

Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SME)

1. What is an SME?

To qualify as an SME, an enterprise must meet the requisite core threshold criteria for staff, turnover, and balance sheet total (total assets) as specified in the Procurement Act 2023 (Act).

In order to qualify as an SME an enterprise must have:

- a. fewer than 250 staff (see paragraph 8 above); and
- b. less than or equal to £44m in annual turnover or a balance sheet total of less than or equal to £38m.

The new Act places a new duty on contracting authorities to have regard to SME participation and consider removing or reducing barriers to tendering.

2. Benefits of using SMEs

The Council recognise the benefits that small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) can make to the local economy and their vital contribution to delivering public services and have produced the guidance below to help guide and assist SMEs when bidding for our contracts.

3. Where to find tender opportunities

A tender is in an invitation for suppliers to bid to supply a product or service.

The Council uses the e-procurement portal known as the Proactis ProContract portal to conduct its procurement exercises. (See separate guidance note – add in link)

You can register for free on the Council's E-Procurement Portal at any time.

You will also find contracts from other organisations advertised on the Find a Tender service (FTS). FTS can be accessed electronically via [**Find a tender / Central Digital Platform.**](#)

You can register yourself for free on the Central Digital Platform (CDP) here [Supplier Registration Service..](#)

To register, you will require:

- Mobile phone – for two-factor authentication
- Companies House number or other registration number
- Business email address
- Shared email address – ideally a shared mailbox or generic company email address

You can use FTS/ CDP to:

- search for contract opportunities in different sectors
- find out what's coming up in the future

4. Things to think about when you tender

➤ Decide Wisely Before You Bid

- Don't waste time bidding for work you can't win.
- Use a simple checklist to help decide:
 - Can we meet all the contract requirements?
 - Do we have relevant experience or a relationship with the buyer?
 - Can we offer a competitive price?
- Having a "Go/No-Go" checklist can save lots of time and effort.

➤ Understand and Show Social Value

- Social value is often used as quality question in a public tender.
- SMEs can compete with big companies by:
 - Researching local community needs (e.g. unemployment, health, education).
 - Giving specific examples like: "We'll work with *this* local food bank or *this* job centre."
 - Highlighting local roots and how you already support the area.
 - Avoid vague promises—say exactly what you'll do if you win the contract.
 - Offer value in low-cost ways (e.g. donating your time or services).

➤ **Show You're Environmentally Responsible**

- You can stand out by showing what you're doing for the planet:
 - Get ISO 14001 accreditation (environmental management).
 - Create a Carbon Reduction Plan (CRP).
 - Make small changes like:
 - Switching to electric vehicles
 - Installing energy-saving equipment
 - Training your staff and supply chain in sustainability
 - Even if not required, this kind of effort can win you points.

➤ **Find Out What Buyers Care About**

- Go to the buyer's website.
- Look at their:
 - Procurement strategy
 - Business plans
 - Community goals
- Use this to write answers that show how you'll support their aims.

➤ **Check your bid before you submit it**

Tenders often do not win due to:

- failing to answer the specific questions
- failing to address the full specification
- an insufficient level of detail
- inability to evidence the required competencies
- poor planning
- the right people are not involved
- unattractive pricing
- non-compliance with eligibility criteria

Proof reading is more than spotting grammatical and spelling mistakes, bids are rarely lost for this reason. Look for whether you:

- you have answered all parts of the question
- you have explained the proposition clearly so it is easy to understand
- you have fully addressed the specification and evaluation criteria
- your response is logically structured and easy to follow
- you have addressed the 'how' as well as the 'what'
- you have provided relevant evidence to demonstrate your competency
- you have been consistent across every question response
- you have used the word count effectively (content above the word count limit will be disregarded)

✗ Common Mistakes to Avoid

- ✗ Not meeting basic requirements (like accreditations or turnover).
- ✗ Assuming the buyer already knows you - spell everything out.
- ✗ Using too much jargon or acronyms.
- ✗ Re-using generic answers that don't fit the new tender.
- ✗ Not answering the question fully.