

SUPPLIER GUIDANCE ON SUBMITTING QUOTATION AND TENDERING RESPONSES

TOP TIPS

Contact: Procurement@cheshireeast.gov.uk
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1. Introduction

Trading successfully with public sector customers can make your business a real option for private-sector customers. All public-sector organisations buying in goods and services must get the best value for money. This means they must choose the bid that offers 'the optimum combination of whole-life costs and quality (or fitness for purpose) to meet users' requirement'.

It is important to realise that bids for public-sector contracts will normally not be considered *just* on the lowest price quoted.

The Public Sector is committed to helping small and medium-sized businesses. Small businesses have a lot to offer their local Council.

Small firms can offer:

- greater competition;
- lower costs;
- new ideas;
- responsiveness;
- flexibility;
- quality of service; and
- specialisation.

All of this can mean better value for money for the public sector.

2. How to find out about procurement activity for Cheshire East

Cheshire East Council has an electronic Contract and Tender Management System to manage its procurement activity, called 'The Chest'.

This electronic system makes the procurement process leaner, more efficient, more transparent and accessible to the market. The Contract and Tendering System is the preferred method of tendering for procurement opportunities.

Therefore, all potential suppliers to Cheshire East Council will need to register with 'The Chest'. 'The Chest' gives suppliers the visibility to see current opportunities available from Cheshire East Council, along with opportunities from other bodies. 'The Chest' is used by over 30 Local Authorities in the North West of England; by registering on the 'The Chest' you can have the potential to see current opportunities across the North West of England.

When registering you will be asked to specify the goods / services that you provide and the areas / Councils that you wish to provide to. If any Request for Quotes (RFQ's), prequalification questionnaires (SQQ's) or Invitation to Tenders (ITT's) are posted that match the criteria that you have entered when registering you will automatically receive an email notification advising you of the details and deadlines for the required service - you are not obliged to provide quotations or tender if you do not wish to. Full user guides for registering as well as contact details if you require any help are available on 'The Chest'.

Additional supplier information is available on 'The Chest' from the 'Suppliers Area' at the link given <https://www.the-chest.org.uk/>

3. Useful Links

i) Cheshire East Council – Procurement Web Site_
<http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/business/procurement.aspx>

ii) Cheshire East Council – Procurement Web Site – Link to ‘Doing Business with Cheshire East Council’ (on this page there is a downloadable ‘Selling to Cheshire East Council’).
http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/business/procurement/doing_business.aspx

iii) The UK Government operates systems called *Contracts Finder* and *Find a Tender Service*. This is where *central* Government tenders for £10,000 and above are published. It is the online access point to all new public sector contract opportunities, including sub-contracting opportunities above £25,000.

The site can be found at
<https://www.gov.uk/contracts-finder>

4. Please find below some general guidance and tips which may help you with your submission.

1. Download all of the documentation.

Please be careful to ensure you download and read all of the documentation e.g. the Request for quotation/Pre-Qualification Questionnaire/Invitation to tender, there will often be more than one attachment.

2. Read the instructions

Please read the instructions thoroughly prior to completion of the documentation, i.e. if there is a word limit set, then stick to it. If you are required to follow a numbering convention, make sure you follow it, only provide additional documentation if this is requested and put your answers in the correct places. Failure to follow instructions may lead to an invalid response.

3. Understand what is required

Please ensure you read and understand what is required – i.e. the full remit of the provision and satisfy yourself that you can meet all of the minimum requirements, before completing your submission.

4. If you don't understand anything – ASK!

If you don't understand anything – ask a question – you are permitted to ask for clarification and the Contracting Authority is obliged to provide it, however make sure you ask the question within the timescales stated within the procurement documents and this should be via the Chest using the ‘messaging area’ for the particular procurement project (previously known as the discussions or Q&A area), otherwise you are not guaranteed a response.

5. Follow the instructions for communication

If you need to ask a question or request clarification, always ensure you follow the instructions for methods of communication – i.e. if it states contact a p a r t i c u l a r person or use the electronic method by specific date then you should endeavour to do

that. It is not permissible to contact individuals within the Contracting Authority's Organisation unless explicitly stated. They may not have the authority to advise you and may not give you the correct information. Please note that, clarifications/responses (other than those of a commercially sensitive nature) all have to be circulated to all other tenderers.

6. Allow plenty of time for completion

Please always ensure you allow plenty of time for completion of your submission – do not leave it until the last minute to start compiling your response and/or to upload your response to 'the chest'. If your submission is 1 minute late, it cannot be accepted – it can take a long time and you may need time to seek further clarification – note the deadlines for this.

7. Your submission should be as concise as possible.

The Contracting Authority will have many submissions to evaluate and they won't have huge amounts of time to review lengthy responses. Therefore, try to stick to the word limits/page lengths set and do not include unnecessary attachments unless specifically asked for.

