

# WARRINGTON Borough Council



## **Selling to the Council: A Guide for Suppliers**

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## About Warrington

1. Warrington is a thriving town in the North West of England. It covers an area of about 70 square miles, with a mix of inner urban wards and rural wards. It was designated a New Town in 1968 and became an independent Unitary Authority in 1998. Warrington has a diverse and multi-cultural population and the current population figure (at 2014) is approximately 205,000.
2. The Council works closely with its strategic partners to deliver the best possible services to citizens and businesses. It employs approximately 6750 staff.

## About this Guide

3. This guide is produced to help suppliers who want to bid for council works, goods or services. Further information is on our council website at:

[http://www.warrington.gov.uk/info/200208/tenders\\_and\\_contracts/246/doing\\_business\\_with\\_the\\_council](http://www.warrington.gov.uk/info/200208/tenders_and_contracts/246/doing_business_with_the_council)

## Why read this?

4. These pages and the web links help you to understand how we buy. They could prove the difference between winning and not winning our business.
5. Procurement is a key activity of the Council. We spend around £150m per year on supplies, works and services. Spending by the Council is paid for with public money and it is right that there are rules in place to ensure that our buying practices:
  - ✓ are transparent, auditable and reasonable
  - ✓ comply with all relevant EU and UK law
  - ✓ support our strategic priorities
  - ✓ ensure Best Value
  - ✓ promote the development of a partnering approach,
  - ✓ ensure market stimulation and sustainability
  - ✓ encourage local businesses, SMEs and the Third Sector to engage with us and compete for our business

## The Rules

6. Our buying rules are dictated by:
  - 6.1. European Procurement Directives
  - 6.2. UK legislation – The Public Contracts Regulations
  - 6.3. The Financial and Contract Procedure Rules of the Council
7. All buying processes and decisions are directed by our [Procurement Strategy](#). The strategy recognises that procurement is important, and how it helps to deliver our long term shared ambitions and improve service performance and value for money.

8. We must ensure that all procurement is conducted in a manner that achieves best value while working within the Regulations. Following these laws and rules binds us (and you) to act in the way we do.

9. All tenders issued by us are subject to the rules and regulations laid down above. The anticipated value of the contract dictates our procurement process, as follows:

<b>Total Value of Contract</b>	<b>Competitive Process</b>	<b>Advertised</b>
Up to £1,000	Quotations advisable	No
£1,001 - £5,000	Where possible, get 3 written quotations	No
£5,001 - £50,000	Request for Quotation or Invitation to Tender to at least 3 suppliers	Yes (Via The Chest)
£50,000 – EU Thresholds	Invitation to Tender to at least 3 suppliers	Yes (Via The Chest)
Above EU Threshold	Invitation to Tender (EU-wide)	Yes (Via The Chest)

10. You should note that the value of any contract is calculated at the entire contract duration (whole life), and not an annual value. Therefore a 4 year contract @ £50,000 per year has a whole life value of £200,000, and is subject to EU regulations (for goods and services)

### **What do we buy?**

11. Pretty much everything! Listed below are examples of what we typically buy each year:

Building Maintenance	Catering equipment and provisions
Cleaning Materials	Corporate and Protective Clothing
Courier and Mailing Services	Electricity, Water and Gas
Fuel Oils	Furniture
Grounds Maintenance	Highways Materials Equipment
Insurance Services	IT Hardware and Software
Leisure Equipment	Occupational Health Services
Office Stationery and Equipment Paper	Print Services
Social Care	Street Lighting
Telecommunications	Transport Services
Vehicle and Plant	Waste Management & Recycling

## Financial Matters

12. We have a legal requirement to comply with the EU Procurement Directives, which govern the way in which public sector procurement is conducted for contracts over specified financial thresholds.

13. The threshold values we are legally obliged to observe (at September 2014) are:

- |       |             |                           |
|-------|-------------|---------------------------|
| 13.1. | £ 172,514   | for Supplies and Services |
| 13.2. | £ 4,322,012 | for Works                 |

14. Where the expected value of the contract exceeds these thresholds, we must follow these basic EU requirements:

- 14.1. Publish a Tender Notice in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) to give all EU suppliers an equal opportunity to tender;
- 14.2. Invite tenders, taking account of the minimum timescales imposed to ensure that reasonable time is given to respond and prepare submissions;
- 14.3. Select a suitable contractor using the marking criteria published in the Tender Notice;
- 14.4. Place a Contract Award Notice in OJEU.

## The Chest

([www.the-chest.org.uk/cms/CMS.nsf/vHomePage/fSection?OpenDocument](http://www.the-chest.org.uk/cms/CMS.nsf/vHomePage/fSection?OpenDocument))

15. All the above may appear complicated and a little confusing. Luckily, there is a very easy solution – you should register as a supplier on The Chest and use it as your first port of call for our contract opportunities. Further details of The Chest are contained at [Annex A](#) to this document.

