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PROCUREMENT STRATEGY January 2012

Introduction

The aim of this strategy is to set out a high level framework for the procurement of goods, works and services within the Council. The strategy plays a key role in setting out the Council's overall approach to procurement and supports the Financial Strategy and other key strategies of the Council. This overall approach embraces the following high level principles:

- The Council aims to achieve affordable excellence in procurement to deliver its Corporate Priorities and reflects efficiency, effectiveness, ethical compliance and sustainability. This will be based on developing an appropriate and robust supplier base to include a mix of local, national, governmental and framework based procurement.
- The Council has a responsibility to ensure that it complies with the legal obligations surrounding procurement and will take advantage of new opportunities in areas such as collaboration, e-procurement and learning from its own experience.
- The Council is committed to ensuring that all suppliers have equal opportunities to support the Council in delivering its priorities and objectives through increased transparency whilst minimising barriers and bureaucracy.

Before undertaking any procurement, Departments should challenge themselves by asking:

- Are the works, goods or services required – can a need be demonstrated?
- Are there any reasonable alternatives e.g. sharing or utilising spare capacity / inventories etc elsewhere within the Council?
- Is there an internal solution / provider?

Procurement in Practice – Operating Procedures

The Council's spend can be analysed into the following two categories which both fall within this strategy:

- Spend on Capital Projects or one-off items or initiatives that are financed by a range of options such as capital receipts, borrowing, revenue and reserves.
- Spend on on-going operational items that are funded from revenue.

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All procurements of goods, works or services must be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Procurement Rules as set out in the Constitution along with any associated internal guidance as well as all applicable UK and EU legislation and external requirements.

This strategy is not a step-by-step manual for procurement. There is a balance to be made between procedures and process and conversely allowing a flexible response to a changing market place. The responsibility and accountability for good quality procurement rests with departments. It is important that the end result demonstrates good procurement practice that maximises savings and limits waste.

- **Department Responsibility** - Procurement remains essentially a decentralised activity within the Council where departments through the Head of Department retain the responsibility and accountability for their own procurement of goods, works and services. However processes and access to central / corporate expertise should be undertaken as set out below.
- **Support to Departments** - In order to provide a co-ordinated corporate approach and to support individual departments, Resource Management maintains a range of knowledge and skills along with specific procurement support from within the Finance and Procurement Service. Resource Management aims to coordinate procurement across the Council and provide advice and assistance on all aspects of procurement such as processes, availability of collaborative contracts and suppliers or maximising the benefits of market intelligence.
- **Tender Evaluation Panel (TEP)**
The tender evaluation panel of officers provides assistance, advice, support and monitoring of the procurement carried out by departments in accordance with the Procurement Procedure Rules that are set out in the Constitution.

Transparency, Fairness and Inclusion

The procurement process must be transparent and fully documented as applicable and be capable of demonstrating a balance between economical advantage quality, appropriateness and timescales in accordance with the following principles:

- Potential suppliers should know in advance what rules are applicable to each stage of the procurement process.
- All decisions need to be open and justifiable on clear and relevant criteria with an audit trail of how procurement decisions have been reached.

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- Decisions to reject or refuse quotes, tenders etc throughout the selection process should be communicated to the individuals or organisations concerned where appropriate.
- Quotes and tenders should encourage suppliers and contractors to submit innovative options or alternatives or actions to improve performance or reduce costs over time.
- Promote and demonstrate fair competition and a healthy market and encourage all potential providers both locally, regionally and nationally in providing services to the Council.

In addition to the above the Council is specifically committed to supporting and encouraging local firms in competing for the works, goods and service required by the Council by:

- Adequately publicising contract opportunities on its website or via other available means in advance of procurement process commencement to give opportunity for a wide awareness of bidders.
- Give guidance on its procurement processes as required.
- Keep tender documentation and processes as simple and straightforward as possible.
- Identify and remove any barriers to local providers doing business with the Council.
- Set realistic procurement timescales.
- Encourage and support suppliers in adopting relevant electronic procurement processes.

