



Kent County Council

Commercial Strategy

2026 – 2028

Procurement that Delivers:

*Improving Efficiency, Maximising Value,
and Supporting Kent*

Foreword	1
The Kent County Council Context	1
Introduction to the Commercial and Procurement Division	3
Our Commercial and Procurement Vision	4
Our Strategic Priorities for 2026 – 2028	5
Delivering Financial Benefits and Return on Investment	5
Strengthening Supplier Management and Partnerships	6
Supporting Local Economic Growth and Wider Public Value	6
Ensuring Compliance and Transparency	7
How We Will Deliver Our Commitments	9
Embedding Category Management	9
Embedding Supplier Relationship Management (SRM)	9
Strengthening Procurement Planning	9
Leading Effective Tendering Processes	10
Effectively Negotiating and Awarding Contracts	10
Managing Contracts to a High Standard	10
Setting Clear Procurement Policies and Governance	10
Elevating Commercial Skills and Capabilities	11
Tracking Progress and Ensuring Accountability	12



Foreword

We're delighted to introduce Kent County Council's Commercial Strategy for 2026 to 2028.

This Strategy sets out how we will place a greater focus on commercialising our activities and use procurement and effective contract management as strategic levers to deliver high-quality public services. Our ambition is to strengthen our local economy and ensure every pound spent has the maximum impact. It reflects our desire to be commercially confident, efficient, and focused on delivering **Best Value** outcomes for the residents and communities of Kent.

We are operating in a complex and evolving environment. Financial pressures remain significant, service demand is increasing, and with Local Government Reorganisation, we face the biggest change to the local government landscape in a generation. Our ambitions must be grounded in the realities of this operating environment, recognising our constraints, adapting, making trade-offs. However, this Strategy is ambitious yet realistic, setting a direction that is achievable and responsive in this context.

Despite the pressures, there are great opportunities, and we have a strong foundation, recognised by our achievement of the CIPS Procurement Excellence Programme Award in July 2024. Alongside our skilled workforce and many existing examples of commercial best practice across the Council, we have strong relationships with innovative suppliers, committed to delivering for Kent. At the same time, the new **Procurement Act 2023** will enable us to further modernise our practices and deliver even greater value.

Procurement and effective contract management is central to how we deliver services across Kent – from supporting vulnerable residents to investing in key infrastructure works and innovation projects. This Strategy outlines how, over the next three years, we will foster strong commercial agreements, support and enhance supplier performance, and embed even greater value creation and cost control.

We will also reaffirm our commitment to supporting Kent-based businesses, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprises (VCSEs) – recognising the vital role they play in creating jobs, building local economic strength, and delivering wider public benefit. We will simplify processes, engage early, and work in partnership with these organisations to ensure opportunities are accessible, solutions are co-designed, and insights are shared.

This Strategy reinforces our commitment to transparency, compliance, responsible procurement and contract management. We will tackle risks in our supply chains, uphold high standards, and ensure our governance is proportionate. We will work in partnership with suppliers to deliver Social Value – supporting local employment and skills development and protecting the Kent environment.

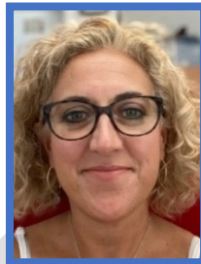
Our approach aligns with the Council's **Strategic Statement** and the **Medium-Term Financial Plan**. It will support the delivery of our organisational priorities, serving us

well now but also ensuring resilience in the face of the further changes expected in our operating environment.

The success of this Strategy will depend on continued strong collaboration – across the Council and with our partners and suppliers. Over the next three years, we will deliver this Strategy together, building on what works, and challenging ourselves to continuously improve – ensuring that procurement delivers **Best Value** outcomes for Kent and the population that we serve.



