



Meet the Buyer North 2021 Outcomes

www.sdpscotland.co.uk

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The supplier Development Programme has published a report on the Meet the Buyer North 2021: Live Virtual Event which took place on 7 September 2021. The headline partners were the Scottish Government and Scottish Procurement Alliance.

Meet the Buyer North 2021 gave suppliers a fantastic opportunity for businesses to meet face-to-face, virtually, with public and private buyers, private contractors with supply chains, and business support services in the Highlands and Islands.

Registration and Attendance

In total, 1020 suppliers pre-registered interest on the SDP website for the Meet the Buyer North 2021: Live Virtual Event. There were 441 actual attendees on the day, which was made up of 224 Scottish unique businesses attended and 108 buyers/exhibiting staff. There were 24 virtual stands, which included not only public sector buyers but also some supply chain contractors, including RJ McLeod and Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd, and various business support organisations, such as Business Gateway Aberdeen City and Shire and Tayside, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Through the 1-2-1 exhibitor meetings on the portal, we collectively achieved 428 live meetings and 275 exhibition live chats plus Scottish Government connections, untracked, as well as 913 brochure downloads and 83 networking connections.

The post-event survey highlighted that 97% of Scottish SMEs responding to the survey said they were more likely to bid for public contracts after participating in the virtual event.

Formal Agenda

On behalf of the Supplier Development Programme Board, Diane Beattie, Moray Council Payments Manager and Fiona Conti, Strategic Procurement Manager at Aberdeenshire, City and Highland Council Shared Procurement Service, delivered a joint presentation to welcome attendees.

Ivan McKee MSP, Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism & Enterprise, delivered a pre-recorded ministerial address to open the online event.

There was a packed agenda split across two themed stages: the Power Of Procurement Stage and the Let's Do Net Zero Stage. Speakers delivered presentations throughout the day on hot topics in the North of Scotland such as Growth Deals, Community Wealth Building strategies, the Climate Change Emergency on Public Sector Procurement, Fair Work First, how to bring innovation to the public sector, the implications of Brexit, and COVID-19 economic recovery plans with links to sustainable, open and transparent procurement. Speakers and other staff were available to answer questions in live Q&A sessions.

Presentations on the Power of Procurement Stage included:

- Scottish Procurement Alliance: Lesley Anderson, Head of SPA Procurement
- Social Security Scotland: Natalie McCrindle, Head of Procurement & Commercial
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise: Stuart Black, HIE Moray Area Manager
- Elevator and Business Gateway: Kirstie McLaughlin and Fiona McLellan
- Construction Pipeline Forecast Tool: Triona Tiernan, Associate Director, Scottish Futures Trust

Pre-recorded speakers on the Let's Do Net Zero Stage

- Circular Economy, Fair Work First & Net Zero:
 - Stuart Calderwood, Aberdeenshire, City and Highland Council Community Benefits & Sustainable Procurement Manager
 - Emily Stone, Edinburgh Science Climate and Sustainability Business Development Manager
 - Lynn Anderson, Living Wage Scotland Manager
- Growing Community Wealth: The Role of Suppliers: Neil McInroy, Community Wealth Building Advisor to Scottish Government
- Sustainable Food Places, and Granite City Good Food: Martin Carle, CFINE Sustainable Food Coordinator
- Zero Waste Scotland: Steven Menzies, Head of Procurement and Grants
- Change for Climate: Five Steps to Net Zero: David Kelly, SCDI Policy Manager

There was also a dedicated interactive workshop session entitled "Top Tips for Tendering with the Supplier Development Programme." Gillian Cameron, SDP's Programme Manager then led a live Q&A session with SDP's expert trainers.

Supplier Survey Feedback

An online survey was distributed to registered suppliers for Meet the Buyer North 2021. This survey was live between 7 September and 8 October. Within this time, responses were received from 56 respondents, and 37 of them were an SME, supported business or third sector organisation based in Scotland.

It was highlighted that 66% of respondents were an SME or third sector organisation and therefore eligible for other SDP training.

The post-event survey highlighted that 97% of Scottish SMEs responding to the survey said they were more likely to bid for public contracts after participating in the event.

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

- Overall event experience – 94%
- Usability of the virtual portal – 91%
- Theme and messaging on being a North of Scotland event – 91%

Additionally, 91% of respondents thought the Meet the Buyer North 2021: Live Virtual Event demonstrated that public sector procurement is open and transparent, despite challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was highlighted that 74% of suppliers also felt that area-specific events such as Meet the Buyer North support business in in the area they are based in. Additionally, 77% felt that their business could benefit from public sector procurement in the North of Scotland after participating on the event.

Finally, as a large portion of the Meet the Buyer North 2021 event focused on Net Zero targets, so this year's survey had some questions on the importance of Net Zero. Two-thirds of businesses (66%) said that reaching Net Zero targets/reducing carbon was a priority in the future, whereas 29% said it was a priority for their business now in 2021. Only 6% 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 – 42%
- Raising awareness and knowledgeability of cleaner, greener, and sustainable practices – 39%
- Reduced or eliminating printing – 47%

Some comments from suppliers included:

- “The virtual Meet the Buyer North event was great for us. It was easy to make quick contact and, in a few words, establish if our offering was of interest and share contact details. Very time efficient way of networking.”
- “I truly learned a lot from the presentations on procurement and speaking to local authority representatives. The Meet the Buyer North event was my first experience with SDP and procurement processes with buyers. Thank you so much for making it so worthwhile.”
- “I thought it was an excellent event, very well thought out, engaging and lots of good information for all companies, large or small.”
- “Great opportunity to remain connected to the public sector in these difficult times.”

