

Ashford Borough Council

Procurement Strategy 2026-2029

(approved Cabinet 9th July 2026 Minute No. 81(ii))

Introduction

1. The Council is required to follow the UK's Procurement Act 2023 (which came into effect on 24 February 2025) with its main goals to improve transparency and create a more flexible system, and ensure the Council is getting best value through procurement activity and the Procurement Regulations 2024.
2. Efficient spending helps us achieve our strategic goals and makes the most of our limited resources. We aim to get the best value for money by securing the best services on favourable terms and driving efficiencies to benefit our residents.
3. When we procure services from external organisations, we must meet our Best Value obligations and consider how these services improve the economic, social, and environmental wellbeing of the Borough.
4. This strategy outlines the Council's procurement commitment to support corporate objectives and align with the National Procurement Policy Statement through professional best practice.
5. With the introduction of Local Government Reform, the council will also need to be mindful of opportunities to get early synergy of systems, and alignment of contracts with proposed merging authorities as information becomes available. This has not been explicitly incorporated into this strategy, but the colleagues will be provided further guidance as the position becomes clearer.

Purpose & Vision

6. This Procurement Strategy explains the Council's plans for buying Works, Services and Supplies (Goods) over the next few years. It sets ambitious goals to achieve our corporate objectives and follow national best practice. Each year, a report will be presented to Management Team to show the progress made in delivering this strategy.

Approach to Strategy

Corporate Plan

7. The approach to this strategy reflects the priorities of Ashford Borough Council:
 - **Planet:** Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creating places for nature.
 - **People:** Listening and serving the Ashford community, making the best use of available resources to build an equitable and fair society.
 - **Place:** Planning for the future of our community to make Ashford a place people are pleased to call home and love to visit.

National Procurement Policy Statement

8. This was refreshed in February 2025 and has the following priorities to which all public bodies are required to pay due regard. This Procurement Strategy aligns with these priorities with the Action Plan (Appendix A) detailing our Ambition, Outcomes and Activities. The Council has also added a “Local First” priority to reflect Ashford ambition to support local business.

- **Driving Economic Growth:** Giving Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME’s) and Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE’s) a fair chance at public contracts, creating high quality jobs and championing innovation.

It is suggested that this is to be achieved through:

- a) Maximising procurement spend with SME’s and VCSE’s.
 - b) Ensuring suppliers are committed to providing high quality jobs, safe and healthy working conditions, fair pay, opportunity and progression for workers.
 - c) Working collaboratively across policy, delivery, and commercial functions to develop a ‘pro-innovation mindset’, defining challenges to solve rather than solutions to buy, and engaging early with the market to consider innovative products and services.
- **Delivering Social and Economic Value:** Working in partnership across organisational boundaries.

It is suggested this is to be achieved through:

- d) Securing social and economic value which supports the national and local priorities and working in partnership with other contracting authorities, the private sector and civil society.
 - e) Ensuring suppliers are actively working to tackle bribery, corruption, fraud, modern slavery and human rights violations, environmental impact, that they comply with their tax, employment law and other legal obligations, and stamp out late payment of invoices in their supply chain.
- **Building Commercial Capability:** Ensuring that the right commercial capability and standards are in place to procure and manage contracts effectively and to collaborate with other contracting authorities to deliver best value.

It is suggested that this is to be achieved through:

- f) Applying commercial best practice and making decisions based on value for money and service quality when assessing delivery models and outsourcing decisions

- g) Benchmarking our organisational capability and workforce capacity to ensure we have the appropriate procurement and contract management skills and capacity necessary to deliver value for money.
- h) Using collaborative procurement agreements, where appropriate for the requirement and the market, to ensure value for money.
- **Local First Approach:** by utilising new legislation in February 2026 (Local Government (Exclusion of Non-commercial Considerations) (England) Order 2026 (SI 2026/94) the Council will look to maximise below threshold, local procurement through identifying active markets to which we can restrict procurement exercises for below threshold contracts.

It is suggested that this is to be achieved through:

- i) Identifying local markets as Ashford, Kent - geographically open tenders.
 - j) Establishing a database of local contractors who want to work with the Council.
 - k) Promote and signpost local developers to the mini database of local contractors and promote contracts through other sources.
9. This is possible where the authority has, before inviting the submission of tenders, determined that contractors based outside either the UK or the local area may not participate in the procurement. "Local area" means the relevant authority or authorities' areas and can include any bordering counties or London boroughs. Restriction to individual nations of the UK (ie, England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland) is not permitted.
10. If the authority is advertising such a contract, it must state in the advertisement of the tender that it is being reserved for contractors in the UK or the local area, in the latter case specifying what the local area is (regulation 24(2)(K), PR 2024).

