Tendering and Procurement Policy

November 2025

Approved by	Date	Review Schedule	Date of next review
Trust Board	November 2025	Every 3 years	November 2028

Saint Paul teaches, 'the body is not made up of one part but of many.'
Chester Diocesan Learning Trust recognises and nurtures the unique gifts, skills and talents within our whole community.

We will empower adults and children to grow in character and mind, shaping a better future.

Shaping better futures; one body, many parts.

Contents:

1. Statement of intent

Chester Diocesan Learning Trust (CDLT) aims to achieve value for money on all its tendering and procurement activities. With that in mind, this policy has been created to establish procedures to ensure all members of staff involved in tendering and procurement are aware of the standards that they are expected to follow.

Preferred suppliers will be used, wherever possible, as the academy has had previous positive interactions with these suppliers. During tendering and procurement processes, the following four key objectives will always be kept in mind:

- **Achieving value for money** – including the cost of goods and services, the quality of goods and services, and administrative costs
- **Ensuring fairness** – ensuring that all parties are treated in a fair and equitable manner
- **Establishing accountability** – taking responsibility for expenditure and the conduct of staff
- **Allowing probity** – ensuring there is no private gain from the academy's financial affairs

2. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to legislation and national guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Academies Trust handbook 2024
- The Academies Act 2010
- Equality Act 2010
- The Public Contracts Regulations 2015
- DfE (2023) 'Governance handbook'
- DFE (2023) 'Declare or seek approval for related party transactions: summary guidance'.
- HM Treasury (2012) 'Review of the tax arrangements of public sector appointees'
- DfE (2023) 'Buying for schools'
- The Public Procurement Regulations 2021

This policy will be implemented in conjunction with the trust's:

- Data Protection Policy
- Finance Manual
- Reserves and Investments Policy

3. Small and medium purchases

Any purchase or service estimates below £5,000 are considered to be 'small' purchases, and any below £50,000 are considered to be 'medium' purchases.

Purchases, below £50,000, do not require approval from the board of trustees but are required to be approved in line with the procurement limits as defined in section 4.

Where possible, the trust will use a framework agreement to purchase small and medium goods, works or services.

Quotes and prices are always obtained prior to purchasing using the trust's template 'Request for Quotation' (RFQ) document, which includes a detailed specification of the goods / services required.

To avoid legal challenges, the trust:

- Does not open any bids before the deadline.
- Does not open any late bids.
- Treats all bids fairly and equally.
- Keeps confidential, secure and, auditable records.
- Buys from the highest scoring supplier.

Where a relevant approved supplier list exists, approved suppliers are used unless written permission is received from the board of trustees outlining the reasons for using an alternative supplier.

The trust ensures that at least two people assess each bid. When they compare scores, they will:

- Discuss where they've scored differently
- Reach an agreed score

The trust will send a contract, such as a purchase order, to the chosen supplier, including:

- What has been purchased
- Total cost
- Delivery address
- Delivery date and any other important dates
- When the trust will pay the cost

All receipts and invoices are kept in the main office for a period of 18 months after the initial purchase.

The Chief Finance Officer and Chief Operating Officer (CFO/COO) will oversee the processing of each receipt and ensure they are available for inspection where necessary.

Goods are inspected upon delivery. Any items that are either not part of the order, damaged or not fit for purpose will be returned.

4. Large purchases

The trust will seek legal advice before making large purchases.

Any purchase or service estimated to cost over **£50,000** is put to formal tender, using the most appropriate procurement procedure, and utilising the relevant Trust template Invitation to Tender documentation.

In the case of major building works or construction, the services of an architect are sought before the tendering process is undertaken.

***Large Purchases* with a value under the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA) procurement threshold**

[The GPA thresholds are formed as part of the trade agreement with the EU and are the same as the EU thresholds.]

When the trust makes purchases with a value under the GPA procurement threshold, it will:

- Assess the market.
- Prepare the contract and tender documents (templates provided).
- Advertise in the right places.
- Consider using an expression of interest to cut the number of bids needed to assess later.
- Send an invitation to tender to people who reply to the advert.
- Fairly assess all the bids received, using the same process.
- Choose the bid that offers the best value for money.
- Award the contract to the highest scoring bidder.

