
Selling to the Council – A Guide for Suppliers

About this Guide

This guide has been produced to help suppliers and contractors who wish to supply the Council with goods, materials, services or works:

- It tells you about the opportunities to supply the Council.
- It outlines the rules that the Council must follow in purchasing goods and services.
- It explains how to bid for Council work.
- It advises of the other contacts in other organisations that you could consider in seeking work.

Why effective procurement is important

Effective procurement helps the Council achieve its aims and objectives by delivering high quality services, which meet the current and future needs of local people, and that are based on value for money principles.

The Council encourages competition and welcomes bids from new and established suppliers especially from small and medium enterprises. Contracts are awarded for their value for money and whilst the Council cannot discriminate in favour of locality, we are committed to supporting and encouraging local businesses to compete for contracts.

The Council deals with contracts of varying types from one-off purchases to contracts for supplies, services or works that will last for a specific period of time before coming up for renewal. We expect to spend approximately £18 million on a range of goods and services in the financial year 2011 – 2012. Obtaining best value is, therefore, an essential requirement and one that cannot be achieved without the support of our suppliers, both large and small.

Why sell to the Council ?

What are the advantages of selling to the Council ?

We:

- are fair and don't discriminate
- pay promptly
- treat you professionally
- are a statutory body, so cannot be insolvent.

What are the disadvantages of selling to the Council?

Our processes are bound by European and UK law and sometimes seem to be:

- formal and inflexible
- require considerable information
- time consuming
- biased to competition rather than established relationships.

What the Council Buys

The Council has over 2,000 suppliers. Here are some of the typical purchases that we make:

Supplies and Services

- Print and publicity materials / advertising
- Vehicles, such as minibuses, refuse collection vehicles (inc. fuel)
- Office stationery, equipment and consumables (including IT)
- Telephony
- Furniture
- Catering provisions
- Corporate and protective clothing
- Security services (such as cash collection)
- Agency staff
- Courier services
- Cleaning materials
- Disposal of confidential waste
- Insurance services
- Building maintenance and window cleaning
- Playground equipment
- Grounds maintenance
- Tree and arboreal services
- Car park equipment and car park maintenance
- CCTV and security systems

Works

Maintenance and building works to Council buildings and property.

What we don't buy

As a District authority there are a number of goods and services we don't buy; they are provided by County Council or other agencies:

- Roads and road maintenance
- Care homes and related equipment (beds, medical etc).
- Housing maintenance (the Council's housing stock was transferred to Luminus Homes (formerly Huntingdon Housing Partnership)).
- Schools and school equipment.

How we buy

Approved (Preferred Supplier) Lists

Except for very specific circumstances, we no longer hold lists of approved suppliers. The vetting and maintenance of an approved list created considerable work and cost for both the Council and prospective suppliers, but in practice gave only limited opportunity to win contracts. .

Frameworks Contracts

Where there is a suitable framework contract (see Glossary) the Council does not normally advertise its requirements. Framework contracts save time and money by simplifying the process; quotes are sought from the companies on the framework. Details of how to be included in other organisations' future framework contracts are detailed below.

How to find out about opportunities

For all other opportunities the Council advertises as follows:

- Notices (adverts) of forthcoming contracts worth more than £5k are placed on the Council's website:
<http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/business/business-opportunities/current-opportunities/>
- Forthcoming contracts worth more than £25k are placed on the Crown Commercial Services portal "Contracts Finder". Suppliers need not register to search for opportunities, however, it's recommended as the site will send notifications if relevant opportunity arises: <https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Search>
- Supplies and services contracts over £164,176 and works contracts over £4,104,394 (limits correct as of 1 Jan 16) are advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). Such contracts can be viewed at [www.euroguide.org](http://ted.europa.eu/TED/main/HomePage.do) or <http://ted.europa.eu/TED/main/HomePage.do>

The contract notice or advertisement will invite companies to submit an expression of interest for a contract. The advertisement will detail the procedure and what information is required.

Opportunities with other organisations

Several organisations have created frameworks contracts that the Council uses. The principle organisations are:

- Cambridgeshire County Council. Selling to the County Council can be found at <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/business/procurement/>.
- Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO). Opportunities to supply to councils across the region through ESPO can be viewed at: <http://www.espo.org/>
- Central government's Crown Commercial Services (CCS). This link connects to CCS 'Supplier zone' for prospective suppliers: <http://gps.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/i-am-supplier>

The choice of procurement procedure

The value of a contract determines the procedures that the Council follows, ie: how many quotes we need to obtain or whether a tender process must be used. Details of the current threshold levels in operation within the Council are as follows:

Estimated Contract Value		Action Required by the Council
Up to £5,000		Minimum of 1 quote sought
£5,001 to £25,000		Minimum of 3 quotes sought
£25,001 to £75,000		Advertised formal quote
£75,001 to £164,176	(Goods & Services)	Tender
£75,001 to £4,104,394	(Works)	
More than £164,176	(Goods & Services)	Tender via OJEU advert and rules
More than £4,104,394	(Works)	

Tendering for contracts

In response to the Expressions of Interest it receives, the Council will either invite companies to tender (a tender open to all) or send companies a Standard Selection Questionnaire (SSQ) (where a restricted tendering procedure is being followed). The purpose of a SSQ is to assess the potential bidder's suitability to supply the Council and ability to satisfy the contract before tenders are issued. Use of a restricted tender is now limited to over EU threshold competitions.

It is important that companies supply all of the requested information and respond by the due date. The general information requested provides basic details about an organisation, verifies that it can be identified as a legitimate discrete trading organisation (address of office, registration number and company group information), that it has acceptable levels of economic and financial standing and that it promotes good practices in areas of equal opportunities, environmental protection and health and safety. The areas assessed are summarised below:-

- **Financial Information**

Companies will be asked for certain financial information (audited statement of accounts) relating to each of the last three years (it may be two years in some contracts).