As the public sector begins to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, SDP was interested on suppliers thoughts on how 'Meet the Buyer' type events should continue in the future. The survey showed that 56% of supplier would now like the Meet the Buyer events to continue in a hybrid format, whereas 29% would like them to remain virtual events and only 15% would prefer a return to in-person events.

Exhibitor Feedback Survey

An online survey was distributed to registered exhibitors after Meet the Buyer North 2021. This survey was live between the 7 September and 8 October. Within this time, responses were received from 16 respondents.

The post-event survey highlighted that 94% said they would likely participate in future virtual Meet the Buyer events organised by SDP. In total, all but one exhibitor - 93% - said they would recommend this event to other public sector buyers, private contractors with supply chains, and business support organisations.

Exhibitor respondents agreed the virtual event helped to:

- 77% - Drive early engagement with SDP member organisations to support an increase of public sector contracts being accessible to Scottish SMEs
- 92% Raise the profile of SDP to be recognised and established as the foremost tender training programme to support SMEs and third sector in Scotland
- 79% Extend SDP engagement with public sector buyers to ensure SME benefit from local contracts
- 93% Demonstrate that public sector procurement is open and transparent, despite the challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic

Some comments from buyers included:

- “The video call function was good.”
- “We would not have been able to attend this event had it been held ‘in person’. We really appreciate the opportunities presented by virtual Meet the Buyer events.”

- “The virtual events although a good tool to get suppliers and buyers talking is not the same as having the meetings face-to-face and I would welcome a return to face-to-face meetings as long as it is safe to do so.”
- “Virtual events should be default if we are serious about Net Zero.”

All feedback from suppliers and buyers is valuable and will be applied to future events organised by the Supplier Development Programme.

Technical Limitations

This was the third fully virtual, online “Meet the Buyer” events organised by the Supplier Development Programme due to the exceptional circumstances presented from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Supplier Development Programme created “how-to” videos for both supplier and buyers to introduce them to the online portal and outlined what was required from a technical viewpoint. SDP also created joining instructions and conducted speaker and exhibitor training in advance of the virtual event, where buyers were able to ask questions to the events management team. SDP also ensured there was a dedicated email address for exhibitors to contact, and staffed SDP’s email inbox in the lead up to and on the day of the virtual event. Hundreds of enquiries were received and responded to by the micro team at SDP.

Due to the technical limitations of the Scottish Government, its stands only offered communication to suppliers via the ‘Live Chat’ option rather than by video chat. To overcome this obstacle, SDP developed a workaround where the Scottish Government set up a video call that they would send the link to the teams call to the supplier through the chat function. Training on the procedure was provided by SDP to Scottish Government exhibitors, as well as Social Security Scotland and Transport Scotland, to ensure the workaround could be utilised with ease.

To make sure everyone got the best experience from the Meet the Buyer North 2021 event, exhibiting organisation were also provided with full business details of all actual attendees, in line with the [terms and conditions](#) and [privacy policy](#) on the SDP website. All presentations and Q&A sessions are available on the [SDP YouTube Channel](#). Once attendees responded to the feedback survey, they were also able to access all presentations and exhibition materials from every virtual stand by logging into their accounts on the SDP website.

Overall Analytics – Social Media

Overall Analytics – Twitter

From 31 July to close of play on 7 September 2021, 76 tweets were sent from the SDP Scotland Twitter account to promote the Meet the Buyer North 2021: Live Virtual Event. The tweets collectively earned 31,804 impressions (the number of times users saw a Tweet on Twitter) and 482 engagements (total number of times a user interacted with a Tweet).

Overall Analytics – Facebook

A limited paid ad campaign was undertaken by SDP on Facebook from 24 August to 6 September 2021. In total, 10,442 users were reached with 985 link clicks to the SDP website for more information and free registration.

Meet the Buyer North Media

To attract as many micro, small and medium sized businesses in the North of Scotland as possible, SDP advertised Meet the Buyer North on MFR Radio, as well as printed in local titles such as the Banffshire Advertiser, Banffshire Journal, [Inverness Courier](#), Forres

Gazette, Caithness Courier, Highland News, North Star, Turriff Advertiser, Strathspey & Badenoch Herald, Northern Times, Ross-shire Journal, Huntly Express, Banffshire Herald, Northern Scot, John O'Groat's Journal, Inverurie Advertiser and Ellon Advertiser. Advertising [features](#) about Meet the Buyer North 2021 also appeared in The Shetland Times, The Orcadian and The Stornoway Gazette.

The sponsored content article in HN Media had 327 views, a homepage "takeover" was viewed 10,000 times and 60,000 ad impressions were also delivered. Social media campaigns locally through HN Media titles ranged from a reach of 720 to 2,160, with a total of 81 clicks.

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](#).