Brian Collins
Deputy Leader of the Council



Clare Maynard
Chief Procurement Officer

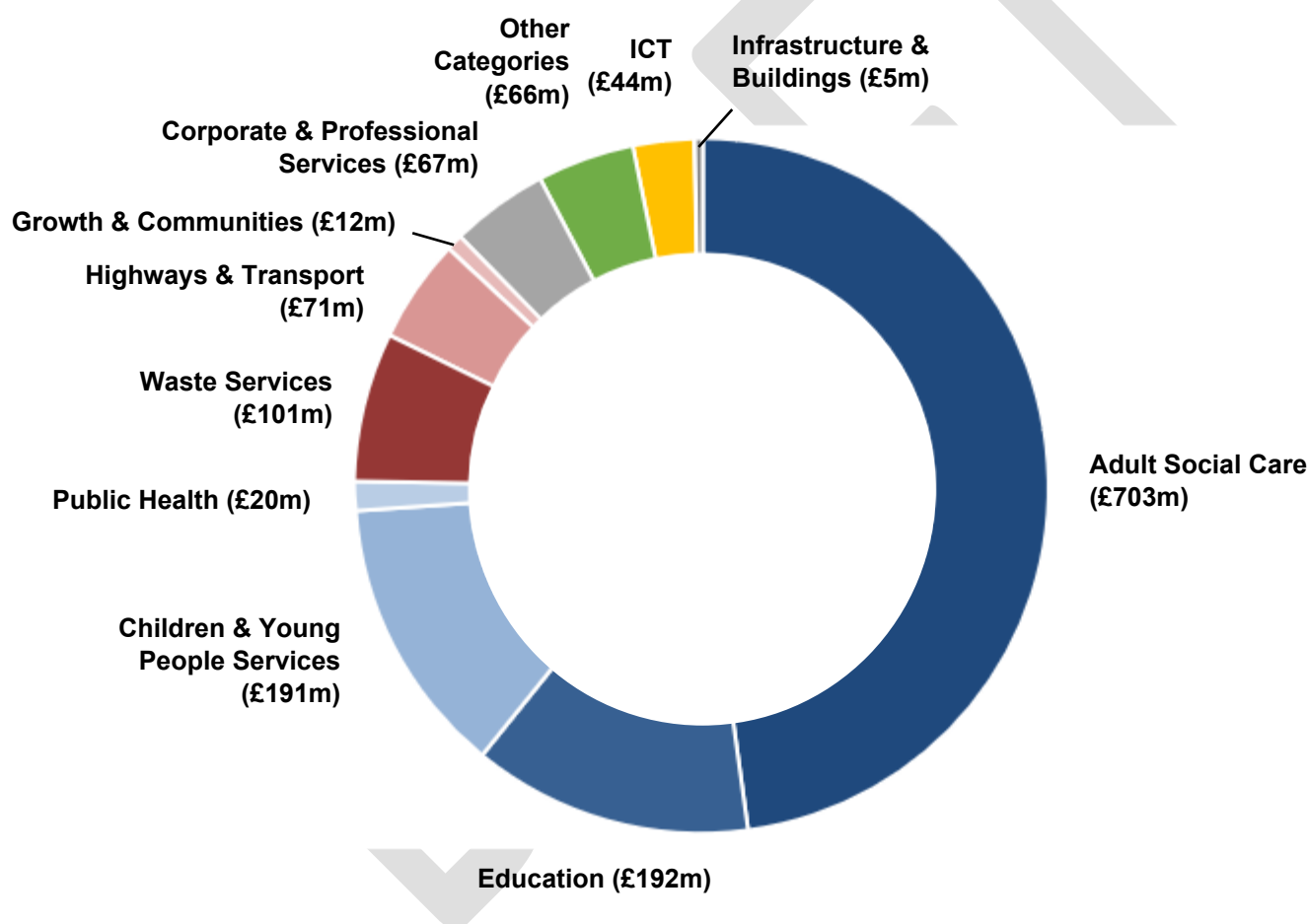


The Kent County Council Context

Kent County Council proudly serves a population of over 1.6 million residents across one of the largest geographical areas in England. As one of the largest local authorities in the country, we play a critical role in delivering public services that touch on every aspect of our residents' lives – from education and social care to major infrastructure, public health, and economic development.

In the 2024-25 Financial Year, **the Council's procured spend totalled £1.47 billion.** This makes us one of the largest buyers in the local government sector and places us among the largest public sector buyers in the South East region. The scale and complexity of our procurement and contract portfolio reflects the breadth of the services and works that we commission – from care and support for vulnerable residents, to key construction and highways projects for our communities, digital transformation, and corporate services vital to keeping the Council operating smoothly.

