

Questions & Answers 10/10/2024

How DfE Get help buying for schools can support you – Birmingham schools

Question

The timeline for having a new HR and Payroll provider in place is roughly a period of 9 months; is this realistic/achievable? This means a potential July 2025 completion, but we need to have this completed by September 2025, and we have school holidays to take into account.

Answer

It is achievable, but it largely depends on effective communication, including document sharing and action prioritisation. A comprehensive project plan with specific timelines will be developed with schools and Get help buying for schools will support throughout the procurement process.

This is the timeline for the aggregation process:

- **October and November 2024:** Initial meetings with all stakeholders
- **November – December 2024:** Document preparation, including TUPE info, data per site and specification
- **6 December 2024** – final deadline for expressions of interest
- **January 2025:** Publish final documents
- **February – March 2025:** Out to market / suppliers completing documents
- **March – April 2025:** Evaluate submissions
- **May 2025:** Award and TUPE consultancy to start

Question

What is the timeline to produce this specification for schools, who will be sending it out and when?

Answer

The circulated SLA will serve as the baseline specification document. Depending on the chosen market route, it will be included in the procurement documentation pack

It will be the school's responsibility to ensure that the specification meets their individual needs. Get help buying for schools service can advise but cannot write the specification on behalf of the school.

Question

How can we add a requirement to the SLA?

Answer

DfE Get help buying for schools service can amend / add / remove any aspect of the SLA document that has been provided based on your schools individual needs.

This would just need to be written into the appropriate section.

Question

There is currently only one DfE approved framework for HR and Payroll which has two suppliers on for combined support. Is this the only option we have if we use the Get help buying for schools service?

Answer

All DfE approved frameworks can be found on GOV.UK Find a Framework where there is currently a CPC HR, payroll and employee screening services framework.

Schools are autonomous and have the freedom to make their own decisions based on individual need and circumstances, and we recognise that other organisations and suppliers may be suitable. Get help buying for schools is not limited to using DfE approved frameworks only and will consider alternative options that may be suitable.

Question

Have DfE vetted the suppliers on your list or are they companies who have applied to be on there?

Answer

Yes, all the frameworks on DfE Find a Framework have been assessed for compliance with procurement regulations, ease of use, suitability and value for money.

The individual suppliers have gone through a rigorous procurement process to be awarded on each framework agreement.

Question

Is the Get help buying for schools service for contracts over a certain amount, e.g. £60k plus?

Answer

The DfE's Get help buying for schools service can assist with any value of procurement.

Question

Is the value of the contract based on the cost of the service, or the amount going through the salary run?

Answer

The contract value is based on the support cost, not the value of the money they are processing.

Individual costs could be low per school, below the service's financial threshold of £214,904 (inc VAT), which means that you would be beholden to your own local contract procedure rules / financial rules when it comes to awarding a contract. This may allow you to direct award with no process.

You may have lower financial thresholds which state you must invite competition into the process. Get help buying for schools service would not assist in the direct award requirement but could assist when it comes to seeking the competition i.e. running a process.

Some schools may find it quicker to sort this themselves out without being a part of the aggregation.

Question

The services required from a payroll provider and a HR provider are varied, do we need to have a contract/run a tender process for each?

Answer

You will have to decide if you want a supplier that can provide both services or if you want two separate suppliers to fulfil these requirements. This is something that we can discuss in more detail further down the process with schools that want to be part of the aggregation.

Question

What will the resulting contract length be?

Answer

This could be determined by the restrictions of the framework but normally the school can determine this. If you are part of any of the aggregations above, this would need to be uniform across all sites.

Question

How will the aggregation work?

Answer

There are several ways this could work and would be agreed with schools that are part of the aggregation:

1. You may decide that one school takes the role of lead organisation on behalf of all in the aggregation. This could mean that the combined total is above the financial threshold, and you will be supported to run a competitive process and award to one single supplier.

This is high risk option for the lead school which could mean transferring budgets and having a legal agreement between all the sites.

2. DfE Get help buying for schools service could run this as an aggregation. We would package individually into one process, but the output is individual contracts.

We could state that one supplier wins the full package. It is evaluated that the supplier would quote individually, but the price would be combined and compared with other suppliers to determine the winning bid.

There are risks, and some schools might see an increase in pricing as it is based on the collective total price.

3. DfE Get help buying for schools service could run this as an aggregation. We would package individually into one process; the output is individual contracts, but multiple suppliers could win multiple sites.

Each site would be priced up and evaluated individually.

There are risks, as suppliers are not forced to price for all sites and could leave some schools with no supplier bidding for the contract.

Question

Why can't the DfE own the aggregation and run the contract at a cost to the aggregation? I am in the Government Water aggregation who act as manager of the contract and any contract issues are resolved by Government staff. If we operated an aggregation independently, we have to manage that contract and any issues with it by ourselves.

Answer

The Government Water Aggregation is a National Aggregation Initiative. This is not a formal national aggregation; we are offering to support you aggregating your spend to go out to market.