

Interview: The strategic importance of green procurement at Växjö



David Braic, Head of Procurement, Växjö, Sweden. Växjö municipality has administered procurement for seven smaller municipalities in the Kronoberg region of Sweden for the last 15 years. Amongst other commitments, Växjö plan to be fossil free as a municipal organisation by 2020 and as a geographical region by 2030.

What level of political support is there for green procurement in Växjö? It is vital that sustainable public procurement (SPP) is supported at the political level in order for it to be fully implemented within an organisation. Political support within our municipality has been so strong that the procurement unit has had to work very hard to keep up! We have a well-functioning dialogue between politicians and management, which facilitates our work. The procurement unit has established a level of trust and integration within the organisation that allows us to have early input into decision-making processes.

Växjö prides itself on being one of the greenest cities in Europe and has set a number of ambitious environmental objectives. The municipality's purchasing strategy reflects these goals, and to a very large extent, it is the procurement unit's responsibility to achieve them. This can include anything from the procurement of electric vehicles to setting green criteria for construction works.

The importance of market engagement and dialogue alongside political support cannot be overstated. Working together with suppliers helps to achieve mutual benefits in terms of sustainability and innovation. This is just one reason why we try and ensure that SMEs are not disadvantaged during the tendering process.

How strategically placed is the procurement unit within the municipality? Within public procurement, issues such as achieving open competition, innovation and sustainability have become increasingly important at the strategic level, both in Sweden and the EU. I believe that GPP is, and will increasingly be an integral part of procuring goods and services in the future. I'm proud to say that GPP has been integrated at a strategic level in Växjö.

In my opinion, procurement should be used by municipal leaders as a strategic management tool and that the procurement unit should be represented as part of the senior management team. This unfortunately means that less time is dedicated to procurement itself, but there are a great many issues discussed at this level which, in one way or another, affect our work. We have found that it is also crucial to be part of this team in order to get the mandate to push innovative, green purchasing initiatives through.

Strategic implementation of green public procurement also requires the organisation's overarching vision to be translated into clearly defined goals, set within a purchasing strategy. This should be communicated to all staff with a purchasing function to ensure that standards including value for money and environmental protection are maintained.

In terms of day to day procurement, how do you achieve GPP goals? Växjö cares about sourcing food with a low environmental impact. We also want to encourage small companies from our region to participate in the tendering process. Therefore, we divided our most recent, large-scale contract for food products into smaller lots and signed agreement with all 17 companies who submitted bids. Another measure we took was to allow all vendors to deliver their goods to a single distribution hub, rather than 300 different sites. Coordinating distribution in this way not only reduces the fees suppliers charge for deliveries, but also reduces air pollution and heavy traffic around schools and retirement homes.

Our new e-purchasing system has helped streamline the procurement process, making huge efficiency savings and allowing the price and quality benefits of products, such as compliance with eco-label requirements, more easily identifiable. Due to the fact that procurement is highly devolved within the organisation, it is important to have clear procedures and well communicated policies in place to embed GPP and meet our ambitious emissions reduction targets.

Växjö has a vehicle purchasing policy which states that wherever possible, electric, biogas, ethanol or biofuel vehicles must be the preferred option. Around 65% of all municipal cars and minibuses currently run on biological fuels.