**Southend-on-Sea Borough Council**

VAT Advisory Service

Specification of Requirements

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Civic Centre

Victoria Avenue

Southend-on-Sea

Essex

SS2 6ER

January 2017

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# Introduction

In accordance with our contract procedure rules, Southend-on-Sea is seeking quotes for a VAT Advisory Service.

Service to commence from the 1st April 2017.

Any clarification questions from the Bidders to the Council should be sent to georgiaisenburg@southend.gov.uk

Bidders should note that all clarification questions must be made in writing (including email). The Council at their discretion reserves the right to circulate any response to all Contractors. All clarification questions must be clearly marked CLARIFICATION with the question and Contractor details clearly set out. Any clarification questions your organisation has for the Council should be forwarded to: georgiaisenburg@southend.gov.uk

To allow information to be circulated in time, the deadline for receiving clarification questions is 10:00am 24th January **2017. To receive clarifications Bidders should register their interest to the email address above: confirming the individual and the email address the clarification responses are to be forwarded to.**

This work will be commissioned through a single stage quote process. Bidders must submit their responses to georgiaisenburg@southend.gov.uk with the email heading ***VAT Advisory Service by 14:00 on 31st January* 2017**

The successful Bidder will be advised by 21st February **2017.**

# The Requirement of the Contractor

The Contractor must be able to demonstrate they are currently successfully and efficiently advising other Local Authorities, including but not limited to Unitary Authorities.

The Contractor must be able to demonstrate that they have the knowledge, experience and qualifications necessary to give VAT advice to a Local Authority.

# The Requirement of the Contract: VAT Advisory Service

All work required for the successful provisioning of the Council’s requirements in relation to this contract is the responsibility of the Contractor.

As such, the Contractor must ensure that all the following requirements relating to the supply of VAT Advisory Service are met:

* Provide a Dedicated point of contact and an alternative point of contact when the dedicated point of contact is unavailable.
* All queries are dealt with in an appropriate manner in line with prevailing VAT legislation / case law / best practice
* Provide a means by which the Council can raise queries either by telephone or email
* Ensure that the Council is able to raise via email or telephone an unlimited number of helpline queries
* Ensuring the provision of a helpline service for day to day issues that the Council can contact, between the hours of 9am and 5pm, relating to a range of VAT issues
* Ensure each query is logged appropriately on the Contractor’s IT System. Email Confirmation that each query has been received and appropriately logged must be confirmed must be sent to the Council by the Contractor within 24 hours(working days) of the query being made.
* Ensure the required email confirmation upon receipt of a query is:
	+ - Communicated to named delegates (which will be provided)
		- Inclusive of details relating to the nature of the query raised and details of advice given (if applicable)

Every practicable effort should be made by the Contractor to answer any query as part of the Helpline facility. Only in legitimate circumstances where a query is classified as complex should it be passed from the Helpline Facility to be dealt with in the alternative matter.

For any Query that the Contractor looks to handle outside the Helpline facility, through a process for more complex query: a separate confirmation email setting out why it has not been possible to handle the query as part of the Helpline facility must be forwarded to the Council.

For each query classified as complex which cannot be handled through the Helpline the Contractor must ensure that:

* It is Appropriately logged for the purposes of any Audit
* That the Contractor can update the Council when required to do so on the query’s progress and estimated resolution time
* That every practicable effort is made by the Contractor to resolve any such outstanding query in as short a time as possible

The Contractor must ensure that the Time invoiced for by the Contractor to the Council in resolving a complex query: is in relation to the actual time spent resolving the complex query and not the total time taken by the Contractor in responding to the query. All queries must be resolved by the Contractor in one fashion or another to the benefit to the Council as soon as possible: so as to avoid additional charges being levied against the Council.

The Contractor must ensure upon resolution of a Query: confirmation of the resolution and the relevant information used in the Contractors determination is provided to the Council via email. Where applicable for the less complex queries this requirement may be addressed in the Confirmation email outlined above: if a solution has been provided in real time over the phone. For more complex queries a separate email will be required detailing the required information.

