Lunchables Summary

Contract Management in Local Government

Introduction

If you couldn't make the full meal, here is a taste of the Lunchables sessions that ran from 13 to 24 October 2025, which addressed key issues impacting contract management in local government.

These sessions were part of the Contract Management Pioneer Programme (CMPP), supported by Crown Commercial Service (CCS), which aims to raise standards and share practice in contract management by providing training, hands-on support for councils, a wide range of downloadable tools and templates, and knowledge sharing.

For more information: CMPP - Contract Management Pioneer Programme - Local Partnerships
Email: CMPPenquiries@localpartnerships.gov.uk

Monday 13th October: Contracting AI

Clair Hayward, CCS and Annie Radcliffe, LGA

This session explored key considerations when procuring AI solutions and highlighted emerging AI tools designed to support and enhance the procurement process.

CCS research has shown that most organisations are buying off-the-shelf AI solutions, and, as with all procurement, it is important to have a clear understanding of what is needed before starting the procurement process. Clair emphasised the need to consider whether AI is the best solution for what the council wants to achieve when compared to advanced data analytics or automation. AI can mean different things to different people, and it can be implemented in different ways, meaning you might want to consider something more bespoke.

The speakers highlighted the importance of engaging with the market when procuring AI solutions. They emphasised the need for early engagement, during which councils should consider factors such as ethical implications, sustainability, innovation, and value for money. The speakers also cautioned against relying on free AI products, noting that such arrangements could create risks or bias future procurement processes.

The LGA is carrying out extensive work on integrating equality and data protection considerations into AI commissioning and procurement and has published the Responsibly Buying AI guide. The session also reflected on the work of the Government Commercial Function Working Group, which is exploring how AI can be adopted across the commercial lifecycle to deliver greater value and efficiency. This work is ongoing, and

resources will be made available to local authorities as they are developed. The first AI tool to emerge from this programme is a quality assurance tool for statements of work, which provides an assessment score, improvement suggestions, and a full audit trail of changes. Further information from CCS will be released soon.

Useful links:

- Artificial Intelligence Playbook for the UK Government (HTML) - GOV.UK
- Responsibly buying AI | Local Government Association
- Guidance on AI and data protection | ICO
- AI DPS
- LGA AI Hub
- Local Government Artificial Intelligence Network

Tuesday 14th October: Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

Rachel Gibson, North Yorkshire Council and Eddie Gibson, CCS

The session highlighted the key challenges and successes in procurement and contract management following North Yorkshire's transition to a single unitary authority in April 2023.

From the 2021 announcement that one unitary authority for North Yorkshire would be created, the driver was to transform public services in the area, ensure equity across communities and achieve efficiencies with anticipated savings. This meant the coming together of the county council with seven district/borough councils.

We heard from Rachel that throughout the LGR programme, dedicated workstreams were established for key areas. A procurement and contracting workstream was in place from the outset, supported by a senior sponsor (at corporate director level), representatives from each authority, and an agreed governance structure. The workstream focused on delivering practical actions and tangible outcomes.

There was a strong emphasis on engagement across the councils to create a consolidated view as the teams worked on a shared pipeline of procurements and a single contract register. The base point was always to ensure the contracts were “safe and legal”.

The nature and size of the councils involved in the LGR process meant that their procurement and contracting teams had multifaceted roles. The reorganisation placed significant pressure on resources, highlighting the need for both upskilling and additional recruitment.

Throughout the transition, the North Yorkshire teams carefully managed supplier engagement - particularly around the timing of communications to ensure suppliers were appropriately informed of changes and reassured about payment continuity. The continuation of North Yorkshire’s authority status proved highly beneficial, as it removed the need for contract novations, resulting in substantial time and resource savings. Ensuring service continuity beyond vesting day was critical, and the team proactively identified contracts at risk of expiry, exploring how procurement regulations could be used to extend them where necessary.