Our Partners in Procurement

The Council seeks to work with a number of partners to maximise any procurement opportunities and provide best practice. This includes:

- Procurement Agency for Essex
- Other public bodies
- Our neighbours both locally and regionally
- Central Government and its associated bodies / agencies
- All interested groups involved in procurement initiatives such as collaborative based approaches
- Improvement East
- Voluntary and community groups
- Central buying contracts, consortia or framework agreements
- Shared Services or marketplaces

Procurement Quality and Standards

In the purchasing of goods the specific British or European Standard can normally be applied. However the Council's strategy is to ensure that consistent and best procurement practices are followed. The standards of operation, use and performance are defined from the outset and that monitoring and evaluation

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take account of these key issues. The selection and monitoring process must identify / evaluate the quality and standard of the procured goods, works or services. This starts from the pre-qualification process through to on-going monitoring arrangements over the life of the contract and includes all aspects of contract management.

This should also be extended to the use of sub-contractors by any contractor or supplier.

E-Procurement

An electronic ordering system is maintained by the Council that must be used for the ordering of all goods, works or service unless otherwise specified in procedure rules.

Further development of maximising opportunities from electronic procurement methods will be considered in future including e-invoicing and e-tendering in consultation with other users including other authorities that successfully operate these approaches.

Training

The capacity of the Council to promote and sustain sound procurement skills across all of the departments is key to successful procurement. Appropriate training in marketplace based procurement, contract preparation and general procurement management skills should be undertaken as appropriate and training needs should be identified by departments through the Council's performance management and training and development processes.

Risk Management

Successful procurement needs to consider the intended process and procedure and the risks involved. Aspects to consider are complexity, duration, sustainability, legislation and price. In procurement terms this means making appropriate and timely decisions, always bearing in mind public responsibility and value for money and insurance implications.

Sustainable Procurement (Environmental Policy)

Procurement needs to take into account the environmental costs involved and ensure, so far as is reasonable, that these important considerations are specifically considered.

When procuring goods, works and services, the procuring department should take into account the following key aims:-

- the conservation of all resources especially those that are scarce or non renewable
- reducing waste through reuse, recycling, refurbishment and efficient on-site activities

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- monitoring and reducing harmful discharges and emissions to air, land and water, including noise and light pollution
- complying with Government legislation, guidance as well as European Union and trading rules to prevent the use of banned practices and reduce or prevent the use of harmful substances or non sustainable sources
- working with contractors and partners to improve environmental performance and ensure contractual compliance to statutory regulation, codes of practice and relevant guidance whilst providing value for money.

Ethical Purchasing

When procuring goods, works, and services the procuring service should where reasonably practical ensure that they are being procured from companies and organisations where

- employment has been freely chosen
- there is no exploitation of children
- living wages are paid
- freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are respected
- working conditions are safe and hygienic
- working hours are not excessive
- no discrimination is practised
- regular employment is provided
- no harsh or inhumane treatment is allowed

Equality and Diversity in Procurement

It is a statutory responsibility of all Local Authorities to eliminate discrimination in carrying out their various functions. The main aim in procurement should be to promote compliance by service providers, contractors and partnership organisations with their obligations for non-discrimination and to address equality and diversity issues.

In order to determine whether equality is a core requirement in the procurement being considered the following should be considered:

Is the procurement related to a function or policy that is relevant to the duty to promote equality and does the procurement affect the ability to meet this duty?

If the answer is yes then there will be a need to include requirements within the procurement terms in order to meet equality requirements.

An Equality Impact Assessment must be undertaken where functions and policies that form part of the procurement process have the potential to impact on the Council's duties and responsibilities.

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Business Continuity

Business continuity is the process of preparing for and responding to a disaster event or situation that could have a serious impact on the delivery of the Council's services. All procurement should consider and include provision for business continuity wherever appropriate.

National Context / Procurement Strategies for Local Government

National guidance and a Procurement Strategy for Local Government have been published in the past. The Council's approach to procurement will continue to take account of any existing and future guidance with improvement actions implemented as appropriate and monitored within the Council's performance management processes.

Performance Management

Successful Procurement does not end with the award of contract or purchase of goods or services. Good procurement should cover the whole life of the contract or service provision. Although financial performance will be addressed via the Financial Strategy and Corporate Budget Monitoring Processes a review of the success of procurement should be undertaken during its life as well as at the end where appropriate, which should also include a non financial analysis. This will support continuous improvement and also inform future procurement decisions.