* + All queries to be responded to via email with details of nature of query raised and advice given, preferably within 24 hours (but no more than 48 hours ) of them being raised (Monday to Friday excluding public holidays).

The Contractor must ensure that the Council receives immediate and regular updates of any changes/amendments in VAT notices/legislation taking place and the potential implications for the Council, in the form of newsletters, mail shots etc. at no extra cost.

The Contractor must hold and attend an annual review on how VAT related procedures and processes are being performed within the Council: to ensure their efficiency and cost effectiveness for the Council. A key aim of the annual review will be to improve on the VAT related procedures and processes existing at the time, dependent upon the prevailing VAT legislation / case law / best practice (List not exhaustive). For the avoidance of doubt any findings of the annual review are to be furnished to the Council in a viable readable electronic format without any added cost.

Ensure the efficient and successful processing of the submission of claims for refunds from HMRC, on behalf of the Council, when required and requested to do so by the Council in writing

**Council and Contractor Quarterly Review Meetings**

Quarterly Contract meetings must be held between the Contractor and the Council at the Civic Centre to:

* review the performance of the contract
* discuss any operational issues and relevant documentation.
* discuss financial aspects and to review the previous Quarter in terms of performance.

The Council reserves the right to address any issues arising from or related to the Contract.

The Council reserves the right to convene a meeting with the Contractor’s designated Representative at anytime.

# Contract Period

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council are seeking to award a three year contract to run from 1st April 2017, with an option to extend for a further period of up to one year or any part thereof.  The extension will be at the discretion of the Council and will be subject to satisfactory service delivery, economic performance and value for money. The provisions of the contract will apply throughout any such extended period.

# Documentation

The Contractor must ensure that all information is provided to the Council in PDF or Word format, or equivalent.

# Procurement Timetable

This work will be commissioned through a single stage quote process. Prospective Bidders must submit their quote submission to georgiaisenburg@southend.gov.uk with the email heading *VAT Advisory Service by****: 14*:00 Monday 31st January 2017.**

The successful Bidder will be advised by: **17:00 21st February 2017.**

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council will not be responsible for costs incurred in the preparation of bids or any costs associated with bidders’ participation in this process. The Council reserves the right not to make an appointment or a partial appointment in the event that the bids received fail to meet the required standard.

# References (Information Only)

As part of the bidding process the Bidder must be able to demonstrate they are currently advising other Local Authorities, including some that are Unitary Authorities and these Authorities would be happy to provide references to all or each of the services have been requested. Their details should be submitted as part of your organisations Bid Submission.

A minimum of 3 referees will be required.

# Award Criteria

The written submissions will be formally evaluated using the following Award Criteria:

40% Technical

60% Commercial

The successful bidder must be able to effectively evidence how they will be able to **meet the requirements of the contract.**

**\*\*Important\*\* Due to the significance of the contract and the timeframes that the Council is subject to: any bidder scoring “2” (4.8%) or less for Technical Question 1 will be excluded from the bid evaluation. It is therefore a minimum requirement of the Bidding Process for Bidders to score “3” (7.2%) or higher for Technical Question 1 (TQ1) to have their bid submission evaluated in full.**

