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Planning

Southsea Castle - Catering & Events Concession Opportunity - Preliminary Market Engagement

Portsmouth City Council

UK2: Preliminary market engagement notice - Procurement Act 2023 - [view information about notice types](#)

Notice identifier: 2026/S 000-016667

Procurement identifier (OCID): ocds-h6vhtk-065b89

Published 24 February 2026, 5:06pm

Scope

Reference

P00005202

Description

Portsmouth City Council (the Council) is undertaking a Preliminary Market Engagement (PME) exercise to inform the future procurement strategy for catering and event services at Southsea Castle.

As a visitor attraction and site of importance, the council aims to, through this procurement process, deliver new areas of growth for Southsea Castle. The successful operator must have a desire to create a destination cafe / restaurant and enhance the catering offer for private events and weddings.

THE SITE

Southsea Castle, built in 1544 by King Henry VIII as part of his coastal defence scheme,

is a historic, Scheduled Ancient Monument and a site of national importance.

Southsea Castle now operates as a visitor attraction and museum, restaurant, and historic wedding & events venue. The Castle attracts upwards of 10,000 visitors per month over the summer season, and offers members of the public free access to the castle keep, ramparts, shop & viewing rooms from April - October.

The restaurant in Southsea Castle is open all year round, and the Castle hosts numerous events throughout the season, in particular weddings & corporate events, as well as community events. During the opening season, there are also local makers market's hosted in the marquee, as well as heritage tours and talks hosted by the museums team. All events hosted by the museums team are aimed at engaging with the local community and increasing the visitor experience at Southsea Castle.

The Castle courtyard, keep, ramparts and museum rooms are open to the public from 10am - 5pm, Tues - Sunday's and bank holidays, from April - October, and are closed over the winter period. The restaurant is open all year round, currently from 9.30am - 5pm every day in the summer season, and Wed-Sun 9.30am - 5pm in the winter season. It would be a requirement that on days the castle is open to the public that the restaurant is also open.

CONCESSION AGREEMENT & COMMERCIAL MODEL

The current concession agreement for the Southsea Castle catering operation is based on a hybrid commercial model that combines both fixed and performance?based rental elements.

Under the existing arrangement, the operator pays the Council an annual base rent of £32,000. This figure reflects the minimum financial return the Council would expect to achieve in order to ensure the asset remains commercially viable. The Council would also expect this base rent to be uplifted annually, in line with CPI, to maintain the real value of the income over the duration of the agreement. The Council will likely seek to increase the rental income it currently receives through the procurement process but is keen to understand the markets position through the PME process before finalising its commercial strategy.

In addition to this guaranteed rent, the concession agreement includes a turnover?share mechanism, through which the operator pays a percentage of gross revenue generated from restaurant operations, café trade, weddings, corporate events, and other hospitality activities.

The Council is likely to include for a revenue share element within the future procurement as either a mandatory or optional bidding element. The Council is also considering applying minimum and maximum revenue % values through the bidding process. Again,

the Council is keen to take feedback from the market on this commercial element via the PME process.

The existing commercial model reflects the scale of the operation, which has historically generated an anticipated annual turnover in the region of £500,000 to £600,000, dependent on seasonal trading patterns and the volume of weddings and events delivered.

Initial considerations include adopting a revised lease term comprising an initial 5 year period, with options to extend the total term to 15-20 years, subject to performance and at the discretion of the council. This structure should support operator investment in catering equipment, bar infrastructure, interior fit out and service improvements, whilst ensuring the Council maintains a financially robust and sustainable partnership arrangement.

However, the Council is keen to gain feedback through the PME process on any mutual benefits that a longer than 5-year base term could deliver as well as provision of different extension options.

FUTURE PROCUREMENT STRATEGY

At this stage, the Council has not yet determined the exact procurement process that will follow this Pre-Market Engagement (PME). However, based on the nature of the requirement, the feedback received to date, it is most likely that the Council will adopt a Competitive Flexible Procedure (CFP) under the Procurement Act 2023.

