

HOW TO DO BUSINESS WITH THE COUNCIL

1. Introduction

West Somerset Council spends approximately £2m each year on a wide range of goods and services. Businesses often contact the Council with a view to supplying products or carrying out work. In many cases the Council is unable to respond positively, either because it cannot favour specific suppliers or because there is no current requirement for the purchase.

The aim of this guide is to help potential suppliers understand the Council's approach to purchasing, how this is organised and what our likely buying requirements are.

2. The Council's approach to purchasing

In common with other local authorities, the Council will:

- ensure that best value for money is achieved in all purchasing activity,
- encourage a diverse and competitive supply market, including small firms, social enterprises, ethnic minority businesses, voluntary and community sector suppliers,
- encourage fair & open competition,
- comply with all applicable statutory requirements and best practice including Council policies and procedures,
- orates fair, impartial and transparent selection and contract award processes,
- ensure that the procurement method used is cost effective and in-line with the level of expenditure involved,
- require contractors to comply with applicable requirements, policies and procedures, and
- where appropriate, seek to establish partnership relationships with suppliers.

3. How the Council is organised

Some of the services that were previously provided directly by Council employees are now provided by partners or contractors. This includes provision of refuse collection, street cleaning and dog wardens.. The major contracts often last for several years and are listed below. The Council is always interested in identifying and engaging with likely contractors, however once a contract is let, the supply of goods and services associated with the day-to-day operation of the service becomes the responsibility of the successful contractor/supplier.

The Council does not have a centralised ordering or contracts section; each service has budget holders who are authorised to buy from suppliers.

4. What the Council buys

The list below shows the main type of supplies and services that the Council is involved in purchasing and the relevant council department responsible for the procurement.

<u>Supplies</u>	<u>Department</u>
Car parking equipment	Parking Services
Dog kennelling services	Environmental Health
Grass cutting	Open Spaces
Insurance services	Finance
Mobile phone services	Information Services
Pest control services	Environmental Health
Printing equipment	Design and Print
Public toilet cleaning	Public Conveniences
Utilities- Gas & Electric	Estates
Legal advice	Legal Services
HR Consultancy	Human Resources
Various computer systems	Various departments

5. How the Council buys

The way in which the Council places orders and lets contracts is laid down in its contract procedure rules

<http://www.westsomersetonline.gov.uk/getattachment/Council---Democracy/Council-Meetings/Full-Council/Full-Council---22-July-2009/Item-12-Appendix-B.pdf.aspx>

More formal procedures are necessary the higher the value of the purchase. For example, only verbal estimates are required for one-off purchases, whereas long-term contractual arrangements will involve formal competitive tendering and detailed appraisals necessary to protect the interests of both the Council and the contractor.

Current thresholds and Council requirements are:

Estimated value of purchase/contract	
Up to £10,000	Verbal offers to be confirmed in writing*
Over £10,000 but less than £50,000	Minimum of three written quotations
Over £50,000	Written tenders required
Over £EU Threshold	European Union requirements apply

The Council is required to be fair, open and honest about how it spends public money and it cannot favour certain suppliers. The Council does not maintain lists of approved suppliers and does not retain unsolicited supplier/contractor information.

When inviting tenders, the Council advertises in local newspapers, relevant trade journals and on its website and where appropriate, in the official Journal of the European Union.

The Council prefers to pay suppliers by electronic means. We aim to pay suppliers within 30 days of receipt of the invoice.

6. Integrating Equality & Diversity into ProcurementThe Council considers equality and diversity should be an integral part of our day-to-day activities. We recognise the importance of fair treatment and believe that everyone should have access to services and also the opportunity to fully participate in all aspects of community life.

Part of our commitment to equality & diversity is encouraging and, where possible, requiring companies and other organisations, which bid for Council services to practise equalities in employment and service delivery. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that public money is spent in a way that ensures Best Value and does not lead to unfair discrimination and social exclusion.

The promotion of equalities in the procurement process will help the Council to;

- obtain the best value for the Council and improve the quality of local authority services,
- ensure that public money is not spent on practices which lead to unfair discrimination,
- create a diverse and integrated workforce,
- deliver more responsive and flexible services in combating social exclusion and building strong and cohesive communities, and
- encourage other organisations to practice the Council's policies on equality.

7. Developing the Supply Market

The council is committed to promoting a strong local economy and, where practicable and consistent with European legislation and value for money, the council will take opportunities to support local small and medium-sized enterprises through its procurement decisions. Small businesses make an important contribution to the delivery of public services and the Council recognises the role these businesses play in the national and local economy. By providing information and advice on the council's website the council will assist businesses (and SMEs in particular), voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises and ethnic minority businesses to build their capacity to win and retain public contracts.

8. Integrating Climate Change Awareness into Procurement

The council is committed to the continual improvement of its environmental performance and will encourage the assessment of the social, economic and environmental impact of the goods, works and services it purchases by considering these factors in the procurement decision making process.

The council will encourage its suppliers and contractors to minimise negative environmental and social impacts by ensuring that environmental issues form part of the decision-making process in procurement, for example considering the impact of a purchase on air quality and carbon footprint.

The council will require its suppliers, contractors and partners to comply with relevant environmental statutory requirements, including all relevant environmental and sustainable procurement legislation.

9. Further Information

For more information, please refer to the Council's Corporate Procurement Strategy, adopted 24th February 2010

<http://www.westsomersetonline.gov.uk/Council---Democracy/Council-Meetings/Full-Council/Full-Council---24-February-2010>