

North Herts Council Procurement Strategy 2025–2028

1. Introduction

This Procurement Strategy sets out how we will ensure our procurement activity delivers high-quality, value-for-money goods, services, and works that support our Council Plan 2024–2028. Procurement is a key lever in achieving our four core priorities: Thriving Communities, Accessible Services, Responsible Growth, and Sustainability.

This strategy aligns with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), the National Procurement Strategy for Local Government in England (2022), the Council's Contract Procurement Rules (CPRs, Section 20 off the Council's Constitution), and the Procurement Act 2023. It positions procurement as a strategic enabler of transformation, innovation, and community wellbeing.

The Procurement Act 2023 introduces a new public procurement regime across the UK from February 2025. It emphasises transparency, value for money, public benefit, and effective contract delivery, and influences our approach to procedures, notices, supplier evaluation, and contract management.

2. Purpose and Scope

When undertaking procurement, we will:

- **Delivering Value for Money:** Ensuring that each procurement decision maximises the value received from public funds.
- **Maximising Public Benefit:** Aiming to achieve the greatest possible benefit for the community through our procurement activities. This includes embedding sustainability.
- **Transparency in Communication:** Providing clear and accessible information to suppliers about our procurement policies and decisions to foster understanding and fair competition.
- **Integrity:** Maintaining the highest standards of integrity in all procurement actions and ensuring that our processes are transparent, promoting trust and accountability.

We operate a devolved procurement model. Service managers are responsible for procurements within their areas, supported by a central Procurement Officer who provides strategic oversight, templates, guidance, training, and compliance assurance.

This strategy applies to all procurement activity, including capital programmes, revenue-funded purchases, and externally funded projects (grants). It embeds legal compliance, social value, environmental responsibility, commercial thinking, and procurement maturity improvement in all procurement practice.

It also promotes use of the National Procurement Strategy Self-Assessment Toolkit to benchmark our progress and guide improvement.

3. Delivering on our Commitments and Council Plan priorities

3.1 Value for Money

We will deliver on our commitments by:

- Supporting high-quality, inclusive, and accessible service delivery.
- Promoting innovation, efficiency, and income opportunities, e.g. through use of flexible procurement.
- Explore use of joint procurement, although balanced against Go Local.
- Ensure delivery models and business cases fully consider affordability, risk mitigation, and value for money
- Procurement decisions will be made on the basis of whole-life value, balancing cost, quality, risk, and deliverability
- Support for Contract Managers to write specifications that promote inclusive and accessible services.

Ensuring that we deliver Value for Money links to our Council Plan priority for Sustainability (financial). We can also help deliver our Accessible Services priority by incorporating requirements into our contracts.

3.2 Maximising Public Benefit

We will deliver on our commitments by:

- Embedding sustainability (including low-carbon and waste reduction) and net-zero targets in procurements over £100k
- Develop a Green Procurement Checklist in conjunction with the Contract Procurement Group
- Applying a 10% minimum weighting for Social Value in all relevant procurements, including a focus on employment, training and community investment.
- Support for Contract Managers to maximise Social Value benefits when writing procurement documents.
- Annual reporting on delivery of Social Value.
- Annual reporting of carbon savings from procurement.
- Supporting local businesses, SMEs, and VCSEs via a Go Local policy (see Annex A).
- Relevant contracts will include KPIs related to customer access and feedback
- Require the use of ethical supply chains.

Our commitments in relation to Social Value can support our Council Plan priorities for Thriving Communities, Responsible Growth and Sustainability (environmental). This will depend on the Social Value offered by successful contractors. This is in addition to any Sustainability (environmental) that is directly incorporated into contracts, supported by a Green Procurement checklist. As a public sector organisation, the Council are also required by the Public Sector Equality Duty to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and advance the equality of opportunity between people who share a

protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage). This obligation also supports the Council's broader efforts to prevent Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) through a Safety Charter and its accreditation to the White Ribbon campaign that seeks to foster a culture of respect and equality within the workplace and broader community. There is an expectation that potential suppliers will support the Council's stance on equality, diversity and inclusion and the reduction of gender-based violence by promoting respectful workplace cultures and practices.

