

EURIM Working Party Minutes

Working Party: 06-PubProc

Ref: 00-WP06-Min01

Minuter: Kate Norman

Date: 19/01/00

Circulation: PubProc WP contacts

Minutes of the EURIM Public Procurement Working Party meeting held at Post Office Headquarters, Old Street, London EC1 on Wednesday 19th January 2000.

1. The Chairman welcomed those present, several of whom were new to the working party, and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss and start to arrange the activities that the working party should be involved in during the current year. Little had happened in 1999, but the recent publication of the Public Accounts Committee report: *Improving the Delivery of Government IT Projects* and also the findings of some other EURIM working parties provided material that should be considered by this group.
2. BN noted that there had been many attempts to produce good documents relating to best practice but there was no apparent co-ordination. These initiatives needed to be brought together and suggestions made on how best to do that. There seemed to be very little said about good large public sector IS/IT projects and perhaps the WP could find and highlight some of them.
3. PT asked what had changed since the earlier work the WP had done on best practice and it was noted that, most importantly, the PAC report had brought examples out into the open. The WP's earlier work was less effective because we could not then identify the case studies used. MJ said that CIPS had documentation at the project manager level.
4. CH described the initiatives being undertaken by the Cabinet Office and the CSSA in this area. A government study was being made of major IT projects, both good and bad, to determine best practice. They hoped to make rapid recommendations and get early implementation. The CSSA had decided this was an ideal opportunity for the ICT industries to have a voice. The supply side, he said, was often not listened to because it was assumed they had an axe to grind. They had an opportunity to take the views of industry and to publicise a clear report. They intended to tackle some particular issues in great depth and come up with practical recommendations. This study, although independent, was being undertaken with the knowledge and support of the Cabinet Office. The other members of the group were John Higgins (CSSA-DG), Brian Collins (Clifford Chance), Prof. Jim Norton (IoD) and General Bill Robbins (Marconi). The team was supported by Bill Kennedy and they aimed to pull together desk research. They were heavily dependent on help from the ICT industry and friends. They were looking for in-depth analysis of fairly narrow issues rather than repeating broad brush reviews.. The study was being sponsored by key figures in the IT industry and they had a good relationship with the Cabinet Office. Their time scale was to receive information until the end of March and to publish their report in May. Input from EURIM members would be very welcome.

5. JI expressed concern at the widespread use of the words “success” and “failure” in this context and it was generally agreed that while they might be applicable at the extremes most projects needed a more qualified description of their outcome. CH suggested it would be better also to talk of “good practice” rather than “best practice”. He noted also the importance of getting the correct definition of “project” since this was interpreted differently across sectors of government. Other areas to be defined clearly included the scope of the term “procurement”.
6. MH said that projects could not be successful if the project management was not right and it was important to focus on best practice in that area and to have very clear definitions from the start. CH said that customers as well as suppliers needed to be very aware of that need. BN commented on an assumption that if PRINCE was used there was no problem. It was important to look beyond methodology.
7. BN asked NC to outline the reorganised structure for government procurement. He said that the OGC (Office of Government Commerce) would co-ordinate the Treasury policy groups, the PFI Task Force and the procurement agencies, the CCTA and the TVA. It would have a chief executive reporting to a Committee that included the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and a Management Board. A number of matters in the PAC report were, he said, within the OGC remit. Their agenda would include: seeking to raise professionalism, getting better statistics together; examining supply management; implementing cross government initiatives, and involvement in developing standards, etc and electronic commerce needs. It was noted that OGC applied to civil central government only. Asked about whether the OGC would have “teeth”, NC said that the details had not yet been worked out but it was not expected to return to the old CCTA status. CH indicated that the Cabinet Office work would provide important inputs to the OGC but that left open the question of who had the authority to say “do” or “don’t”.
8. BN said this raised the question of how the working party should take advantage of its political contacts to make things work together. We should support ideas that were worthwhile and make the assumption that the OGC was where we should be directing our recommendations. LG said that the Information Age champions could be another vehicle. They were representative of all government departments and also local government. The key issue for them was the one of application and they were concerned that there was too much re-invention of the wheel. It would be helpful to know more about that and work out how EURIM could interact.
9. BN said it was necessary to take into account the subjectivity that governed decision making. Each individual wanted to do it his own way and thought that each case was different. Drivers for success had less to do with what would have the best result than as to what made the individual feel best. The psychological drivers of decision makers should be taken into account but were not. CH confirmed that issues of motivation and reward should be addressed. The whole culture of the civil service was not to take risks and no allowance was made for mistakes. JI cautioned against defining good practice in a way that would rapidly become outdated; it might, he said, be impossible to define it correctly in time for an individual project. BN said there were some things that could be identified as constants. TS noted that recent work on partnerships had identified areas where the rules needed to be very different and that should be taken into account.
10. BN stressed the importance of a European focus for the working party’s activities and indicated that the debate on UK regulations and practices was but one part of the agenda.

It was important to get more information on the position in other Member States. BN would check with Bill Kennedy what information he had and KN would find out if CEPIS could contribute anything. Meanwhile it was agreed that the short term priority for the working party was to get relevant information to Members of Parliament prior to any debate on the PAC report. To facilitate this, a map would be prepared of best practice initiatives.

11. AP considered it important that the WP had an objective that was a response on specific topics. For example the WP could promote the aim that a government department commits to electronic procurement. Other topics suggested were:

- skills and appropriate training in ICT and services procurement; (there were no recognised qualifications anywhere in Europe);
- information access;
- awareness and road map of existing good practice;
- attitudes which frame decision making;
- what do the major GCAT projects tell us;
- framework agreements were being inhibited.

12. BN agreed to work out a complete picture of the working party's aims and means of achieving them. This would include a workshop on good practice and another aimed specifically at Parliamentarians. A further working party meeting would be held within a month to arrange details.