To illustrate this, the chart below provides a breakdown of our spend by category:



The largest portion of the Council's procured spend in the 2024-25 Financial Year was in Adult Social Care (£703m), followed by Education (£192m), Children & Young People Services (£191m), Waste Services (£101m), and Highways & Transport (£71m). This was then followed by spend in Corporate & Professional Services (£67m), ICT (£44m), Public Health (£20m), Growth & Communities (£12m), and Infrastructure & Buildings (£5m). Other categories account for £66m of spend.

Procurement and effective contract management are not just back-office functions – they are strategic enablers for successful service delivery, financial sustainability, and the delivery of public value to Kent residents. Across the Council, teams have demonstrated commercial awareness,

developed strong supplier relationships, and shown a commitment to delivering value for money in the interests of Kent Residents. This Strategy builds on those strengths and sets out our ambition to go further.

We are operating in a dynamic and challenging environment. Financial pressures remain acute, demand for services is rising, and Local Government Reorganisation will introduce the biggest change to the structure of local government in a generation. At the same time, the **Procurement Act 2023** provides a renewed regulatory framework for public procurement – emphasising value, innovation, transparency and delivering greater public value and social impact through procurement – and we will need to monitor for additional legislative changes that the Government may introduce to support implementation of the **National Procurement Policy Statement (NPPS)**.

This Strategy responds to that context, aiming to provide:

- **Officers** with a clear outline of expectations and guidance to make commercial decisions.
- **Elected Members** with visibility of the strategic priorities driving our commercial activity and the necessary assurance that procurement decisions align with our organisational goals.
- **Partners and suppliers** with clarity and consistency around our priorities, our commitment to collaboration, and our expectations for working together.
- **Residents and communities** with the confidence that public money is being spent wisely, with the Council focused on delivering results for the people of Kent.

The Strategy complements the Council's **Commissioning Framework**, which sets out the standards we aim to achieve through our commissioning practices. It will help to ensure that procurement expertise is brought in early in the commissioning process to deliver the best possible outcomes.

Critically, the Strategy aligns with the Council's **Strategic Statement** and supports the **Medium-Term Financial Plan**, ensuring that our commercial activity contributes to the delivery of wider organisational goals. It builds on our strengths, responds to the opportunities presented by new legislation, and prepares us for further changes in our operating environment – so that we remain ready to meet the needs of Kent.

At the same time, it marks a clear shift from previous approaches – introducing a more structured, strategic framework and moving us beyond transactional procurement to a value-led, outcomes-focused model. By embedding commercial thinking earlier in the commissioning cycle and aligning procurement more closely with our organisational priorities, we will unlock greater financial and social value, improve service delivery, and strengthen long-term resilience.

Introduction to the Commercial and Procurement Division



The Commercial and Procurement Division (CPD) leads on the Council's most significant procurements and plays a central role in ensuring that public money is spent effectively.

Working across the Council's directorates and with key external partners, the Division provides expert commercial and procurement advice, supports contract management, and helps shape sourcing strategies that deliver real value.

Between September 2024 and September 2025, Kent County Council published over 500 procurement notices, of which 85 related to tenders and 341 detailed contract awards. The remaining notices included prior information notices, expressions of interest, market engagement exercises, and updates or amendments to existing opportunities. This reflects the scale and activity of the Council's commercial operations and the key role that the Division plays.

The Division works closely with commissioners in the early stages of the commissioning cycle, including where Make-Buy-Sell assessments are being developed, seeking assurance that commissioning decisions have been fully considered before progressing to market.

While the Council's directorates retain responsibility for managing contracts, the CPD works in partnership with them to ensure that procurement is well-planned, compliant, and commercially sound, and that contracts are managed effectively throughout their life. The Division also helps set the tone for how KCC engages with suppliers – promoting transparency, fairness, and collaboration.

The CPD provides strategic oversight, operational support, and continuous improvement. It also works with colleagues across the Council's finance, legal, policy, and audit functions to ensure procurement governance is robust, proportionate, and practical, while also helping interpret and embed legislative developments, case law, and sector trends into our sourcing approaches.

The Division also leads on embedding and raising commercial skills across the Council, including developing training, guidance, and peer support and helping Officers build greater confidence in market engagement, negotiation, and supplier management.

