



**working in partnership**

*with*

**ProContract**  
Powered By DueNorth

Orbit Group e-tendering web portal

Guidance for Suppliers, Contractors & Consultants  
considering working with Orbit Group

See also

Main Orbit website: [www.orbit.group.org.uk](http://www.orbit.group.org.uk)

(E-tendering portal: [www.orbit-tenders.org.uk](http://www.orbit-tenders.org.uk))

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## 1. ORBIT BACKGROUND

We feel it is important that organisations working with Orbit understand the profile of the Group.

Orbit started life in 1967 as a co-ownership society. The world has changed a-pace since then and Orbit with it. We match our organisational culture to our mission of Building Brighter Futures by trying to deliver what we have set out to achieve. The major parts of any culture are values and behaviours, which is why we have developed a new set for the Group to underpin our mission and the Customer First strategy.

The Group's Missions is to **build brighter futures for people and communities**

This mission is supported by 5 Corporate Goals **ORBIT**



Offer outstanding customer service



Run a highly efficient and effective organisation



Brighten our employees' futures



Invest for the future in homes and communities



Treat everyone fairly and with respect

And 5 Values

### Honesty

- Saying what we mean
- Building trust
- Deliver on our promises
- Challenging the status quo
- Committed to our organisation and our customers
- Telling it like it is

## **Innovation**

- Enthusiastically putting forward our ideas
- No idea too small
- Celebrating and promoting success
- Taking informed risks
- Learning from experience
- Delivering change

## **Respect**

- Seeing things from our customers' point of view
- Celebrating diversity
- Giving and receiving constructive feedback
- Open minded
- Active listening and valuing all contributions

## **Partnership**

- Exploring the approaches of others
- Valuing all our partners
- Recognising the skills and experience of others
- Building great relationships
- Celebrating team working
- Collaborating to deliver results

## **Excellence**

- Empowering staff
- Striving to be great
- Passionate about what we do
- Getting things right first time
- Delivering exceptional results
- Pushing the boundaries

Currently the structure comprises:

### **Orbit Group Ltd**

- Parent company, Registered Social Landlord (RSL) and Exempt Charity
- Winner of two National Housing Federation (NHF) awards for local engagement and diversity and race
- Manages more than 34,000 homes and employs around 1,800 staff

### Orbit Heart of England (the brand name for Heart of England Housing Association Ltd)

- RSL & Exempt Charity, which manages 17,000 homes in the Midlands
- 2008 amalgamation between Orbit Housing Association in the Midlands, and South Warwickshire Housing Association (SWHA)
- Manages four Care & Repair agencies which offer home improvements to vulnerable home owners who need to repair, improve or adapt their homes
- Provides supported housing as well as general rented and sheltered accommodation
- Manages 3 Care & Repair Agencies in conjunction with Local Authorities in the region.

### Orbit South Housing Association Ltd

- One of the largest RSLs in the South managing 13,300 properties
- 2007 merger between Thanet Community Housing Association (TCHA) and Orbit Bexley Housing Association (OBHA)

### Orbit Homes

- Orbit Homes is a wholly owned subsidiary company of Orbit Group Ltd, founded in 2009 to develop schemes for Social Rent, Market Sale and the Intermediate market
- Orbit Homes operates in the Midlands, the South East and the East of England and will develop around 1,000 properties per year of all tenures across these regions

### Orbit East

#### (the East Anglian Division of Orbit Group Ltd)

- Responsible for 4,800, primarily rented, homes
- Two Care and Repair agencies
- Managed by Orbit South

### Orbit Services

Division of the parent company including:

- Finance and Resources
  - Customer Service Centre
  - Finance services
  - IT

- Audit and Compliance
  - Governance
  - Research and Business Information
  - Audit
  - Insurance
  - Health and Safety
  
- Business Development
  - Development
  - Regeneration and community investment
  
- Organisational Development
  - HR
  - Marketing and communications

#### [Orbit Treasury Ltd](#)

- Limited Company created in 2007
- Oversees all the Group's treasury activities and annual strategy
- Generates economies of scale to reduce the Group's overall borrowing costs and ensure the Group gets the best deals with the bank

#### [Orbit New Homes Ltd](#)

- Limited Company formed in 1997
- Created to pursue commercial activities such as developing new homes for open-market sale

## 2. INTRODUCTION TO E-TENDERING & RELATIONSHIP WITH DUE NORTH

### 2.1 What is e-tendering & why are we doing it?

E-tendering is a mechanism by which all of the copious paperwork associated with traditional tenders is replaced by on-line information combined with the electronic transmission of documents between the purchaser and the supplier.