Large purchases over the GPA procurement threshold

If it is estimated that the cost of a contract is above the GPA threshold for procurement spending, the trust will follow GPA procurement directives and seek legal advice. The current GPA threshold for all goods and most services is £189,330. A ‘light touch regime’, with a higher threshold of £663,540, applies for some services that are specifically for education provision. We will seek professional advice to determine if any procurement run by the trust qualifies.

5. Procurement and spending decisions

Procurement basics

The trust ensures that:

- Spending is for the purpose intended and there is probity in the use of public funds.
- Spending decisions represent value for money.
- Internal delegation levels exist and are applied.
- The tendering policy is in place and applied, and OJEU* procurement thresholds are observed.
- Professional advice is obtained where appropriate.

Procurement limits

The following limits are placed on the procurement process and/or number of bids which are to be obtained before purchasing or confirming a service:

Quotations and tendering	Order Value	Process Required
	Below £5,000	A fixed quote or price must always be obtained before any order is placed. Each budget holder must consider value for money.
	£5,000 to £50,000	Framework agreement or a minimum of three quotes to be obtained (unless justifiable reason for less quotes e.g. only supplier providing a certain product, clear demonstratable value in using certain supplier e.g. knowledge of CDLT) Approval in line with authorisation limits as per CDLT financial handbook.
	£50,000 to relevant EU limit	Framework agreement or formal tendering process requiring approval from Chief Executive Officer.
	Over EU/GPA limit [Under the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), the EU and the UK have agreed that public procurement in the education sector should be subject to the same commitments as are set out in the Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA), so the EU thresholds still apply.]	Framework agreement or EU-compliant buying process under the EU trade agreement (unless the light touch regime applies, in which case the threshold is £663,540) For academy trusts, new procurement commencing from 1 January 2021, above the relevant threshold, must be advertised on Find a Tender.

6. Invoices

All invoices are recorded and stored for future reference, with checks on the following information:

- The mathematical validity
- The purchase ledger
- The goods or services ordered and delivered
- Any difference between the agreed and delivered price
- The authorisation for payment
- The amount paid in VAT
- The total payment made

The MAT/School Finance Team create regular invoice reports which are submitted to the CFO.

7. Risk management

The trust maintains a risk register and manages risks to ensure its effective operation.

The trust's risk management includes contingency and business continuity planning.

The trust is protected from risk by the RPA.

The trust cooperates with risk management auditors and risk managers, implementing any reasonable risk management audit recommendations.

8. Open tender

Open tender is the trust's preferred method of tender due to its open and competitive nature.

All interested suppliers are invited to tender, with the CFO/COO making a recommendation to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and/or Trust Board.

The CEO has the final say in selecting the successful tender. Advertisements will be included on the CDLT website and where appropriate in trade publications to attract bids for tender.

The Open procedure is best used where:

16.1 The requirements are typically straightforward, with a relatively simple Selection and Award process; and

16.2 It is anticipated that only a small number of organisations will respond to the advertised Contract Notice.

Advantages of the Open Procedure
Increased competition due to the potentially high volume of responses
Organisations of all sizes have the opportunity tpo submit a tender, increasing the opportunity for a number of innovative proposals / solutions
Advantageous for simple and straightforward requirements (e.g. stationery)
Providing full tender documentation (at the outset) enables suppliers to make an informed decision as to whether they can satisy the requirements, or choose to discount themselves from the copetition.
Overall timescale reduced (no Selection Questionnaire stage)

Disadvantages of the Open Procedure
Resource implications of a potentially lengthy tender evaluation (due to a high volume of responses)
Increases the risk of challenge (more responses and time invested / transaction costs ijn preparing a tender as opposed to a Selection Questionnaire)
Poor quality bids (due to the fact there is an increased chance of being unsuccessful and a limited timescale)
No opportunity to discuss / refine bids

9. Restricted tender

In this scenario, only suppliers who meet specified criteria are invited to bid.

The Restricted procedure is a two-stage process:

1. Stage One (Selection) - Suppliers are alerted to express an interest to a contract opportunity by obtaining and submitting a Selection Questionnaire (SQ); this will be used to establish their capability, experience and suitability etc. The purpose of the SQ is to select a shortlist of 3 (or more) suppliers which are likely to meet the tender requirements.
2. Stage Two (Award) - Shortlisted suppliers which meet the selection criteria are then invited to tender. All tenders are evaluated in line with the methodology and award criteria set out in the tender documentation.

