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Welsh Assembly Government

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Jeff Cuthbert AM

[Date]

### **OAQ(3)0295 – response to supplementary question**

As promised in response to your question of 16<sup>th</sup> April 2008, I am writing to provide details of our initiatives to make public sector contract opportunities more available to small businesses in Wales.

In my original answer to you I said that, through the Business Procurement Taskforce, good progress has been made towards developing a level playing field for suppliers in Wales, encouraging better access to public sector procurement opportunities. The work of the Taskforce has included providing practical advice and support to both the procurement and supplier communities across Wales. For example:

- we are leading on the 'One Wales' commitment to develop an **all-Wales purchasing code of practice** to support a progressive increase in the amount of public purchasing sourced from Wales.
- we are monitoring progress on engagement through the use of the national procurement website and the adoption of the "Opening Doors" charter;

to date public sector procurement opportunities in excess of £5 billion have been advertised through the buy4wales portal. Over 28,000 suppliers are currently registered on the sell2wales portal – and over 60% of these are based in Wales. These suppliers receive automatic notification of opportunities that match their registered profile. Some 40% of the contract opportunities advertised via the buy4wales portal are below the European Procurement thresholds;

- we have produced best practice guidance via the procurement route planner. This is a free resource, available via the [www.buy4wales.co.uk](http://www.buy4wales.co.uk) website which promotes a

structured, step-by-step approach and encourages a consistent, best practice approach to procurement throughout the Welsh public sector;

- we are co-ordinating work between business support agencies to ensure that appropriate support is being given to Welsh SMEs to enable them to better compete for public sector business.

The Taskforce has recently agreed to explore a key area of concern relating to the complexity and myriad of different arrangements employed by the public service in dealing with suppliers and potential suppliers. These can be difficult to navigate and place financial burdens on suppliers. The Taskforce will receive a stage report on this research at its next meeting in the autumn.

On the procurement of food, the Welsh Assembly Governments' 2005 public sector food purchasing survey reported that:

- total public sector food purchases identified in 2005 were £66 million - up from £55 million in 2003;
- the overall percentage of Welsh food purchased has risen from 18% in 2003 to 24% in 2005;
- the percentage of key food products purchased during this same period from Welsh suppliers (bread, milk, meat, etc.) has increased from 38% to 45% the key increases are in milk – up from 89% to 91% and meat – up from 57% to 76%;
- the significant effort by the NHS and local authorities in conjunction with the Welsh Assembly Government to encourage more local suppliers to tender for the supply of food products is demonstrating results.

The 'One Wales' commitment to launch a major initiative on local food procurement is being led by the Department for Rural Affairs and is supported by Value Wales' food procurement group, which is acting as a conduit to share good practice being carried out by many local authorities in Wales, this in turn encourages others to conduct similar work.

Specific outputs from this group include the publication of the 'Food for Thought' guidance which promotes the safe procurement of high quality, fresh, nutritious food. In addition, the group contributes to the development of various key policies and initiatives including the Appetite for Life Action Plan, Quality of Food Strategy, and the developing Food and Drink Strategy and the Local Sourcing Strategic Action Plans for Wales.

I hope this information is of help, I would be happy to provide further details should you wish.