



Kent County Council

Responsible Procurement Charter

*Supporting the businesses,
communities, and residents of Kent*

August 2026

Introduction

Procurement is the process by which Kent County Council uses its spending power to secure the goods, services and works needed to deliver outcomes for residents, communities and businesses across Kent. It enables us not only to achieve value for money, but also to support the wider economic, social and environmental priorities that matter to Kent. Through the contracts we award, we influence supply chains, markets and behaviours, and with that comes responsibility.

Responsible procurement means taking a considered and balanced approach to how we buy goods, services and works. It is about acting lawfully and responsibly, managing risk, achieving value for money, and delivering outcomes that align with the Council's strategic priorities.

Kent County Council spends over £1.47 billion each year with suppliers. Our suppliers are therefore key partners in helping us meet our obligations and expectations. This Charter sets out the standards and principles that underpin our approach to responsible procurement, and provides a clear framework for how we work together.

The sections that follow explain our expectations in more detail across a range of priority areas, and what suppliers can expect from us in return. We expect suppliers to be able to demonstrate how they are meeting these standards throughout the life of a contract, through contract management discussions, performance reporting, and other proportionate assurance activities. We are committed to building open and constructive relationships with our suppliers. Where opportunities for improvement are identified, we will work together to agree proportionate actions and support progress towards the standards set out in this Charter.

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This document sets out our actions, and in return, our expectations from our suppliers in relation to:

- Supporting Small or Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs)
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- Protecting the Kent Environment
- Tackling Supply Chain Risks
- Anti-Discrimination
- The Prevent Duty

Ensuring Value for Money

Evaluating and balancing cost with wider public benefit is essential to ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively, providing best value to Kent residents. Our approach to evaluating tenders plays a key role, ensuring that we assess potential suppliers against a range of criteria. This includes not only cost but also quality and social value. By considering factors such as responsible practices and community benefits, we ensure that the selected suppliers align with the Council's broader priorities and objectives. This approach helps us to make informed decisions supporting long-term public value, while also achieving cost-effectiveness and high standards of delivery.

Supporting Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs)

SMEs and VCSEs are vital for boosting our local economy, creating jobs, and providing numerous benefits that make Kent a great place to live and work.

Kent County Council is committed to simplifying public sector procurement and making it as accessible to SMEs and VCSEs as possible, including:

- Improving engagement with SMEs and VCSEs, facilitating an ongoing dialogue to understand the barriers they face in accessing our public contracting opportunities, and how these can be tackled.
- Ensuring that SMEs and VCSEs are aware of upcoming opportunities to supply KCC as soon as possible, allowing them to forward plan and build capacity and capability to tender.
- Carrying out pre-market engagement, providing an early opportunity to find out about contracting opportunities, suggest innovation, and provide healthy challenge.
- Considering the use of lotting (i.e. splitting up) contracts to make the scale of opportunities more accessible to SMEs and VCSEs.
- Where appropriate, we will encourage small VCSEs to collaborate with other organisations, for example, as a part of consortia, to respond to local needs and meet desired outcomes.
- Ensuring the tender process is as simple as possible for SMEs and VCSEs to access, and that, where possible, the Council's requirements are proportionate for smaller organisations and there is sufficient time available to bid.
- Developing guidance and resources to support SMEs and VCSEs with navigating public sector procurement, which will be available on the Council's website.
- Encouraging internal services to invite more local SMEs and VCSEs, including those based in Kent, to bid for contracts below the public procurement thresholds.

We expect:

- Our **larger suppliers** to engage local SMEs and VCSEs in their own supply chains to simplify processes and encourage their participation in tenders.
- Our **suppliers** to pass our prompt payment mechanisms down the supply chain to their suppliers and sub-contractors.
- Our **suppliers** to consider how they can support SMEs and VCSEs when deciding what social value commitments they can offer on Council contracts.

Delivering Social Value for Kent

Social value describes the wider social and economic benefits that can be secured beyond the core requirements identified when supplies, services, and works are commissioned. Social value can promote innovation in the way contracts are delivered, through encouraging good employment and supply chain practices, addressing skills gaps, promoting co-design and community integration, and improving the wellbeing of our residents.

Kent County Council is committed to securing social value effectively and comprehensively through its procurement processes, and accounting for social value in our tender evaluation criteria. We aim to deliver this commitment by:

- Having a clear, Kent-focused, and supplier-friendly [social policy](#), which sets our social value priorities, themes, outcomes and measures.
- Introducing a mandatory minimum 10% weighting for the evaluation of social value in tenders above the public procurement thresholds, and encouraging the assessment of social value on contracts below these thresholds, where appropriate.
- Developing resources and case studies to support suppliers in committing to and delivering social value in our contracts, which will be available on the Council's website.