The Restricted procedure is best used where:

1. It is anticipated that a large number of suppliers will respond to the advertised Contract Notice; or
2. The requirements are typically complex, with a relatively detailed Selection and Award evaluation process.

Advantages of the Restricted Procedure
Restricts the number of organisations invited to tender (making the tender evaluation more manageable)
Enables a detailed Selection assessment (i.e. stage 1 of the procedure)
Helps improve the quality of the bids (due to the fact that there is an increased chance of a bidder being successful and the contracting authority has selected their shortlist of ‘pre-qualified’ suppliers.

Disadvantages of the Restricted Procedure
Speculative SQs being submitted due to the fact that the full tender documentation may be unavailable at the Selection stage
Increased timescales
Added resource and cost and potentially unnecessary burden for suppliers (making the contract opportunity appear unattractive to some)
No opportunity to discuss / refine bids

10. Negotiated tender

In this scenario, the terms of the contract are negotiated with the supplier.

Negotiated tender is only used in any of the following circumstances:

- Other types of tender have been used and have not found any suitable suppliers
- Very few suppliers are available
- There is an urgent need for a service

Where a negotiated tender is used, the Trust Board will be informed of the value of the contract award and reasons why this method of procurement has been used. The Trust Board may, depending on circumstances, instruct the CFO/COO to conduct a benchmarking exercise and/or proceed with a restricted or open tender process.

11. Preparation for tender

In preparing for a tender, the CFO/COO will consider the following:

- The overall objective of the project
- Any technical skills required to complete the project
- Any after-sales services required
- The form of the contract

12. Invitation to tender

The trust makes all necessary documents available online when the advert has been placed on the relevant portal. These include:

- A covering letter or overview of services/products required
- A timeline
- How to ask questions
- How to submit a bid
- Specifications / Scope of Work
- A list of things the trust requires prices for
- The award criteria
- The level of service required
- Any contract management needs, such as regular meetings or contact
- If needed, an invitation for suppliers to give a demonstration
- The proposed contract drafted as far as possible

13. Tender evaluation

When making purchases, the trust:

- Decides the method of assessing the bids
- Invites bids from at least 3 suppliers
- Assesses all the bids received fairly
- Chooses the supplier that offers the best value for money

When evaluating a tender, the following financial implications are considered:

- Lower costs may not necessarily be the most favourable, for example, when they result in a reduced service
- The price being considered should be the total cost, without extra fees or hidden costs
- Where there is scope for negotiation, the CFO/COO needs to ensure the best possible value for money

When evaluating a tender, the following technical requirements are considered:

- Certificates of conformity
- Conformity of standards
- The qualifications and experience of the supplier
- Descriptions of technical services and facilities
- Quality control procedures
- Details of previously delivered services
- References from previous customers

When considering a tender, the following other requirements are considered:

- Pre-sales demonstrations
- After-sales service
- The financial viability of the supplier

14. Tender acceptance

Invitations to tender always state the date and time the completed tender documents are to be received by the CFO/COO.

Suppliers are required to submit documents clearly stating they are tender documents.

Tender documents received after deadlines are not considered, unless the supplier provides proof of exceptional circumstances.

Informing unsuccessful bidders

Upon request the trust will confirm to all unsuccessful bidders:

- The award criteria used
- The scores for the winning bid
- The reasons for the decision, including the characteristics and relative advantages of the successful tender
- When the standstill period ends
- Their scores and feedback

The trust will provide information regarding the cost of the winning bid upon request, provided it does not reveal any commercially sensitive information.

Informing the successful bidder

The trust will provide the following information when informing the successful bidder that they have won. This may include:

- The award criteria used
- Their scores
- Why the trust thinks their bid is the most economically advantageous
- When the standstill period ends

The trust will issue an invitation to finalise a contract. The invitation will make it clear that:

- The trust will only award them the contract if the standstill period passes without a challenge from another supplier
- There are no commitments, and no work should begin, until both sides have signed the contract

15. Tender opening

Tenders will usually be submitted electronically by email to a named contact at CDLT.
If hard copy tenders are sought, all offers for tender received in paper format are opened at the same time, with a minimum of two members of staff present, one of whom is the CFO/COO.
A record is kept of all the suppliers who submitted tenders, along with the amount tendered. A record is signed by all members of staff who are present at the opening of a new tender.
The record is stored in line with our Data Protection Policy.

16. Tender evaluation

The CFO/COO is responsible for ensuring that none of the members of staff involved in the tender process are subject to conflicts of interest.