The CFP offers the flexibility for a procurement approach similar to Competitive Dialogue under the previous Public Contract Regulations 2015, and the Council anticipates structuring the process in two stages, as follows:

STAGE 1 - INITIAL PROPOSALS

Operators will be invited to submit tender proposals demonstrating how they intend to deliver the catering operation at Southsea Castle, including commercial, operational, heritage sensitive and visitor experience considerations. These submissions will be evaluated against published criteria, taking into account qualitative and pricing elements.

In addition to the assessment of tender submissions, Operators should be aware that progression to the subsequent stages of the procurement will be subject to meeting a set of Conditions of Participation. These are expected to include, but may not be limited to:

- Financial standing requirements
- Minimum experience criteria, including the ability to evidence delivery of catering, restaurant, bar and event operations of a comparable scale.

- Insurance requirements, such as public liability, employer's liability, and product liability at levels to be set out in the tender documents.
- Mandatory and discretionary exclusion grounds, as required under the Procurement Act 2023, which all Operators must formally declare.
- Debarment checks, undertaken via the government's Central Digital Platform, which all Operators must be registered on as part of the tender process.
- Relevant professional and operational accreditations, where applicable (e.g., food safety, environmental health, sustainability credentials, licensing compliance).
- Health & Safety and Environmental Health record.

Stage 2 - Shortlist & Refinement

A shortlist of the highest scoring Operators will be invited to refine their proposals in greater detail. This stage is expected to include further dialogue, solution development, and clarification of operational and commercial models before final tenders are submitted. It is likely that a maximum of 3 highest scoring operators will be invited to submit 2nd stage best and final offer bids.

STAGE 2 - SINGLE COMPLIANT BIDDER / HIGHEST SCORING BIDDER SCENARIO

If, at the conclusion of Stage 1, only one bidder meets the minimum requirements and is capable of delivering the contract, or multiple compliant bids are received but at stage 1 assessment the highest scoring bidder's score is significantly higher (probably more than 20% margin to be applied) than the next placed bidder, the Council reserves the right to engage directly with that operator on a negotiated basis to complete the procurement. This will be carried out in compliance with the flexibility afforded by the CFP under the Procurement Act 2023.

ISSUE OF CONTRACT TENDER NOTICE

The Council will confirm the chosen procurement route in due course, by issuing a Contract Tender Notice outlining the key details and requirements. The Council anticipates that this opportunity will be classified as an above-threshold concession under the Procurement Act 2023. This will be confirmed upon publication of the tender notice.

PME & PROCUREMENT TIMETABLE

The Council are intending to run the PME and the subsequent envisaged tender process under the following Procurement Programme:

1. Publish PME Notice - Tuesday 24th February 2026
2. Site visit and briefing - Tuesday 10th March 2026 from 16:30 to 19:00
3. 1-2-1 supplier discussion - From Tuesday 10th March 2026 to Wednesday 18th March 2026
4. Issue of Tender Notice and 1st Stage Call for Applications & Invitation to Participate in Dialogue - Monday 13th April 2026
5. Site Visit (condition of tendering) - Monday 27th April 2026 between 14:00 and 15:30
6. 1-2-1 dialogue meetings - From Monday 4th May 2026 to Friday 15th May 2026
7. Request for clarification deadline - Wednesday 20th May 2026 by 16:00
8. 1st Stage CFP proposals return - Tuesday 26th May 2026 by 12:00
9. 1st Stage CFP shortlisting decision notification - Friday 5th June 2026
10. Issue of 2nd Stage Invitation to Partake in Further Dialogue & Submit Tendered Proposals - Monday 22nd June 2026
11. 2nd stage dialogue meetings - From Monday 29th June 2026 to Friday 3rd July 2026
12. Request for clarification deadline - Wednesday 8th July 2026 by 16:00
13. Deadline for submission of 2nd stage tendered proposals - Friday 17th July 2026 by 12:00
14. Evaluation of 2nd stage tender proposals including for any post tender clarification & negotiation meetings - Monday 20th July 2026 to Friday 7th August 2026
15. Notification of award decision, issue of assessment summaries and publication of Contract Award Notice - Monday 17th August 2026
16. Standstill Period - Tuesday 18th August 2026 to Thursday 27th August 2026
17. Preferred bidder secured and confirmation of contract award - Friday 28th August 2026
18. Contract Start - Monday 1st February 2027