Overview of Procurement and Contract Management Activity

11. Ashford Borough Council defines Procurement as;

"The process of acquiring the Works, Services, Supplies (Goods) an organisation *needs*. *It spans the whole commercial cycle*", comprising:

- **Delivery Model Assessment:** Including 'make or buy' decisions, which may result in using our in-house provision where appropriate.
- **Procurement Planning:** Identifying needs and deciding what is to be bought and when.
- **Contract Award:** The process of awarding a contract, including defining the terms on which the Works, Services or Supplies (Goods) are to be provided and selecting the contracting partner that offers the best value.

- **Contract Management:** Managing the contract to ensure effective performance.

UK Public Procurement

12. UK public procurement law provides the regulatory framework for the Council's contracting activity. This sets out procurement procedures we can or must follow in a range of circumstances, for example requiring most higher-value above threshold contracts to be opened up to competition.
13. It also sets out our obligations to be transparent and award contracts based on value for money. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires the Council to consider the economic, social and environmental benefits that can be delivered at all stages of the of procurement process.
14. The Procurement Act 2023 was implemented in February 2025; however, we still have 'live' contracts procured under the previous legislation, The Public Contracts Regulations 2015. We will follow two sets of procurement regulations until all contracts procured under the previous regulations have expired. Our last contract procured under previous regulations expires in 2037.
15. Our internal rules governing procurement activity are set out in the Council's Constitution, Section 4 Contract Standing Orders.

Action Plan

The Procurement and Contracts Manager will be responsible for implementing the plan, and the Council's Management Team will review progress. The Action Plan aligns with the National Procurement Policy Statement.

Ambition	Outcomes	Activities
1. Maximising procurement spend with SME's and VCSE's		
Small business and social enterprises contribute to diverse and thriving local economies, creating local jobs and fostering economic growth.	All suppliers have the opportunity to access and apply for Council contracts. The supply market has early visibility of upcoming opportunities and understands how to access them. Supplier markets are engaged during the pre-tender phase, allowing input and development of sourcing strategies and encouraging innovation that drives best value. The Council engages with and influences the supply market and potential suppliers to drive innovation and develop new ideas around service delivery.	In compliance with legislative requirements, a pipeline of upcoming procurement activities will be published on the Central Digital Platform (Find a Tender Service FTS). The Council's website will advise where opportunities are published so that potential and existing suppliers understand how to access them. The Council advertises procurement opportunities on a free e-sourcing portal where suppliers can upload their bids. Regularly updated guidance on how to do business with the Council on our website. Simplified tender documentation allowing flexibility in our process for SME's.

		Breaking large procurements into Lots (small packages) to allow SME's to compete for applicable Lot(s) within the contracts and provide opportunities for SME's to win some aspects of larger contracts. Procuring Officers will be encouraged to engage with the market early, allowing suppliers to influence the solutions to meet the Council's needs. This will be published and recorded according to the Procurement Act 2023. Observe any changes in Regulation that may provide flexibility in restricting procurements to local suppliers where appropriate, promoting "Local First". The Procurement team will regularly engage with local suppliers through local business groups. The Council's website will be developed to allow local suppliers to register their interest in doing business with the Council. This information will be available to service areas responsible for smaller contracts that do not meet the threshold for formal procurement activity.
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		Procuring Officers encouraged to gain quotes from local contractors for under threshold procurements.
2. Ensuring suppliers are committed to providing high quality jobs, safe and healthy working conditions, fair pay, opportunity and progression for workers		
Suppliers benefitting from taxpayers' money should deliver public contracts in a way that benefits Ashford Borough Council and its residents, promoting growth and fairer outcomes for all. Good jobs and a highly skilled workforce will drive growth and productivity, so public contracts should consider fair working conditions, appropriate pay, progression and provision of skills opportunities throughout the commercial lifecycle.	Suppliers are required to comply, at a minimum, with legal requirements concerning pay, modern slavery, health and safety, and other staff-related regulations.	For contracts above a certain value, suppliers must declare that they follow laws about pay, modern slavery, health and safety, and other staff-related regulations. This will be included in contracts and checked regularly. For contracts above a certain value, we will undertake checks on suppliers to ensure they are paying their sub-contractors in line with Ashford's payment terms. We aim to promote social value by encouraging suppliers to use local apprentices or small businesses when possible (sub-contracting and supply chain). This helps grow the local community.
3. Working collaboratively across policy, delivery, and commercial functions to develop a 'pro-innovation mindset', defining challenges to solve rather than solutions to buy, and engaging early with the market to consider innovative products and services.		
Innovation is crucial for economic growth and	Using Category Management strategies to help the Council purchase proactively rather than reactively.	Promote Category Management, aligning similar purchases from different services,

