

## **Excellence in Public Procurement**

Sir Michael Lyons, one of the most influential and respected figures in government procurement, has reiterated the vital importance of collaborative working among central and local government.

Sir Michael, author of the highly influential Lyons Inquiry into Local Government and Chair of the BBC Trust, addressed hundreds of delegates who met in London on Wednesday 6 June to mark National Public Procurement Practitioners Day (N3PD) 2007, honouring the success of those working in the public procurement sector.

Sir Michael said: "A good local authority will be less interested in providing its services, less interested in getting best value for money, but more interested in building a coalition or series of coalitions with people outside of its boundaries to promote the interests of the community that it serves.

"A strong message in my report is the importance of incentives for a national coalition between central and local government to grow the cake and to concentrate on economic prosperity."

The prestigious ceremony, held at the Institution of Civil Engineers, One Great George Street, also featured high-profile speakers Dr Neil Bentley, Director of Public Services Policy of the Confederation of British Industry, and Dr Vincent Cable, Shadow Chancellor and Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Dr Bentley urged delegates to continue pressing ahead with reforms and look towards radical improvement: "We can't rest on our laurels: neither business nor the public sector can sit back and hope that things are going to work themselves out. With the Comprehensive Spending Review around the corner, now is the time to really focus on better value and innovation.

"I believe that by working together, we can improve radically the public services delivered by this country."

Dr Cable, referring to the recent National Audit Office report, *Progress in improving government efficiency*, stressed the need for procurement professionals to develop consistency: "We do need some mechanism; we need a process to carry out a course evaluation of the procurement process, judging how much gain there has actually been. This is [at present] most unsatisfactory, and something that we need to work on."

The event also encompassed the announcement of the eagerly awaited results of the annual *Government Opportunities (GO)* magazine Excellence in Public Procurement Awards. Superb achievements in the field of public spending were recognised across seven categories, while the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award – bestowed by David Smith, Director of Commercial Services for the Department for Work and Pensions, who was presented with the Award in 2006 – was received by David Wheller, a founder member and former Chairman of the Society of Procurement Officers in Local Government (SOPO), as well as a former chairman of the Central Buying Consortium and creator of the Procurement Agency for Essex. Mr Wheller, who has more than 30 years' experience in public procurement, also contributed significantly to both the National Procurement Strategy and the Byatt Review. Celebrating the accomplishments of those who have made notable contributions within their field, the *GO* Lifetime Achievement Award is recognition of a career devoted to excellence.

Bringing together representatives from local authorities, public services, utilities and community initiatives, N3PD and the *GO* Awards recognise the efforts made to deliver ever-improving supply management services. Organised by BiP Solutions Ltd, one of Europe's leading providers of procurement information services and publisher of *GO* magazine, the event brings together those working in public procurement to improve efficiency in public spending and bring benefits to the taxpayer.

Grahame Steed, Managing Editor of *GO* magazine, said he was delighted by the response to the event: "In the rush to achieve increasingly difficult goals, it can be easy to overlook the good news stories. Today has demonstrated that there are plenty of these, and also that public procurement – as a profession and as a public service – has a great deal to be proud of.

"Congratulations must go to all the *GO* Awards winners and those who were highly commended - on the evidence of their achievements, the future of public procurement is in safe hands."