8. Your response should follow a logical format

Please ensure your response follows a logical format, is easy to read, and does not require the evaluator to search through reams of documentation to find an answer to a question asked. I.e. ensure it is in number order, appendices are labelled and follow in sequence, and are referred to within the response. Please don't include/ refer the evaluator to generic marketing information and unnecessary attachments unless specifically asked - answer the question where asked.

9. Use Templates Provided

Where forms/templates are provided – Please use them! Failure to do so may invalidate your submission.

Do not attempt to alter forms/templates to suit your requirements – they may have been created in such a format to enable efficient evaluation of responses. Any alterations to forms/templates provided may also invalidate your response.

10. Answer all of the questions asked

Failure to do so may invalidate your response. Note the evaluation criteria and weighting of each of the questions, this will give you an indication of the importance of the specific topic area to the award decision.

11. Answer the entire question

If the question asks for a number of points in respect of a response, please make sure you address each point – failure to do so may lead to poor marks or may even invalidate your response.

12. If unable to answer a question or unable to meet a requirement, - say so, and Why

If you are unable to answer a question or unable to meet a specific requirement, then you should clearly state that within your response, and explain why you are unable to meet, and what alternative solution you propose to meet the requirement.

13. What would lead to automatic exclusion from the process?

Where a question is indicated as a PASS/FAIL within the evaluation criteria – failure to

meet the minimum requirements specified will mean that your response will be rejected. For example, if the organisation states that it is a requirement to agree to the Council's Terms and Conditions of Contract then this means that this is non-negotiable and any requests to negotiate on this will lead to a rejection of your submission.

We will require suppliers to be compliant with all relevant legislation. Examples of the policies likely to be asked for are as follows: • Health and Safety policies; • Equal Opportunity policies; • Sustainability Policies; Data Protection Policies etc.

14. Do not make assumptions- they may be WRONG!

Again, if you have any queries –ask! – Raise a query via the communication method i.e. the 'Chest' (using the project 'messaging area') and within the timescales advised.

15. Do not assume the Contracting Authority “knows” your Organisation

Even if your organisation has worked with the Council before, please do not assume the Council knows your Organisation. Approach your submission as if you have never provided any goods/services to the Council before. Treat your submission as if the Contracting Authority or Council knows nothing about your Organisation, and hence provide full details in your response to the questions asked. Contracting Authority's are only permitted to take into consideration information provided within your response. Prior knowledge / experience / assumptions etc. cannot be taken into consideration. This ensures a fair, open and transparent process is conducted.

16. Quality assure your submission.

Presentation is important. Poor quality submissions give a bad impression of the quality of the goods/services your Organisation provides, and this may be reflected in the scoring of your submission.

17. Submit your response in plenty of time of the closing date and time

Do not leave it until the last minute to submit your response - Make sure you submit your response in sufficient time to ensure receipt before the closing date for submissions. - The time and date for completion of submissions is FIXED. Late responses may not be considered.

18. ICT Security and Data Protection

The security of Data and ICT is of utmost importance to the Council in order to safeguard its residents, service users and the supply chain.

For projects being procured that include the transfer of data between the Council and supplier and/or other bodies and/or a procurement that includes an element of ICT e.g. use of a system/software, the Council will require an ICT or Data Security Questionnaire to be completed. Tenderers will be made aware if this is a requirement within the tender documentation.

Tenderers can ask clarification questions as advised above where they are unsure of any questions and the Council will advise accordingly, again this should be via the appropriate method (usually 'The Chest' using the project 'messaging area').

To help provide some context and information on this subject please visit the various links below:

<https://www.ukauthority.com/articles/ncsp-think-cyber-think-resilience-cyber-pathfinders-exercises/>
[Small Business Guide: Cyber Security - NCSC.GOV.UK](#)
[Advice for small organisations | ICO](#)

Training Sessions to help and encourage local and small - medium enterprises to tender for business and contracts within Cheshire East

Cheshire East Council holds periodic free workshops to help business people learn how to win public sector contracts.

The procurement training events are targeted at local businesses in Cheshire East.

The workshops show small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) from Cheshire East how public sector procurement works, the different frameworks in public sector contracts, how to identify the best opportunities and how to write a winning bid. The workshop is suitable for businesses new to the tendering process or looking to improve how they tender.

The one-day workshops aim to cover the whole process from start to finish, focusing on three key areas:

- Find – Looking for tendering opportunities;
- Bid – Practical bid management skills; and
- Win – Ways to ensure the bid submission is a winning one.

The interactive session will help SMEs to:

- Understand public sector procurement processes;
- Represent their financial position;
- Identify their strengths, weaknesses and selling points;
- Utilise techniques that make the bid process efficient and effective;
- Quickly build up a knowledge base of procurement processes; and
- ‘Punch above your weight’ when participating in procurement processes.