Supporting local business and employment supports our Responsible Growth priority.

KPIs relate to customer access will help to ensure the delivery of Accessible Services.

3.3 Transparency, Communication and Integrity

We will deliver on our commitments by:

- Enhance transparency in line with the Local Government Transparency Code
- Improve procurement maturity using the National Procurement Strategy Toolkit
- Using data and feedback to improve how we engage the market, manage suppliers, and build capability.
- Provide SME-friendly quote packs and standardised simplified documentation
- Consider use of supplier Q&A sessions
- Conflict of interest declarations and assessments required for all contracts above £100k.
- Waivers and direct awards follow formal sign-off procedures

4. Procurement maturity

In addition to the above we will also aim to improve our procurement maturity. Some of the specific themes and actions in relation to that ambition are:

4.1 Commercial Procurement and Innovation

Procurement supports innovation and commercial thinking by identifying opportunities to reduce cost, increase efficiency, and generate income.

How we will deliver this:

- Provide flexible procurement documents that allow innovation
- Deliver commercial awareness training to service managers and contract managers
- Explore joint procurement opportunities with neighbouring councils

4.2 SME (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) and VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises) Engagement

The Council will support SMEs and VCSEs by reducing entry barriers and ensuring transparent, proportionate processes.

How we will deliver this:

- Publish a live procurement pipeline
- Provide SME-friendly quote packs and standardised simplified documentation
- Hold supplier Q&A sessions and provide guidance via the Procurement Officer

5. Governance and Accountability

All procurement must align with the principles, procedures, and transparency requirements of the Procurement Act 2023, including use of standardised notices and compliance with new thresholds and competitive procedures.

In addition, they will comply with the Council's CPRs and Constitution. Contract managers are accountable for their activity; the Procurement Officer provides assurance and support.

- Templates and checklists are mandatory
- Conflict of interest declarations and assessments required for all evaluations above £100k.
- Contract Procurement Group will review high-value procurements and oversee pipeline planning
- Waivers and direct awards must follow formal sign-off procedures

6. Measuring Success

Key performance indicators:

- % spend with local suppliers
- % of spend with SMEs, and VCSEs
- Carbon savings achieved through procurement
- Value of Social Value achieved (Social Value Portal) and assessment of Social Value achieved for lower value procurements.
- Procurement maturity level measured using the National Procurement Strategy (NPS) Toolkit
- Training completion
- Monitoring CPR compliance and audit outcomes, and learning lessons from those findings

7. Continuous Improvement

The strategy will be reviewed annually and updated in response to:

- Legal or policy changes
- Market developments
- Internal audit findings

- National benchmarking or peer reviews

Annual self-assessment against the NPS Toolkit will guide training, supplier engagement, and process development.

Annex A- Go Local Policy

1. What is this policy for?

This policy helps North Herts Council support local jobs and businesses by encouraging officers to prioritise suppliers who operate from within the district. It keeps the process simple and practical for everyday use - especially when getting quotes or awarding contracts under £100,000. This is part of the Council priority for Responsible Growth.

2. What is a local business?

- **North Herts business:** A business that is based solely in North Herts or has its main physical business presence (e.g. office, depot, premises) in the district.
- **Strong North Herts presence:** A business that has a significant physical presence in North Herts (e.g. a permanent site, office or satellite premises) and offers local employment.

3. When do we use this?

- Use this policy for all contracts and quotes under £100,000.
- Applies to formal tenders and informal quote exercises.

4. What do officers need to do?

- Where required to only get one quote (under £10k for Goods and Services, under £25k for Works) then use a local business wherever possible. Value for Money should still be considered, but the value of local business must form part of that.
- Try to include at least one local supplier in your quotes.
- Ask all suppliers if they are a Local Business (this will be included in the quotation pack)
- When comparing suppliers, make it clear that this is part of your evaluation criteria. 2 points will be awarded for suppliers that meet the definition of a North Herts business. 1 point will be awarded for suppliers that meet the definition of having a strong North Herts presence.