We expect our suppliers to:

- Consider all potential aspects of social value that could be delivered through the contract at tender stage – recognising that small changes can have a big impact and that we all have a role in supporting the social, economic, and overall wellbeing of our community.
- Deliver against their contractual commitments relating to social value.
- Through the life of the contract, proactively work with the Council to consider whether there is any additional social value that could be delivered.
- Promote social value through their supply chain.

Protecting the Kent Environment

Kent County Council is committed to delivering the ambitions set out in the Council's Strategic Statement, ensuring that we protect our Kent environment with practical, affordable, and visible improvements.. We will use our roles as a commissioner and purchaser to support improved outcomes for the Kent environment, including a stronger focus on adapting to changes in our weather, stewardship for the local environment, and visible improvements for our communities. Through our own operations and supply chains, we will take a proportionate and targeted approach to improving the Kent environment, using our influence and purchasing power to support sustainable, meaningful, and measurable improvements.

Specifically, when buying goods, services and works, we will:

- Support delivery of the Council's strategic ambitions for protecting the Kent environment, embedding appropriate environmental considerations into commissioning, procurement and contract management decisions.
- Build capability across the Commercial and Procurement Division and wider Council, developing practical tools, such as a Sustainability Toolkit to support informed commissioning, procurement, and contract management decisions.
- Take a proportionate risk- and opportunity-based approach to managing environmental impacts across the contract lifecycle, ensuring that actions deliver a meaningful improvement in environmental performance.

- Use the Council's purchasing power to support innovation and sustainable supply chains to generate local economic benefit.

We expect our suppliers to:

- Support the Council's environmental ambitions through the delivery of goods, services and works.
- Demonstrate how they manage local environmental impacts within their operations and supply chains, proportionate to the contract.
- Work collaboratively with the Council to improve environmental performance over the life of the contract, including identifying opportunities to increase efficiency and resilience.
- Provide relevant information, where required, to support monitoring of environmental performance and delivery of contractual commitments.

Tackling Supply Chain Risks

Fraud is the use of deception for personal gain (usually financial gain). It is a criminal offence. Procurement Fraud covers a wide range of illegal activities from all stages of the procurement lifecycle, from bribery and cartel risks at tendering stage, through to duplicate/false invoicing, defective/non-existent goods, services and works, and false performance reporting.

Bribery and Corruption are related concepts. Corrupt individuals seek advantage for themselves or others (e.g., family or social connections) through actions such as bribery and favouritism in the award of public contracts. Bribery is the act of offering, giving, receiving, or soliciting something of value to influence the actions of an individual in a position of power or authority. These too are criminal offences.

Kent County Council must ensure funding is used for its intended purpose, to provide services to our Kent community, and acknowledges that no Authority is immune from the risk of fraud or bribery. KCC takes a robust approach to bribery, fraud and corruption, aiming to instil a strong anti-fraud culture and demonstrating a zero-tolerance approach. We will do this by:

- Regularly reviewing and updating our Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and Anti-Bribery Policy and ensuring there is good level of awareness of this across the Council.
- Assessing the risk of bribery, fraud and corruption before publishing a tender, ensuring that it can be addressed in the procurement process.
- Instigating investigations to establish if a supplier is excludable. Potentially leading to the exclusion of suppliers who have engaged in improper conduct.
- Encouraging all members of our Commercial and Procurement Division to further strengthen their knowledge by completing learning on the Bribery Act and Fraud awareness.
- Supporting staff carrying out procurement processes to identify and manage both actual and perceived conflicts of interest by providing comprehensive advice, guidance and templates.
- Sharing, on an ongoing basis, resources relating to tackling bribery, fraud and corruption in our supply chains to help staff identify issues and ensure that suspected instances are handled correctly.

We expect our suppliers to:

- Work with KCC with honesty and integrity.
- Establish and maintain policies and procedures to prevent bribery, fraud and corruption, and require their sub-contractors to have these policies and procedures in place.
- Provide appropriate training and support to staff involved in submitting tenders, ensuring the correct process and procedure is followed and that issues are escalated appropriately.
- Provide training to appropriate employees which covers the risk, identification and reporting of any instances of procurement fraud, bribery or corruption.
- Notify the Council of any investigation of or proceedings brought against them or their officers for bribery, fraud or corruption related offences, or excludable offences within Schedules 6 and 7 of the Procurement Act 2023.

