Before the Contract Starts

This guidance covers the **period after preferred bidder identification / intention to award**, up to **Go-Live / Day 1 of service delivery**.

It ensures the contract is set up for successful performance, compliance, and risk management from the start.

Purpose of Pre-Contract Contract and Supplier Management

For medium and high-risk contracts, the preparation before the contract begins is critical. The work will already have been started when the commodity strategy and tender documents were prepared and this phase will build upon that.

The objectives are to:

- Ensure a smooth and controlled mobilisation
- Confirm the supplier fully understands the specification, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and obligations
- Establish governance, communication channels, and performance expectations
- Finalise risk controls, data requirements, and compliance arrangements
- Ensure the contract manager has everything needed to manage performance from Day 1
- Document evidence for audit and procurement governance

Early clarity reduces operational risk, improves supplier performance, and creates the foundations for a strong commercial relationship.

Key Principles

Open or close

1. **Proportionate to risk** – higher-risk contracts require more robust planning and documentation.

2. **Collaboration** – early engagement with the supplier sets the tone for partnership working.
3. **Transparency and documentation** – all agreements should be minuted and filed.
4. **Service continuity** – the mobilisation plan must minimise disruption to service users.
5. **Governance first** – roles, responsibilities, and decision pathways must be agreed before work starts.

Checklist

Checklist

Core Pre-Contract Activities

For medium–high risk contracts, the following 10 activities are essential:

1. Contract Handover from Procurement to Contract Manager (if applicable)
2. Internal mobilisation planning
3. Supplier mobilisation meeting
4. Confirmation of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), balanced scorecard, reporting and data requirements
5. Risk assessment and creation of the contract risk register
6. Governance structure setup
7. Agreeing change control, escalation and communication routes
8. Finalising implementation / mobilisation plans
9. Readiness checks and acceptance testing (where relevant)
10. Go-Live approval and sign-off

Each activity is described in detail below:

Contract Handover from Procurement

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A structured handover ensures that the contract manager has the necessary information.

Procurement should provide the contract manager with:

- Signed contract / Terms and Conditions (T&Cs)
- Specification and schedules
- Tender responses (technical and commercial)
- Pricing schedules
- Scored evaluation sheets
- KPI and service level requirements
- Risk and issues identified during procurement
- Award letters and standstill documentation
- Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) information (if applicable)
- Data protection agreements
- On-boarding requirements

Handover Meeting Should Cover:

- Context and purpose of the contract
- Key risks highlighted during evaluation
- Supplier strengths and potential areas requiring attention
- Contract management expectations
- Mobilisation timeline and Go-Live target date

All documents should be stored in the contract/relevant file.

Internal Mobilisation Planning

Before meeting the supplier, the public body must align internally. **Key actions should include:**

Establishing the **contract management team**, including:

- Contract Manager
- Technical leads
- Finance

- IT/Data protection
- Human Resources (HR)/TUPE leads
- Legal (if required)
- Reviewing resourcing needs
- Mapping internal dependencies
- Agreeing internal governance (who approves what, and when)
- Checking budget availability and coding
- Identifying training needs (e.g., system access, technical knowledge)

Supplier Mobilisation Kick-Off Meeting

A formal kick-off meeting is essential in medium–high risk contracts.

Agenda should typically include:

1. Introductions and governance structure
2. Review of the contract objectives and outcomes
3. Mobilisation plan and timelines
4. Supplier resource allocation
5. KPI dashboard/balanced scorecard and reporting templates
6. Data and system access requirements
7. Business continuity expectations
8. Health & Safety, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), security or regulatory requirements
9. Risk review and new risks identified
10. Communication and escalation routes

The meeting should end with:

- A joint action plan
- Named points of contact
- Mobilisation timeline
- Agreement on next steps

Minutes should be recorded and shared.

Confirming KPIs, SLAs & Reporting

Medium–high risk contracts require clear and tested performance measures from the start.