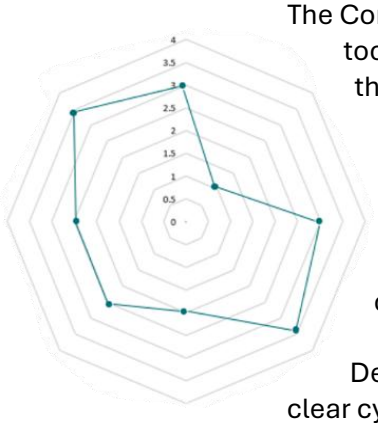
Reflecting on the four-year journey, the team emphasised the importance of maintaining a clear plan, collaborating with peers, and leveraging internal capabilities. Persistence and perseverance were key - and as a result, North Yorkshire's financial position has been strengthened directly through the LGR process.

References:

- Local Government Reorganisation - Local Partnerships
- Local government reorganisation (LGR) | Local Government Association

Wednesday 15th October: Commercial Continuous Improvement Assessment Framework

Stephen Griffin, Cabinet Office



The Commercial Continuous Improvement Assessment Framework (CCIAF) is a powerful tool that helps contracting authorities benchmark their commercial practices against the government's functional standards.

The framework is structured around eight commercial themes, each assessed through a series of statements that together generate a detailed feedback report. This report provides valuable insights and a clear roadmap for improving both compliance and commercial maturity. Importantly, the CCIAF is not static – it is continuously updated to reflect evolving best practices across government.

Designed for use by both local and central government, the framework follows a clear cycle: an initial assessment, the creation of an improvement plan, and finally a baseline review to measure progress. The session included a live demonstration of the online self-assessment platform, which brings the process to life with an intuitive visual dashboard view.

During the Q&A, one of the key questions focused on which sections of CCIAF local authorities should prioritise, given their ongoing capacity and capability challenges. The discussion highlighted the importance of focusing on the core commercial lifecycle, particularly defining, procuring, and managing processes as a foundation for strengthening commercial outcomes.

Overall, the session provided a thoughtful and practical look at how the CCIAF framework can help local authorities build stronger, more mature commercial capabilities, supporting continuous improvement.

References:

- Commercial Continuous Improvement Assessment Framework Onboarding Guidance V2.3 (HTML) - GOV.UK
- National Procurement Policy Statement

Thursday 16th October: Market Strategies and Market Shaping

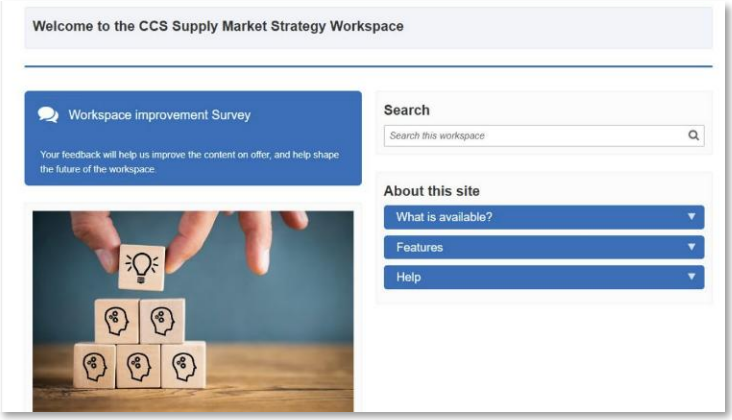
Ben Knight, Crown Commercial Service

The session explored strategies for engaging with, developing, and strengthening key markets. Participants gained insight into CCS's market-shaping initiatives and learned how to apply these approaches within their local context.

As Ben explained, a key role of CCS is to provide market strategies and insights for public sector procurement. This has led to the work of the Supply Market Strategy Workspace – a document library covering over 50 categories, and highlights the importance of understanding one's position and stake in a market to gain meaningful insights.

The workspace covers:

- Market Reports providing in-depth insight into various commercial markets
- The Market Summary Report publishes an executive summary, overlaid with CCS knowledge and insights - for categories not classified for a full Market Strategy
- The Market Strategy publishes CCS's vision for the supply market, the strategy for getting to this vision - with the detailed market analysis to support the proposed strategy.



A demonstration was given on how to use the Workplace, and explored how to use the insights to:

- Make sense of your position within the market – consider what is the spend and stake, any critical dependencies in the market, any regional perspectives to consider, and the future projection in relation to the contract
- Understand the scale and shape of the market – what is the size, contract or expansion in the future? Potential to leverage better deals, remaining agile or grow.
- Compare and contrast your strategy with others to help you 'triangulate' your position and gain wider context for your situation. For example, use regional/sectoral/size/use case comparisons - CCIAF can help!