Generally e-tendering systems are operated via computer software that offers additional benefits to both purchaser and suppliers (contractors, consultants, and other service/goods providers).

Suppliers require an Internet connection and an e-mail address.

The benefits include:

- An ability for us to advertise potential opportunities for suppliers in advance of agreement on specific programme dates
- Issue and receipt of
  - Expressions of Interest,
  - Prequalification Questionnaires,
  - Tenders
  - Quotationsvia electronic means, which
  - speeds the process,
  - reduces costs for us and our potential suppliers, and
  - contributes to the sustainability agenda by reducing the use of energy, paper & other consumables in the print process and the costs (financial & environmental) of shipping hard-copy documents around the country.
- Ensures that suppliers more remote from our central base are not disadvantaged.
- Provision of an automatic acknowledgement of receipt of document being submitted to us.
- Automated creation of an audit trail of the issue of all documents and receipt of queries and submissions.

- All information issued to tenderers is via the web-based system and is issued simultaneously to all tenderers, ensuring consistency of information and removing time lags between change decisions and information supply.
- Standardised response formats allow more direct and transparent comparisons between bids.

## 2.2 How are we implementing e-tendering? (What is ProContract and who are Due North?)

Orbit Group has implemented a system called **ProContract**.

You will see this name on the web-portal (the page which provides your link to the system found at [www.orbit-tenders.org.uk](http://www.orbit-tenders.org.uk) ). It is the software package that is used to communicate with suppliers and to securely hold submissions until the deadline for opening.

The package also enables us to:

- advertise future contracts
- submit OJEU notices
- maintain a database of registered suppliers and their interest areas of work/supply

It enables suppliers to:

- search for opportunities
- register their interest on specific contracts and automatically receive updated information
- complete on-line Pre-qualification Questionnaires and Tender Submissions

**Due North** are the external providers of the software system. They maintain the website upon which all of the data is stored, and via which you will receive communications.

Quite often more than one communication will be automatically sent via the site simultaneously. This creates a risk that it may be blocked by your spam-filters, firewalls, etc. This issue can **only** be addressed by your own IT sections / providers, who need to set due-north.com as a safe sender.

This “external” provision is a key factor of all e-tendering systems. It eliminates the possibility of any tampering of the system from within the buying organisation.

It maintains the “lock” on quotation and tender submissions until the due date/time.

It ensures that we (as the buyers) cannot access any part-completed submissions which suppliers have stored on site.

### 3. PROGRESS TO DATE & FUTURE PLANS

The first small batch of tenders was entered onto the system during August 2008, using the system to simply exchange document files in a secure environment.

In 2009 we adopted the Proquest & ProEvaluate modules which allow both submission & evaluation to be carried out directly within the system.

As with all new software unexpected issues arise during use. We are actively engaged with Due North & the ProContract Development Group to address areas for system improvement & enhancement.

In the shorter term this guide is an initial attempt to address some of the most common issues. It will be updated regularly and the latest version will be posted on the Procurement page of Orbit Group's main website: [www.orbit.org.uk](http://www.orbit.org.uk) > [procurement](#)

We are looking to expand the prior notice of contracts on the basis of a revised & updated contract database, which will give us a much longer-term view of contract renewals across all parts of the recently restructured Orbit Group. Hopefully this will assist suppliers in planning their own tendering work.

Ultimately, our aspiration is for all tendering to be carried out electronically.

Additionally, the portal has the facility to be shared with other organisations who may wish to use the same platform to advertise their tenders. It is our intention to work with other RSLs to develop this potential.

## 4. USING THE SYSTEM – GETTING STARTED

### 4.1 Registration

Go to the web portal [www.orbit-tenders.org.uk](http://www.orbit-tenders.org.uk)

As an unregistered supplier you will be able view any contracts which we have publicly advertised, but will not be able to download additional information.

### 4.2 Supplier Guides

To register as a potential supplier click “register free” and complete the on-screen form. Only basic information is required and there is no charge. Please note that this is **not** a vetting or accreditation service.

Two points to note:

**(1) Categories.** These are based on the EU CPV codes (high level only). It is important that you select the right categories or you will not receive appropriate notification of tender opportunities.

