

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND – FOOD VOUCHERS

PART I: Contract Award Report April 2023

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to describe the recommendation for the Local Authority (LA) to distribute Household Support Fund (HSF) monies to vulnerable families, and to recommend the award of a contract to support this aim. This follows a Business Case giving approval to undertake a mini-competitive tender agreed by Cabinet Executive Delegated Decision in March 2023.

The recommendation is to award a contract to Wonde Limited, to deliver eVoucher codes during the May, October and February half term holidays, the Summer Holiday and the Christmas Holiday periods, up to a value of £2m in year 1 with the option to extend for a period of 12 months.

This support is needed for children at risk of going hungry during school holidays. The successful provider has been selected through a mini-competitive tender process as described below using providers who are already on the Crown Commercial Services provider framework.

BACKGROUND

In December 2020 the government launched a Winter Grant scheme to fund Local Authorities to support families entitled to Free School Meals and other vulnerable children with food and essentials during the school holidays. The Winter Grant Scheme was replaced by the Household Support Fund (HSF) in October 2021 and funding has continued in 6 monthly payments since then. In the Autumn Statement, November 2022, the government announced a further extension of the HSF from April 2023 to March 2024.

From the start of the Winter Grant Scheme, the City Council has used a proportion of this grant funding to provide families entitled to Free School Meals and other vulnerable children (as nominated by schools) with a voucher to purchase food during each week of the school holidays.

The current contract for these eVouchers ended on March 31st 2023. A procurement process has therefore been carried out to ensure that there is a contract in place for a provider of food vouchers during the next HSF funding period and that the Council is receiving the best value for money from the provider of eVouchers.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE

The total number of children eligible for vouchers changes according to the number of children registered for free school meals each year. However, over the last 3 years this has been approximately 12,000 children.

There are 11 school holiday weeks a year and in the year 2022 – 23 vouchers to the value of £13 per week per child have been provided for each week. The total cost of this is therefore around £1,716,000 per annum.

The total amount paid by the Council for the vouchers depends on the agreement between the provider and the supermarkets. The provider will negotiate a price to bulk buy vouchers and is therefore able to pass on some of the savings to the City Council.

FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS

The Household Support Grant is entirely funded by DWP – the annual value of the grant for Plymouth is £4,589,594. The food vouchers spend comprises part of the funding (approx. £1.7m) and a plan is currently being developed which will set out the Council's plans for the total grant amount. This also has to be reported to the DWP for transparency.

PROCUREMENT

A mini competition was conducted in accordance with the Crown Commercial Services Payment Solutions framework agreement RM6248. The framework agreement has been set up in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015. All Suppliers who are on the framework have given the following assurances:-

- ISO/IEC 27001
- Cyber Essentials Plus
- Professional Indemnity Insurance with cover (for a single event or a series of events and in the aggregate) of not less than five million pounds
- Public Liability Insurance with cover (for a single event or a series of events and in the aggregate) of not less than five million pounds
- Employers Liability Insurance with cover (for a single event or a series of events and in the aggregate) of not less than five million pounds

The Request for Quotation (RFQ) was only open to the Suppliers who have been successfully elevated to the framework RM6248.

Four responses were received from suppliers. The RFQ is attached at Annex I for information.

EVALUATION

The evaluation of the mini-competition was carried out using the following weighted scores

70% QUALITY

- a. Timely distribution of vouchers -25%
 - b. Robust and easy to use support function and platform – 10%
 - c. Range / number of food retailers – 20%
 - d. *Customer service* – support, helplines, hours/days available – 5%
 - e. Social value commitment – 5%
- 5.6. Voucher printing – 5%

30% PRICE

The mini-competition was evaluated by a team of evaluators from the City Council's Children and Young People's Commissioning team, Public Health and Schools teams.

RECOMMENDATION AND DECISION

In order to support the health and well-being of the most disadvantaged children and continued engagement in their education, this report recommends that the Council approves the award of a contract to the successful provider Wonde Limited to deliver eVoucher codes at an estimated total cost of up to £2million, to provide food vouchers to cover May, October and February half term holidays, the Summer Holiday and the Christmas Holiday periods.

The intention is to ensure that there is a contract in place for a provider of eVouchers from April 2023 to March 2024, so that if the City Council again commits funding to Free School Meals families for this period there is a method for delivering this support.

This procurement does not prevent the City Council from deciding not to use the HSF funding in this way during the 2023 – 24 financial year.

