**Tender Specification**

**NORTH EAST ACCESS TO FINANCE LIMITED and group companies**

**Procurement of IT support contract**

**Tender Reference: NEA2F/042**

**30 September 2022**

**3rd Floor**

**Baltimore House**

**Abbots Hill**

**Gateshead**

**NE8 3DF**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Contracting Authority for this tender is **North East Access to Finance Limited** (‘NEA2F’). Our office is at 3rd Floor, Baltimore House, Abbots Hill, Gateshead NE8 3DF.

**Our remit**

NEA2F and its group companies are responsible for overseeing public sector investment funds to support SMEs in North East England, including the Finance for Business North East (‘JEREMIE’) programme.

Our remit includes looking after the financial returns from these funds and working with partners to reinvest this money in new funds and initiatives for SMEs. This forms part of a co-ordinated network of SME funding across the region.

**What we need**

We are a small team of 7 people, and we operate a hybrid working model, with staff working remotely for a significant part of the week. All our records and data are ‘in the cloud’ and we rely heavily on robust IT support for our operational effectiveness.

We will require our IT providers to support our cloud computing requirements, to supply us with hardware and software as required, to maintain all appropriate IT security and to provide a reliable and responsive support helpdesk.

**Invitation to Tender**

**NEA2F is inviting firms to tender for the provision of IT hardware and software support for a period of 4 years from December 2022**. There may be an option to renew the contract for a further period by agreement, subject to procurement limits and operational factors. Your price may include an annual increase for inflation, and this should be set out in your bid.

Section 2 below sets out the specification of our requirements. Your proposal should explain how you would fulfil the requirements set out in the specification, and should give details of the technical expertise and capacity of the team.

Section 3 sets out key information on pricing and the proposed contractual arrangements, which you will also need to address. Details of the tender process itself and closing date for submissions are set out at section 4 of this document.

**2. SPECIFICATION OF REQUIREMENTS**

**Services to be provided**

In summary, we require a provider who will:

* **support our cloud computing requirements;**
* **supply us with hardware and software as required;**
* **maintain all appropriate IT security; and**
* **provide a reliable and responsive support helpdesk.**

Bidders should pay attention to the need for a reliable and responsive technical support ‘helpdesk’. We are looking for bidders to provide a helpdesk, during working hours, giving us direct access to someone with the right technical expertise. You should give details of guaranteed response times - we would expect routine matters to be resolved within 4 hours and more complex matters in 24 hours unless there are exceptional circumstances.

We will need you to provide us with sufficient cloud storage to accommodate all our working records and archives. We will also be looking to you to supply, maintain and replace our laptops and office hardware. See following sections for full details.

You should also provide details of your recommended solutions on cyber security, which we see as an important issue. We handle sensitive information, personal as well as financial data, and the safety and security of these are of the utmost importance. We are currently working towards Cyber Essentials Plus.

As part of the contract, we would like you to have a meeting with us onsite once a quarter to review our IT arrangements and support needs, and identify improvements and upgrades.

**Current Infrastructure**

The hardware and software currently in place within NEA2F are as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Hardware** | **Software** |
| 6 x laptop computers (Lenovo/ Dell) | Microsoft Office 365 (7 users) |
| 2 x Microsoft SurfacePro | Anti-virus/malware software (N-Able) |
| Meraki firewall (with 3 year licence) | Sage 50c Accounts (but see below) |
| **Cloud storage** | |
| vCloud Server plus 5 x vCPU and 40GB RAM | |
| 1150 GB Tier 1 Fast SAS disks (NETApp SAN) | |

**Detailed requirements**

* Hardware support including supplying and maintaining all computer equipment.
* Software support including Microsoft Office, Sage and anti-virus software.
* Supplying the latest supported versions of any application and all necessary patches.
* Provision of ‘cloud’ data storage with secure remote access and at least daily backup.
* Robust IT security system and technical expertise to ensure optimum cyber-security, including meeting requirements of Cyber Essentials Plus.
* Confirmation that physical and cyber security of data storage satisfies all legal requirements including General Data Protection Regulation.
* Confirmation that no data is stored or backed up outside the European Economic Area.
* Prompt and timely support in the event of outages and other technical problems.
* Support helpdesk, at least during working hours, with access to qualified technicians with the necessary experience and technical expertise.
* Ability to provide a guaranteed response time for resolving different types of support issue.
* Advising on possible improvements or upgrades to facilitate an efficient and secure system.
* Quarterly operational review meeting with our IT Manager at our office.
* Routine maintenance, patch updating and other assurance requirements as part of Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation (firewall log, user creation, user deletion, user amendment).
* Hold Administrator privileges.

