



## Meet the Buyer North 2022

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## Overview

This report covers the activities and outcomes from Meet the Buyer North 2022, which took place on 7 September 2022 at the UHI Moray in Elgin. The headline partner was the Scottish Government.

Meet the Buyer North 2022 saw a return to face-to-face events for the Supplier Development Programme (SDP) since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The event aim was to support SDP member organisations in the North of Scotland and to give businesses and social enterprises of all sizes an opportunity to meet in-person, with public buyers, private contractors with supply chains, and business support services in the Highlands and Islands. Meet the Buyer North resumed as an in-person event in its fifth anniversary year.

## Community Benefit: Social Enterprises

SDP is keen to demonstrate the economic benefit of a Meet the Buyer North event. The programme worked to involve social enterprises in the event, so they could provide sustainable, economic growth back into the community. On the day, cash catering was provided by the social enterprise, the Inkwell. The initiative offers employability opportunities to young people who need additional support to transition into work and is part of the Elgin Youth Development Group which was established in 1998 in response to concerns that young people did not have a place to meet and socialise.



## SDP Networking Breakfast

SDP hosted a networking session prior to the event for public sector buyers to facilitate discussions on current and future pipelines of local work and some of the challenges the public sector in the North of Scotland currently faces. Along with exhibitors, members of the Highlands and Islands Networking Together (HINT) group were invited to attend.

## Supplier Registration and Attendance

In total, 672 suppliers pre-registered interest on the SDP website for the Meet the Buyer North 2022 event. There were 345 actual attendees on the day. Of these, 238 attendees were from 192 unique Scottish SME businesses. Of those, 40 Scottish SMEs were based in the Moray Council area, 35 were based in the Highland Council area, 1 was based in Argyll and Bute Council, 19 were based in Aberdeen City Council and 29 were based in Aberdeenshire Council.

## Buyer Exhibitions

Paid exhibitions at Meet the Buyer North are a demonstrable community benefit in Scotland's public sector, which embodies a commitment to open and connected procurement, economic development, and supply chain structures. In total, there were 23 in-person exhibitions which included public sector buyers and some supply chain contractors, including Robertson Facilities Management, Ogilvie Construction, Mitie, and hub North Scotland Limited.



RJ McLeod and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) exhibited virtually via Microsoft Teams. On the day of the event, all registered suppliers received the links to connect virtually with HIE and RJ McLeod. The HIE virtual exhibition link received 17 clicks and the RJ McLeod link received 10 clicks, which showed that suppliers preferred in-person connections at Meet the Buyer North 2022.

In addition to exhibitors from the Scottish Government and Public Contracts Scotland, exhibitors including buyers from Moray, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Highland Councils, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Historic Environment Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and Social Security Scotland.



Other exhibiting organisations include Scottish Procurement Alliance, PfH Scotland, Scotland Excel, Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges (APUC), and the UK's largest public sector buying organisation, Crown Commercial Service.

Mitie also took part to connect with local businesses to talk about supply chain opportunities for several of its customers in the public sector.

**The post-event survey highlighted that 87% of Scottish SMEs were more likely to bid for public sector contracts after participating in Meet the Buyer North.**

### Formal Agenda

The Supplier Development Programme deliberately kept the agenda short, as Meet the Buyer North 2022 was the first of its kind to be held in-person after the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020. Instead, the focus was kept on face-to-face, in-person networking. A shorter formal programme would therefore allow ample time for suppliers to talk 1-to-1 with buyers.

Meet the Buyer North 2022 was opened by Councillor Marc Macrae, Chair of the Moray Council Economic Development Committee.

Presentations included:

- Welcome to the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Meet the Buyer North Event, delivered by Fiona Conti, Supplier Development Programme Board member and Strategic Procurement Manager, Commercial & Procurement Shared Services.
- How SMEs can bring innovation to the defence sector, delivered by Dr. Debra Carr, from the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA).
- A panel session by the Scottish Government and the Supplier Development Programme on demystifying the Public Contracts Scotland website.
- Vote of Thanks by SDP's Programme Manager, Gillian Cameron.

The agenda was streamed online via a Microsoft Teams meeting for those who could not attend in person. From the mailing sent out on the day of the event, the virtual agenda link received 53 clicks.



## Supplier Survey Feedback

An online survey was distributed to all registered suppliers for the Meet the Buyer North 2022 event. This survey was live between 8 September and 7 October 2022. Within this, responses were received from 64 responses, including 51 SMEs, social enterprises, and third sector organisations based in Scotland.

**The post-event survey highlighted that 87% of Scottish SMEs said they were more likely to bid for public contracts after participating in the event.**

Scottish SME suppliers that responded to the survey also rated the Meet the Buyer North 2022 event as 'excellent' or 'good' in several areas:

- 82% - Messaging and theme on being a North of Scotland event.
- 89% - Representation of public sector buyers and decision makers.
- 60% - Hybrid option for remote suppliers to participate in the main agenda, speakers, and presentation.
- 81% of respondents thought the Meet the Buyer North 2022 event demonstrated that public sector procurement is open and transparent, despite challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current economic challenges.

