



## Transforming Procurement Through Partnership: Hartlepool Borough Council and NEPO

In September 2023, Hartlepool Borough Council commissioned NEPO to provide strategic support and additional capacity to enhance the effectiveness of its procurement function. Gavin Rimmington, Head of Public Sector at NEPO, was appointed on a part-time, fixed-term basis to lead the Strategic Procurement Project. Initially contracted for 12 months, the engagement was extended to December 2025 in recognition of the project's success and its alignment with wider organisational priorities.

The project focused on building procurement capability and readiness across the Council, addressing key areas such as spend analysis, supplier engagement, risk management, skills development, social value integration, and contract oversight. Additional support was provided for governance improvements, commercial strategy development, and preparation for the Transforming Public Procurement reforms. The engagement also included recruitment support for a revitalised procurement function and strategic guidance on a major capital programme.

### Key Achievements & Impact

Beyond its core objectives, the Strategic Procurement Project delivered over 100 documented value added activities. Notable contributions

include support for Hartlepool Council's emerging data strategy. Collaboration with the Strategic Development and Sustainability Manager led to investment in AI-driven technology that now actively monitors gas meters, delivering cost savings and reducing carbon emissions.

The project also provided hands-on support for numerous operational procurements and contributed to broader Council initiatives such as the Better Health at Work scheme and the digital transformation programme.



The Strategic Procurement Project gave our team the confidence, tools, and structure to evolve. We've become more agile, more outward-looking, and better equipped to support the Council's priorities. It's been a turning point for procurement in Hartlepool.

**Karen Cooper**  
Corporate Procurement  
Manager,  
Hartlepool Council

## Top Five Headline Achievements

### 1 Elevating Procurement's Strategic Role

The project successfully repositioned procurement as a proactive, valued function aligned with Council ambitions. Senior leadership engagement, particularly from ELT and assistant directors, was instrumental in embedding new processes and embracing change.

### 2 Establishing a Sustainable Structure

A new team structure was developed to meet modern procurement needs within financial constraints of the Council. The planned recruitment of a Procurement Business Partner to support service lead engagement, plus a role focused on systems, data, and governance is a strategic move to future-proof the function.

### 3 Improved Governance and Buying Practices

Introduction of tools such as the procurement request form and exemption process review led to a more discerning buying culture.

### 4 Enhanced Regional and Cross-Sector Collaboration

The team strengthened ties with NEPO, Tees Valley peers, Blue Light partners, and Hartlepool College. Use of data tools like Oxygen Insights enabled smarter collaboration and benchmarking.

### 5 Adaptation to Change and Innovation

Despite resourcing pressures, the team embraced significant changes including PA 2023 preparation, engagement with the launch of NEPO's new regional procurement portal Open, and adoption of Microsoft technologies such as Teams and Copilot. They are well-positioned to explore AI's potential in streamlining certain procurement processes.



This project was a genuine partnership built on trust, ambition, and a shared vision for what procurement can achieve. Hartlepool's commitment to transformation allowed us to push boundaries and deliver meaningful change that will continue to benefit the Council and its communities.

Gavin Rimmington,  
Head of Public Sector, NEPO

## Summary

The Corporate Procurement Team demonstrated professionalism, adaptability, and openness throughout. Their evolution into a more outward-facing, agile unit has laid a strong foundation for continued transformation. With ongoing support and investment, the Council is poised to build on this momentum and further embed procurement as a driver of strategic value.

One of the key benefits of the project was the enhancement of regional collaboration with NEPO, which led to increased utilisation of NEPO solutions, from **50 to 54**. This growth contributed to a **40% increase** in rebate generated and a **17% return on investment (ROI)**, significantly outperforming the regional average of 6%.

The project also inspired NEPO to launch a new service for its members and key associates through the NEPO Hub. This service offers tailored support designed to complement internal procurement teams, recognising the increasing complexity, intensity, and strategic importance of procurement within the public sector.

Although the formal project has concluded, the Hub will remain closely connected with Hartlepool Council. It is ready to continue working alongside colleagues, offering support through ad-hoc initiatives or more structured engagements, ensuring the momentum built during the project is sustained and further developed.



This initiative has elevated procurement from a transactional function to a strategic enabler. The engagement with senior leaders and the tangible outcomes achieved reflect the value of investing in procurement as a driver of innovation, efficiency, and social impact.

**James Magog**  
**Director of Finance,**  
**IT and Digital**  
**(Section 151 Officer)**