**(2) Company Classification** – non mandatory field – Orbit does not set targets for employment of specific categories.

On the right hand side of the front screen, you will find links to a series of Supplier Guides. These are the system user guides as provided by Due North. Clicking on each guide will open it in a separate window. We **strongly** advise that you print a copy of the guide or have it open for the relevant part of the process and refer to it as you work through the steps, until you are familiar with the system.

See ProContract User Guides:

1: Visiting the Site for the 1<sup>st</sup> Time;

2: Opportunity Search when not logged in; and

3: How to do business on the portal

We receive an alert when a new supplier submits an application.

Upon our acceptance of the application: you will receive system-generated e-mails providing your username and password. Please note that these e-mails are sent in rapid succession and this may provoke some spam-filters or firewalls to block them. Please ensure that your IT section notes the domain due-north.com as a safe sender.

Please note that acceptance of your application to access the web portal as a potential supplier does not constitute any form of approval as to your organisation's suitability or qualification to work on Orbit projects. Prequalification or qualitative vetting of some kind will apply to most tenders: this may be contract specific or via agencies such as Constructionline or Exor.

### **4.3 Having Received Your User Name & Password**

Once you have received both e-mails giving your user name and password you can log in to the site.

You will be prompted to change your password when you first log in. Do this. Log out. Then log back in with your new password.

You should find a pane labelled "My Opportunities" – top right of screen. Opening this will give you access to any invitations that have been sent to you, and all tenders that you may be currently working on. If you do not see this pane, please contact Orbit.

[See ProContract User Guide: 4: First Time Log In](#)

### **4.4 Changing your organisation details**

You can change your company information at any time. Open the "My contracts / My opportunities" pane. This will give you access to the "Company Profile" and "Personal Details" panes through which you change the information.

[See ProContract User Guide 5: Managing your Account](#)

## **4.5 Expressing an Interest**

To register an interest in a publicly advertised contract:

- log in
- locate the contract via the Search system – click on the contract title to open it
- click register interest

[See ProContract User Guide 3: How to Do Business](#)

## **4.6 Receiving and Responding to Tenders**

When tender opportunities are issued to you, you will receive an e-mail alert. To view the tenders and submit your responses to them, log in to the system and open the “My Opportunities” pane. Do not try to access the opportunity if on the Front Page advert. This will not work. You must go through “My Opportunity”.

[See ProContract User Guide: 6 The Tender Response.](#)

## 5. USING THE SYSTEM – TROUBLE-SHOOTING

Below are some of the common questions that arise when suppliers first use the system. With any query, your first port of call should be the ProContract User Guides which can be opened or downloaded, without being logged in to the system.

If those guides & the information below still don't resolve the issue – do please contact us for further help (see Section 6).

### **Attachments: Supplier gets message “there are no attachments” when trying to submit PQQ or Tender –**

The statement "there are no attachments" relates to any attachments added at Step 3 (outside of the questionnaire), rather than those included at Step 2 (within the questionnaire). Check whether attachments are specifically required at Step 3. If not your submission will be valid.

**Copying info between submissions** – there is no easy way to copy repeat information from submission to another. The system generally does not allow you to have two submissions open at the same time, even if using separate browsers. (This will occasionally work but it can create problems if you do work this way, so the advice is a very definite "Don't").

There is a mechanism for previous answers to be saved and recalled in future submissions. We are awaiting clearer guidance on this issue but the advice we have to date is:

- answers will only be saved if we have used a library question **and not amended it** within the questionnaire
- answers will only be saved from 'submitted' questionnaires and not any that are currently in progress
- it is believed (though not entirely certain) that when opening a new questionnaire the answer will be pre-populated, but that the green tick will not show because you need to go back in and re-save the answer to validate it.

Due-North will look further at this and update the supplier guide to make it clearer.

## **Enquiries – see off system enquiries below**

**Library Answers:** - see Copying information above

**Link to site doesn't work:** links in e-mails generated by the system tend to "wrap" in some e-mail messages, so what looks like a link is actually only half of it. If a link doesn't work, check whether the browser address continues on the next line, then copy and paste both lines into the address bar. Generally speaking it's easier to go back to first principles and simply log on from the home page.

**Notification not received:** all notifications will go to the supplier's named contact on the system. It is important that you keep your account details up to date and that cover is arranged for any absences.

