

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL, SCOTLAND

### Procurement objectives

East Ayrshire Council is responsible for 44 primary and nine secondary schools, offering approximately 1.3m school meals per year. A contract was advertised in 2008 to cover the supply of food and beverages to 30 schools for a period of up to three years. The objectives were to transform the menus on offer to reduce reliance on processed food and ensure good nutritional standards. At the same time, reductions in packaging and a switch to organic produce were intended to reduce the environmental impact of school meals.

### Background

The [Hungry for Success](#) initiative aimed to promote healthy eating in Scotland's schools through improved nutritional standards and a more integrated approach to school meals as part of the learning experience. East Ayrshire was one of the first councils in the UK to change its procurement practices to reflect the Soil Association's [guidelines on sustainable food](#).

This focuses on reducing processed food, organic agriculture, using fresh ingredients and implementing nutritional standards and education programmes for schoolchildren. The Council has also taken steps to green other contracts, as set out in its [procurement strategy](#).



### Criteria used

The restricted procedure was used and the contract was divided into nine lots for the supply of meat, poultry, fish, fruit, vegetables, milk, eggs, cheese and dried/bottled goods.

#### Subject matter of the contract:

Supply and delivery of fresh/organic foodstuffs.

**Technical specifications:** Bidders are required to submit method statements detailing their approach to all aspects of supply, including:

- Organic certification
- Compliance with animal welfare standards (where relevant)
- [HACCP](#) systems or clear details of sourcing
- Production and transport arrangements

#### Award criteria:

Most economically advantageous tender in terms of:

- Net price – 50 %
- Ability to supply to deadline – 15%
- Quality and range of foods – 15%
- Food handling arrangements and facilities – 10%
- Use of resources – 10%

The evaluation of 'use of resources' looked at the suppliers' proposals for reduction in environmental impacts; contribution to sustainable development and biodiversity; minimising packaging; minimising waste; recycling and composting; and higher than minimum animal welfare standards.

## Results

Following selection of tenderers, the number of offers received ranged from one to four per lot. Although the number of tenderers were low in some categories the standard and level of commitment to higher quality standards and ethical and environmental improvement was evident. One successful bidder initially did not have the required organic certification, but provided a commitment to do this and quickly adapted their supply chain and storage to meet the requirements.

The total value of all lots is approximately £400,000 (€480,000) per annum. Increased comparative costs were observed against alternative contracts that did not take the ethical and environmental requirements into account, however this has been mitigated partly by reviewing the menus and sales mix offered. It was also noted that the higher quality meat resulted in less being required in the menu and fewer off cuts of meat being wasted.

Research also established that taking a wider perspective and examining the social return on investment identified that for every £1 spent through this approach brought up to £6 back to the local community through employment, environmental, health and social benefits. As of 2011, over 90% of the food used for school meals is fresh and unprocessed and 30% is organic. At least 70% is sourced locally, although this was not a requirement under the tender. The uptake of school meals has also increased since the introduction of the strategy – contrary to a national trend downwards.

## Environmental impacts

Food production has a massive impact in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, soil and water pollution, depletion of natural resources and biodiversity. The effects of industrial agriculture using pesticides and the production of meat in particular are carbon-intensive. Switching to organic agriculture, less processed food and minimising food waste can all help to reduce this burden. East Ayrshire's approach incorporated all these elements, and the food items used also have a shorter distance to travel. Independent research carried out by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency indicated that the CO<sub>2</sub> emission savings associated with the change in food sourcing for one school alone amounts to 37.7 tonnes per annum.

## Lessons learned

As the contract involved smaller, local producers and distributors the direct relationship allowed improved cooperation. With a narrow product list per supplier quality, consistency and reliability proved better. This was evident both at the individual school kitchen level and in overall contract management. Overall satisfaction levels were high and further improvements were implemented by suppliers following encouragement to work towards [SALSA accreditation](#).

In 2011-2012 East Ayrshire is repeating the tender process. This will include greater discussions with a wider number of suppliers prior to tender on the strategy and the process. The tender criteria and aspects of the evaluation will be adapted to more clearly identify requirements and guidance provided by the Soil Association's Food for Life Standard. It will also aim to establish a further commitment to consider improvements and identify benefits through all aspects of farm to fork process with an emphasis on supporting educational, health and social outcomes.

East Ayrshire participated in the Scottish Government's National Food and Drink Leadership Forum, leading to a policy on sustainable food procurement in hospitals, schools and prisons, which was approved with cross-party support in 2009. East Ayrshire was also the winner of an [Association for Public Service Excellence](#) award in 2011.