The session concluded with a reflection on the culture needed to ensure that the strategy is effective – your category/market strategy should be treated as a live document and not left to gather dust. Engage with stakeholders when developing your strategy – gathering input and ideas, and seek out critical friends. Also understand how the strategy can support business processes and decision making e.g. options assessment, pipeline creation, business cases. A final point was to be agile to reflect agile markets, things can change quickly in the markets and wider external forces.

For more information: ben.knight1@crowncommercial.gov.uk

Friday 17th October: Local Government Procurement Benchmarking

Tina Holland, Local Government Association

The National Procurement Policy Statement includes the point that 'contracting authorities should benchmark their organisational capability and workforce capacity to ensure they have the appropriate procurement and contract management skills and capacity necessary to deliver value for money'. The **National Procurement Strategy Benchmarking** supports councils in meeting this requirement by providing a structured way to assess performance and gain valuable insights.

Each council's Head of Procurement is invited to complete a confidential survey to measure areas such as leadership, commercial behaviour, community benefits, digital technology, and contract management. Councils receive instant results, with detailed reports provided after the two-week submission period. The exercise has seen a 60% uptake in previous years, with findings used to create anonymised regional reports and identify training needs, such as the contract management training currently being offered by Local Partnerships.

Councils can generate additional reports to benchmark their results against other, similar councils either regionally, nationally, or against their own previous submissions from 2022 and 2018. The LGA uses the collective findings to produce an anonymised report highlighting achievements across the sector and identifying opportunities for further training and collaboration.



The benchmark uses a five-level rating system to assess councils' performance across key areas. In 2021, most councils rated themselves as *developing*, with the lowest scores observed in contract management, skills, and knowledge.

Although the current benchmark operates as a self-assessment without peer review, plans are in place to introduce a peer review element in 2026 as part of the new National Procurement Strategy. The survey will also be issued annually allowing for more insights and data available for councils.

For more information: procurement@local.gov.uk

Monday 20th October: Leadership Insights

John Coyne, Birmingham City Council

During an engaging 20-minute talk, John shared practical insights drawn from his extensive experience leading teams and driving complex projects within the public sector and local government.

The session started with John talking about his career to date and the value of having worked with multiple public sector organisations before joining Birmingham City Council.

LEADERSHIP

John focused on what truly makes an effective leader in today's fast-paced and often challenging work environment, where officers are often juggling multiple plates and are responsible for a plethora of activities. One of his key messages was the importance of keeping things simple both in communication and in his leadership approach. In a landscape where information overload and competing priorities can all boil down to delays to decision making, he highlighted how effective leaders cut through complexity, communicate clearly, and make sure their teams understand not just the "what," but the "why" behind their work.

During the discussion, John encouraged individuals to avoid overusing technical jargon and spoke about his guiding principle, of approaching all situations with the mindset that no one has all the answers or knows everything, therefore nothing should be assumed, and individuals should feel comfortable stating the obvious and/or asking questions.

A major takeaway from the session was the value of authentic engagement with stakeholders and a focus on building genuine connections. An interesting point was on effective leadership in connecting with people on a human level, listening actively, showing genuine interest and responding with emotional intelligence.

Also emphasised was the growing importance of soft skills, such as active listening, adaptability and collaboration in shaping strong, resilient teams. This is valuable in navigating changes with confidence, which are essential competencies for the requirements of working within local government. These skills have helped his team stay aligned and motivated to support a better Birmingham for the council's residents.

Tuesday 21st October: Transforming Public Procurement -The Procurement Act 2023

Jennifer Pallister, Cabinet Office

Jen started the session with a reminder of the benefits of the Procurement Act (2023), leading to:

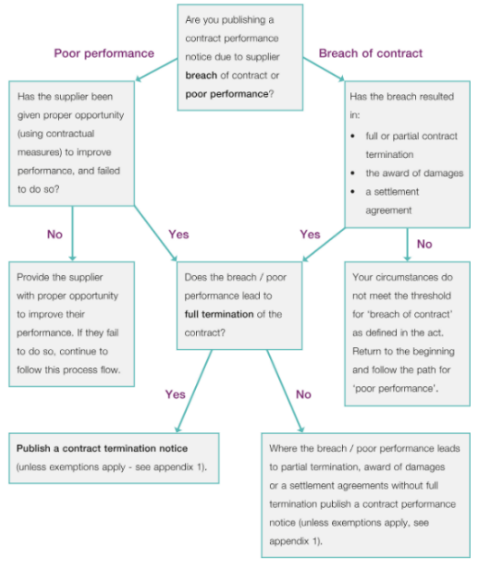
- Simpler and more streamlined commercial system
- Opening up public procurement to new entrants
- Taking tougher action on underperformance
- Embedding transparency.