ANNEX I

Food Voucher Statement of Requirements & Evaluation Scheme

I. COMPLETION INSTRUCTIONS

I.1 Introduction

The scheme is managed and administered subject to the requirements as set out in DWP Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities. PCC's Corporate Management Team (CMT) approved the recommendation and preferred option of distributing funds via schools and Early Years settings using the medium of eVoucher codes that can be exchanged for food vouchers at selected supermarkets.

PCC are running a competitive procurement process to establish a single provider of the Food Vouchers for the next period of the grant. As no grant information has been shared with Local Authorities yet we are not able to provide a value to the contract but we anticipate it is likely to be similar values as in previous grants.

This document sets out the process for the procurement and will allow PCC to be ready to appoint a Supplier from April 2023 when the value of the grant funding will be known.

I.2 Purpose of this document

This is a competitive procurement conducted in accordance with the Crown Commercial Services Payment Solutions framework contract RM6248. All Suppliers who are on the framework will have given the following assurances:-

- ISO/IEC 27001
- Cyber Essentials Plus
- Professional Indemnity Insurance with cover (for a single event or a series of events and in the aggregate) of not less than five million pounds
- Public Liability Insurance with cover (for a single event or a series of events and in the aggregate) of not less than five million pounds
- Employers Liability Insurance with cover (for a single event or a series of events and in the aggregate) of not less than five million pounds

This Request for Quotation (RFQ) is only open to Suppliers who have been successfully elevated to the framework.

Please note that if any information provided as part of the submitted bid changes during the ensuing evaluation period you are required to notify the Council accordingly.

No information contained in this document, or in any communication made between the Council and any Supplier in connection with this RFQ, shall be relied upon as constituting a contract, agreement or representation that any contract shall be offered in accordance with this RFQ. Kindly note that you and not the Council are responsible for all costs, expenses and liabilities incurred in connection with the preparation and submission of responses to this RFQ.

The Council reserves the right, subject to the appropriate procurement regulations, to change without notice the basis of, or the procedures for, the competitive tendering process or to terminate the process at any time. Under no circumstances shall the Authority incur any liability in respect of this RFQ or any supporting documentation.

Direct or indirect canvassing of Council Members or officers or any employee of the Council concerning this procurement may result in disqualification.

Prospective Suppliers should answer all questions as accurately and concisely as possible. Where a question is not relevant to the responder's organisation, this should be indicated, with an explanation.

Supporting information should be presented in the same order as the questions and should be referenced to the relevant question.

Questions should be answered in English.

Failure to furnish the required information, make a satisfactory response to any question, or supply documentation referred to in responses, within the specified timescale, may mean that Suppliers will not be invited to participate further.

Cross-references to other or previous submissions made to the Council will not be considered or taken into account.

Responses will be evaluated in accordance with the procedures set out below.

In the event that none of the responses are deemed satisfactory, the Council reserves the right to terminate the procurement and where appropriate re-advertise the procurement.

1.3. Freedom of Information Act (2000) Environmental Information Regulations (2004) and Data Protection Act 1998

The Council is subject to The Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("FoIA") and The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 ("EIR") and is committed to open government.

Accordingly as part of the Council's duties under FoIA or EIR, we may be required to disclose information submitted to us, information concerning the procurement process, details about the Contract in response to a request under FoIA or EIR. We may also decide to include certain information which we maintain under FoIA.

If Suppliers consider that any of the information provided in their RFQ is commercially sensitive then they should:

clearly identify such information as commercially sensitive by marking it "**Not for disclosure to third parties**";

explain the potential implications of disclosure of such information and (in broad terms) the harm it might cause; and

provide an estimate of the period of time during which they believe that such information will remain commercially sensitive.

This explanation and time estimate must be submitted with the completed PQQ (as an Annex if this is likely to be the most convenient means of communicating a receiving the information).

Where Suppliers identify information as commercially sensitive, the Council will endeavour to maintain confidentiality. Suppliers should be aware, that, even where information is identified as commercially sensitive, the Council may be required to disclose it under FoIA if a request is received. Accordingly, the Council cannot guarantee that any information identified as commercially sensitive will not be disclosed. Moreover the acceptance of receipt by the Council of information marked "confidential" or the like should not be taken that the Council accept any duty of confidence by virtue of that marking.

The Council will endeavour to consult with Suppliers and have regard to comments and any objections before it releases any information to a third party under the FoIA or the EIR. However

the Council reserves its unfettered discretion to determine whether any information is exempt from the FoIA and/or EIR or not. The Council will be obliged to make its decision on disclosure in accordance with the provisions of FoIA or EIR (as the case may be) and will be bound by the rules as to disclosure in FoIA and EIR.