## Advertising

16. The Council advertises all its contract opportunities over £5,000 on The Chest, and in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) for all contracts over EU Thresholds. Additionally, contracts with a value of over £25,000 will (in 2015) be placed on [Contracts Finder](#).

17. We may also advertise in specialist publications, depending on the value and nature of the contracts. However, such adverts will only signpost you to The Chest, so you will still need to be registered to view opportunities.

## Approved Suppliers

18. The council does not operate an Approved Supplier List, with the exception of some limited services that mainly relate to construction and maintenance requirements.

## Equality

19. We have a duty to provide services that demonstrate Best Value, whilst ensuring that our policies support local diversity and do not lead to unfair discrimination or social exclusion.

20. Our spending contributes to local sustainability and regeneration, and you have a right to expect the money we spend will promote and protect equalities in employment.

21. Under UK law, we must consider equal opportunities in our contracts and we always encourage suppliers to adopt similar policies and practices in their businesses. We must ensure that our suppliers abide by the law and are working to best practice in this area. Where appropriate, Equality forms part of the marking criteria for bid submissions.

22. We will comply with all current Acts that consider equality issues, and we expect suppliers to do the same.

## Bidding for work

23. Spending public money demands that we carry out checks of your business to assess your suitability, experience and expertise as a potential supplier.

24. Our buying processes and documentation may initially appear daunting and detailed. However, we make every effort to encourage suppliers to bid, and strive to ask for details that are only appropriate to the particular contract opportunity. The process for each opportunity will be detailed in the bid documentation, issued on The Chest.

25. When you are bidding for council work (and dependant on the criticality/value of the opportunity), we may ask you to provide additional information as part of your tender submission or as part of what is called a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ). This information may include such topics as:

- General details about your Company
- Financial information
- Your Equal Opportunities policy
- Health and safety
- Insurance certification, including public and employers' liability
- Contracts works insurance and/or professional liability insurance

- Environmental Issues
- Quality assurance
- Technical information concerning your experience
- References

## Your Bid

26. A PQQ or bid return date and time will be specified on The Chest. Your bid will be stored on The Chest and sealed. Bids can only be opened by us after the deadline date and time. Once the bids have been opened, they are forwarded to the appropriate lead Officer for evaluation. All bids received on time will be considered for evaluation.

27. Late bid returns will invariably mean they are excluded from the evaluation process.

28. Each accepted bid is evaluated according to pre-determined criteria. From 2015, all of our tenders will be marked on a system which considers the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT), a balance between Quality and Price.

29. Details will be provided in the Notice or the Tender Documents. This allows you to see exactly where we place the greatest importance (and marks), and to balance your offer accurately. Such focused submissions will attract the greater proportion of marks and allow us to differentiate between bid offers and select the most appropriate value for money offer.

30. The percentage split between Price/Quality is dependent upon the type of requirement, but splits of around 40% and 60% (either way) are not uncommon.

## The Decision

31. Invariably, tenders are evaluated on two criteria: Quality and Price.

32. The Quality assessment (and percentages) will be variable, depending on our needs. While your bid may meet the specific requirement, there are other aspects that may also be evaluated. This could, for example, include such topics as:

- 32.1. Delivery and availability
- 32.2. Whole life Cost of ownership (including maintenance and replacements)
- 32.3. On-costs (such as transport and storage)
- 32.4. Issues around Sustainability, the Environment and Social Responsibility

33. Price. Points are awarded in accordance with the declared weighting for the price offered within your bid.

34. Final Total. Combining the Quality and Price scores will give a total score for each tenderer, and will influence our decision as to which supplier is selected.

35. When will you know our decision? You will be told as soon as all internal processes have been completed. You will be told of the outcome and the name of the winning bidder (if not you) via The Chest.

36. Not won the bid? If not chosen, you can discuss with us the reasons. This will allow you to understand why you were unsuccessful, and how you could improve future bids to both us and other local authorities.

### **Tips on how to tender**

37. The following tips provide guidance on how to prepare and complete your tender. This should point you in the right direction towards submitting that winning bid – but clearly we cannot guarantee success.

38. Many of the tips appear very obvious, but our experience is that bidders sometimes lose sight of our core needs, or provide an incomplete bid – both of which will impact on their awarded scores, or may mean that their bid is disqualified and not considered:

38.1. *What do we want?* Read the specification and associated documentation and understand what we are asking for, and what is required of you.

38.2. *What's this?* Don't be put off by the tender documentation – you can always ask us for clarification to aid your understanding.

38.3. *Is this really what you are good at?* Should you make a bid? If this is not what you are good at, you will probably be better walking away and waiting for a future opportunity. Failure to submit a bid will not count against you when bidding for future council opportunities.

38.4. *Provide all the information requested.* You can always ask for advice from us or clearly indicate in your submission why you cannot provide requested information.