As this Strategy is delivered, the CPD will act as a central enabling function – supporting directorates and services, engaging suppliers, and driving commercial excellence across the organisation. However, throughout this document, “we” refers to Kent County Council as a whole – recognising that commercial success depends on collaboration across the Council, as well as with external partners.

To support this shift, we will re-balance resources within the CPD to prioritise commercial planning, early market engagement, and strategic supplier management – while continuing to provide operational support. This will involve upskilling staff, refining roles, and investing in the tools and systems that enable smarter, data-driven decision-making. Our focus will be on high-impact activity that drives Best Value and supports the Council's wider transformation agenda.



“We will deliver the best possible services and outcomes for Kent residents, securing Best Value at the least possible cost. We will achieve this through smart, innovative, and efficient procurement that supports the local economy and strengthens our communities.”

Our vision for commercial and procurement at Kent County Council reflects our ambition to embed commercial thinking across the Council, ensuring that procurement is not just a process, but a strategic enabler of better public services, stronger supplier relationships, and greater public value.

Across KCC, there are already many excellent examples of commercial thinking – from successful cost-saving initiatives to innovative supplier partnerships. This Strategy builds on those strengths, aiming to scale what is working already and spreading further best practice across the Council.

This will involve making sure that we are applying a value-led mindset to how we plan, procure, and manage services and manage costs carefully, not just at the point of procurement, but throughout the whole contract life cycle. However, while we will scrutinise spend and identify and address inefficiencies to ensure we are delivering **Best Value**, we will also enhance how we monitor and support supplier performance, encourage innovation, support local businesses, and deliver measurable Social Value.

As part of this, we will explore opportunities to generate additional income – whether through commercial partnerships, new trading models, or the innovative use of our data, insights, and specialist expertise – ensuring that procurement contributes not only to savings, but to broader financial sustainability.

Commerciality is not just about individual behaviours – it is an organisational culture shift that must be embedded in our systems and processes. From planning tools and templates to contract management processes, platforms, and reporting dashboards, we will ensure that our infrastructure supports smarter, more commercial decision-making and continued best practice across the Council.

Our commercial activity will support the Council's strategic priorities – as set out in the Council's **Strategic Statement** – and the **Medium-Term Financial Plan**. It will also help us improve outcomes, ensure resilience in the face of future changes within our operating environment, and ensure that every pound spent contributes to Kent's long-term success.

This Strategy sets the direction for the next three years, outlining the strategic priorities that we will focus on and the core practices, systems, and capabilities we will develop. Acknowledging that change takes time, our approach will be iterative, collaborative, and sensitive to the pressures faced by services and suppliers alike, and we are confident that – through working together – we can deliver the best possible services and outcomes for Kent residents, securing Best Value in a cost-effective manner. This approach will continue to be Officer-led, building on the capability and expertise already demonstrated across the Council.



Our Strategic Priorities for 2026 – 2028

To deliver on our vision, we will focus on four strategic priorities over the next three years. These priorities reflect the scale and complexity of our procurement activity, the opportunities we have, and the Council's ambition to deliver better services, stronger partnerships, and greater public value.

Each priority is designed to support the Council's **Strategic Statement** and the **Medium-Term Financial Plan**, while aligning with the principles of the **Procurement Act 2023**. Together, these strategic priorities form the backbone of this Strategy and will guide our commercial decisions, shape our supplier relationships, and ensure procurement and our contracts continue to deliver for Kent.



Delivering Financial Benefits and Return on Investment

We will deliver strong financial outcomes through early and effective planning, smarter contracting, and informed, outcome-focused commercial decision-making. This includes assessing delivery models and conducting cost-benefit analysis early in the commissioning cycle to determine whether outsourcing is the right approach, with commercial input for constructive challenge and to inform decision-making. It also means strong but fair negotiation of contracts and closely monitoring spend and contract performance throughout their duration to ensure that every pound delivers **Best Value**.

We will build on previous successes – including £23 million in financial benefits delivered on key procurements over the last two years – by embedding this commercial approach across the Council. This includes exploring additional income generation opportunities, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring procurement and our contracts deliver **Best Value**, having the maximum impact possible, and helping us to realise long-term financial sustainability.

