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Excellence in catering procurement

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council

Since joining TUCO, Sefton Council's school meals service has **saved an average of 10%** on a wide range of products. But it is the due diligence around food safety that they have been particularly impressed with.

Last year Sefton Council was let down by one of their most important school meal suppliers.

"Our fruit and veg provider pulled out of the school meals market giving us just three weeks' notice", explains school meals and catering services manager Colin Upton. "It could have been a huge headache."

Luckily Sefton's school catering team was using TUCO's fruit and vegetables framework and another three accredited suppliers were ready and waiting. "Previously we would have had to go cap in hand to a local supplier and they would have the upper hand when it came to price. Instead, because of TUCO's framework, we quickly got three alternative suppliers in to talk and they were still really competitive."

Having a selection of suppliers on each framework has come in handy for Sefton Council on other occasions too. Colin believes it has helped to resolve supply issues quickly because providers know the council can turn to another ten approved suppliers, all offering good prices, without having to re-tender.

"It keeps suppliers on their toes and it gives us extra clout. We don't spend lots of time sorting issues out because suppliers don't take advantage and anyway, TUCO look after that side of things for us."

'That side of things' includes handling any operational issues that Sefton Council can't resolve fast or don't have the time to focus on.

A recent example is a school meals supplier that tried to evoke a backdated price increase,

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arguing with Sefton's catering service about when the hike should come into effect. Colin brought in TUCO to mediate and the issue was resolved fast, allowing Colin and his team to focus on their core job rather than be drawn into protracted negotiations.

In January 2013 Sefton's school meals team called on TUCO's help again, this time to deal with issues around the horse meat scandal.

Colin Upton remembers the time well.

"I had lots of enquiries from schools asking about the meat we were supplying. I found TUCO's support really helpful then. I could pass on any concerns and I also had the reassurance of all the groundwork TUCO do with suppliers to ensure their products meet high standards."

What's on the menu?

Sefton Council's school meals and catering service spent a total of £1,686,535 through TUCO from April 2013 to March 2014. Here's the breakdown:

Frameworks Used	Total Spent	% Saving	Savings Total
Frozen	£364,202	12.24%	£44,578
Grocery	£592,026	7.00%	£41,441
Meat & Poultry	£331,424	6.68%	£22,139
Soft Drinks	£88,704	21.23%	£18,831
Fruit & Vegetables	£180,949	10.00%	£18,094
Milk & Bread	£100,753	3.70%	£3,727
Light Equipment	£27,404	5.50%	£1,507
Confectionery	£544	10.20%	£55
Disposables & Chemicals	£217	16.66%	£36
Water	£312	5.64%	£17
Grand Total	£1,686,535		£150,425



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These standards are something that TUCO prioritises, particularly in light of the 2005 E.coli outbreak in South Wales which affected children in 44 schools. The Pennington report that examined the incident concluded that food procurement procedures had been lacking and future purchasing needed to comply with new standards.

In light of this, TUCO uses food safety auditors STS (Support Training Services) to carry out annual assessments on every one of its framework suppliers. These audits ensure that suppliers comply with food safety requirements.

Another reason Sefton Council procure through TUCO is price. For Colin Upton, this is a key priority. “We used to put our contracts out for competitive tender. But back then we only spent about £1.5m on food and we struggled to attract competition. We found ourselves trying to reduce increasing costs rather than making significant savings.”

Like many local authority school catering teams, Sefton’s service gets no central funding, instead relying on individual school contracts. “We are competing with big private sector contract caterers. Before we joined TUCO, the prices we were offering schools just didn’t match the purchasing power of big caterers. But now we have the massive

buying muscle of TUCO behind us and we can offer really competitive rates.”

This muscle comes from the fact that TUCO procures over £100m worth of goods and services for catering departments in 28 councils, 4 NHS Trusts and 340 universities and colleges across the UK each year, harnessing demand to drive down costs.

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TUCO’s contracts are also independently benchmarked against those of other purchasing organisations through the Catering Price Index, giving Members the assurance that they are getting the best prices in the market.

From a sustainability point of view, Colin Upton also likes the fact that TUCO encourage local providers to tender, reducing the carbon footprint of suppliers. But for him, there is one benefit that wins out every time.

“It’s the due diligence side of things. I can’t stress that enough. As the head of the school meals and catering service my number one priority has got to be food safety. With TUCO’s due diligence, I am confident we are receiving safe food. You can’t really put a price on that.

SCHOOL MEALS IN SEFTON – WHO’S BEING SERVED?

- ▶ **75** primary schools
- ▶ **9** secondary schools
- ▶ **6** special education schools

▶ 2013/14: approx. **10,000** meals a day

▶ 2014/15: approx. **14,000** meals a day (increase due to the new universal infant free school meals)



If you would like to find out how **TUCO** can support your council's catering department, call us: **0161 713 3420**, email us: **info@tuco.org** or visit **www.tuco.org/buy**