When considering the Scottish Government's commitment to becoming a Net Zero society by 2045:

- 80% of respondents were aware of the Scottish Government's commitment to achieving a Net Zero society.
- 72% of respondents said they have an existing policy to support a reduction in its carbon footprint, and 69% said they have an implementation plan to reduce its carbon footprint.
- 44% said that carbon reducing/reaching net zero targets is a priority right now in 2022 for its business.
- 44% said it is a priority in future business plans.
- 13% said Net Zero is not a business priority.

Some comments from suppliers included:

- "Thanks for all the people involved, well worth the trip."
- "Super event, met some of our clients and some new potential ones, busier than expected, and believe I will gain a couple of good opportunities following this event."
- "Great event, well turned out and good opportunities."
- "I found the day most enjoyable and informative. Although not a lot related to my industry I still made a couple of new contacts who we might be able to do business with, in the future. On the whole a well-run event."
- "The event was busy but that added to the buzz. However, the venue was very hot."
- "The event was very busy, and the room was quite small and congested."

The Meet the Buyer North event was originally planned to take place as a virtual event. However, due to the easing of the COVID-19 restrictions it was decided by the SDP Board that the event would take place as a hybrid event. Going into the event the Programme knew

that the space might be too small as there was limited availability of large scale spaces at short notice in the North of Scotland.

### **Exhibitor Feedback Survey**

An online survey was distributed to registered exhibitors after the Meet the Buyer North 2022 event. This survey was live from 8 September and 7 October. Within this time, 22 responses were received.

The post event survey highlighted:

**100% of buyers said they would participate in Meet the Buyer North in the future.**

and

**100% of buyers said they would recommend Meet the Buyer North to other public sector buyers, private contractors with supply chains, and business support organisations.**

Exhibitor respondents agreed the in-person event helped to:

- 96% - Drive early engagement with SDP member organisations, through collaboration with procurement and economic development to increase the number and breadth of public sector contracts being accessible to the Scottish SME base.
- 100% - Raise the profile of SDP to be recognised and established as the primary tender training programme to support SMEs and third sector in Scotland.
- 95% - Extend SDP engagement with public sector buyers to ensure SMEs benefit from local contracts.
- 96% - Demonstrate that public sector procurement is open and transparent, despite the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 100% - Benefit SMEs as they can talk to the buyers from organisations who commission contracts and want to meet potential suppliers for their works and services.

Some comments from buyers included:

- “It was well run, well handled, and well attended – it was one of the best Meet the Buyer North events to date.”
- “Excellent event and good to meet suppliers/contractors face to face again, it not only gives you and them a lot more opportunity to discuss products and services but also a chance to get to know suppliers on a more personal level.”
- “Well organised and very helpful team. Instructions were clear and ample area around each stand.”
- Very pleased to be able to attend Meet the Buyer North in Elgin. Many thanks to SDP for organising.

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

## Promotion through the Supplier Development Programme

### Social Media Analytics

The Supplier Development Programme has a robust social media presence on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, which is utilised to promote contract opportunities and engagement events regularly to Scottish businesses. In advance of the Meet the Buyer North 2022 event, SDP promoted the event across its social media channels. The campaign ran from 22 July until 8 September and collectively the posts earned 20,286 impressions (the number of times users saw a post and 567 (the total times a user interacted with a post).

### Mailings/Newsletters

On 11 July 2022, Meet the Buyer North was announced in SDP's July monthly newsletter which received 98 clicks. When it was confirmed that the Meet the Buyer North event would take place as an in-person event SDP sent out a mailing, informing all registered suppliers of the event update which received 33 clicks. The Meet the Buyer North event was also mentioned in the August newsletter which received 159 clicks.

On 1 September, SDP sent out a 'Last Places Remaining' mailing to its database. The Meet the Buyer North events page received 116 clicks and the Meet the Buyer North agenda page received 81 clicks.

The day before the event, on 6 September, SDP sent out a mailing to all registered suppliers recapping all the information the suppliers would need to attend the event. The Meet the Buyer North event page received 227 clicks and the agenda page received 81 clicks.

On the day of the event, SDP sent out one final reminder about the Meet the Buyer North event. The event page received 113 clicks and the agenda page received 49 clicks.

### Celebrating Five Years of Meet the Buyer North

In the last five years, 4,730 bookings have been registered on the SDP website for Meet the Buyer North. In total, 2,419 actual attendees came to all five North events, and this includes 1,780 attendees from 1,467 unique Scottish SMEs, supported businesses and third sector organisations.

Meet the Buyer North has become a landmark annual event for all micro, small and medium sized businesses across the Highlands and Islands, as well as Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, and demonstrates that Scotland's public sector is truly more open and transparent when supported by the Supplier Development Programme.

### Contact

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