We will also review how we track and report on financial benefits delivered through procurement and our contracts, ensuring that savings and other financial benefits are consistently captured, validated, and communicated. This will help to build further confidence in our commercial activity and demonstrate the contribution that excellent procurement makes to the Council's strategic goals.

Our approach will be underpinned by the intelligent use of data, analysis of categories of spend as well as strong financial oversight of contracts, and close collaboration between our commissioning, procurement, legal and finance teams as well as Officers in services who are managing our contracts. Together, **we will ensure that commercial decisions are well-informed and strategically aligned**, focused on delivering the best possible outcomes and **Best Value** for Kent.

What success will look like:

- ☐ Clear evidence of savings and financial benefits from procurement activity.
- ☐ Strong cost control and benefits tracking across contracts.
- ☐ Commercial decisions are well-informed and aligned with strategic goals.



Strengthening Supplier Management and Partnerships

We will take a consistent, more streamlined and value-focused approach to managing supplier relationships, building on the strong examples we have from doing this to date. This includes setting clear expectations and performance requirements, which we will monitor closely, and encouraging continuous improvement and innovation. We will also work collaboratively with suppliers to understand their perspectives, solve problems together, share insight, and deliver better outcomes.

With our strategic suppliers, we will look to apply Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) practices. This will include structured governance, regular performance reviews, and shared planning. **We will recognise and reward strong performance, while constructively addressing areas for improvement.** Given the collective resource needed to embed SRM principles, we will take a phased, proportionate approach, focusing initially suppliers and contracts where the greatest value and risks reside.

Recognising the value of commercial skills and that contract management is a vital capability, we will also invest in enhancing these skills across the Council to support better supplier engagement. This includes providing the training, tools, and guidance needed to help Officers negotiate effectively, manage contracts proactively, and build productive supplier relationships. **We will also strengthen our ability to review contract performance and value for money** throughout the contract lifecycle, identifying opportunities to enhance delivery through collaborative dialogue with suppliers.

Alongside this, harnessing our existing partnerships that have delivered real value, **we will further strengthen our partnerships with key public sector organisations.** This includes our trading companies, the Integrated Care Board, and other local authorities in Kent and beyond – to help align procurement and service delivery, reduce duplication and avoid excess spending, and maximise impact.

What success will look like:

- ☐ Supplier performance is consistently monitored, supported, and improved.
- Strategic suppliers are engaged through structured, collaborative relationships.
- ☐ Procurement is joined-up across the Council and with our public sector partners.



Supporting Local Economic Growth and Wider Public Value

We will support Kent-based businesses, SMEs, and VCSEs by engaging early, simplifying our processes, and removing barriers to participation, wherever possible. While we already spend above the local government average with local businesses and smaller organisations – with 32% of our third party spend in 2024-25 being with Kent-based SMEs and VCSEs – this renewed focus recognises the value that that these organisations bring to service delivery and the crucial

role that local spending plays in supporting jobs, building resilience, and strengthening our communities.

Our ambition here aligns with the Council's **Strategic Statement** and the commitments that have been made in our **Commissioning Framework**. These emphasise the importance of investing in Kent, using our buying power to support the local economy, and supporting local suppliers for Kent's long-term success.

As well as strengthening how we capture the voices of residents and engage with our external partners, we will work closely with our suppliers, ensuring their insights also inform our procurement activity and help shape innovative solutions that reflect and address local needs. This will include engaging the market early, providing clear and accessible information, ensuring our procurement processes are proportionate and accessible, and working constructively to help suppliers develop.

We will also continue to embed Social Value across our procurement activity – working with suppliers who have shown great innovation in this space to date. Our contracts will deliver measurable additional benefits, including support for local employment, skills development, and environmental improvements to the benefit of Kent residents and communities.

To support this, we will develop a **Social Value Policy** that sets out how we define, evaluate, measure, and report on Social Value. We will work with services and suppliers to develop a consistent approach, build capability, and **ensure Social Value commitments are meaningful, deliverable, aligned with our strategic goals, and support the communities of Kent.**

What success will look like:

- ☐ Kent-based SMEs and VCSEs are actively participating in Council procurements.
- ☐ Social Value is considered early and tracked throughout contract delivery.
- ☐ Procurement supports community outcomes and local economic resilience.



