



Lanarkshire Meet the “Real” Buyer Outcomes

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Lanarkshire Meet the “Real” Buyer Event Outcomes

In response to the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the original in-person event for the Lanarkshire Meet the “Real” Buyer event was postponed indefinitely from its original date in March 2020. On Tuesday, 30 November 2021, the Lanarkshire Meet the “Real” Buyer event was jointly hosted by both Lanarkshire Councils and the Supplier Development Programme (SDP) as a live virtual event.

This online event aimed to enable local businesses to meet the procurement teams from North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire Councils, as well as the “real” buyers who commission the contracts and identify the need for procurement of goods, works and services.

On the day of the event, businesses were able to learn how to engage with both Lanarkshire Councils’ procurement processes, how food and drink is procured by local authorities, and what both councils are developing in Lanarkshire for the construction industry:

- Both Lanarkshire Councils and SDP gave a joint presentation on how to engage with the councils’ procurement processes which included a live Q&A panel.
- Scotland Excel along with the Lanarkshire Councils also delivered a presentation on how local authorities procure food and drink.
- SDP along with a selected trainer panel hosted a Q&A on how to use PCS and how to bid better with the SDP.
- Suppliers learned how Lanarkshire are building for growth with a construction roundtable.

Registrations and Attendance

Prior to the event, there were 787 attendee bookings on the SDP website.

- Of these registrations, 231 individuals were from 152 businesses based in North Lanarkshire.
- Of these registrations, 157 individuals were from 108 businesses based in South Lanarkshire.

On the day of the event, in total there were 108 participants and of these, 63 were unique SMEs/supported businesses based in Scotland.

- Of these, 14 attendees were from 13 businesses based in North Lanarkshire.
- Of these registrations, 15 attendees were from 14 businesses based in South Lanarkshire.
- In total, 43% of SME/supported businesses who attended this pan-Lanarkshire event were businesses based in the Lanarkshire area. This is higher than SDP’s average attendance this financial year (2021 – to-date) for businesses located in the region where the event is based in (39%).

Other Outcomes

Several polls ran during the event’s live sessions, asking suppliers if the session had encouraged them to bid for more public sector contracts:

- 100% (10 votes cast out of 77 attendees) said the SDP Helping You Bid Better Workshop encouraged them to bid for more public sector contracts (10 questions/comments were also received)
- 95% said (21 votes cast out of 121 attendees) the How to Engage with Council Procurement Processes session with NLC & SLC Procurement encouraged them to bid for more public sector contracts (24 questions/comments received)
- 100% said (4 votes cast out of 67 attendees) the How do Councils local authorities procure food and drink? session with Scotland Excel encouraged them to bid for more public sector contracts (8 questions/comments received)
- 100% said (7 votes cast out of 75 attendees) the Building for Growth in Lanarkshire: Construction Roundtable with Live Q&A session encouraged them to bid for more public sector contracts (17 questions/comments received)
- 108 attendees also viewed the opening address from NLC & SLC Chief Executives
- All attendees viewed the welcome from Cllr Brannan-McVey, Chair of the Supplier Development Programme; and
- Over the course of the day, there were 709 visits to exhibitions.

Supplier Survey and Feedback

An online survey was distributed to registered suppliers for the Lanarkshire Meet the 'Real' Buyer 2021.

This survey was live between 30 November and 21 December. Within this time, responses were received from 68 respondents, with 48 of them being an SME, supported business or third sector organisation based in Scotland. This highlights that 71% of respondents were an SME or third sector organisation, and therefore eligible for other SDP training. Included within those SME responses were 20 respondents from Lanarkshire based businesses, accounting for 42% of all Scottish SME responses.

The post-event survey showed that 95% of Scottish SMEs responding said they were more likely to bid for public contracts after participating in the event – above average (91%) compared to the other regional Meet the Buyer events held by SDP to date, this financial year.

Supplier respondents from Scottish SMEs, supported businesses and third sector organisations rated the Meet the "Real" Buyer 2021: Live Virtual Event as 'excellent' or 'good' for the following:

- Overall event experience – 92%
- Representation of "real" public sector buyers and decision makers at the event – 89%
- Theme and messaging on being a Lanarkshire-based "real" buyer event – 95%

Additionally, 94% of respondents thought the event demonstrated that public sector procurement is open and transparent, despite challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was highlighted that 92% of suppliers also felt that area-specific events such as Meet the "Real" Buyer support business in the area they are based in. Additionally, 81% felt that their business could benefit from public sector procurement in the Lanarkshire area after participating in the event.

Net Zero Supplier Feedback

Finally, with such an emphasis on COP26 at the beginning of November, the questions relating to Net Zero showed that an increasing number of suppliers are also realising the importance of Net Zero targets.

- Half of businesses (50%) said that reaching Net Zero targets/reducing carbon was a priority now and 48% said it was a priority for their business now in 2021.
- Only 2% of respondents said it was not a priority for them.

