

## What's going on

Since the last newsletter, we have been busy driving a number of new and exciting projects. As you know, collaborative working is at the heart of what we do at Procure Plus, and we have been actively encouraging our members to explore opportunities to work with others, in order to achieve best value.

Collaborative working can cover a wide range of activities, including informal opportunities such as sharing information, to more integrated arrangements such as sharing resources to improve services. All of which can result in cost savings, improved efficiency and better delivery of services for those involved.

Through the Procure Plus frameworks and our Green Hub meetings, for example, we are able to facilitate services and be a connector of best practice, all to the benefit of our members.

A recent example of where we have supported shared working is between Together Housing Group and Places for People. The Together Housing Group, a partnership made up of six housing associations, including Housing Pendle and Twin Valley Homes, was set up in April 2011 to provide 35,000 quality, affordable and modern homes for rent across the North of England.

By utilising the Procure Plus merchant framework, we helped the Together Housing Group subsidiary Twin Valley Homes set up a managed store with merchants, Wolseley, so that its operatives can use the store to procure materials for their responsive repairs service. After hearing about the success of this partnership, Places for People, one of the largest property management, development and regeneration companies in the UK, discussed with Procure Plus the opportunity of co-sharing the merchant store with Twin Valley, so they could also use it to deliver a better service locally.

Procure Plus facilitated the partnership and, following a successful trial, the scheme has been made permanent. Working in this way has been mutually beneficial for all parties involved. It has generated considerable time and cost savings for Places for People and it has delivered a more efficient and competitive agreement for Together Housing Group by reducing its overheads.

This is just one example of how we assist collaborative working in practice.

As always, if you've any comments or questions about our services, including how we can help with collaboration, or our e-newsletter, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Best Wishes,

Mike Brogan



## Introducing...Gwen Heap

What's your role at Procure Plus?



*"I first started working for Procure Plus in 2008 where I held the role of Project Coordinator, working with landlords on delivering their Planned Maintenance programmes. As Procure Plus' range of services grew, I changed role to Business Development Manager and took the lead on developing the consortium's fleet and merchant framework schemes. This then expanded to include the existing gas and responsive repairs service. My new job title is Development Executive. This role maintains the Business Development responsibilities but also includes the management of the Operations Support team, and a more general requirement to work with clients, members, our supply chain and partners to develop the work programme and new initiatives."*

How have operations changed post Decent Homes?

*"The Operations Support Team is being introduced as a result of the changes we're seeing in works carried out post Decent Homes. Landlord projects are becoming more varied and, as a result, we're now seeing a greater mix of work streams being carried out. In addition, works that previously have not been carried out through our frameworks have been growing – examples of this are environmental and sustainable technologies. As such, we've changed the way we operate to reflect how the sector is developing."*

What else are you developing to suit the change?

*"The process we use for setting up and managing projects is altering to build in more flexibility, whilst maintaining cost certainty and the advantageous framework rates. We are also streamlining the process, making it easier for landlords, contractors and supply chains to work together. For instance, they can now share information at all stages, which will help to eliminate any unnecessary delays."*

*However, we are mindful that we need to ensure the landlord remains supported through this and we maintain the cost management side of things that made our work on Decent Homes so successful.*

*We believe that sharing information is key to a successful project and, since I first started at Procure Plus, we've improved our systems to do just that.*

*Previously, we used separate systems but we are now working to get target costing, project management and order and invoice management all on the same platform, reducing duplication and giving more visibility to everyone. It will also enable us to manage the varied project types on one system. For example, at the moment we use our Voids & Schemes system to manage projects that aren't property specific, such as environmental works, and the e-Trading platform to do works that can be associated to a property address. The new system will enable both these type of projects to be managed either as separate projects or even on the same one."*

Meet our member...



Harvest Housing Group is a collection of housing associations and companies operating in the North West and Midlands area. Responsive to its customers' needs and focused upon its vision of 'Turning homes and neighbourhoods into places where people want to live and choose to stay', Harvest Housing Group owns and manages 18,000 affordable high-quality homes. It also works with its customers and partners to provide a range of housing, community and regeneration services.

Lee Woods, property director at Harvest Housing Group, spoke to us about the organisation's involvement with Procure Plus:

*"As founder members of Procure Plus, we have worked together since 2005, back when it was called GM Procure. The two are very closely linked. Mike Brogan, Chief Executive of Procure Plus, developed the concept for GM Procure, whilst he was working on secondment at Harvest Housing Group. He worked alongside Ian Perry, Chief Executive of the housing group, who went on to become the Chairman of Procure Plus.*

*We joined the consortium for many reasons, but most notably because we recognise that working in partnership with others often delivers better outcomes for our customers and the communities we serve. Linking the procurement and delivery of large scale investment programmes to the creation of jobs and training opportunities for people in our neighbourhoods, very much aligns to our own vision and values."*

Lee continues: *"Over the last five years, Harvest Housing Group has reinvested £50m into its housing stock - much of this being delivered through the Procure Plus framework. We continue to deliver kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems, windows, doors, electrical rewires and roofing programmes through the framework. However, more recently we have procured cyclical painting, gas servicing and PV programmes, as well as purchasing a number of vehicles through the fleet work stream."*

Procure Plus has worked with Harvest Housing Group on a number of projects including helping the organisation to implement a large-scale solar photovoltaic scheme across its properties in Greater Manchester. Around 650 Harvest Housing homes will be fitted with the technologies in a bid to save residents money on their communal electric bill.

Lee concludes: *"In an effort to improve our energy efficiency and reduce our tenants' service charge bills, we decided to implement solar PV across our properties. By working with Procure Plus, we were able to do this efficiently and effectively, and it will help us ensure we get the best return on our investment."*

## Procure Plus and Parkway Green partner in innovative training project for Manchester students

A ground-breaking employment and training scheme has been launched in Wythenshawe, South Manchester, by Procure Plus and Parkway Green Housing Trust. The initiative, named PG Gateway, gives eight local students the opportunity to gain practical on-the-job experience, while completing their education.

The programme sees students from Newall Green High School, St Paul's High School and Manchester Enterprise Academy spend three days per week during term time in school, and the remaining two days working with Parkway Green. The students, who were specially selected for the initiative, work with the organisation's fencing team learning transferable skills such as time management, communication and reliability, which will ultimately help prepare them for the world of work.

## An award-winning clean start for ex-offenders

Procure Plus is supporting framework member, Trafford Housing Trust, in developing the 'Cleanstart' initiative – a social enterprise scheme that helps ex-offenders get back in to employment, and has recently received the prestigious Business in the Community's (BITC) National Big Tick award.

The Cleanstart scheme was set up by Trafford Housing Trust, with the support of Procure Plus, in September 2008 to offer ex-offenders from the local community a first step into employment and an opportunity to rebuild their lives. The Trust employs former offenders in a property clearing and clean-up service, with the aim of breaking the re-offending cycle. Each participant benefits from a learning and development programme alongside their day job and, through Procure Plus, are supported in securing permanent employment at the end of their contract.

Since Cleanstart started three years ago, Procure Plus has helped 27 unemployed ex-offenders become part of the scheme, and supported them in getting back in to long term employment. Procure Plus has also provided individuals interested in joining the scheme with a mentor who offers valuable career advice, helping to increase their ongoing job prospects.