Ensuring Compliance and Transparency

We will continue to uphold the highest standards of governance, integrity, and transparency across our procurement and contracting activity. This means ensuring compliance with internal policies and regulations, maintaining clear audit trails, and applying proportionate, risk-based due diligence – recognising requirements may differ between high-value procurements and lower-value activity. It also means ensuring our procurement processes remain open, fair, and accountable.

Aligned with the ambitions of the **Procurement Act 2023**, and the **Health Care Services (Provider Selection Regime) Regulations 2023**, transparency will remain a cornerstone of our approach. We will continue to publish relevant procurement and contracting information, engage openly with suppliers, and provide assurance to elected Members, Officers, and the public.

We will also continue to effectively manage our supply chain risks – including risks relating to fraud, modern slavery, and long-term supply chain resilience – from the start of the commissioning cycle. We will strengthen our internal controls and reporting mechanisms, ensuring that risks are identified and mitigating actions developed, aligning with the Council's risk management

framework. We will also improve how we use data to monitor compliance, flag issues, and drive improvements.

Alongside this, **we will work to ensure that our governance remains proportionate, practical, and supportive of good commercial outcomes**. This is with the aim to strike the right balance between necessary control and flexibility, ensuring that procurement remains agile without compromising integrity. We will ensure our governance supports good commercial decision-making.

What success will look like:

- ☐ High levels of compliance with procurement policies and regulations.
- ☐ Supply chain risks are identified and managed effectively.
- ☐ Governance supports strong commercial outcomes and public assurance.

These priorities will guide our commercial activity through to 2028 and support the Council to navigate the evolving operating environment over the next three years. They are ambitious but achievable and reflect our commitment to deliver better outcomes through smarter, more strategic procurement and effective contract management. The next section of the Strategy sets out the key enablers to delivering on these priorities, ensuring we have the right tools, skills, and systems in place to succeed.



How We Will Deliver Our Commitments

To deliver on our strategic priorities, we must build on our existing strengths and ensure we have the right core practices, systems, and capabilities in place. These foundations will enable smarter commercial decision-making, better procurement outcomes, and stronger contract management.

From planning and governance to supplier engagement and skills development, these key enablers will help embed commercial thinking more deeply across the Council. They are interconnected and support every stage of the commissioning and procurement lifecycle.



Embedding Category Management

We will take a strategic, joined-up view of our spend across service areas by grouping related goods, services, and works into categories and managing them holistically. This means using market insight, spend data, and cross-service collaboration to identify opportunities for efficiency and value. The National Audit Office has estimated that category management could save the public sector £500 million over five years. We will apply these principles locally to ensure smarter sourcing.

We will develop category strategies for priority areas, piloting new sourcing approaches, and rolling out best practice across the Council. This will help to reduce duplication, identify efficiencies, strengthen our supplier relationships, and ensure that procurement decisions are consistently informed by data, insight, and a clear understanding of needs, markets, and risks.



Embedding Supplier Relationship Management (SRM)

We will build strong, collaborative relationships with our strategic suppliers – those suppliers whose contracts are high in value, complexity, or risk, and critical to delivering our core objectives. This will involve working together on long-term planning and shared goals, and engaging in structured, conversations around performance, problem solving, and opportunities for continuous improvement.

Over time, we aim to extend such principles more widely. **We will also work towards a unified approach to supplier engagement across the Council** – ensuring suppliers experience consistency in their interactions with us, making sure we listen to and understand their perspectives, and ensuring smaller suppliers are not disadvantaged and continue to have fair access to opportunities.



Strengthening Procurement Planning

We will embed a clear procurement pipeline aligned with our budget and service planning cycles. This will help the Council to plan, reducing the need for reactive procurement activity, while supporting the consideration of delivery models and sourcing strategies. It will also support early market engagement, ensuring suppliers have sufficient time to prepare for contracting opportunities.

We will improve internal engagement, ensuring procurement is involved early in the commissioning process and planning is collaborative and coordinated across functions – including commissioning, finance, audit, legal, and policy which will help deliver good commercial outcomes.



