500 businesses from across Cornwall have been involved in events and activities.

The webinar programme is the brainchild of the Council's procurement team and the LEP who are keen to help local firms compete on an even footing and create more local jobs. A pilot Webinar was trialled at the end of January and following the success of this event, a detailed programme of topics has now been agreed.

"We know that taking time away from work to travel to a seminar or conference can be difficult for many of our small and medium sized businesses " said Alex Folkes, the Council's Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources. **"Webinars will enable these people to take part via the internet without leaving their homes or their offices"**.

"Businesses don't need any specialist equipment to get involved - people can see and listen to the presenter and interact with them using a standard computer and telephone and, best of all, taking part is free of charge".

The webinar programme, which will be led by Procurement Officer David Morgan, begins on 24 February with a session offering an Introduction to Public Procurement between 1.30 and 2.30pm.

There will then be a further three sessions taking place over the following four weeks.

These are:

- 27 February – 3pm to 4 pm – Completing a Pre-Qualification questionnaire
- 21 March – 9.30 am to 10.30 am – Introduction to Public Procurement
- 25 March – 10 am to 11 am – Completing a Pre-Qualification questionnaire

LEP Board Director Simon Tregoning said: **"The LEP is committed to removing barriers to business growth and retaining wealth in the county. Cornwall Council is a huge purchaser of goods and services, representing a tremendous opportunity for the county's businesses. As a businessman myself I know that the jargon and bureaucracy associated with public sector procurement can be off-**

putting and time-consuming but through this initiative, the LEP and Cornwall Council are making it much easier for businesses to access £1.5 billion of public sector contracts.”

It is planned to hold future webinars on responding to invitations to tender, an introduction to framework agreements and information on how to meeting policy requirements related to safeguarding, equality and diversity and environmental sustainability.

All the webinars will be recorded so anyone who missed them will be able to access them at any time in the future. Recordings will be available from: <http://www.business-pulse.co.uk/advice-centre/selling-to-the-cornwall-council>, where businesses can also access the Cornwall Council tendering toolkit and find additional information on selling to the public sector. Business Pulse also provides a discussion forum so businesses can share their experiences and suggest how the process could be simplified.

Further information on the webinars and the Cornwall Supplier Development Programme is available from the Council’s website on www.cornwall.gov.uk/supplierdevelopment

To sign up to Supplier Newsletter for info on future webinars email: responsible.procurement@cornwall.gov.uk

Ends

Note to editors:

Photo caption: The photo shows Alex Folkes, the Council’s Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources with Procurement Officer David Morgan

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was launched in May 2011. Private sector-led, it is a partnership between the private and public sectors and is driving the economic strategy for the area, determining local priorities and undertaking activities to drive growth and the creation of local jobs. www.cornwallandislesofscillylep.com

Regional Growth Fund

The Regional Growth Fund is a £3.2 billion fund designed to help companies in England to grow. So far £2.6 billion of funding has been allocated to support projects and programmes committed to deliver sustainable jobs and economic growth. Round 5 closed on 9 December and selected bidders will be announced in the spring 2014. For more information, please go to www.bis.gov.uk/rgf

Business Catalyst Fund

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership successfully bid for £7 million from round two of the Regional Growth Fund, which is available to businesses that are not eligible for European Regional Development Fund support. It includes £5 million for the Business Catalyst Fund to support businesses to improve productivity and promote business growth primarily through job creation. The LEP and Cornwall Council has commissioned Cornwall Development Company to deliver the RGF programme.

www.cornwalldevelopmentcompany.co.uk/catalyst

In May 2012 Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP announced the Business Boost investment programme totalling £17 million. The Business Catalyst Fund is one of a suite of investment opportunities which also includes Superfast Cornwall Fund, Growing Places Fund and Business Investment for Growth.

www.cornwalldevelopmentcompany.co.uk/businessboost

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