



## Meet the Buyer North 2020 Outcomes

[www.sdpscotland.co.uk](http://www.sdpscotland.co.uk)

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**The Supplier Development Programme has published an online report on the Meet the Buyer North 2020: Live Virtual Event which took place on 2 September 2020. The Scottish Government was a headline partner of this event.**

Meet the Buyer North 2020 allowed suppliers to engage with virtual exhibitors from the public sector, private contractors, and business support providers. This was scheduled in an alternative format, as a virtual event, to support efforts towards economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis whilst complying with on-going restrictions on face-to-face gatherings in Scotland. It was the first fully-virtual 'Meet the Buyer' type event that the Supplier Development Programme has ever organised.

The free virtual event afforded suppliers that wish to do business in the North of Scotland, including the Highlands and Islands, unprecedented access to buyers and decision makers from across the Public and Private sector, with the opportunity to raise their profile as a business and prepare for upcoming contract opportunities.

The virtual activities aimed to demonstrate an innovative approach to communicate with suppliers and contribute to open, connected and transparent procurement practices in Scotland's public sector in the wake of restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Suppliers were encouraged to sign up to register interest in the overall event through a widespread promotional campaign in partnership with SDP's membership organisations and valued partners. Pre-event communications related to economic recovery efforts from COVID-19 were promoted by Public Contracts Scotland to registered suppliers on PCS at SDP's request. However, e-mailings to registered suppliers on the SDP website continued to be much more limited than in the past, due to arrangements around furloughed and out-of-office staff. In light of the limitations on SDP's normal routes of communication with suppliers to raise awareness, and due to the launch of full membership of Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and Highland Councils with the Programme, SDP promoted the event through paid local press with HN Media and a paid social media campaign to SME business owners through Facebook and Twitter.

### **Registrations and Attendance**

In total, 1,606 suppliers pre-registered interest on the SDP website for the Meet the Buyer North 2020: Live Virtual Event. There were 825 actual attendees on the day, which was made up of 684 suppliers (from 590 unique businesses) and 141 buyers/exhibiting staff. There were 30 virtual stands, which included not only public sector buyers but also some supply chain contractors, including Hub North, and various business support organisations, such as Business Gateway Aberdeen City and Shire and Tayside, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise. Through the 1-2-1 exhibitor meetings on the portal, we collectively achieved 11,000 minutes of video interaction.

### **Formal Agenda**

Kate Forbes MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, delivered a pre-recorded a ministerial address to open the online event.

Other pre-recorded speakers in the formal agenda included:

Diane Beattie, Payments Manager, Moray Council

Craig Innes, Head of Commercial & Procurement Shared Services at Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Highland Councils

Lesley Anderson, Head of SPA Procurement

There was a dedicated workshop session entitled, "Helping You Bid Better: Live Q&A Panel with the Supplier Development Programme's Expert Trainers". The event also linked with Scottish Enterprise's external webinar on the DeepWind supply chain cluster, which brings together 400 member groups, including representatives from the energy industry, the public sector and academic and research.

### **Supplier Feedback Survey**

An online survey was distributed to registered delegates for Meet the Buyer North 2020. This survey was live between 2 September and 2 October. Within this time, responses were received from 114 respondents, and 111 were from businesses based in Scotland.

It was highlighted that 94% of respondents were an SME or third sector organisation and therefore eligible for other SDP training and support, and 98% of respondents attended the online event on 2 September.

The post-event survey highlighted that 90% of Scottish SMEs responding to the survey said they were more likely to bid for public contracts after participating in the event.

Supplier respondents rated the Meet the Buyer North 2020: Live Virtual Event as "excellent" or "good" for the following:

- Overall event experience - 80%
- Usability of the virtual portal - 82%

Additionally, 96% of respondents thought the Meet the Buyer North 2020: Live Virtual Event demonstrated that public sector procurement is open and transparent, despite challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some comments from suppliers included:

- "Really good, innovative event."
- "It's different in that there's less networking between stalls, but based on the challenges faced with hosting events, I thought this was well done."
- "Just get the technology working properly. Otherwise it was obvious the huge effort from public bodies to deliver, thank you for that."
- "Excellent event; I would not have attended if it had not been online."
- "Very good event conducted in a virtual environment."
- "Hopefully to revert back to the event being held in a public space and to meet buyers personally."
- "It was really pleasant having an opportunity to have a face to face chat with the buyers. In fact, it was slightly better than being in a busy exhibition centre. I felt as if I got on really well with them."

- "The idea is excellent but as a participant, further training is required on how to navigate effectively and make the most of the time."
- "It was a pity not all exhibition stands were set-up for video calls. The video calls we did were massively better than the messaging, although that was clearly better than nothing."
- "Given the current COVID pandemic this was a good idea to have the event online, but nothing beats the atmosphere and face to face contact you get by meeting people in real life situations."

