

SELLING TO HERTSMERE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Do you operate a business and would like to sell your services or products to the Council?

The Council spends around £14m a year on buying in goods, works and services. This guide explains how your business can submit bids to the Council, who to contact and what is required from you when you submit your application.

What types of goods, works and services do the Council purchase?

The Council purchases a very wide range of products and services. The main areas are grounds maintenance, property maintenance, construction, and, in addition, we employ around 300 people so we have general office purchases such as furniture, stationery, printing etc.

The Council purchases services such as:

- Advertising
- Agency staff (including temporary staff)
- Building cleaning
- Building maintenance
- Confidential waste
- Construction works
- Consultancy (inc. management, financial, IT)
- Grass cutting
- Grounds Maintenance
- Mechanical & electrical installations
- Insurance services
- Leisure & Community Services
- Maintenance and refurbishments to Council establishments
- Personnel services
- Professional services
- Security services
- Telecommunications
- Vehicle maintenance
- Window cleaning

The Council also purchases a variety of goods such as:

- water
- Cleaning materials
- Computer equipment and consumables
- Electric lamps and bulbs
- Fuel supplies, gas, electric and oil
- Office furniture
- Protective clothing and footwear
- Signage
- Stationery and office equipment
- Telephones (fixed and mobiles)
- Vehicles

Our primary objective is to secure services that are affordable, fit for purpose, meet the needs of local people and service users and provide best value. In so doing we take into account important issues such as equalities, carbon reduction, modern slavery, sustainability.

What are the Council's purchasing arrangements?

Contracts awarded by the Council range from just a few pounds to over a million, and our purchasing procedures are fully detailed within the Council's formal Contract Procedure Rules. Understandably, our purchasing arrangements vary according to the size of the contract concerned as follows:-

- **Minor Contracts (less than £75,000)**
Our internal regulations require officers to obtain at least three quotations before issuing a purchase order and the contract is awarded often, but not always, on the basis of lowest price.
- **Major Contracts (£75,000 and above)**
For major contracts our regulations require formal competitive tenders to be sought. For some major contracts (above £185,000), however, we are required by procurement laws to seek at least five tenders. Major contracts are awarded after taking into account a range of quality evaluation criteria, as well as price, in order to identify the best, which is then called the 'most economically advantageous tender'.

The prime responsibility for the procurement of common goods and services rests with the Procurement Department. More specialist procurements are generally handled by individual directorates but with support from the Procurement Department.

To make our purchasing procedures as efficient as possible, by reducing the number of tendering exercises required each year, we have a number of framework agreements in place. Such agreements provide for the supply of specific products or services over a certain period of time (e.g. three or four years) and are awarded following competitive tendering processes.

We also make use of framework agreements let by other public sector organisations where that gives us best value.

How do you find out about current work opportunities?

Whenever tenders are to be invited for a specific contract or framework agreement, we place advertisements on www.supplyhertfordshire.uk and Contracts Finder <https://www.gov.uk/contracts-finder>

Whenever the values of the contracts are expected to exceed the financial thresholds defined by law (i.e. approximately £185,000 for goods and certain services; and approximately £4.1m for works) we also advertise in the Find a Tender service www.find-tender.service.gov.uk when required to do so.

A schedule of current framework agreements, and major recurring contracts, together with their respective expiry dates can be found on the Council's website www.hertsmere.gov.uk/business/Tenders--contracts Tendering processes for these contracts typically commence around 12 months before the current contracts are due to expire. If you are interested in being considered for any of these contracts you could contact the procurement team at the appropriate time, or wait until you see the respective advertisement.

Full details of all contracts for which tenders are currently being advertised by the Council, see www.supplyhertfordshire.uk

What information and details will we want from you?

You will understand that we need to be confident that your business will be able to deliver what we require and that you will be able to achieve our standards, before we award you any contracts. We therefore need to be satisfied that your business is technically capable, financially stable, and hold any relevant qualifications required by law.

We have kept the amount of form filling to a minimum and for minor contracts you may find that the submission of a quotation, perhaps together with a copy of your company prospectus will be all that is needed. For major contracts, however, you may be required to complete a Selection Questionnaire (SQ) this asks for details about your business. A Selection Panel will assess your completed SQ before your business is accepted for being placed on a tender list.