38.5. *Think outside the written word.* Give thought to what you can offer which may add value to your proposal. If you have a unique selling point, a distinct market advantage or an innovative solution, tell us about it.

38.6. *Keep to the point.* Don't include publicity material and/or other company information in your submission unless you have specifically been asked to provide it.

38.7. *"If only they had asked for this instead"* Let us know if you have an alternative solution or a "better way" to provide for our needs. We welcome and encourage innovation and lateral thinking. You could always talk to us about your ideas before you submit them.

38.8. *Complete and Return.* You must complete and return the documents to the

right place by the given time and date. Have you completed and signed everything?

38.9. *How Much?* Be clear on your pricing model and state any assumptions you have made when pricing (for example, resources required by you and/or the Council, timetables, etc.).

38.10. *Make it easy for us.* Maybe cross-reference the responses in your tender to the questions in the invitation to tender, or put your answers in a different font next to our requirements? This will make it easier to read and evaluate your bid and will speed up the marking, and consequently the decision process.

## Contact us

39. The Central Procurement Team is responsible for developing our procurement strategy and policy, and promoting good practice and procedures.

40. The team provides internal support, guidance and advice on all aspects of procurement and ensures that the Council complies with current EU and UK contract and procurement law.

41. For enquiries or if you have any comments about any of the information in this guide, please e-mail the team at [centralprocurement@warrington.gov.uk](mailto:centralprocurement@warrington.gov.uk)

42. Alternatively you may contact us at:

Central Commissioning and Procurement  
Corporate Services Directorate,  
PO Box 13,  
New Town House (Quattro)  
Buttermarket Street  
Warrington  
WA1 2BN  
Tel: 01925 442879  
Fax: 01925 413586

## Annex A

### **The Chest- A Briefing for Suppliers**

#### 1. Introduction

1.1. This brief introduces “The Chest” – an e-Tendering solution used by the council since 2011 and mandated for all contract opportunities over £5,000. Over 45 NW authorities have implemented The Chest.

#### 2. Why an e-Tendering Solution?

2.1. Both buyers (us) and suppliers (you) can make substantial savings by e-Tendering. The contracting functions within The Chest provide access to all processes from start to finish, including:

- 2.1.1. The advertisement of the tender requirement,
- 2.1.2. The electronic delivery/receipt of documents,
- 2.1.3. The award announcement of the contract and associated letters/information

2.2. Electronic tendering benefits all of us. It cuts cost and time taken with advertising, printing, copying and postage and the administration burden associated with the traditional paper based response process. Amendments to your bid documents can be corrected quickly and easily before sending submissions. You can even change your bid after submission, provided that the closing deadline has not passed.

2.3. All this will give you more time to concentrate on the bid itself, rather than concerning yourself with the production, printing and delivery of your bid. Time and money is saved, as bid submission is a “point and click” away. The security of your bid is also maintained as The Chest will not allow us to view bids until after the deadline for bid submission has passed.

2.4. As access is via any computer or suitable handheld with an internet connection, the tender opportunities can be accessed at any time, day or night. Any stored information can be re-used and updated easily.

2.5. In addition to the above, some obvious benefits are:

- ✓ You will automatically be notified by email of opportunities for your selected specialities - no need for us to pay for advertisements, nor for you to scour the newspapers or specialist magazines and/or contact the council,
- ✓ Each contract has its own audit trail, providing assurance to all,
- ✓ Document changes can be quickly made and sent to you, giving you confidence that you are working on up to date information,
- ✓ An electronic copy means that sections can be copied and e-mailed to your

- colleagues for their collective input, saving internal printing costs and speeding procedures,
- ✓ Printing and posting costs are eliminated as all submissions are done electronically,
  - ✓ E-Mail confirmation of the receipt of the bid submission provides reassurance of receipt ,
  - ✓ Registration on The Chest is free and there are absolutely no costs to your being part of The Chest supplier database.

2.6. E-Tendering offers you the chance to expand your business with the public sector. You can tap into lucrative markets both at a local and a regional level, as The Chest will allow you access to all the tenders from those NW councils on the system.

2.7. When you register, you nominate what services you provide. This means that you will automatically be notified by The Chest of any such tenders from buyers. It will also allow us to identify potential suppliers for focused requirements – especially useful for quotations for suitable contracts.

2.8. We also use The Chest to advertise upcoming contracts and seek market help to consider the requirement specification. Such notices may target specific providers and will engage the market at an early stage in the contract process, which can only benefit both sides.

2.9. The Chest is a North West regional solution and therefore presents the opportunity for you to trade regionally. Those of you that are forward thinking in this respect are more likely to successfully gain public sector business across local borders and expand your services outside your Local Authority area.

### 3. Next?

3.1. You can view The Chest's webpage [here](#). This will give fuller information about the services available and there is a comprehensive FAQ and Help section to help answer any of your questions.