Total value (estimated)

- £15,326,794 excluding VAT
- £18,392,153 including VAT

Above the relevant threshold

Contract dates (estimated)

- 1 February 2027 to 31 January 2032
- Possible extension to 31 January 2047
- 20 years

Main procurement category

Services

CPV classifications

- 55310000 - Restaurant waiter services
- 55320000 - Meal-serving services
- 55330000 - Cafeteria services
- 55400000 - Beverage-serving services
- 55520000 - Catering services
- 79952000 - Event services

Contract locations

- UKJ31 - Portsmouth

Engagement

Engagement deadline

20 March 2026

Engagement process description

INTRODUCTION

Portsmouth City Council (the Council) is undertaking a Preliminary Market Engagement (PME) exercise to inform the future procurement strategy for catering and event services at Southsea Castle.

To ensure effective engagement with organisations, and in the interests of transparency and fair and equal treatment set out within the Procurement Act 23, the Council has instigated this Preliminary Market Engagement (PME) process via issue of a PME Notice on the Central Government Find a Tender Service / Central Digital Platform.

Through the PME exercise suitably qualified and experienced operators will have the opportunity to participate in a site tour of the premises on 10th March at 16:30 - 19:00 and take part in 1-1 discussions with key Council officers.

The 1-1 meetings will generally be held on-line via Microsoft Teams between 10th - 18th March, although the Council may also be able to offer in person meetings at the Council's Civic Offices. The Council currently has 4 1.5-hour meeting slots available which will be allocated on a first come first served basis to operators who can meet the minimum experience requirements detailed below.

If more than 4 qualifying operators express interest in 1-1 meetings the council will endeavour to make further meeting slots available but cannot provide any guarantees, as such interested operators are encouraged to submit formal expressions of interest as a matter of urgency. Where meeting slots cannot be allocated the Council will give operators an opportunity to provide written feedback.

The feedback gained through this process will inform the development of the operational, commercial and contractual positions taken by the Council when the formal procurement

process is undertaken, as well as informing the design and programme for the actual procurement process.

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST PROCESS & PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

Attendance at the site visit, and participation in any subsequent one-to-one meetings, will be limited to Operators who have completed and submitted the accompanying Expression of Interest (EOI) form via In-tend using the correspondence function .

In the first instance, interested Operators must complete the EOI form and return it via In-tend, confirming their interest in taking part in the site visit and the 1-to-1 discussions. The EOI form requests operators to provide the following information for up to two case studies, which must be in relation to current operations or operations that have ceased within the last 12 months:

- Daily restaurant or café operations of a minimum of 30 covers
- Event catering delivery of a minimum of 100 covers
- Bar operation and management

These minimum requirements are expected to form part of the pass/fail Conditions of Participation in the subsequent procurement process. Operators who are unable to evidence the stated level of relevant experience will not be eligible to take part in this PME process or bid for the future opportunity.

The expression of interest form requests Operators to provide the following information:

- General company information
- Details of previous experience managing a hospitality business; whether a café, restaurant or catering company
- Availability for meetings on:
 - o Slot 1 - Tuesday 10th March - Either 11:00 - 12:30 or 11:30 - 13:00
 - o Slot 2 - Wednesday 11th March - 09:30 - 11:00
 - o Slot 3 - Thursday 12th March - Either 15:00 - 16:30 or 15:30 - 17:00
 - o Slot 4 - Wednesday 18th March 13:00 - 14:30
- Names of delegates who will attend the site visit and/or the 1-2-1 meetings, including

their role and email address.

