

Increased use of digital working on travel, subsistence, stationary and administration

Maximising the digital aspects of the purchase ordering system

The ERW Finance Officers receive a large amount of invoices from schools, each of these invoices were previously being recorded individually on our purchase ordering system, then a large volume of batch payments were being made to each of the local authorities in order to filter these payments through to the schools.

Recording and paying these invoices in this way was not efficient or economical from a time perspective as the administration time to input all of purchase orders individually was significant. The only form of correspondence the Local Authorities had from ERW was the remittance advices, this would result in a large amount of queries from the Local Authorities requesting more information on a high volume of transactions.

The purchase ordering system was reviewed to see if there were any aspects within it that we had not explored to try and increase efficiencies and provide more detailed information for the Local Authorities to minimise the queries we received from them. The system in place was evaluated as one that was not time efficient and created unnecessary blockages within the financial process. Investigations concluded that there were aspects within the system that we were not utilising as well as extra functions within it that allowed a large volume of transactions to be included on one purchase order.

The system was tested using internal data to see if there was a more effective way of using the package and once initial errors were rectified conclusions were very positive. The new procedure allowed us to accumulate several different school invoices (up to 99 at a time) onto one purchase order, rather than previously a singular purchase order used for each school invoice, this is able to improve administration efficiencies dramatically.

A facility within the system has also been utilised where the purchase order itself can be emailed to the revenue department of the Local Authority prior to the transfer of funds. As now all of the school invoices are accumulated on the one order, this has reduced the amount of transactions to the Local Authority and they have a complete breakdown of the amount that they physically receive prior to the funds being transferred.

As a result, the first trial has been met with substantial positive feedback, and the initial sentiment is that there is added value in the fact that there is reduction of workload on the side of the LA officers, thus strengthening the working rapport between ERW's Finance Officers and their peers in the LAs.

Digitized Authorization Processes

The ERW Finance Officers have worked alongside members of the ERW Senior Leadership Team to further formalize and streamline processes surrounding authorization. By co-operatively forming digital documents that ERW officers can fill in and submit to their line managers, ERW is issuing clear guidelines on how to effectively spend budgets. These authorization processes also encourage a Value For Money centric analysis of spending, and ask officers to take into account such criteria outlined in the Value For Money Framework when spending money, be it grant based or from the Core Budget.

Not only does the incorporation of such a process secure that Value for Money cascades throughout ERW as a principle, but also strengthens the audit trails and financial accountability of the

Consortium. The added value of the strengthening of these audit trails is that pressure is taken off the small team of Finance Officers, and they can more effectively and efficiently answer queries from external stakeholders as they will have more information available to hand. Also, these processes increase general awareness among ERW officers for their own personal financial accountability as well as the financial accountability of the Consortium as a whole.

Travel and Subsistence

While the raw expenditure of the Consortium on travel and subsistence for its staff has risen in the last two years, this is in line with expectations when the increased size of the Central Team is taken into account. However, this rise in expenditure is not conducive to a decrease in Value for Money, and several strategies implemented by the Consortium will hope to demonstrate impact in future. The appointment of a full time systems officer, staff training on the Consortium's digital systems, as well as the arrangement of further training in Video Conferencing facilities for several members of the Central Team should have demonstrable impact on travel and subsistence, and reduce the spending on travel and subsistence per staff member.