On other occasions the SQ questionnaire forms part of the main invitation to tender and is assessed at the same time.

We generally apply three tests to firms who are looking to do business with us:

- Legal
 - We will check the legal status of your firm
 - You will need to be prepared to accept our conditions of contract.
 - You must have no convictions for serious environmental offences, fraud, corruption or other major breaches of the Companies Acts.
 - You will be asked to have company policy statements covering health and safety, environmental and equal opportunity aspects of your business that must meet legislative requirements.

- Financial

- You may need to pass a financial check that is usually based on your last three years of audited accounts.
- You will have to have public liability insurance of at least £5M. Employer's liability insurance and professional indemnity insurance may also be required.
- Technical
 - You will be asked to provide details of similar current and past contracts awarded to you by other organisations. This will include the contact details of at least two referees who we can approach to vouch for your work.
 - We will need to be provided with evidence of any quality accreditation certificates held by your company that are appropriate to the work.

If you are accepted and placed on a tender list, you will be given access to tender invitation documents that will include a specification of the goods, works or services that are required. The documents will contain instructions on how to price your submission and will include details of when it is due to be submitted.

We will allow you sufficient time to complete your bid and will ensure your submission is treated as confidential and that commercial details are not disclosed to others.

What are we doing to help local and small businesses?

Local Government is big business, but not all of our contracts are with big companies with multi million pound turnovers. In fact, approximately 90% of our suppliers deliver goods and services totalling less than £75,000 in a year.

Therefore, there is tremendous scope for small firms to win work from the Council and it is our policy to support local businesses and Small and Medium Enterprises as much as we can within the law. Local suppliers are encouraged to tender for our business wherever possible, either directly or indirectly as subcontractors to larger companies. For contracts under £20,000 officers are expected to invite only local suppliers to quote wherever possible.

However, as a public body spending public money, we must ensure that we receive value for money from our purchases and that we are able to demonstrate this to our external inspectors. Therefore, our primary concern is that our tender assessment processes are fair to everybody and that there is no question of us favouring local or small firms.

There are a number of areas within our purchasing processes that are of help to all firms that submit tenders and win work from us. These include:

- Keeping the costs incurred by potential tenderers in mind when tender procedures for specific contracts are devised (such as keeping the level of paper work to a minimum);
- Offering constructive debriefing to all those who compete for contracts in order to help them to do better in the future;
- Ensuring that there is commercial flexibility within the rules and regulations that we work to;
- A 30-day payment policy, with suppliers being paid directly into their bank accounts.

Helpful tips for bidding

If you have been invited to tender or quote please bear in mind the following:

- Download the documents as soon as possible; there may be a bidders day or site visit early in the process. Remember to raise queries before any deadlines. Do not leave it too late.
- Read the instructions carefully and give yourself plenty of time to prepare your response
- Check with your legal advisor that they are happy with the council's terms and conditions of contract before you submit a tender.
- Don't exceed any page limits but if the limit is 2 A4 pages it's unlikely a one sentence answer will provide enough information for high marks.
- Always answer all questions in full even if you have dealt with the council before, the evaluation panel will only be able to consider information that is written in your response.
- Do not submit marketing information that is not relevant to a question in the tender or as an alternative to providing a full explanation.
- Look at the scoring criteria, you want the top marks so what do you need to include to achieve that?
- Be aware of phrases such as "clear evidence" "significant added value"
- Complete (and sign where necessary) all documentation in full.
- Proof read your tender submission.
- Ensure that you submit all attachments and supporting information requested in order to ensure that your bid is fully evaluated.
- Submit your bid on time and double check that you have uploaded the correct documents. Please remember that late tenders cannot be submitted.
- Be ready to provide further clarification on your tender submission and, if there is one, be prepared for your interview/presentation to the evaluation panel.

Further Information

Information on the procurement processes followed by the Council, or forthcoming tender opportunities can be obtained from the procurement department:

Telephone – 020 8207 2277

procurement@hertsmere.gov.uk