Leading Effective Tendering Processes

We will design and manage fair, transparent, and robust procurement competitions that lead to strong commercial solutions. This includes standardising documentation, streamlining processes, and co-designing solutions – drawing on lessons learned from suppliers, partners, and previous procurements and contracts to inform better outcomes, where appropriate.

This will help the Council and our partners and suppliers learn from experience, strengthen future delivery, and ensure our contracts consistently deliver **Best Value** and maximum, positive impact.



Effectively Negotiating and Awarding Contracts

Effective negotiation is a fundamental part of procurement and critical to securing **Best Value**. **We will enhance our negotiation capability across the Council** through training, peer support, and providing modelling tools. By negotiating well and awarding contracts with a balanced assessment of cost, quality, and long-term value, we will achieve even stronger commercial outcomes.

We will also lead with strong due diligence processes, ensuring that suppliers are financially stable and capable of delivering on their commitments. We will protect the public interest from unscrupulous suppliers and those that pose an unacceptable risk to public money.



Managing Contracts to a High Standard

We will take a consistent and proactive approach to contract management – recognising contract management as a discipline that demands clear roles and responsibilities, targeted training, effective tools, and systems that monitor performance, risks, and financials. Research from Deloitte shows that poor contract management can erode up to 20% of contract value, underscoring the importance of investing in strong governance, digital tools and commercial capability.

Securing **Best Value** does not end at the point of contract award. **We will carefully review the ongoing value for money case for contracts in life**, engaging in open and constructive dialogue with suppliers to identify opportunities for improvement, innovation, and enhanced delivery – particularly when considering contract changes or extensions. This will require continued close collaboration between the CPD and Officers managing contracts across our directorates.



Setting Clear Procurement Policies and Governance

We will simplify and clarify our procurement policies, ensuring our internal spending rules remain up to date considering the evolving legislative landscape, but also making them easier to navigate. **We will also further strengthen our controls around non-compliant activity**, reducing the use of Waivers and spot purchasing, while setting out our expectations for responsible procurement with the introduction of a **Responsible Procurement Charter** to raise standards internally and with suppliers.

We will ensure governance is robust, proportionate, and supportive of good commercial outcomes, working closely with commissioning, finance, legal, policy, and audit teams. We will encourage feedback on our procurement approach internally and from our partners and suppliers.

We will look to continuously improve – embedding a culture of learning that improves year-on-year.



Elevating Commercial Skills and Capabilities

We will invest in building commercial capability across the Council. This includes providing a clear training offer for our staff and developing communities of practice, extending these opportunities to procurement and commissioning colleagues, contract managers, and other staff members whose role touches on commercial activity. We will also share lessons learned from our procurements and contracting, embedding peer support and mentoring opportunities to further help staff development. Where possible, we will also extend helpful resources and materials to support supplier development.

Finally, **we will harness data, technology, AI, and automation to drive efficiency, transparency, and control** across our commercial activity. By digitising our processes and building digital capability, we will support smarter, faster decision-making and streamlined, joined up working across the Council. We will also support effective collaboration with suppliers and partners, while ensuring that our processes, tools, and systems remain flexible and proportionate.

With these foundations in place, we can achieve our ambitions. We will diligently ensure adherence to these core practices, making sure we have the right tools, skills, and systems in place to succeed.

Tracking Progress and Ensuring Accountability



Delivering this Strategy will require clear accountability, consistent monitoring, and a shared understanding of what success looks like over the next three years.

We will track progress against each of our strategic priorities through contextual goals and actions aligned with the Council's business planning and performance management framework.

Implementation will be focused, visible, and responsive. Progress will be reported regularly to the Corporate Management Team, Corporate Board, and the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, with annual updates published to provide assurance to residents, suppliers, and partners.

While the CPD will coordinate performance tracking and lead on many of the enabling actions, successful delivery of the Strategy will depend on collective effort across the Council. Collaboration with commissioning teams, services, and corporate functions will be the key to our success.

This Strategy is designed to be dynamic. It will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains relevant aligned to changes in legislation, market conditions, and Council priorities – particularly those relating to unlocking efficiencies and ensuring that every pound spent delivers maximum public value.

Through this committed and accountable approach, we will ensure that procurement delivers the **Best Value** outcomes for Kent – now and into the future.