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Planning

## **Families First Partnership Programme: Integrated Front Door - Soft Market Test Questionnaire**

Essex County Council

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

Notice identifier: 2026/S 000-017777

Procurement identifier (OCID): ocds-h6vhtk-065e05

Published 27 February 2026, 10:55am

### **Scope**

### **Description**

Essex County Council ("the Council") is inviting prospective providers to participate in a soft market test to inform the Council's commissioning considerations regarding the development of an Integrated Front Door (IFD) for children, families, and professionals across Essex.

This proposed model would create a single, joined-up, easy-to-navigate route into early help, information, advice, guidance and support.

At this stage, no decision has been made to commission the IFD. The purpose of this Soft Market Test is to understand:

- whether the external market has the capability and capacity to deliver the whole IFD model if the Council chooses to commission it
- what enabling conditions, digital requirements and partnership arrangements would be essential

- The Council's emerging vision is a single, integrated, multi-channel front door that:
- simplifies access for families
- provides warm, guided navigation to earlier help
- reduces duplication and bounce around the system
- supports professionals with clear threshold guidance
- ensures families tell their story once
- enables timely, appropriate help
- aligns partners behind shared outcomes

This soft market test is designed to secure market feedback on the current commissioning intentions for this service. For indicative purposes, please note that the scope of the IFD must include:

- A single digital point of entry with clear navigation and self-serve information and integrated contact recording to ensure all interactions are captured,
- A multi-channel contact model including online and phone
- Supported navigation delivered through skilled practitioners who hold holistic, strength-based conversations
- Warm referrals and coordinated handovers into early help services
- Effective triage that identifies and escalates safeguarding concerns safely and quickly
- A single directory and open data model for service listings
- A joined-up workforce with thresholds and decision points that are easy to apply
- Shared visibility across partners

Please note that the Council reserves the right to refine the scope of this proposed procurement following the market engagement process. In addition, please note that this procurement remains subject to governance approval. Therefore, the Council will confirm the final scope of the procurement, including but not limited to, the contract duration and confirmed procurement timetable in the corresponding Tender Notice following the conclusion of the requisite governance process.

However, please note that the Council currently envisages that this service will be implemented by April 2027 under a two (2) year contract term.

In addition, please note that the contracting authority for this service is Essex County Council and any Successor Body meaning one or more entities which assumes any of the Council's functions (as applicable) as a result of Local Government Reform (LGR). Such successor body or bodies may be, without limitation, a local authority, a combined authority, a combined county authority, a strategic authority or any other status determined pursuant to the Devolution and LGR Legislation.

In addition, please note that further details of the Council's commissioning intentions for this service and a suite of soft market test questions can be located via the Council's e-tendering portal, ProContract: <https://procontract.due-north.com/>

Please note that you will need to undertake the registration process to secure a user account to access the soft market test questionnaire on ProContract. However, please be advised that the registration process is free of charge and provides access to all the current and forthcoming procurement opportunities for Essex County Council alongside several other public sector organisations.

Please note that the deadline for the soft market test responses will be 17:00 on Friday 13th March 2026 and all responses must be submitted via the online questionnaire in ProContract.

### **Contract dates (estimated)**

- 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2029
- 2 years

### **Main procurement category**

Services

### **CPV classifications**

- 85000000 - Health and social work services

## **Contract locations**

- UKH3 - Essex
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## **Engagement**

### **Engagement deadline**

13 March 2026

### **Engagement process description**

Full details of the structure of this proposed procurement and associated timetable will be detailed within the corresponding Tender Notice in due course. However, please note that the specified response deadline within this notice relates to the submission requirements for the soft market test only.

Further details regarding the current commissioning proposals for this service alongside a copy of the soft market test questionnaire can be accessed via the Council's e-tendering portal:

<https://procontract.due-north.com/>

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## **Participation**

### **Particular suitability**

- Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME)

- Voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSE)

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## Procedure

### Special regime

Light touch

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## Contracting authority

### Essex County Council

- Public Procurement Organisation Number: PWVM-4844-NRQH

County Hall, Market Road

Chelmsford

CM1 1QH

United Kingdom

Contact name: Rachel Horne

Email: [rachel.horne@essex.gov.uk](mailto:rachel.horne@essex.gov.uk)

Region: UKH36 - Heart of Essex

Organisation type: Public authority - sub-central government

