

EXCELLENCE IN CATERING PROCUREMENT

SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

The introduction of universal infant free school meals put huge additional demands on Sefton Council's catering service. But having TUCO in its corner ensured it was a smooth transition



Dealing with an upsurge in demand ought to be a 'nice' problem for any caterer to have. But imagine having to cope with an immediate 40% increase across dozens of outlets.

That's the situation Sefton Council had to manage when the government introduced free meals for infant school children.

"It substantially changed our business and we went from serving 10,000 meals a day to 14,000," explains school meals and catering services manager Colin Upton.

But being a member of TUCO brought

with it much-needed peace of mind.

"We were able to rely on TUCO and know we would have the suppliers to cope with the extra demand," says Colin. "It meant from day one that we could be up and running."

At a time when local government resources are under greater pressure than ever before, it's vital to secure value for money and consistent quality in such a major area of spend. Having TUCO's clout behind you has come in handy on a number of occasions, says Colin.

"The biggest benefit I have got out of TUCO is due diligence and knowing they are there if we have any issues with suppliers."

The most recent example was a long-standing meat supplier whose quality of service had dipped.

Colin explains: "I was able to use TUCO to give that extra bit of leverage to get the service back on track as quickly as possible. But I also knew there were alternatives via TUCO should I need to change supplier."

WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

Sefton Council's school meals and catering service spends more than £2m a year through TUCO. Here's the breakdown of latest spend and savings:

FRAMEWORK	TOTAL SPEND (AUG15-JUL16)	SAVING %	SAVING AMOUNT
CATERING LIGHT & HEAVY EQUIPMENT	£1,137.24	0.85%	£9.75
CONFECTIONERY, SNACKS, CAKES & ANCILLARY PRODUCTS	£368.13	5.20%	£20.19
DISPOSABLES & KITCHEN CHEMICALS	£8.93	15.65%	£1.66
FRESH/FROZEN MEAT & POULTRY	£380,753.09	19.62%	£92,931.60 £6.64
FROZEN & CHILLED FOOD	£495,208.08	29.57%	£207,823.05 £89.81
FRUIT & VEGETABLES	£208,503.29	5.14%	£11,297.77
GROCERY PROVISIONS & CHILED FOODS	£729,914.71	11.46%	£94,475.07
INNOVATIVE FOOD CONCEPTS	£8,477.90	3.00%	£262.20
MILK, DAIRY, MORNING GOODS & BREAD	£103,100.41	5.14%	£5,586.51
SANDWICHES	£6,688.86	0.90%	£60.75
SOFT DRINKS & FRUIT JUICE	£111,596.14	19.51%	£201.70 £26,750.20 £97.93
TOTAL	£2,045,756.78		£439,614.83



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- Colin Upton, Sefton Council

SCHOOL MEALS IN SEFTON - WHO'S BEING SERVED?

75 primary schools

9 secondary schools

6 special education schools

14,000 meals a day

"I do feel we get prioritised. In the case of the problem with the meat supplier it would have been easy for us to go elsewhere, which wouldn't have been the case before Sefton joined TUCO.

"You can do it yourself but it means a long-winded approach and putting it out to tender, which is a time consuming and costly exercise."

Having a selection of suppliers on each of TUCO's frameworks 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 includes handling any operational issues that the council is unable to resolve quickly or doesn't have the time to focus on.

One example saw a school meals supplier try to evoke a backdated price increase, arguing with Sefton's catering service about when the hike should come into effect. TUCO was brought in to mediate and the issue was resolved, allowing Colin and his team to focus on their core job rather than be drawn into protracted negotiations.

Another reason Sefton Council procures through TUCO is price. For Colin, 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 more than £150m worth of goods and services for catering departments in local authorities, NHS trusts and universities and colleges across the UK each year, harnessing demand to drive down costs.

"The £150m going through TUCO contracts every year gives schools in Sefton the confidence that they're part of a massive catering consortium and that our prices are competitive," says Colin.

TUCO's contracts are also independently benchmarked against those of other purchasing organisations using an independent catering price index, giving members the assurance that they are getting the best prices in the market.

From a sustainability point of view, Colin 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."

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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.ac.uk or visit www.tuco.ac.uk/buy

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