Due North can run an audit check to see if the e-mail was rejected but this will only be done upon specific request by Orbit. Neither Due North nor Orbit accept any liability for notifications undeliverable because of suppliers account management or technical difficulties not related to the Due North site.

**Off-line Enquiries:** See "Off-system Enquiries" below.

### **Off-system Enquiries :-**

To maintain probity and the audit trail, all queries relating to specific projects must be raised via the Q&A on the system.

Q&A relating specifically to a company rather than to the tender generally will not be made public. All other queries will be made available to all tenderers.

The reason for this is to ensure that all queries relating to a tender are fully auditable and that this can be verified by Due-North. Non-project-specific enquiries can arise in response to a specific project but are general in nature e.g. how to use the system, I can't find the information, what's my password, etc. We will endeavour to respond to these by telephone. Please ensure you provide a contact number where you can be reached at a time /place where you can log in to the system.

**OPPORTUNITY (Supplier cannot find information on an Opportunity):** - Refer to the Supplier Guide for full screenshot guidance, but in essence you need to:

Log out, log in again.

If you haven't logged in before, or have logged in but not done anything, you will be forced to change your password. Do so, log out and log back in with the new password.

You should now be on the front page headed Welcome to the Opportunities portal.

A common mistake at this point is to click on the contract ID at the bottom of the page. If you have already expressed interest in the project do **not** do this.

You should be able to see My Opportunities in the top right hand panel.

If you can't:

- **either** you've clicked on the contract ID on the previous page see above, which case you need to go back a page, or log out & start again;
- **or** you're not actually registered on the site – if you believe you have registered and still cannot see "My Opportunities" please contact Orbit.

Assuming you can see My Opportunities:

Click "My Opportunities"

This should take you to My Opportunities to View, under which (on the left hand side) it should say

My Pre Qualification Questionnaires (PQQs)

My Invitations To Tender (ITTs)

My Requests For Quotation (RFQs)

My Auctions

Another common mistake is to think that you have expressed interest in the project, when all you have actually done is register on the site. If this is the case – at this point it will say "You have no opportunities to view".

You have no opportunities to view

This probably means that you have registered on the site, but not registered interest in the actual project.

Go back a couple of pages to the first page. (Where we first clicked on My opportunities).

Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on the contract ident. Under options you should have Register Intent. Click that. The system will register your intent, and send an e-mail confirming that you have a new opportunity. Once you receive that you can log in and continue. By Clicking on My Opportunities.....

Assuming you get the list – continue...

Click on My PQQs (or ITTs as appropriate)

This will refresh the screen, remove My Pre Qualification Questionnaires (PQQs) from the top panel, but now show the contract in the second panel.

Click on the contract ident (text in blue, ref number beginning ORBIT-DNWD-).

The top panel gives general information on the contract – including the background information and instructions for completion of the PQQ etc. It is important that you read this. Click on the folder icon to open it.

The second panel gives access to the PQQ. Click on the folder icon to open.

On the next page, Step 1 gives general information. Although there is an edit icon, there is nothing much in there that you can edit. If the system forces you to put in a date against Prices Firm until, you can insert any date – it will not be used at PQQ stage – we're not asking for prices at this point. It **does** matter at **ITT** stage.

Step 2 on that same page gives access to the actual questionnaire. Click on View. It will take a little time to open, because of the level of detail behind it.

You then click on individual questions to open them up. This will give you either a drop down selection, a check box or a free text field that you can type into. You cannot download it to store somewhere else and re-upload, it must be answered on-line. But you can go in and out of it as many times as you like, saving as you go. It doesn't have to be done in one fell swoop.

Generally all of the questions will be mandatory, so you will not be able to submit it until you have answered them all.

If at Step 5 you are told that there are no attachments, this doesn't refer to anything you've attached within the questionnaire (which should be ok) but to anything outside of the questionnaire. We may have required something specific at this point, or not. If you are uncertain check with Orbit.

### **Passwords**

Orbit does not have access to supplier passwords and on no account should you provide them to us. If any member of Orbit staff request your password please report this to Gary Stephens, Director of Procurement.

In some circumstances Due North may require your password. They will not disclose this to Orbit – but we still recommend that you change it immediately the problem has been solved.

Orbit can however instruct the system to reset your password if this has been lost. You can also set your own password or request a username reminder. See Supplier Guide: Managing Your Account.