The Council treats its obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998 (“DPA”) very seriously. The rights of data subjects under the DPA will be applied in accordance with the requirements of the DPA.

1.4 Transparency on Local Government

The Council is generally required to publish details of all of its individual items of monthly expenditure over £500. This requirement will include publishing the sums paid to the successful tenderer under a contract awarded under this tender process. The Council may also publish the contract entered into with the successful tenderer. In making publication the Council intends to follow guidance set out in A Practitioners Guide to Publishing Local Spending Data published by the Local Government Group.

1.5 Queries about the procurement

The Council will not enter into detailed discussion of the requirements at this stage.

Any questions about the procurement should be submitted by email and all responses will be made available to suppliers within the ‘Question & Answer’ section for this RFQ.

If the Council considers any question or request for clarification to be of material significance, both the query and the response will be communicated, in a suitably anonymous form, to all Suppliers who have responded.

1.6 Timeframe

Activity	Date/Target Date
Issue RFQ	17 th March 2023
Return of RFQ	31 st March 2023
Evaluation of Bids	3 rd – 7 th April 2023
Contract award	23 rd April 2023
Estimated Service Commencement	8 th May 2023

3. EVALUATION SCHEME:

The information supplied by CCS in the Rate Cards, Supplier Prospectuses and Framework Schedule 2 documents will be used to determine the most economically advantageous offer. This will be conducted in accordance with the CCS RM6248. The assessment process is set out below.

For this procurement evaluation will be split as follows:

Quality 70%

Price 30%

4. PRICE

Please submit your bid providing detail of the discount to be offered for this procurement.

Prices will be evaluated using the following formula:

$$\left(\frac{\text{Supplier's discount}}{\text{Top ranked supplier's discount}} \right) \times \text{Weighting} = \text{Weighted score}$$

5. QUALITY

Quality Criteria will be scored using the following 0 to 10 scale:

Response	Score	Definition
Unacceptable	0	Nil or inadequate response. Fails to demonstrate an ability to meet the requirement/deliver the required outcomes
Poor	2	Response is partially relevant and poor. The response addresses some elements of the requirements/outcomes but contains insufficient/limited detail and explanation to demonstrate how the requirements/outcomes will be fulfilled
Satisfactory	5	Response is relevant and acceptable. The response addresses a broad understanding of the requirements/outcomes but lacks details on how the requirement/outcomes will be fulfilled in certain areas.
Good	8	Response is relevant and good. The response is sufficiently detailed to demonstrate a good understanding and provides details on how the requirements/outcomes will be fulfilled.
Excellent	10	Response is completely relevant and excellent overall. The response is comprehensive, unambiguous and demonstrates a thorough understanding of the requirement/outcomes and provides details of how the requirement/outcomes will be met in full.

6. PASS/FAIL REQUIREMENTS

- Closed loop food vouchers

Pass =Yes; Fail =No

7. QUALITY REQUIREMENTS (SCORED)

Please submit your bid in a word document covering how your organisation will deliver the Voucher scheme as detailed against the following criteria. Please note the maximum words under each section, your bid will be considered within the word count advised.

a. Timely distribution of vouchers -25%

Maximum 250 words

Order placed by 10/05/2023

Critical 4 day turn around -distribution by 15/05/2023

Distribution to PCC with 72 hours of voucher order being place.

b. Robust and easy to use support function and platform – 10% Maximum 250 words

To provide an easy to use swap platform that openly promotes the concept of choice. Whereby the recipient can easily choose between merchants to suit their particular needs.)

c. Range / number of food retailers – 20% Maximum 250 words

Offer a range of popular supermarkets, meaning that recipients can choose their local, or most preferred brand. Number and geographical range in Plymouth.

Only grocery-specific retailers should be available on the platform, to ensure that recipients are getting the items they actually need. (See *Voucher Framework schedule 2 – 2*)

d. Customer service – support, helplines, hours/days available – 5% Maximum 250 words

Customer service is delivered 7-days a week (See *schedule 2 - 4.5*)

e. Social value commitment – 5% Maximum 250 words

The Supplier shall promote social value in the delivery of the services. As a minimum this shall reflect the key priorities outlined in Schedule 2 - 5 of the CCS Voucher Framework. Social value refers to the wider financial and non-financial impacts of projects and programmes including the wellbeing of individuals and communities, social capital and the environment

5.6. Voucher printing – 5%

The Supplier will make available printed vouchers where these are requested for appropriate reasons e.g. lack of access to a computer and or printer by the recipient.