



# PROCUREMENT PEER REVIEW

## Executive Summary

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**Report to Rhodri Rowlands, Director Strategic  
Commissioning, Capacity Building & Engagement**

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## **Procurement Peer Review – Final Report**

### **1. Executive Summary**

A peer review of Procurement at the London Borough of Brent was initiated due to senior management concerns about the service, feedback received from directorates and from a Limited Assurance internal audit report. The review took place in the context of significant external changes such as the implementation of the Procurement Act in February 2025, the Council's change programme and Grant Thornton's Audit Findings Report dated Feb 2025.

NK Procurement Limited was engaged to undertake a detailed peer review to independently draw out both areas for improvement and to highlight what works well and current strengths. The scope of the work is detailed in section 4. This "State of the Nation" report provides the outcome of the review in detail with a series of recommendations and proposes an Implementation Plan to deliver the improvements required.

- The predominant factor and the cause of the many issues within Procurement that impact directorates is the extremely high turnover of both permanent and interim staff, with the accompanying inability to retain many staff of a high quality. The likely reasons for the high turnover are outlined though the report.
- The consequences include inconsistent approaches to procurements, poor relationships with directorates at multiple levels and erosion of confidence in and credibility of the service leading to delays to procurements, the need to extend contracts beyond their intended term and the failure to deliver greater value for money from procurement and contract management. .
- There has been consistent and detailed criticism of the leadership of the procurement function from across a wide swathe of the organisation and from external organisation who interact closely with procurement. Respondents acknowledge a deep technical knowledge but referred to a lack of engagement, slow responsiveness and failure to meet expectations.
- Procurement is therefore seen as a compliance and administrative function rather than a strategic enabler which consistently adds value for departments.
- There is a risk of "blame displacement". Procurement is or is perceived to be failing in some areas, therefore delays and poor planning by service areas by not commencing projects in a timely way, or non-compliance within directorates, as detailed within the report, is sometimes erroneously badged

as a further Procurement failing. There are few sanctions, such as holding managers to account or “naming and shaming” of this non-compliant behaviour within directorates which makes it harder to create a complete and accurate picture.

- There are some good examples of strong contract management within directorates though this is not widespread. There were limited examples of proactively seeking improved value from suppliers or evidence that suppliers are fully delivering on their contractual commitments.  
The Strategic Contracts list has several contracts that are hard to justify as “strategic” and omits some of the council’s most complex and strategic contracts.
- Within directorates there is little awareness and understanding of processes and tools such as the Gateway Process and Contract Management Handbook which leads to inconsistency and potentially loss of value.

**In summary, Procurement must change to become a strategic function, contributing to shaping the future direction of the council, a team with which directorates willingly engage. To enable the change requires leadership of Procurement that a) accepts and understands the need to change, b) understands best practice and c) is capable of leading the change and inspiring others to follow.**

### **Key Recommendations**

1. A culture reset is required to adopt a proactive, “can do” and more commercial approach, build a stronger team ethos and attract the best procurement talent to build enduring relationships. This should be accompanied by a new approach to staff learning and development that nurtures and retains a wider and necessary skill set.
2. Non-compliant activity within directorates needs to be addressed by providing absolute clarity of expectations, responsibilities and accountabilities between Procurement, directorates and other support services.
3. Improved relationships between Procurement and service areas can be achieved through more robust governance: at the corporate level through an enhanced Commissioning, Procurement and Contract Management Assurance Board; at directorate level through establishing Directorate Procurement Groups and for Category Managers to have an increased focus on business partnering.
4. The Contract Register is reported to be only approx. 60% complete and should be refreshed so that directorate contract registers are integrated into it. Given the importance of the data held and the vulnerability of using spreadsheets, a more robust approach should be evaluated.
5. The Council’s Procurement Strategy and Social Value (SV) Policy both expired in 2023. Both should be updated to reflect the current needs of the Borough and the changed world since 2019/20.
6. Responsibilities across all SV activities need to be reviewed and clarified to ensure suppliers are held accountable for delivery and SV is designed and

delivered in a way that benefits the borough without the supplier incurring costs that are indirectly passed to the council.

Section 8 outlines a **Procurement Improvement Plan** and the associated governance, structure and budget to achieve the improvements. The following workstreams are recommended as being required in order to achieve this along with project governance and supporting communications and engagement.

1. Directorate engagement, governance and compliance
2. Strategy and policy
3. Contract management
4. Staff development, culture and capability
5. Procurement operational excellence

To fully achieve the desired state the Improvement Plan will take approximately two years to deliver. The outcome will be a modern, strategic Procurement function that meets the needs of the Council and individual directorates, adds value across the whole commissioning cycle, and nurtures and develops talent to ensure the service is robust and capable of delivering within a challenging environment.

If the recommendations that accompanies this report are approved to establish a Procurement Improvement Programme, then it is anticipated that the Improvement Plan can commence as soon as possible in May 2025.

### **Summary of what will be different – what will improve?**

A Procurement service that helps to achieve council priorities by driving value for money and cost savings, optimising spend and creating a culture of innovation and continuous improvement.

1. A more stable team, with better motivated and trained staff
2. Focused on business partnering
3. A better understanding of directorate needs with the ability to meet them
4. Clearer responsibilities and accountabilities across the Council
5. Accountability and reporting which leads to improved compliance
6. Improved project planning and delivery
7. Improved contract management demonstrated through better value for money
8. Strategy and Policies reflect current and anticipated needs.