**Q&A:** we have a "default" policy that all Questions & Answers on PQQs and ITTs will be made public, unless they relate specifically to the supplier (e.g. a change in company status) rather than the tender. Orbit has sole discretion as to whether or not a question and answer shall be made public and shall accept no responsibility or liability in respect of such publication.

**Questions not opening (on-line questionnaire):** if you are looking at the questionnaire but cannot get the questions to open, it is probably that you are in the wrong page. The questionnaire can be seen from the General Information page, but this is a read only version. To access the interactive questionnaire you need to go back to the contract front page and either click on the open 📄 icon next to “View my response” – or click on “Response Wizard” at the bottom of the page. [See also Section not opening.]

**Saved answers:** - see copying information above.

**Section not opening (on-line questionnaire):** if the supplier cannot get a questionnaire section to open – it may be that we have inadvertently created a section but not put any questions in it. Please refer this to Orbit.


**Supplier cannot log on / User-name & password do not work:** see “Passwords” above.

**Supplier cannot find on-line questionnaire:** suppliers used to the old system of downloading word documents for completion, may have difficulty locating the on-line questionnaire. You need to:

- Log-in
- Click My Opportunities
- Click My PQQ's (or ITT or RFQ as appropriate)
- Click on the contract ID
- If they then click on View in the top panel PQQ information – this will give access to all of our uploaded documents (Instructions, draft contracts etc).
- To access the questionnaire itself, they need to click on View in the second panel “My Response”
- Step 1 is general info – they only need to add their own internal reference (and on ITT's or RFQ's when prices will be held until) – if the system insists on a date at PQQ stage – they can input anything, since we won't use it.
- Step 2 is the questionnaire itself – click edit to access the individual questions
- Step 3 is the final attachment – suggest that this should be a signed acceptance of the terms and conditions.

**Supplier cannot find tender:** when you log in, you should find a box (top right) which says “my opportunities”. Click to open. Please note that select-list tenders which were not advertised will not be picked up on search, but will appear under My Opportunities.

**“System Error” Messages:** the current software platform at Due North has difficulties with the amount of data included in some questionnaires and responses. We are promised a new platform which should resolve this, but timescales are not firm. In the meantime, opening the questionnaire at ‘section’ level does seem to resolve the problem. Click on the section sub heading to do this.

To open any pane in the system click on the  icon – usually located top right of the pane.

## 6. NEED MORE HELP?

If you have any problems, which are not addressed above, do not hesitate to contact us.

The primary contact at Orbit Group is:

Lesley Mason  
Procurement Manager  
Tel: 01603 505036  
Mobile: 07871 807725  
E-mail: [lesley.mason@orbit.org.uk](mailto:lesley.mason@orbit.org.uk)

In Lesley's absence please contact any of our Procurement Officers :-

Graham Percival – Telephone 02476 438394  
Email [grahampercival@orbit.org.uk](mailto:grahampercival@orbit.org.uk)

Adam Mottershead – Telephone 02476438393  
Email [adamcottershead@orbit.org.uk](mailto:adamcottershead@orbit.org.uk)

Teresa Merrill – Telephone 02476 437053  
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Ashley Thornton – Telephone 02476 437052  
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## 7. FEEDBACK – We need your views

Orbit Group commenced implementation of the e-tendering facility in the summer of 2008. The process has had the expected number of “teething problems” and we are most grateful to those suppliers and tenderers who have worked with us to improve the facility.

Feedback from users is vitally important if we are to continue to develop the system to its full potential.

We believe that potential is to provide a tool which can be used across all disciplines and all subsidiaries in the Group which will support our principles of open, transparent and fair procurement at all levels.

We believe that the potential is also to provide a tool which makes tendering quicker, easier, more cost-effective and environmentally more sustainable for our suppliers.

We appreciate however that it doesn't always feel that way, when you first access the site. We know. We have been there too!

### **So please tell us what you think:**

We don't want to clutter up your in-box with surveys asking questions that may not be relevant.

Simply send any comments you have about registering on the site, first impressions, subsequent use, responsive of Orbit Group, responsiveness of Due North or any related issues to:

[lesley.mason@orbit.org.uk](mailto:lesley.mason@orbit.org.uk)

Specific issues on specific contracts will be addressed (as appropriate) by personal response, or via the Q&A system under the relevant tender.

General site feedback will be followed up, but we cannot guarantee an individual response on generic matters. We will seek to issue periodic reviews of progress on the site & updates of this guidance.

~ end ~