With specific benefits to contract management:

- Swift response to changes, challenges and opportunities
- Greater clarity and confidence when deciding whether to amend a contract
- Improved transparency
- Being proactive in how contracts are run.

The key changes impacting contract management were highlighted, including more grounds for modifying a contract, such as materialisation of a known risk identified early in a procurement.

68. Supplier poor performance and breach of contract: Flowchart



The importance of knowledge sharing and learning and training, and recommended the eLearning Module 9: contract governance.

Jen shared her top tips for making the most of the new approach brought in by the Procurement Act (2023):

1. Optimise market engagement to help identify potential changes anticipated during the contract term (the known risks)
2. Engage early with procurement teams to ensure procurement processes are aligned with contract management requirements (e.g. setting KPIs)
3. Across your council ensure you agree roles and responsibilities to meet the transparency requirements.

For more information: procurement.reform@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

Wednesday 22nd October: Beyond Social Value

Ed Humphreys and Natalie Evans, Westminster City Council

This session looked at the impressive progress Westminster City Council has made on responsible procurement and its approach to social value.

The Council's Procurement and Commercial Services was restructured in April 2020, creating an integrated structure to support all departments in procuring goods, works and services. The service also promotes environmental and socio-economic goals through its Responsible Procurement and Commissioning Strategy.

Ethical Procurement Policy is built into contracts through:

- A set of core requirements addressing policies of importance to the council and specifically the "Fairer Westminster Strategy"
- Principles the council abides by in the treatment of its workers that are cascaded to its contractors
- Applied to all contracts over a value of £100k, of any duration and within any sector
- Incorporated into the standards terms and conditions
- Assessed as part of survey and supplier evidence through the e-contract management system.

A key aspect to the success of the approach is supplier engagement and giving time to the suppliers to provide the evidence. The council has a social value weight of 10-20% (aspiring to 30%), however it is not just about weighting, but ensuring the right measures are put in place and that suppliers can deliver. As a consequence, the council has developed an easy-to-use points system for suppliers, which calculates the value and percentage. The suppliers can choose the range of points to give some flexibility within the framework of what is important to the council.

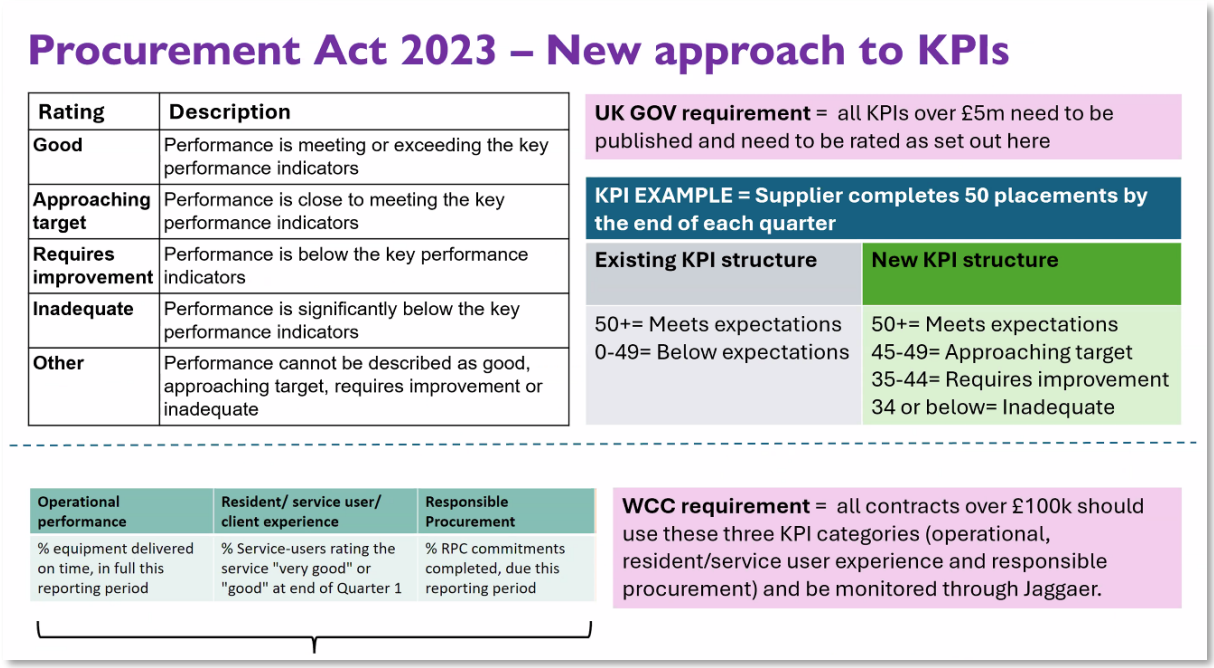
All contracts over £100k should have KPIs based on in the category areas of:

- Operational performance
- Resident/service user/client experience
- Responsible procurement

Working across the council has been essential. The cluster of similar types of social value commitments can create greater impact, and reporting on the e-contract management system enables visibility.

The council has established a dedicated buying team for contracts valued between £25k and £100k. This team will assess opportunities to deliver social value within smaller contracts and identify where outcomes can be achieved through social value initiatives rather than separate contracts, which helps reduce overall expenditure.

The council has categorised and tracked over 1,500 social value commitments from existing contracts, enabling better coordination of supplier efforts and leading to cost savings through shared initiatives.



References:

- Social Value Impact Report | Westminster City Council
- Responsible procurement | Westminster City Council

Thursday 23rd October: Contract Management Landscape

David Crowe, Local Partnerships

This session marked the penultimate session of the CMPP Lunchables series, and David Crowe from Local Partnerships focused on providing insights from the CMPP work with local authorities.

David noted that while contract management is increasingly recognised as important, many councils lack senior leadership and consistent approaches. There is a need for changing skill sets, but in the sector, there is a prevalence of interim arrangements and recruitment challenges, at all levels.

The implementation of the Procurement Act 2023 will have significant impacts on Contract Managers with increased obligations around monitoring, reporting, and documentation, which will impact on staffing and budget constraints. The Act places strategic focus on social value, including local employment, apprenticeships, community cohesion, and carbon reduction, with councils using weightings for social value in contract award criteria. Taken together, this creates a need for increased investment in training to upskill procurement and contract management officers, particularly in smaller councils facing additional administrative and governance.

David discussed the need for proportionate management of risks and value in public services, highlighting concerns about legal risks under new legislative regimes. He noted that many councils' contracts lack strong monitoring mechanisms and have poorly designed KPIs, which can lead to a loss of value over time. David also emphasized the importance of financial analysis, performance management, and negotiation skills for councils. He touched on changing delivery models, including outsourcing, insourcing, and hybrid approaches, driven by a desire for greater control and cost management. David also mentioned the trend of councils collaborating to share best practices and achieve economies of scale, as well as efforts to increase spending with SMEs and support the voluntary, community, and social enterprise sectors. Finally, he discussed the ongoing push for digital transformation to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance the experience of residents and suppliers through new technologies and systems for contract management.

Highlighted was the emerging risks in contract management, including weaknesses in post-award oversight, data quality gaps, and compliance burdens. He outlined key factors for success, emphasising the importance of accessible tools, supportive management, engaged suppliers, and adequate training. It is therefore important to maintain an accurate contract register, prioritising high-risk contracts, designing KPIs around outcomes, and embedding post-award governance. He also highlighted the free tools and templates developed as part of the CMPP.



Access the tools: CMPP tools

For more information: CMPPenquiries@localpartnerships.gov.uk

Friday 24th October: Data Insights

Libby Burgwin and Debbie Lyons, Oxygen Finance

Oxygen Finance draws on a wide range of published sources to create a comprehensive view of third-party spend across the public sector. These sources include invoice data, transparency reports, decision notices, governance reports and framework information. When this data is brought together and analysed, it provides a detailed picture of spending trends and valuable insights into public sector activity. At a local level, councils can use data insights to inform decisions that support their economic and community development goals.