Actions:

- Walk through each KPI and Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the supplier
- Ensure definitions and measurement methods are clear
- Test reporting templates before Go-Live
- Agree frequency of monitoring (monthly/quarterly)
- Confirm data sources (supplier-provided vs internal systems)
- Agree tolerances and thresholds (green/amber/red)
- Identify KPIs that require base-lining during mobilisation
- Establish how under-performance will be addressed

The supplier must sign off on the agreed KPIs.

Contract Risk Register (Pre-Go-Live)

Open or close

A dedicated contract risk register should be created before the contract starts.

Minimum required risk categories include:

- Service continuity
- Supply chain risks
- Financial stability
- Cybersecurity and data protection
- Health & Safety
- Workforce (including TUPE)
- Business continuity
- Dependency on subcontractors
- Political or reputational risks

Each risk should have:

- Likelihood and impact scores
- Owner (public body or supplier)
- Mitigation actions

- Early warning triggers

Risk registers should be reviewed at least weekly during mobilisation.

Establishing Governance

Open or close

Medium–high risk contracts require documented, structured governance.

Governance should define:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Delegated authority levels
- Meeting structures:
  - Weekly or biweekly mobilisation meetings
  - Monthly contract review meetings (from Go-Live)
  - Quarterly strategic review meetings
- Reporting expectations
- Decision-making routes
- Dispute escalation procedures
- Audit and record-keeping requirements

This structure must be formally agreed with the supplier.

Agreeing Communication and Escalation Routes

Open or close

Early clarity prevents future misunderstandings.

Agreements should include:

- Operational contacts (day-to-day)
- Commercial contacts
- Senior escalation paths
- Emergency contacts
- Response times for routine and urgent communications
- How issues, risks and incidents will be reported

- Shared document locations (if applicable)

A communication plan/matrix should be issued to both sides.

Mobilisation and Implementation Planning

Open or close

A mobilisation plan is mandatory for medium–high risk contracts.

The plan should outline:

- Activities
- Owners
- Timescales
- Dependencies
- Risks
- Milestones
- Gate reviews (“ready for service” checkpoints)

Examples of mobilisation tasks:

- Staff on-boarding / TUPE transfers
- System access setup
- Site surveys
- Equipment installation
- Process mapping
- Business continuity rehearsals
- Trial runs / test scenarios
- Training delivery
- Data migration (if relevant)

The plan should be reviewed weekly.

Readiness Checks and Acceptance

Open or close

Before Go-Live, a **Readiness Assessment** must be completed.

This should confirm:

- All staff are trained and cleared
- Systems and data access work
- KPIs and reporting are tested
- Business continuity plans are implemented
- Health and Safety and compliance checks passed
- Risks are within acceptable tolerance
- Stakeholders are informed
- Supplier has demonstrated ability to meet service levels

If concerns remain, Go-Live should be delayed or a controlled soft-launch used.

Go-Live Approval and Contract Commencement

Open or close

The formal Go-Live requires:

Sign-off from:

- Contract Manager
- Procurement Lead
- Senior Responsible Officer (SRO)
- Legal (if required)

A Go-Live communication sent to:

- Supplier
- Internal stakeholders
- Service users (if relevant)

A contract management pack should be finalised containing:

- Signed contract
- Mobilisation records
- KPI dashboards/balanced scorecard
- Risk register
- Communications and escalation map

- Meeting calendar
- Contact lists
- Reporting templates

Checklist

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Immediate Post-Go-Live Actions

Within the first 30 days you should:

- Hold a Go-Live review meeting
- Validate early KPI data
- Update risks based on operational experience & market/environmental changes
- Address any immediate issues
- Move to Business As Usual (BAU) contract management phase
- Document lessons for future procurement exercises

Quickfire Guide

Quickfire Guide

Summary Checklist

Before the Contract Starts, the following should have been completed:

- Contract handover completed
- Internal mobilisation team established
- Supplier mobilisation meeting held
- KPI & reporting arrangements confirmed
- Contract risk register created
- Governance and escalation routes agreed
- Mobilisation plan in place
- Data, systems & compliance requirements confirmed
- Readiness check passed

- Go-Live approved