Members of staff who are involved in decision making will never accept gifts or hospitality from suppliers.

A full record of the evaluation process will be maintained by the CFO/COO.

17. Contracts

Non-routine tenders or purchases, such as leases, are subject to a contract, which is signed before the work begins or goods are delivered.

All contracts include the following details:

- The scope of the work including accurate specifications
- The timeline and completion date of the work
- Quality control measures
- The agreed fees or charges
- The payment date.
- Specifications of the goods or service

Copies of all contracts are securely stored in the central record located in the main office.

You must place a contract award notice in the FTS within 30 days of awarding the contract.

Challenges from unsuccessful bidders

The trust maintains a standstill period of 10 calendar days between telling notifying the winning bidder and awarding the contract. – if this period ends on a non-working day, this will be extended to the end of the next working day.

During the standstill period, if an unsuccessful bidder challenges the fairness of the contract award decision or process, the trust will contact them and explain the assessment process was conducted fairly and that the trust has maintained good records – legal advice may be sought depending on the nature or seriousness of the challenge.

If an unsuccessful bidder makes a legal challenge, the trust will not finalise the contract, and will seek legal advice before proceeding.

18. Related party transactions

The principles we adhere to:

Trustees avoid any conflicts of interest, declare their interest in proposed transactions and arrangements, and do not accept benefits from third parties.

All members, trustees, local governors and senior employees complete the register of interests.

No member, trustee, local governor, employee or related individual will use their connection to the trust for personal gain, including payment under terms that are preferential to those that would be offered to an individual or organisation with no connection to the trust.

Payments to trustees by the trust are only made where permitted by the articles, or by the authority of the Charity Commission, and comply with any relevant agreement with the Secretary of State.

The trust considers their obligations where payments are made to other businesses who employ a trustee, are owned by a trustee or in which the trustee holds a controlling interest.

Where the trust believes a significant advantage exists in paying a trustee for acting as a trustee, the Charity Commission's approval will be obtained prior to payment. The trust adheres to 'at cost' requirements.

The chair of the board of trustees and the accounting officer ensure their capacity to control and influence does not conflict with related party transaction requirements.

Personal relationships with related parties are managed in a manner that avoids both real and perceived conflicts of interest, promotes integrity and openness and is in accordance with 'The 7 principles of public life'.

The trust is aware of relationships with related parties that may attract greater public scrutiny, such as:

- Transactions with individuals in a position of control and influence, including the chair of the board of trustees and the accounting officer.
- Payments to organisations with a profit motive, as opposed to those in the public or voluntary sectors.
- Relationships with external auditors beyond their duty to deliver a statutory audit.

Record keeping

The trust keeps sufficient records, and makes sufficient disclosures in the annual accounts, to show that related party transactions have been made in accordance with accountability and transparency standards.

Approval by the DFE

The trust will obtain the DFE's approval for related party transactions that are novel, contentious or repercussive. Transactions involving the chair of the board or the accounting officer will be carefully considered against this requirement.

The trust will obtain the DFE's prior approval for contracts supplying goods or services by related parties agreed on or after 1 September 2023 where any of the following limits apply:

- The contract exceeds £40,000.
- The contract would take the total value of contracts with the related party to beyond £40,000 in the same financial year ending 31 August.
- The contract relates to a party already in receipt of contracts exceeding £40,000 individually or cumulatively in the same financial year ending 31 August.

For the purposes of reporting to, and approval by, the DFE, contracts and agreements with related parties do not include salaries and other payments made by the trust to a person under a contract of employment through the trust's payroll.

When seeking approval, the trust will ensure it has the relevant information about the supplier, including the supplier's name, address and company number. The trust will also:

- Confirm the statement which best describes the relationship between the supplier and the trust.
- Confirm that the supplier is listed in the trust's register of interests.
- Confirm that the trust has a statement of assurance from the supplier.
- Confirm that the trust has an open-book agreement with the supplier.
- Provide a short description of the goods or service, details of the proposed cost and the start and end date of any contract or agreement.

Provide evidence of the following:

- How the trust agreed to the related party transaction, e.g. minutes of meetings where it was discussed
- That the trust followed this policy
- That the trust tested the market before making a decision
- How the trust has managed any conflict of interest

The trust will provide a copy of the agreement or proposed contract.

The trust will upload any additional documents the trust feels are relevant as part of its submission.