productivity. By procuring innovative solutions, we can improve public sector performance and support UK companies in adopting new technologies. Collaborating across services to analyse procurement requirements and considering strategic advantages and disadvantages, such as insourcing or outsourcing options. Grouping similar or related products into distinct categories to help promote a Category Management approach to procurement and contract management. Early market engagement is critical in supporting the development of innovative solutions and allows the Council to understand the maturity of potential solutions as well as identifying risks and challenges.	By managing categories strategically, the procurement team can streamline processes and reduce overall costs. Early engagement with supplier markets encouraging joint working to drive innovative solutions.	creating volume buying, reducing overall costs and creating efficiencies. Continue to analyse spend, identifying areas for cost savings and optimising procurement strategies. Ensure that Supplier markets are appropriately engaged during the pre-tender phase, allowing input and development of sourcing strategies and encouraging innovation that drives best value. Procuring officers will be encouraged to undertake preliminary market engagement, enabling suppliers to have early engagement and the ability to influence the solution to meet our needs. This will be published and recorded in accordance with the Procurement Act 2023. Improve relationships with other local authorities in Kent to identify projects with the potential to improve service delivery and reduce cost through collaboration. Maximise benefits of joint procurement and contracts with key local authorities, achieving better value through economies of scale and volume buying.
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4. Securing social and economic value which supports the national and local priorities, and working in partnership with other contracting authorities, the private sector and civil society.		
In carrying out procurement exercises under the Procurement Act 2023, the Council must have regard to the importance of maximising public benefit. Applying social and economic value requirements can have a significantly positive impact by broadening the public benefits delivered throughout the life of the contract. By focussing on these outcomes throughout the life of the contract the Council can achieve greater social and economic benefits for our residents.	A proportionate and effective Social Value policy, with a supporting methodology for evaluation, is embedded across the Council. The Council can record and track Social Value outcomes delivered through contracts with third parties. Expenditure on contracts is leveraged, and suppliers are engaged who enhance our communities through increased social value.	The Council will adopt a Social Value Policy that encourages suppliers to focus their social value offer on areas with the greatest benefit and importance to the Council and the borough's residents. The evaluation of such social value is to be simplified to better assist both the Council's officers and supplier. Contracts over £5m in value are required to have at least three Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) where performance is published. This may include the delivery of Social Value commitments. Contract Managers will be required to regularly record performance against these commitments by suppliers on their contracts as part of regular supplier reviews and reporting.
5. Ensuring suppliers are actively working to tackle bribery, corruption, fraud, modern slavery and human rights violations, environmental impact, that they comply with their tax, employment law and other legal obligations, and stamp out late payment of invoices in their supply chain		
The Council expects the highest standards of integrity, ethical conduct, and	Suppliers are required to comply with all law including legal requirements concerning ethical conduct and environmental legislation.	Commitment to integrity, ethical conduct and adherence to environmental legislation is incorporated into contractual agreements.

environmental sustainability in business practices from suppliers delivering public contracts.	Environmental aspirations towards net zero will be assessed as part of the procurement process, and we will check supplier's commitment to environmental sustainability, especially for larger contracts. Supplier declarations of payment terms to subcontractors will be assessed as part of the procurement process and during the life of contracts, particularly for larger contracts.	We will ensure that all procurement processes are run fairly and provide feedback to help all bidders understand the Council's decisions. Robust processes will be in place to deal with any conflicts of interest or allegations of favouritism. Where appropriate, we will seek to incorporate carbon reduction requirements into new tenders, such as electric vehicles. We will develop and implement incentivised KPIs and carbon targets. Checks on suppliers will be conducted to ensure they are paying sub-contractors in line with our payment terms.
6. Applying commercial best practice and making decisions based on value for money and service quality when assessing delivery models and outsourcing decisions		
Value for money will be achieved if: The Council aims to acquire goods services	A common approach to sourcing strategies across the Council, which emphasises outcomes, performance and understanding of markets, will enhance the ability to drive the right solutions that provide the best value for money.	Sourcing strategies are required for all procurement activities conducted through the procurement team. This must include early engagement with Legal Services and Procurement to ensure a compliant and best

