Case study

SOUTHERN WATER

From Bottlenecks to Breakthroughs: Barkers Doubles On-Time Supplier Payments at Southern Water

Sector: Water Utility. Contract period: March'17 – April'18

Southern Water partnered with Barkers to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their procurement operations. Through a focused sourcing delivery and process improvement programme, we delivered measurable results in just five months.

Summary

Southern Water sought to improve the performance of their procurement operations and engaged Barkers to support their sourcing delivery. Using our Managed Service approach, we implemented a multi-targeted strategy that delivered measurable improvements in efficiency, compliance, and supplier payment performance within five months.

Our collaborative, hands-on approach ensured stakeholders were engaged throughout, helping Southern Water achieve sustainable improvements while maintaining continuity of service.

Business Challenge

Southern Water required specialist support to streamline critical procurement processes, particularly invoicing and payment activities. Inefficiencies in these processes were creating additional manual workload and impacting supplier payment timelines.

The organisation needed to improve operational consistency, reduce non-value-added activity, and ensure suppliers were paid accurately and on time — all while maintaining strong governance and compliance.

Case study

Our solution

Barkers delivered a targeted procure-to-pay improvement programme alongside a sourcing execution service to support Southern Water's objectives.

Key elements of our approach included:

- A detailed review of procure-to-pay processes and on-time payment performance, with practical recommendations for improvement.
- Empowering staff to make better use of Go Shopping and P-Cards, reducing reliance on manual purchase orders.
- Designing a robust, compliant process for Lodge Cards (business travel cards).
- Reducing non-value-added purchase order volume and processing activity through:
    - Consolidation of paper/email invoices
    - Streamlined individual payment processes
    - File upload payments for key contracted suppliers, such as chemicals and temporary labour
- Minimising purchase order rework via optimised accounts payable invoice processing and refined invoice workflows.

This structured, people-led approach ensured the improvements were embedded into daily operations rather than being one-off fixes.

The results

Southern Water's procurement processes are now significantly enhanced, delivering clear efficiency gains for the organisation, its suppliers, and its customers.

Most notably, the number of suppliers being paid on time more than doubled, strengthening supplier relationships and enhancing Southern Water's reputation. Internal teams also benefited from reduced manual processing, improved compliance, and smoother workflows across the procure-to-pay cycle.