This information is used to assess the financial position of the company in relation to the size of the contract. Information is also required to check that a company is registered (if appropriate) for tax and complies with the Council's insurance requirements. In high risk contracts where non-performance could result in significant financial loss or where operational performance is crucial, a Parent Company Guarantee or Performance Bond may be required.

- **Experience and Technical Ability**

Information requested seeks to assess whether a company has the relevant experience and technical ability to carry out the categories of work or to provide the type and quality of service required. It will usually be necessary to provide references.

- **Health and Safety**

Depending on the nature of the goods or services or works, companies may be asked to submit their Health and Safety policy and for works or other high risk activities the Council may seek evidence of CHAS registration (see glossary) or similar H&S scheme.

- **Insurance**

Evidence of appropriate insurance will be required and the level of cover will vary according to the degree of risk.

- **Equal Opportunities**

The Council aims to ensure that organisations that provide services on behalf of the Council comply with equal opportunities legislation and promote equality of opportunity. Questions may be asked about how racial equality issues are included in an organisation's employment practices.

- **Environment**

In February 2007, Huntingdonshire District Council signed the Nottingham Declaration to show its commitment to protecting our local environment and ensuring a better quality of life for everyone – now and for future generations. In order to promote this the Council has agreed a sustainability strategy to improve its environmental performance. The Council expects it's contractors to meet similar levels of environmental care and commitment.

- **Quality Assurance**

For certain contracts such as works contracts, organisations may be required to prove that they have a suitable quality assurance system in place. This may be demonstrated by certification by an approved assessment company or by our review of the organisations quality manual.

Tender Evaluation and Contract Award

Returned tenders will be evaluated against the pre-determined criteria as specified in the tender documentation. Evaluation will focus on examining how the tender proposals will deliver the service (quality) and the cost of the service (price). The balance between quality and price will depend on the particular service area. Normally the Council will award the contract on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender. The successful tenderer will be notified in writing either by letter or electronic communication.

Post Contract Award Debriefing

Within the limits of commercial confidentiality, the Council will endeavour to offer unsuccessful tenderers feedback to find out why their bid has failed. This information can be used to help shape future bids as being unsuccessful in one contract does not mean that a company will be unsuccessful in future.

Electronic Trading

The Council has adopted an electronic tendering system provided by “Due North”. The aim is to reduce the Council's and supplier's costs associated with the procurement process and the costs of normal commercial trading. The system is shared with our partner authorities (South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council) and is provided through the LGSS (Cambridge County Council) portal. Use of the “Due North” system is free to suppliers. Suppliers are recommended to register at: <https://procontract.due-north.com/Login>

Payment Terms

The Council aims to pay undisputed invoices within 30 days of receipt and we routinely exceed 97%. All payments are made via the Bank Automated Clearing System and we expect all suppliers to provide valid bank details.

Contract Performance

The Council is continuously striving to improve its own performance and it expects its contractors to do the same. Whilst suppliers and contractors to the Council are monitored to assess their compliance with pre-defined performance criteria, ideas for innovation or improvement are welcomed. Where performance is not satisfactory, however, contract conditions will be strictly applied.

Complaints Procedure

Most complaints will be discussed and can be resolved through the routine contract monitoring arrangements. However, if any contractor or prospective supplier has a complaint about unfair treatment or discrimination that cannot be resolved through normal commercial contact with the Council, the complaint can be made in writing through the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure which is to be found on webpage:

<http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/council-democracy/have-your-say/complaints-and-feedback>

The inclusion of third party organisations mentioned in this guide does not constitute any form of recommendation by the Council. The Council is not responsible for and is in no way liable for any third party organisation's performance and users must check that any service offered is suitable and meets their needs.

Other Formats. If requested, the Authority will arrange for copies of any information to be made available in large print, Braille, audio tape and endeavour to provide it in other languages.

Glossary

Contractor H&S Accreditation Scheme (CHAS)	CHAS verifies contractor's H&S performance and may be undertaken in conjunction with Constructionline. Link: http://www.chas.co.uk/
Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO)	ESPO is a purchasing agency jointly owned by several County Councils in the Eastern region. ESPO provides catalogues and a number of call-off contracts or frameworks for a range of services and goods or equipment.
Expressions of Interest (Eoi).	Expressions of Interest. Supplier formally registering interest in a forthcoming competition.
Framework Contract	A term for either a call-off contract with single or multiple suppliers offering goods /services at agreed rates or a contract with multiple suppliers that quote in response to customer specifications.
Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU).	The Journal lists, amongst other thing, all forthcoming competitions that exceed EU thresholds. Available via the internet through TED.
Crown Commercial Services	Crown Commercial Services (CCS) is the commercial arm of the Cabinet Office and provides catalogues of goods as well a numerous frameworks for a wide range of services and goods.
Open Tender	Open Tenders. Any supplier expressing an interest will be sent the competition documentation and invited to tender.
Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ)	PQQ – now replaced by the Standard Selection Questionnaire (see below).
Restricted Tender	Restricted Tender. Any supplier expressing an interest will be sent a SQ and invitations to tender are restricted to suppliers qualified and capable. This is commonly known as “short-listing”. Use restricted to competitions above the EU threshold.
Standard Selection Questionnaire (SQ)	Gathers information on the background of potential suppliers. The Council used the information provided to access whether Suppliers are qualified and capable (ie: meet the financial soundness, H&S standards, performance record, evidence of capacity, etc).
Tenders Electronically Daily (TED).	Tenders Electronically Daily (TED). Lists all European tender opportunities. Web page: http://ted.europa.eu/