In undertaking the evaluation for Technical Questions, the Evaluation Panel will consider the respective responses against the Scoring Key below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **SCORING MATRIX** | **SCORE** |
| Question not answered – and / or – Response to the question significantly deficient – and / or - raises fundamental concerns regarding the organisation’s ability to successfully deliver the Contract. Answer does not provide satisfactory evidence as to the organisation’s capability to deliver the contract successfully.  | 0 |
| A response that is inadequate or only partially addresses the question. Response provides only limited evidence as to the organisation’s capabilities to deliver the contract successfully. Raises a large number of concerns and/or includes a large number of informational deficiencies. Does not raise any fundamental concerns regarding the organisation’s ability. | 1 |
| An acceptable response submitted in terms of the level of detail, accuracy and relevance. Answer provides an average level of evidence as to the organisation’s capability. The response raises some concerns and/or includes a significant number of informational deficiencies. Does not raise any fundamental concerns regarding the organisation’s ability. | 2 |
| A good response in terms of the level of detail, accuracy and relevance. The information provides good evidence of the ability of the organisation to deliver the Contract successfully; but does raise minor concerns and/or includes deficiencies around some of the information provided in the response. Does not raise any fundamental concerns regarding the organisation’s ability. | 3 |
| A very good response in terms of the level of detail, accuracy and relevance. The information submitted provides significant evidence of the ability of the organisation to deliver the Contract successfully. However, the response lacks a level of detail needed for full marks. The response raises no fundamental concerns regarding the organisation’s ability. | 4 |
| An excellent response in terms of the level of detail, accuracy and relevance. The level of information provided is comprehensive and evidences strongly an assurance as to the organisation’s capability to deliver the contract successfully. The response raises no concerns and has no information deficiencies.  | 5 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Technical Questions(TQ)** | **Weighting****40%** |
| TQ1) How will your company ensure the reliability and objectiveness of the information that your company provides as part of this Service? Your response must include but not be limited to ensuring standards relating to:* the advice / information provided via the Helpline
* the advice / information provided in response to a more complex query
* the use of clear and unambiguous language in relation to the advice given to the Council
* the experience and training of the personnel delivering the contract
* continuous improvement
 | **12%** |
| TQ2) How will your company determine if a query can be responded to via the Helpline Facility or requires further research and is handled by the process for more complex queries? Your response to this question must include:* a detailed description of both processes
* related timescales for both processes
* explanation as to how your company ensure the maximisation of the number of queries handled through the Helpline
 | **12%** |
| TQ3) How will your company undertake and ensure beneficial outcomes for the Council in regards the Annual Review? Your answer should include but not be limited to:* Key Personnel
* Timescales
* Detailed description of the Process
* Quality Assurance Standards
* Updating the Council throughout the year on changes to VAT law
 | **8%** |
| TQ4) How will your company undertake and ensure beneficial outcomes in regards the HMRC Refund Process? | **8%** |
|  | **40%** |

**Commercial questionnaire (60%)**

Bidders must fill out all fields in Table 1 in order to have their bid fully evaluated. Any Bidder not providing pricing for each of the Commercial Questions will be excluded from the process.

The lowest overall bid received in relation to each Commercial Question (CQ) will receive the maximum percentage score for that CQ. All other bids received against the same CQ will be allocated as a percentage score of the lowest respective bid for that CQ. This will be achieved by dividing the lowest bid value by the higher bid value and multiplying it by the percentage score available. The scores achieved by each Bidder for each CQ will be combined to make a respective Commercial Bid Total. It is this Commercial Bid Total that will be used in the evaluation of the received bids.

Bidders must ensure the pricing submitted for the Commercial Questionnaire is inclusive of all related costs. This includes but is not limited to; all expenses, management, supervision, materials, equipment, labour, training, and all associated operating costs to provide the required goods and services to the standard required by the Council. For the avoidance of doubt all pricing confirmed as part of Table 1 must be inclusive of all related costs pertaining to all liabilities and obligations, whether expressed or implied by, or incumbent upon, the Contractor pursuant to the Contract.

The price inserted by the Bidder for each applicable question must be based on pricing that excludes Value Added Tax (V.A.T). This tax, if applicable, will be paid by the Council as an addition at the appropriate rate on the invoices when submitted.

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| **Table 1 (60%)** |
| CQ1(20%) | Helpline: Fixed fee - no limitations on calls made | £ .......................Per Annum |
| CQ2(20%) | Hourly rate for complex queries considered to exceed time constraint of the Helpline | £ .......................Per Hour |
| CQ3(10%) | HMRC Refund ProcessNo win , no fee: fixed percentage | .......................% Per Successful Process |
| CQ4(10%) | Annual Review | £.......................Per Annum |

The Council does not bind itself to accept the lowest priced quotation, or any quotation for this service. The Council will have no obligation to Contractors arising from this quotation unless and until it enters into a formal contract with the successful Contractor for the provision of the services that are subject to this Quotation document. Any contract awarded will be to the Contractor whose proposal is determined to be the most economically advantageous.