Modern slavery is a heinous and often hidden crime, and the impact can be devastating.

Kent County Council acknowledges its duty to adopt a strong stance against modern slavery and human trafficking and expects its suppliers to uphold the same standards. We are committed to reducing and managing the risk of modern slavery within our supply chains and operations, leading by example. This commitment involves the following actions:

- Kent County Council is working on its first Modern Slavery Statement, which will include our commitments to tackling modern slavery in our supply chains.
- We will assess the risk of modern slavery before publishing a tender, ensuring that it can be effectively considered and addressed in the procurement process.
- We will share, on an ongoing basis, resources relating to tackling modern slavery in our supply chains to help staff identify issues as a part of contract management and ensure that suspected instances of modern slavery are handled correctly.
- Kent County Council has established a Serious Organised Crime Working Group to address supply chain risks related to modern slavery. To comply with the Modern Slavery Act 2015, we:
 - require bidders to evidence their compliance with the Modern Slavery Act if they are a relevant commercial organisation as defined by Section 54 of the Act.
 - will exclude a supplier if they have been involved in serious labour abuses or modern slavery, ensuring we only work with responsible suppliers.
 - include contract terms related to modern slavery in our standard terms and conditions, clearly specifying what is required of suppliers in relation to modern slavery.
 - have developed a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) bank which includes suggested KPIs to support the management of contract performance in relation to modern slavery.

We expect our suppliers to:

- Evaluate their own operations and supply chains to identify and address potential risks of modern slavery.
- Establish and maintain policies and procedures to prevent modern slavery.
- Educate employees and suppliers about modern slavery, its signs, and how to report it.
- Require their sub-contractors to comply with the Modern Slavery Act.
- Where applicable, publish statements on their efforts to combat modern slavery.
- Provide accessible channels for workers to report concerns or abuses.

Anti-Discrimination

As set out in our [Corporate Equality Objectives](#), Kent County Council is committed to treating people fairly, **providing equality of opportunity and opposing unlawful discrimination** in all its forms.

The Council will comply with the Equality Act 2010 and meet its obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. Through our procurement and contract management activity, we will ensure that our suppliers also deliver services fairly, lawfully and without discrimination. We will do this by:

- Considering relevant equality and accessibility requirements when specifying for Council services and planning our procurements.
- Ensuring procurement processes are fair, open and transparent, with clear and objective criteria for supplier selection and tender evaluation.
- Collaborating with local communities and organisations to support accessibility for all suppliers and promote economic growth.
- Applying equality requirements proportionately, taking account of the nature of the contract, the services being delivered and the people who use them.
- Taking appropriate action where unlawful discrimination connected with the delivery of a Council contract is identified

We expect our suppliers to:

- Comply with the Equality Act 2010 and all other applicable equality and anti-discrimination legislation when delivering Council contracts.
- Treat employees, service users, and members of the public fairly and without unlawful discrimination.
- Maintain appropriate policies and working practices to prevent discrimination, harassment, and victimisation in connection with the contract.
- Where relevant, design and deliver services in a way that improves outcomes for service users and communities.
- Support KCC to monitor equality impacts throughout the contract lifecycle, including contributing to Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) where required.
- Provide proportionate information or assistance where required to support the Council in meeting its legal obligations.
- Notify the Council of relevant investigations, enforcement action or legal proceedings relating to discrimination, and cooperate appropriately with any resulting process.

The Prevent Duty

The Government's Prevent strategy aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism, tackling all forms of extremism, including both religious and political extremism.

[Prevent](#) has 3 key objectives:

- Tackle the ideological causes of terrorism
- Intervene early to support people susceptible to radicalisation
- Enable people who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate

Kent County Council recognises its important role to participate fully in protecting vulnerable children, young people and adults from being radicalised and drawn into terrorism, keeping Kent, Medway and the people here safe. This includes:

- Ensuring appropriate training for our staff
- Promoting the importance of the duty to suppliers

Extremism and radicalisation in our community are real threats, and being aware is the first step.

We expect our suppliers to:

- Be mindful of the principles of the Prevent duty.
- Provide training to all appropriate frontline staff ensuring that they have a good understanding of prevent, are able to recognise the signs that someone may be being drawn into terrorism and are aware of available programmes to deal with this issue.