If you wish to express an interest in attending one of the workshops mentioned above, please email: ProcurementEast@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Further information is available via the Cheshire East Council website or for current procurement opportunities please refer to ‘The Chest’: <https://www.the-chest.org.uk/> ‘Current Opportunities’ section.

GOOD LUCK and thank you for the interest shown in supplying good/works/services to Cheshire East Council.

PROCUREMENT TERMS – GLOSSARY

A glossary of common procurement terms is provided below to help you with your submission.

Acronym	What does it stand for?	What is it?
Award Notice	Usually this is the Contracts Finder (CF) or Find a Tender Service (FTS) Award notice	This is the notice which has to be published to notify the market of a contract award, for processes started from 01/01/2021 Contracting Authorities need to place notices on Contracts Finder or Find a Tender, notices were previously placed in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) & CF prior to 01/01/21
Debriefing	Debriefing/Feedback	If you are unsuccessful at either a Selection Questionnaire stage and/or Request for Quotation stage and/or Invitation to Tender stage, you are able to request a debriefing which will contain constructive feedback on your submission.
E-Auction	An auction/further competition to get better prices	e-Auctions are being used by councils to secure better contract terms and prices for the goods and services they buy. An e-auction allows councils to set up a scheduled event where suppliers can bid against each other to win the council's business. Understandably, this can give councils significant savings on price when compared to previous contracts, but the process of running an e-auction can be complicated and councils using e-auction technology need to be sure that the e-auction process has been backed up with a well run procurement process. There may well be training provided by the council and/or e-auction provided given.
EOI	Expression of Interest (EOI)	Expressions of interest can be called for as a result of an advert being placed for a procurement project. EOI's can be asked for to aid the Council in determining the requirements/market interest in a particular opportunity.
Framework	An overarching agreement where local authorities can conduct mini tenders e.g. ('call-off' requirements)	An agreement between one or more contracting authorities and one or more suppliers which establishes the main terms for the period of the contract. A framework may cover one of many councils and usually several suppliers and the terms specified may include price & if appropriate, quantity. In addition to the framework agreement there should also be a call-off agreement, which will include more specific terms or requirements.

ITT	Invitation to Tender	If a supplier is invited to tender, they have either been successful at selection stage and have been invited to the next stage and/or there is no selection stage and all potential bidders can bid for the specific tender opportunity. Documents may also be referred to as ITT
ITQ	Invitation to Quote	This is similar to Request for Quotation (RFQ) and this term will tend to be used when calling off from a public sector framework.
KPI's	Key Performance Indicators	These are key indicators which need monitoring and reviewing throughout the life of the contract.
Negotiated Procedure	This procedure is exceptional, justifiable in specified circumstances, under which the contracting authority selects a defined number, usually at least 3 participants on similar lines to a restricted procedure, and negotiates some of the terms of the contract with them.	
OJEU	Official Journal of the European Union	Prior to Brexit (01/01/2021) this is where local authorities <i>used</i> to place advert & award notices for above threshold contracts i.e. contracts with a value above the EU threshold.
Open Procedure	When using the Open procedure all interested parties can tender for a contract. As in other procedures the contracting authority may lay down minimum standards of suitability but it must send out or make available the contract documents to anyone who asks for them (or expresses an interest).	
PTC	Pre/post-tender clarification	Suppliers and/or the council can ask questions prior/post submission, known as the pre or post tender clarifications.
PTN	Post-tender negotiations	In below threshold submissions the council can, in limited circumstances negotiate with bidders. This is known as post tender negotiations.
Restricted Procedure	A procurement procedure	This is one of the possible procurement procedures, it is where a Standard Selection Questionnaire (SQ) is required to be completed by bidders to assess their financial, technical and professional capacity and capability. Note the SQ is often used in open ITTs too
RFQ	Request for Quotation	An invitation or request for quotations is a process used to enable bids to be submitted to (& evaluated by) the Council for goods or services that have an expected value of below the threshold and where an SQ may not be required.
SQQ	Standard Supplier Questionnaire	An SQQ sometimes called SQ or the Selection Questionnaire is the first stage of a restricted tender process, responses to an SQ enable the Council to assess the technical ability, competence and financial standing of the bidders for the specific contract they are applying for. If successful at SQ, the bidder will be invited to tender or will progress to the award stage.

The Chest	E-Portal used to run electronic tender processes	The Chest is the e-tendering system used by the North West public sector bodies, it brings together buyers and suppliers making it easier for businesses to find out about new opportunities and to grow and develop for the benefit of the local economy. This is a fully auditable system which allows the Council to conduct fair and transparent procurement processes.
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