



partnerships for schools

This case study looks at a pioneering website designed to help local firms reap the benefit of £370m investment in Sandwell's secondary schools as part of its BSF project which will make a positive social, economic and environmental impact in the West Midlands.

Key project information

Local authority: Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Private sector partner: Interserve

BSF Waves: 3 and 5

Project cost: £370 million

Number of schools: 20 across two Waves

Wave 3 Financial Close reached: August 2009

Sandwell website offers local job opportunities

Project description

Sandwell Metropolitan Council is in Waves 3 and 5 of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme which will refurbish and rebuild secondary schools in Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich. Financial close was reached on the Wave 3 project in July 2009 with construction under way on sample projects.

Attracting local talent

Sandwell Council and construction partner Interserve are using the website www.finditinsandwell.co.uk to promote business opportunities through its BSF project. It works in two ways by making tenders available to local business while at the same time ensuring they are 'fit to bid'.

More than 5,000 organisations have signed up for free access to the website since it was launched in April 2007, which has assisted in winning BSF and other contracts totalling £12m. The site gets an average of 18,000 hits each month.

'Finditinsandwell' is especially aimed at local businesses, social enterprises and the voluntary communities and shows Sandwell's support for the Government's target of placing 30 per cent of public sector business with small and medium-sized enterprises in the next five years.

The website is used for a host of council contracts in addition to BSF and, increasingly, opportunities offered by partner organisations like the Primary Care Trust. Companies using the site can search for local contracts, request a quote, find an apprentice or learn about advice and training sessions.

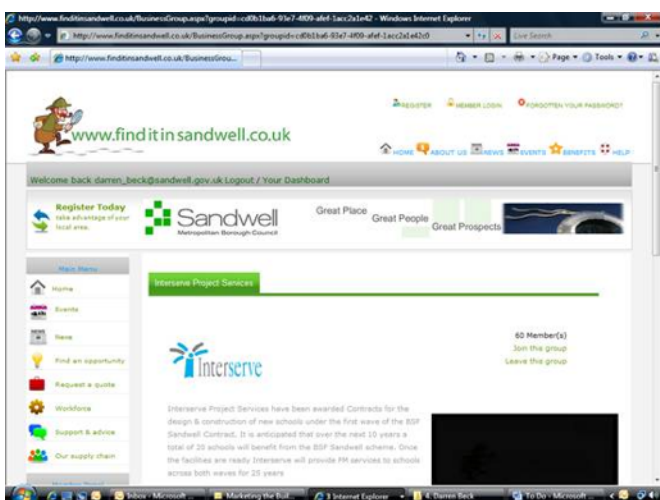
Interserve has its own procurement page where, subject to EU law, it advertises sub-contract and material supply packages, giving business leaders quick and easy access to a variety of opportunities.

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Food for thought

There is also news about 'meet the buyer' and other events, including free tendering workshops, delivered by a bid-writing expert, which unravel the jargon involved in pre-qualification questionnaires and tender documents. Examples have included a BSF Breakfast Meeting which was attended by over 150 delegates and provided an opportunity for prospective members of the local supply chain to network with key members of Environments For Learning, the Local Education Partnership, which is delivering Sandwell's BSF project. Attendees were able to hear first-hand how they could potentially supply to BSF. Many construction professionals stayed for one-to-one meetings with our procurement team afterwards, and the feedback was excellent

Jane Sweeney, of Forker, an engineering firm in West Bromwich, who attended the event said: "The 'finditinsandwell' team have yet again come up trumps with a very informative and structured event. If any of us win any business it will be largely down to them so thank you."



Interserve's procurement page on finditinsandwell

National recognition

A simple but effective idea, 'finditinsandwell' was shortlisted for an Innovation prize in The West Midlands Centre for Constructing Excellence Awards 2009. It was also a finalist in the MJ Achievement Awards 2009. The website also played a part in Sandwell MBC and Buying Solutions winning Best Procurement in LGC's 2010 awards.

To ensure local businesses have a chance to benefit from BSF, Interserve has signed 'Finditinsandwell's' 'Sandwell Procurement Pledge', promising its BSF buyers will source the products and services they need, wherever possible, from closer to home.

The commitments include:

- making tenders transparent, by publishing supply opportunities on 'finditinsandwell';
- encouraging suppliers to follow suit; and
- publishing notifications on 'finditinsandwell' about which companies have been awarded BSF contracts.

What they say

'Finditinsandwell' Purchasing Co-ordinator, Steve Massey, said: "Local businesses, particularly in the building industry, were telling us they were frustrated at the number of costly industry-accreditation schemes they are advised to join, then seeing little - if any - work resulting from them.

"They were also critical of how much work was being placed outside the region, even though many companies in Sandwell were perfectly able to take the contract. "

Sandwell Council's cabinet member for employment, skills and partnerships, Councillor Ann Shackleton said: "We are very proud of the fact that 'finditinsandwell' has been held up nationally as an example of good practice in how a local authority can make tenders accessible to local businesses, while behind the scenes helping local businesses become 'fit to tender'."



Sandwell's Rowley Learning Campus

Sandwell website offers local job opportunities

Conclusion

In tough economic times, there is a great need to provide opportunities for local construction firms, to sustain and create jobs, and allow local people to benefit from regeneration investment coming into their region. Sandwell's innovative website is an example of how the BSF programme can be a catalyst for this making full use of local resources and engaging with the labour force to reduce unemployment.

Key contact

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Further information

To learn more about 'finditinsandwell', please visit: www.finditinsandwell.co.uk/

For more information on Sandwell's BSF project, please visit: www.laws.sandwell.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/education-and-learning/schools/building-schools-for-the-future/