and works through fair open competition. • Efficient and effective policies are in place to manage commercial delivery with a focus on delivering sustainable long-term outcomes. • The individuals undertaking procurement and managing contracts have the right level of capability, skills and expertise to make informed decisions. Government guidance emphasises the importance of partnerships across organisations and sectors to effectively manage markets and strengthen supply chains. This approach, underpinned by the principles of outcome-based delivery, early engagement with Procurement and Legal Services, and early supplier engagement, helps assess market health, address weaknesses and promote	Increased involvement of procurement resources in developing robust business cases. Improved contract management ensures that suppliers continue to deliver value for money as contained within the contract terms.	value approach in line with internal rules and external legislation. Greater use of the forward pipeline will allow the procurement team early sight of activity - utilising the skills and knowledge of the team in the process to develop the solution and ensure best value. Contract Managers are suitably trained in best practice. Waiver requests are reviewed when received with the aim to reduce their number.
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suitable competition that delivers value for money.		
7. Benchmarking our organisational capability and workforce capacity to ensure we have the appropriate procurement and contract management skills and capacity necessary to deliver value for money		
To support commercial capability, training needs to be given to procurement staff and Contract Managers. This training should go beyond legal compliance to legislation and include how the new flexibilities in the Procurement Act can be used to deliver greater efficiency and better commercial outcomes.	Procurement staff must have full awareness of the Procurement Act and any other applicable procurement legislation to be able to accurately and confidently advise other officers and members. Procurement staff should be encouraged and supported to undertake relevant professional qualifications. Contract Management staff must be suitably trained to a level commensurate with the complexity, risk and value of the contracts they manage. This training should include guidance on how to undertake regular supplier health checks, risk assessment, and mitigation of identified risks. It must also cover how to conduct and report performance, including how to produce plans to improve poor performance.	Compliance with all relevant UK legislation, including public procurement law. The Council's standard procurement templates should be reviewed and refreshed as necessary to reflect changes and best practice. All procurement staff have undertaken and passed the full training made available through the Governments Commercial College covering the Procurement Act. Investing in the skills of the Council's procurement and contract team is crucial, supporting staff to achieve relevant professional qualifications such as CIPS (Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply) accreditation. Make Contract Managers responsible for tracking and reporting on contractual performance, as well as for addressing any under-performance.

		Encouraging and embedding training and development within the procurement team ensuring internal procurement competency and clear delivery of procurement solutions. Promoting procurement and contract management training across the council through take-up of the e-learning package (for appropriate managers) available and awareness of guidance material on the SmartHub. Use data to identify lessons learned and seek to continuously improve the way we procure and manage contracts. Systems, processes, and reporting mechanisms should be put in place to give decision-makers clear oversight of money spent, contract management activity, and contractual performance. Maintaining an up-to-date procurement pipeline shared with the service areas which will allow for identification of resource shortages.
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8. Using collaborative procurement agreements, where appropriate for the requirement and the market, to ensure value for money		
Contracting authorities can often ensure value for money by using collaborative procurement arrangements established by centralised procurement authorities such as the Government Commercial Agency and other framework providers. These arrangements aggregate spend for common goods, services and works, enabling selected suppliers to be contracted quickly on agreed terms and with competitive maximum pricing. Authorities should ensure that any collaborative arrangements used are transparent concerning fees and that they offer the best value for money compared to other agreements.	Increased surety that the arrangements used offer best value for money and comply with legislation. The arrangements used should be in accordance with the terms of the agreement and how awards of contracts are to be made.	Procurement Officers are required to identify suitable agreements, ensure that the Council can use them and advise the service areas on how contracts are to be awarded.

Review

16. The Procurement Strategy will be reviewed periodically to reflect any changes in the Council's needs, legislation, best practice and audit recommendations.

Governance and Responsibility for the Procurement Strategy

Activity	Responsibility
Ownership of the Strategy	Cabinet Members
Overall Responsibility for delivery of the Strategy	Assistant Director of Finance
Leading implementation of the Strategy, including provision of training, guidance, data and tools	Procurement and Contract Manager, supported by Officers within the Procurement and Contract Management Team. Support from other services such as Exchequer and Legal will also be necessary.
Delivery of the Strategy in respect of commercial, procurement and contract management activity	All Council Officers with responsibility for service leadership, procurement and contract management

Contacts and Useful Links

Email: procurement@ashford.gov.uk

Ashford Borough Council Website:

- Selling to the Council Guide for Suppliers
<https://www.ashford.gov.uk.uk/business/contracts-procurement-and-tenders/>

References/Related documents (links to be added):

- Procurement Act 2023 [Procurement Act 2023](#)
- Public Contracts Regulations 2015 [The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 \(revoked\)](#)
- Social Value Act 2012 [Public Services \(Social Value\) Act 2012](#)
- National Procurement Policy Statement 2025 [National Procurement Policy Statement - GOV.UK](#)
- Ashford Borough Council Contract Standing Orders [Document The Constitution - Modern Council](#)
- Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028 [Information about Ashford Borough Council's Corporate Plan and performance reports.](#)