In addition to submission of the EOI operators will also be required to complete and submit a Conflict of Interest (COI) Statement using the form provided. Further information in respect of Conflict of Interest is included within the further documentation accessible via the Council's e-sourcing solution In-tend.

NB: Operators should note that there is no obligation to take part in this exercise and that if they do not take part, it will not preclude them from any subsequent related procurement process. Engaging Operators will not receive preferential treatment in the subsequent procurement process, and this is in no way an indication of the selection of any organisation or a guarantee of future work.

COUNCIL TEAM

The key Council officers who will attend the 1-1 meetings are as follows:

- Claire Looney - Partnership and Commissioning Manager - PCC Culture Leisure and Regulatory Services
- Jacqueline Braks - Events and weddings manager, Southsea Castle - PCC Culture Leisure and Regulatory Services
- Richard Lock - Assistant Director Procurement - PCC Finance and Resources
- Simon Courtney - Senior Procurement Professional - PCC Finance and Resources
- Shannon Penfold - Trainee Procurement Professional - PCC Finance and Resources

PME & PROCUREMENT ADMINISTRATION

The Council will administrate the preliminary market engagement and future formal procurement process using its e-sourcing system In-Tend which will be used for:

- Access to and issue of information and documentation
- Clarification requests and response
- Expression of interest submission
- Allocation of 1-1 meeting slots
- Issue of tender documentation

- Submission of tender responses
- Issue of Award Decision notification

The In-tend system can be accessed for free using the following link:

<https://in-tendhost.co.uk/portsmouthcc.aspx/home>

PME SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The following documents have been included as part of the PME Briefing pack via In-tend:

- Southsea Castle - PME Brief (this document)
- Southsea Castle - PME 1-1 EOI
- Castle Website: <https://southseacastle.co.uk/>
- Conflict of Interest Statement
- Conflicts of Interest Declaration Form
- Intend Guidance, Supporting Information & Clarification Process.

PME FEEDBACK AREAS

As the council explores options for the new catering arrangements for Southsea Castle, it is keen to seek input from the market in respect of interest, ambitions, vision, commercials, contract, maintenance, procurement strategy, etc. to inform the future formal procurement process.

Through undertaking 1-1 discussions with operators the Council will seek information on and input into the following headline areas, further detail on these discussion points are included within the PME Brief document accessible via In-tend:

1. Experience, Capacity & Growth Ambitions
2. Vision for the Catering Offer
3. Opportunities for Weddings, Corporate Events & Private Hire
4. Community, Cultural and Local Partnerships
5. Marketing, Communications & Customer Service - Launch and Ongoing Strategy

6. Investment, Building Improvements & Maintenance
7. Commercial Viability & Business Model Options
8. Partnership Working, Performance Reporting & Contract Management Expectations
9. Procurement Process, Mobilisation & Transition Planning
10. Contractual Parameters and Limitations

CONFLICTS ASSESSMENT

The Procurement Act 2023 requires the Council to identify and keep under review actual and potential conflicts of interest. The Council must also mitigate conflicts of interest and address circumstances which the Council considers are likely to cause a reasonable person to wrongly believe there to be a conflict or potential conflict of interest.

A conflict of interest arises when an individual's personal interests, relationships, or activities have the potential to interfere with their impartiality or the integrity of the procurement process. This may include financial, personal, familial, or business interests that could improperly influence, or be perceived to influence, their decisions or actions.

Operators should refer to Conflicts of Interest Declaration Form accessible via In-tend for further details of the Council's duty regarding conflict of interests.

Operators should complete and submit one conflict of interest declaration per organisation in word format.

Participation

Particular suitability

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME)

Submission

Publication date of tender notice (estimated)

13 April 2026

Procedure

Special regime

Concession

Contracting authority

Portsmouth City Council

- Public Procurement Organisation Number: PCNL-5714-PRZV

Civic Offices, Guildhall Square

Portsmouth

PO1 2AL

United Kingdom

Email: procurement@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Region: UKJ31 - Portsmouth

Organisation type: Public authority - sub-central government