### Exhibitor Feedback Survey

An online survey was distributed to registered exhibitors after Meet the Buyer North 2020. This survey was live between 2 September and 2 October. Within this time, responses were received from 40 respondents.

The post-event survey highlighted that 65% of exhibitors that responded to the survey said the overall experience was "excellent" or "good" and 90% said they would likely participate in a future virtual Meet the Buyer event organised by SDP. In total, 93% of exhibitors 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:

- 85% - Drive early engagement with SDP member organisations to support an increase of public sector contracts being accessible to Scottish SMEs
- 83% - Raise the profile of SDP to be recognised and established as the foremost tender training programme to support SMEs and third sector in Scotland
- 88% - Extend SDP engagement with public sector buyers to ensure SMEs benefit from local contracts
- 90% - Demonstrate that public sector procurement is open and transparent, despite the challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic

Some comments from buyers included:

- "Great to see so many suppliers registered and attended, it really extends our engagement across Scottish suppliers in the north of Scotland."
- "Considering the circumstances we are in, it would have an easy decision to cancel the event so well done to SDP for organising and co-ordinating the day."
- "I appreciate the restrictions we are currently faced with, but I feel these events should be face to face (if possible) in the future."
- "Aside from COVID, maybe this works better virtually! It is a shame that exhibitors don't really have a chance to keep up with event content as well as managing live queue and connections. We need a better system of appointments and suppliers wanting appointments obliged to give more information on who they are, what they

do and what they want to know. Easy to get caught up in an interesting, mutually beneficial chat."

- "There were a couple of 'technical' issues but it was very well managed by SDP and hopefully suppliers found it of benefit."
- "Overall we had a high proportion of useful conversations with potential suppliers as they could only queue at one stand at a time - consequently they really had to seek us out."
- "Very well done! There were technical challenges but when the videos worked, it was fantastic."

All feedback from suppliers and buyers is valuable, and will be applied to future virtual events organised by the Supplier Development Programme. Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate.

### Technical Limitations

This was the first fully virtual, online "Meet the Buyer" event ever organised by the Supplier Development Programme due to the exceptional circumstances presented from the COVID-19 pandemic. Had it not been organised online as a virtual event, it simply would not have taken place in 2020.

The Supplier Development Programme created "how-to" videos for both suppliers 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 "info@sdpscotland.co.uk" 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.

On the day of the virtual event, as can happen with any face-to-face event, there was a technical hiccup during the formal agenda. This resulted in the Question-and-Answer sessions to be cut short following two presentations. All supplier questions that were not answered during the sessions were passed to each organisation.

Due to the Scottish Government's highest priority of its on-going response to COVID-19, exhibitors from the Scottish Government's procurement stands were limited to communication with suppliers via the 'Live Chat' option rather than by video chat, and this was communicated to suppliers in advance as well as on the platform.

To address these issues after the event, exhibiting organisations 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. [SDP also published a full Q&A and video](#), and all presentations were posted 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 account on the SDP website.

Local businesses were able to engage and have one-to-one conversations with the procurement teams and partners at the events and hear about upcoming contracts and opportunities. Both Dumfries and Galloway Council and DGHP/Wheatley Group were able to connect with those suppliers interested in bidding for contracts in many areas and sectors including, food supply, fleet maintenance, social care, legal services, roads and construction. In addition to meeting and discussing with exhibitors, businesses could also attend sessions focusing on Understanding Market Challenges and the impact of Public Sector spending on Community Wealth Building in the Dumfries and Galloway region.

The Supplier Development Programme promoted the in-person roadshow events widely in advance. Half of those who attended and provided feedback heard about the events through SDP's marketing and communications efforts.

### **Overall Analytics – Social Media**

#### **Overall Analytics - Twitter**

From 31 July to close of play on 2 September 2020, 71 tweets were sent from the SDP Scotland Twitter account to promote the Meet the Buyer North 2020: Live Virtual Event. The tweets collectively earned 40,697 impressions (the number of times users saw a Tweet on Twitter) and 578 engagements (total number of times a user interacted with a Tweet). The tweets earned 78 retweets, 118 likes and 3 replies. The SDP Scotland Twitter account gained 26 new followers. Finally, the tweets during the Twitter Takeover resulted in users expanding tweets for more detail 98 times with 684 views of the media images attached to the tweets.

#### **Overall Analytics - Facebook**

From 29 July to 1 September 2020, the SDP Scotland Facebook account promoted the Meet the Buyer North 2020: Live Virtual Event. The campaign collectively reached 21,776 people, and 21,704 of these were located in Scotland. The campaign earned 18,603 engagements, 17,989 3-second video plays, and 506 link clicks.

### **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](#).