A central question of the session focused on how local authorities can leverage contract and spend data to enhance procurement and contract management. Five key areas were explored:

Creating benchmarking: Compare spend in like authorities, including types of contract and spending trends; costs comparisons in similar categories, where there are similar types of commissioning including value and length of contracts. Even the time to reach the market from when governance decisions are made until the tender release.

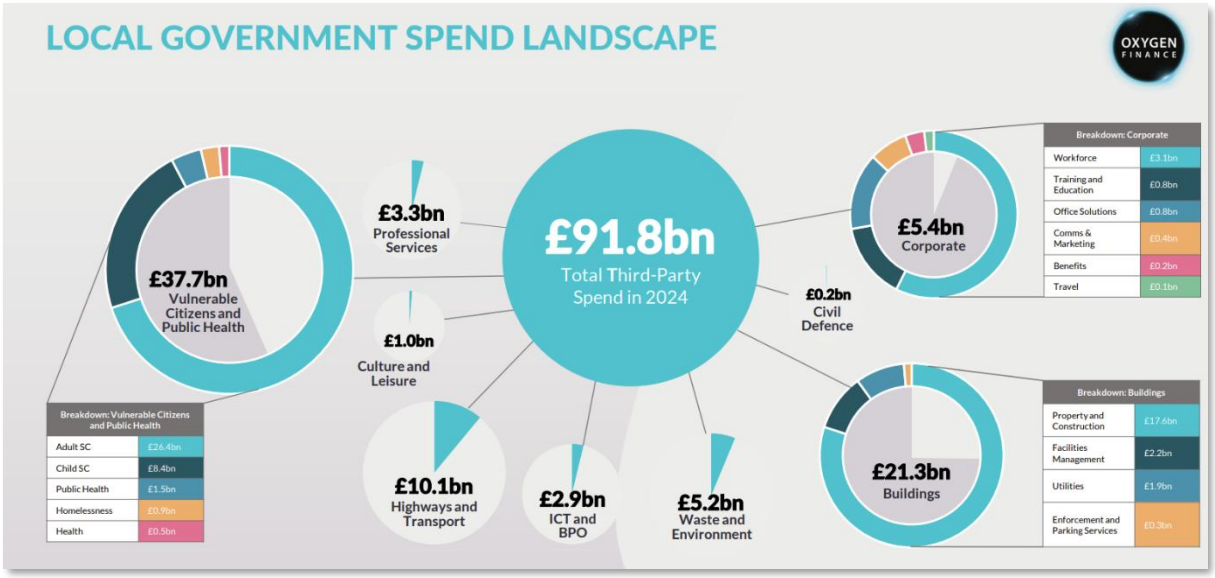
Meeting organisational objectives: How spend on third parties relates to meeting the council's priorities; where there may be a reliance (and therefore risk) on particular suppliers for essential services;

assessment of whether the council is meeting savings targets through contracts; and support for social value including economic growth through local and SME suppliers.

Managing spend: Profiling tail spend to understand where lower value contracting is taking place, for example to see whether to repeat suppliers (taking the procurement above threshold) or where contracts can be bought together; matching your contract register to spend information to understand any gaps in the register or planned pipeline.

Supporting market engagement: Gathering information on the market reduces dependence on single suppliers, suppliers working in neighbouring authorities and knowledge on up and coming suppliers. Also, information gathered directly from engagement with suppliers to understand potential deliverables.

Fostering collaborations: Speaking to peers and seeking advice from councils who have previously procured a similar service; supplier feedback and services on lessons learned; explore shared arrangements with other councils imminently procuring a service.



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Link: www.oxygen-finance.com

End Note

Many thanks to all the great speakers for the Lunchables sessions, which were both engaging and insightful.

Benchmarking, data, insights, collaborating and sharing practice are valuable ways for local authorities to develop and learn. On that note, please complete the National Survey of Contract Management – with the findings being shared at a webinar on 10 March 2026 so you can gain a national picture of contract management in local government compared to your local authority:

https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/NationalSurveyContractManagement/