The trust will ensure the information and documentation listed above has been received before the trust completes the online related party transaction form.

Register of interests

The trust will document all relevant business and pecuniary interests of members, trustees, local governors and senior employees, including:

- Directorships, partnerships and employments with businesses.
- Trusteeships and governorships at other educational institutions and charities.
- For each interest, the name of the business, the nature of the business, the nature of the interest and the date the interest began.

The register of interests will identify all relevant material interests from close family relationships between the trust's members, trustees or local governors. It will also identify relevant material interests arising from close family relationships between those individuals and employees.

The trust will consider any other interests for inclusion on the register of interests. The board of trustees will keep the register of interests up-to-date.
The trust will publish on their website the relevant business and pecuniary interests of members, trustees, local governors and accounting officers.

The publication of interests belonging to any other individuals named on the register is at the discretion of the trust.

'At cost' requirements

The trust will not pay more than 'cost' for goods or services provided by the following:

- Any member or trustee of the trust
- Any individual or organisation related to a member or trustee of the trust, namely:
    - o A relative of a member or trustee: defined as a close member of the family, or member of the same household, who may be expected to influence, or be influenced by, the person. This includes, but is not limited to, a child, parent, spouse or civil partner.
    - o An individual or organisation conducting business in partnership with the member, trustee or a relative of the member or trustee.
    - o A company in which a member or the relative of a member (taken separately or together), and/or a trustee or the relative of a trustee (taken separately or together), holds more than 20 percent of the share capital or is entitled to exercise more than 20 percent of the voting power at any general meeting of that company.
    - o An organisation which is controlled by a member or the relative of a member (acting separately or together), and/or a trustee or the relative of a trustee (acting separately or together) – an organisation is controlled by an individual or organisation if that individual or organisation is able to secure that the affairs of the body are conducted in accordance with the individual's or organisation's wishes.

- Any individual or organisation given the right under the trust's articles of association to appoint a member or trustee of the academy trust, or any body connected to the

individual or organisation.
- Any individual or organisation recognised by the Secretary of State as a sponsor of the trust, or any body connected to the individual or organisation.

A body is connected to an individual or organisation if it is controlled by the individual or organisation, controls the organisation, or is under common control with the individual or organisation, namely any of the following:

- Holding a greater than 20 percent capital share or equivalent interest
- Having the equivalent right to control management decisions of the body
- Having the right to appoint or remove a majority of the board or governing board

'At cost' requirements do not apply to the trust's employees unless they are employed by one of the
parties outlined above.

'At cost' requirements apply to contracts for goods and services from a related party agreed on or after 7 November 2013.

'At cost' requirements apply to contracts for goods and services from a related party exceeding
£2,500, cumulatively, in any one financial year. Where a contract takes the trust's cumulative annual
total with the related party beyond £2,500, the element above £2,500 must be at no more than cost.

If any of the parties outlined above are based in, or work from, the trust's premises, the trust will agree an appropriate sum to be paid to the trust for use of the premises, unless the party is conducting work on behalf of the trust.

'At cost' requirements apply to legal advice or audit services when the organisation's partner directly
managing the service is a member or trustee of the trust, but not in other cases.

The trust will ensure that any agreement with an individual or organisation referred to above is procured through an open and fair process and is:

On the basis of an open book agreement including a requirement for the supplier to demonstrate clearly, if requested, that their charges do not exceed the cost of supply.

The cost will be the full cost of all the resources used in supplying the goods or services and will not include any profit. Full cost includes:

- All direct costs – the costs of any materials and labour used directly in producing the goods or services.

- Indirect costs – a proportionate and reasonable share of fixed and variable overheads.

Reporting

The trust will report all related party transactions taking place on or after 1 September 2025 to the DFE in advance of the transaction taking place, using the DFE's online form.

Tax arrangements for senior employees

The trust ensures its senior employees' payroll arrangements fully meet tax obligations.

The trust complies with the HM Treasury's 'Review of the tax arrangements of public sector appointees', which explains that senior managers with significant financial responsibilities should be exclusively on payroll and are therefore subject to Pay As You Earn (PAYE) with income tax and NI contributions deducted at source.

19 .Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed (as a minimum) annually by the CFO/COO and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and/or at any time regulatory, statutory or non-statutory guidance in relation to Academy Trusts or Public Procurement Regulations is updated. The scheduled review date for this policy is the Summer Term 2026.