The three most common actions taken by Scottish SME businesses to reduce carbon/reach Net Zero were:

- Using sustainable suppliers and supplies – 65% of businesses
- Raising awareness and knowledgeability of cleaner, greener, and sustainable practices – 65%
- Installed LED lighting – 60%

Qualitative Supplier Feedback

Some supplier quotes included:

- “I am new to tendering and bidding and I gained excellent knowledge from this event.” (Micro-sized SME from Glasgow City)
- “I find the procurement pipelines that the local authorities issue are extremely helpful.” (Small-sized SME from North Lanarkshire)
- “At times the events can feel rushed but overall it ran smoothly and was good to be a part of.” (Medium-sized SME from North Lanarkshire)
- “Very engaging - keep up the good work.” (Small-sized SME from South Lanarkshire)
- “Great experience.” (Micro-sized SME from Glasgow City)
- One supplier who said that previous participation in SDP training/events had helped them to win public sector contracts also explained the community benefits they would provide on the framework they were currently on: “Placements for unemployed and school leavers, volunteering in the Community” (Small-sized SME from South Lanarkshire)

Non-Attendance of Suppliers

Attendance figures from this event highlight a huge drop-off in bookings to attendance, with just 14% of suppliers who pre-registered for the event attending on the day.

Contributing factors to consider related to the postponed event:

- There were approximately 100 bounce-backs for out-of-date email addresses that had pre-registered for the March 2020 in-person event, which was a contributing factor to making the number of registrations artificially high.
- Three-quarters of registrations - 77% - were confirmed in the year 2020.
- Post-event, separate to the survey, it was widely discussed with economic development and procurement teams that everyone marketed robustly prior to the event. A survey isn't going to give absolute conclusions, but one contributing factor could be related to the 'aligned' marketing to the agenda.
- Good marketing practice did take place in the construction industry with hub South West Scotland, at SDP's request.

In total, 10 Scottish SMEs who responded to the survey stated that they **did not** participate in the event. This represented **21%** of all Scottish SME survey responses which is much higher than the expected, usual response rate of around 5-6%.

The main reasons suppliers did not attend included: (respondents were able to select all reasons that applied):

- Unexpected business appointment – 7 respondents
- Date conflict – 4 respondents
- Other (e.g., work commitments) – 3 respondents
- Comments from suppliers that did not attend reiterated the main reasons for not attending – with suppliers saying they were “very busy” or “wanted to attend the event, but definite work takes priority”.

Timing and Conflicts:

- 80% of respondents said they realised “**on the day of the event**” that they were not going to make the event
- One respondent also said that they attended a different event on that day

Suppliers that did not attend appear to be well-connected with SDP:

- 70% of those suppliers have participated in previous SDP training/events
- 70% follow SDP on various social media platforms
- 90% heard about the event either through SDP Communications (Website/Newsletter) or through social media platforms

Feedback from Exhibitors

An online survey was also distributed to those registered exhibitors at the Lanarkshire Meet the “Real” Buyer event. In total, 20 responses were received and showed:

- 85% of exhibitors agreed that this event helped to drive early engagement with SDP member organisations to support an increase of public sector contracts being accessible to Scottish SMEs;
- 90% agreed that it had also extended SDP engagement with public sector buyers to ensure SME benefit from local contracts;
- 90% of buyers and exhibitors said the event helped to benefit SMEs as they could talk to the real buyers from organisation; and
- 80% thought the event had helped raise the profile of SDP to be recognised as the primary tender training programme to support SMEs and third sector in Scotland.

The survey highlighted that 90% of exhibitors would recommend this type of event to other public sector buyers.

Exhibitor comments included:

“I think this is such a good link for the supply chain to meet and discuss opportunities and to be honest SDP have been able to provide this vital link throughout the pandemic.”

“I believe it is always useful to have these lines of communication available so that all parties are aware of each others needs.”

“This opens up markets for SMEs to give them more experience and information on procurement routes and opportunities to get involved locally.”

“It’s a good opportunity to enhance understanding between commissioners and suppliers.”

Future Planning for Lanarkshire Meet the “Real” Buyer Events

Suppliers that did not attend were asked what would encourage them to attend a future Meet the “Real” Buyer event with North and South Lanarkshire Councils.

- Most (5) respondents said that this question was ‘**not relevant**’ to them – with one supplier saying “n/a - I wish to attend all future events.”
- Other comments included that they wanted “Notice” and “More reminders and earlier”

Suppliers that did not attend were asked what could be offered at the next Lanarkshire Meet the “Real” Buyer event that would make it a ‘must-attend’ event.

- Many suppliers skipped this question – most (6 respondents) said that it was ‘not relevant’ or were ‘not sure’.
- Other supplier comments mentioned that they wanted a “good all round representation of companies” and that “information from each department to allow us to decide if [the event] is relevant or not” would make it a ‘must-attend’ event.

Suppliers were also asked what the best time would be for them to attend/participate in event such as the Lanarkshire Meet the ‘Real’ Buyer was initially scheduled for the Spring, and then took place in Autumn.

- 60% said Spring was the best time;
- 20% said Autumn; and
- Two respondents voted for Summer and Winter respectively.

Future Format of Meet the Buyer

As the public sector continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, and given the uncertainty about the format of in-person events, SDP has asked suppliers about their thoughts on how 'Meet the Buyer' type events should continue in the year 2022. The survey showed:

- 52% of suppliers would like events to return to in-person.
- 35% would like future events to be in a hybrid format.
- 13% would like events to remain fully virtual.

Interestingly, 70% of those who did not attend the event would like future events to return to an in-person format.

Suggestions for Future Improvements

The Supplier Development Programme suggests the following be considered for future events:

- The event should be held in the Spring.
- Additional communications should be issued as reminders and updates to supplier attendees in advance of the event (in addition to the five that are automated).
- Bounce-back emails are more closely monitored and actioned by SDP.
- The event should be held as an in-person event as a first option, and hybrid as a close second option.
- Consider specific contract or framework aligned opportunities in future programmes rather than a generic format.

Contact

More information on the Supplier Development Programme can be found at www.sdpscotland.co.uk and on social media via [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#).