**Exceptions and exclusions**

Please note the following are not included in the scope of the contract:

* Our internet banking software is supplied and maintained by Barclays and will not form part of the support contract.
* Our website [www.nea2f.co.uk](http://www.nea2f.co.uk) is hosted and registered under a separate contract.
* Sage 50c Accounts Professional is supported by Sage Premium Plus, but assistance may be required to update the software.
* Our Kyocera printer/scanner/copier is maintained under a separate contract, but assistance may be required in relation to its interface with our system.

**3. PRICING AND CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS**

Bidders are asked to provide pricing proposals based on:

**A fixed quotation for an IT support contract for 4 years from late 2022**, specifying the service level and guaranteed response times as set out in detail in section 2 above.

You may if appropriate build in an annual increase for inflation.

**An hourly rate for additional systems advice and support** if any is required.

The key contractual arrangements will be as follows:

* The appointment will be for a term of four years, commencing December 2022, with an option to extend further by agreement at NEA2F’s discretion.
* The successful provider will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement and/or data processor agreement.
* We reserve the right to review service requirements annually, and if necessary to amend the scope of the contract.
* We may terminate the contract by giving 3 months’ notice in writing.
* We will pay all invoices within 30 days of receipt, provided that the services to which they relate have been performed in accordance with the contract.

**4. TENDER PROCESS AND SUBMISSION**

**Enquiries**

All enquiries in connection with this tender should be addressed in the first instance to James Arkless, Company Secretary and Legal Manager, at [james.arkless@nea2f.co.uk](mailto:james.arkless@nea2f.co.uk). Any bidder who wishes to have an informal conversation with our IT Manager may arrange to do so, although it should be noted that bids will be assessed on the basis of your formal submission only.

**Expressions of interest**

If you intend to submit a tender, **please register an expression of interest as soon as possible** by emailing [james.arkless@nea2f.co.uk](mailto:james.arkless@nea2f.co.uk) so that any additional information can be sent to you.

**Closing date**

The closing date for tenders to be received is **12.00 noon on Tuesday 1 November 2022.** Tenders should be emailed to [james.arkless@nea2f.co.uk](mailto:james.arkless@nea2f.co.uk).

**Page limit**

Tenders should be **limited to a maximum of 10 pages of A4**, excluding CVs of key individuals which may be appended.

**Timeline**

Below is our estimated timeline for the tender process:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Invitation to Tender published** | **30 September** |
| Deal with queries and questions from bidders | 30 September to 1 November |
| **Closing Date for bids** | **1 November** |
| Assessment of bids received | 1 November to 11 November |
| **Final decision on appointment** | **w/c 14 November (approx)** |
| ‘Handover period’ to any new provider | Up to mid-December (2-3 weeks) |

**5. AWARD CRITERIA**

The contract will be awarded to the bidder who submits the most economically advantageous proposal. Written submissions will be evaluated against the following criteria:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | **Max score** |
| Price and value for money | 30 |
| Technical expertise of support team demonstrated in the bid document | 30 |
| Customer service and timely response to requests for support | 30 |
| **Total** | **90** |
| **Scoring principles** | |
| ***Price****: The maximum 30 marks will be awarded to the lowest priced bid, with other scores reduced in proportion to the additional cost.* | |
| ***Other criteria*** *will be marked as follows:*   * *Meets the contract requirements to a very high standard: 26-30 marks* * *Meets the contract requirements to a good standard: 21-25 marks* * *Meets the contract requirements to a satisfactory standard: 15-20 marks* * *Below satisfactory standard: less than 15 marks (will not be considered further)* | |

**NEA2F**

**September 2022**