



Councils in the North West gain cost-saving confidence from NWCE and Barclaycard Business link up

The North West Centre of Excellence (NWCE) is one of the nine Regional Centres for Excellence (RCEs) that were set up as lead change agencies by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to support local authorities in delivering efficiencies and service improvements.

The NWCE, funded by DCLG, covers 47 local authorities in the North West spanning from Cheshire to Cumbria. Following the rollout of the Government Procurement Card (GPC Visa) on a national level by the Office of Government Commerce, the organisation was keen to implement something similar which covered the entire North West region. The aim was to encourage greater efficiencies and cost savings specifically with council purchasing and invoicing. Neil Hind, eProcurement Manager for NWCE was tasked with selecting a GPC Visa supplier, "We carried out a basic evaluation of a number of suppliers and invited two of them, one of which was Barclaycard Business, to present their offering to eight Local Authorities who were part of the project team. Barclaycard Business won hands down because it demonstrated it had the scale and infrastructure to fully support the NWCE throughout the process."

As part of the package, Barclaycard Business assigned members of their staff to work in the region and help each of the councils implement the GPC Visa. "It was evident through Barclaycard Business's work with other councils that it offered a dedicated approach to suit the needs of each individual council regardless of its size and profitability. Since we deal with councils both large and small, we wanted peace of mind that all would be treated with equal importance and Barclaycard Business certainly assured us of this."

Communicating the benefits

In order to communicate the NWCE's plans for the rollout of the GPC Visa amongst the regions, Barclaycard Business organised a launch event that all council Chief Executives were invited to, with around 60 delegates attending. Barclaycard Business had calculated that by using the GPC Visa in place of paper based purchase orders and invoices, NWCE councils could save an average of £33 per purchase. A presentation was given at the event by Barclaycard Business

and VISA Europe explaining how the card scheme could help each council make these cost savings and also save their staff a considerable amount of time spent on administration. Delegates were also provided with briefing notes and advice on how to cascade the news of the programme down to each of the council members. Neil Hind explained that the GPC Visa scheme was not obligatory, "We wanted to encourage the councils to implement the card by communicating and demonstrating its benefits. What really brought the card scheme to life however were the numerous examples and case studies Barclaycard Business were able to draw upon from their work with other councils. This really helped our member councils to understand how it would work for them."

Accessing all areas

The response from NWCE councils to date has been very positive. Many of them are already utilising the Barclaycard Business staff resources to help them write business cases on how they can implement the GPC Visa. Most commonly, the card is used for hotel, travel and day to day expenses but the NWCE are keen to encourage councils to look at different areas where the cards could help them buy more efficiently. "Already we have one council investigating GPC Visa use in leisure centres as staff do not have easy access to finance systems and purchases are often made in the evening and at weekends." Neil also reports that other councils have suggested the cards are introduced into school canteens enabling staff to purchase bulk food with the card. "Barclaycard Business staff working on the ground with the councils has really given our members confidence. Rather than feeling like they are starting from scratch, they are able to tap into the experience and industry knowledge of the Barclaycard Business staff and use it to their advantage, helping them to gain momentum quicker and ensure their businesses cases are viable and directed at the right audiences."

Day to day management of the GPC Visa scheme is managed totally by Barclaycard Business, enabling the NWCE to focus on other business areas and projects. Barclaycard Business feedback the progress of the GPC Visa rollout formally on a monthly basis and provide more regular updates on an ad hoc basis. Neil Hind continues, "There is considerable pressure on all councils to reduce costs and increase efficiencies and therefore, the sizeable savings a Barclaycard Business GPC Visa can offer is very much welcomed by us. To date, the experience has been hassle free and will certainly allow our staff to direct their time and money into other worthwhile areas."