Procurement of catering services and organic food for school canteens
City of Lens (France)

Background

The City of Lens is situated in northern France and has a population of 36,000 people. The City is part of the agglomeration community of Lens-Liévin composed by 35 different Cities.

The City of Lens made the choice in 2008 to deliver 20% of organic food in school canteens, a target set under the “Grenelle environment” national initiative.

A tender was implemented in 2016 and it builds on the experience of two similar past procurements of catering services (from 2008, and from 2014). A previous GPP News Alert featured the procurement implemented in 2014. Requirements of the new tender have evolved as a result of the experience gained from the two past tenders.

In comparison to the previous procedure, three main changes can be highlighted in this recent tender. Based on the lessons learned from the past, this new tender included more detailed GPP criteria and it introduced three variations for the meals to be provided. In addition, the contracting authority put more emphasis on consultation with the market at the pre-procurement stage.

Procurement objectives

The general aim of the procurement was to provide the school children with an environmentally friendly, cost-effective, nutritional and organic catering service.

The procurement aimed to address different environmental and societal issues related to school canteens, such as the reduction of the environmental footprint of the services through the reduction of food-waste, awareness-raising of the children on sustainable development and the provision of sustainability training to the professional catering staff. The tender set minimum requirements and award criteria to tackle these challenges.

By the initiative of the Nord pas de Calais Regional Council, market engagement activities took place in the pre-procurement stage. Several meetings were organised between the regional council, the contracting authority and potential suppliers with the aim of communicating the public need and requirements and to stimulate the delivery of better services. The regional council and the participating companies agreed to sign a partnership charter.

Criteria used

Subject matter of the contract: Procurement for the provision of the preparation and delivery of cold meals. The tender consisted of one lot only, with the total amount of 2.2m EUR during the whole contract duration. The initial contract is for one year. It can be renewed three times for a total duration of four years. The tender procedure had the form of an open procedure.

Technical specifications:
20% of the food provided under the contract has to have an organic origin, which has been increased comparing to the 15% specified in 2014. The components of the organic meals have to be derived from organic farming, certified according to the Organic Farming Regulation (EC) 834/2007.
Bidders were required to provide three types of menus with different levels of organic content as defined by the contracting authority:

1. Menu with a set of components from organic farming (5 out of 5 components)
2. Menu comprising 3 components (out of 5) from organic farming
3. Menu comprising 1 component (out of 5) from organic farming

The bidders had to provide 5 different combinations for each of the above menu categories.

In addition, the contractor had to guarantee the traceability of their supplied products. On request the contractor has to provide the City of Lens with the certificates of organic origin of the product. Additionally, the winning bidder was required to train its staff with regards to the composition, nutritional value and balance of every meal.

Award criteria:
The contract was awarded to the bidder that offered the most economically advantageous tender. For this purpose, four criteria and the following weighting system were established:

- **Technical offer 45%**
  - Quality of products used in menu design (30 points)
  - Respect of product seasonality in menu design (30 points)
  - Variety of menus (20 points)
  - Compliance with nutritional recommendations (20 points)

- **Price 25%**
  - Price of the overall service (40 points)
  - Prices of menus with products of organic origin (60 points)
    - Price for organic menu comprising all the 5 components (20 points)
    - Price for organic menu comprising 3 components out of the 5 (40 points)
    - Price for organic menu including 1 component out of the 5 (40 points)

The City of Lens is committed to weight the price criteria with less than 50% in its procurements. In this procedure, the city set this criterion lower than in the last catering tender and included the above four sub-criteria with the aim of providing bidders with more flexibility to offer organic menus.

- **Quality assurance 15%**
  - Measures to ensure the optimal delivery (25 points)
  - Measures for processing orders (25 points)
  - Monitoring measures (25 points)
  - Resources dedicated to the training of catering staff (25 points)

- **Performance for the environment and supply of agricultural products 15%**

  Compared to the last tender from 2014, this new procedure introduced specific award criteria related to assess the supplier’s performance for the environment. This development is in line with the political commitment of the municipality of Lens to tackle climate change. This new award criterion included one subcriterion to assess the company measures to reduce and/or recycle packaging to lessen the environmental impact. In addition, another subcriterion assesses the percentage of products included in the menus resulting from integrated farming.

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1 According to the [EISA Common Codex for Integrated Farming](http://example.com), Integrated Farming is a system of farm management designed to be economically viable, ecologically sound and socially acceptable.
Results

Four bids were received and all of them passed to the evaluation stage. Organic menus proposed by the winning bidder were priced at €2.75 per meal; a reasonably small cost premium compared to the non-organic menu priced at €2.33.

The procurement had different impacts on the winning supplier. The winner has created a new company department in charge of sustainable development policy and nominated a research officer for the region to link the different company projects with sustainable policies. Moreover, the success of this procurement contributed to the decision of the contractor to apply ISO 14001 Environmental Management System Standard in its own central kitchen premises.

It is important to note, that this type of tender has resulted in the creation of seven new jobs by the winning company. Two positions have been established in the sustainable development department of the company whereas five positions have been created in relation to its direct food supply activities.

Environmental Impacts

This tender increased the demand for organic products. Organic farming has been proved to have positive impacts on the environment.

Due to the higher organic content and the more intensive biological activities, organic agriculture can improve the soil formation and structure better than traditional agriculture. In addition, organic agriculture prohibits the use of synthetic fertilizers and allows only the usage of organic fertilizers. Organic fertilizers act as soil conditioners and they have been proved to be more environmentally friendly than synthetic substitutes.

Lessons learned

- Market engagement activity prior to the initiation of the tender process is necessary in order to fully understand its capacity to deliver the desired outcomes.
- Based on the feedback from the market consultations, potential suppliers from the catering sector reacted positively to the contracting authority increasing the number of GPP requirements in the tender. This included the positive response by suppliers to the requirement for organic food.
- Defining GPP requirements in the tender can potentially lead to job creation on the supplier side.
- Allowing bidders more flexibility to present their offer can lead to better price/quality ratio.

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