

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need the Birmingham Business Charter for Social Responsibility?

The Birmingham Business Charter for Social Responsibility aims to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Birmingham and surrounding area. It is doing things differently in our everyday business that makes a positive difference to those with the greatest need.

Who can sign up to the Charter?

Any business or organisation, whether contracted to the Council or not, public, private or third sector, regardless of size can sign up to the Charter. Contractors to the Council and grant recipients are required to sign up to the Charter, subject to thresholds. The list of current Charter signatories, showing the variety of organisations signed up can be seen on www.finditinbirmingham.com/charter

What are the thresholds?

This depends on the type of contract with the Council. The table below shows the thresholds for each type of contract. These thresholds apply only to contractors and grant recipients.

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
	Charter does not apply	Light touch application tailored by contract or grant type	Fully consider Social Value and all action plan measures
	Contract value or grant value as appropriate		
Contracts for Services	<£200k	£200k to £750K	Over £750K
Contracts for supply of Goods	< £1m	£1m to £5m	Over £5m
Contracts for execution of Works	< £1m	£1m to threshold in Article 4(a) Directive 2014/24/EU*	Over threshold in Article 4(a) Directive 2014/24/EU*
Grants	< £200k	£200k to £750K	Over £750K

* For current EU thresholds refer to www.ojeu.eu/thresholds.aspx

All Contractors, subcontractors and grant recipients are required to adhere to the Council's Living Wage Policy, regardless of the contract / grant size.

What is a “Light touch action plan”?

With regard to the proportionality aspect of the Social Value Act, the smaller the contract, the smaller the action plan needs to be. With regard to efficiency, smaller the contracts need less resource to draw them up and agree them. A light touch action plan is one that has all the essential elements such as payment of the Living Wage to staff servicing Council contracts as well as a few relevant actions.

What am I committing to when I become a Charter Signatory?

When you become a Charter signatory you are committing to the principles set out in the Birmingham Business Charter for Social Responsibility document and the activities you have specified in your action plan.

Where can I see the list of the current Charter signatories?

The list of current Charter signatories can be seen on www.finditinbirmingham.com/charter and click on the “Charter Signatories” tab and scroll through the list.

Will it help me get a contract from the Council?

The Council will only contract with Charter signatories (subject to the thresholds set out above). An organisation can become a Charter signatory during the tender process. However if an organisation is already signed up then it makes the tender process easier as this step is already covered. It can also be an added advantage when tendering to main contractors and bidding for work to other public sector organisations particularly local authorities.

What do I need to do to become a Charter signatory?

You need to complete an action plan. The action plan template can be downloaded from www.finditinbirmingham.com/charter. The action plan is in excel format. The first sheet is for guidance, the second sheet captures information about your organisation. The third sheet is where the specific commitments are recorded. These commitments need to be relevant to your contract if contracted or organisation if not contracted, specific and measurable. The fourth and final sheet provides the list of measures with a little more explanation and contains a list of the wards in Birmingham in order of deprivation to help focus your commitments. The guidance document on www.finditinbirmingham.com/charter will help you with completing a good action plan.

The completed action plan needs to be submitted for assessment and once it is accepted then your organisation will receive a certificate. If you are submitting an action plan as part of a tender process then it needs to be submitted together with other tender documents. If you are submitting an action plan to become a voluntary Charter signatory then please email it to bbc4sr@birmingham.gov.uk

What do you mean by local?

What we mean by local depends very much on the context. As guidance, we have specified 30 miles to be reasonable in many cases but there is no strict rule around this. Sometimes, some supplies cannot be sourced locally (e.g. salt for road gritting) and they need to be sourced from further away. Other aspects of procurement such as quality and price need to be considered as well as the benefits of purchasing locally.

Do I have to sign up to all of the principles?

There are four important aspects to the Charter. These are relevance, proportionality, specific and measurable. You need to provide specific commitments to actions that are relevant to your contract or company. The larger the contract, the more substantial the commitments need to be. If you are signing up to the Charter as part of a tender process then guidance will be provided as to which principles are most relevant.

Do I have to select every principle?

No, only what is relevant and proportionate

Do I have to respond to every activity within a principle?

No, only what is relevant.

What makes an acceptable action plan?

There are many aspects to what makes an acceptable action plan. The most important are relevant, proportionate, specific and measurable.

Relevant: The commitments need to be relevant to the activity of the contract and the geographic area. If not contracted then it needs to be relevant to the organisations activity.

Proportionate: The value of the activities needs to be proportionate to the size of the contract. The larger the contract, the larger the value of the commitments. This does not necessarily mean that the action plan needs to contain many lines with a commitment under each measure. The value of the commitment depends on the value entered in Column J (how many, how much, etc...) of the action plan as well as how sharply it is targeted at those in most need.

Specific: The action needs to be as specific as possible. Column F can be used to add detail to exactly how / where / when / with whom the activity will be done. As a general rule, avoid phrases such as "look to ..", "seek to...", "endeavour".

Measurable: We need to be able to determine if a commitment has been fulfilled or not. Column J needs to contain the volume being committed to.

Do I have to prepare an Action Plan for every contract?

Yes. Your action plan will be contract specific and will cover the full period of the contract (excluding extension period)

How long is my Charter certificate valid for?

If you are contracted then your certificate is valid for the life of the contract as long as you perform satisfactorily on achieving your commitments. You can always continue being a charter signatory on a voluntary basis when the contract ends. If you are not contracted then your certificate will be valid as long as you have an acceptable action plan and performing satisfactorily against that action plan.

How do I know which tier my contract or tender is in?

The thresholds table should make it clear however if you have any doubts then your procurement officer can clarify this.

What do I need to do if the contract is extended?

A new action plan will need to be submitted for the extension period.

How long will my action plan be valid for if I am a voluntary signatory?

If you are not contracted then we suggest 2 years would be a reasonable period of time.

If an activity is stated in the Specification can the activity be part of an Action Plan?

No. We often procure activities with social value, particularly in the care sector. What is being procured and paid for under a commercial arrangement cannot be included in the action plan. The action plan can only include what is additional.

If I sub contract part of the requirement, in agreement with the Council, does the sub contractor have to do an Action Plan in their own right?

No. The action plan is agreed between the Contractor and the Council. However it is understood, particularly where there is significant subcontracting, that the sub contractors will contribute to the activities of the main contractor. It is encouraged that the subcontractor also becomes a charter signatory and includes those actions in their action plan. This does not mean that the main contractor reduces their commitment in their action plan. It does however lead to double counting in some situations. If a contractor holds more than one contract then they cannot count the same output more than once.

How is the progress monitored?

The Council's contract manager will review the progress of the charter activities on a regular basis and at least annually. This normally is done as part of the contract management process.

What is an Annual Report?

An annual report is required at the end of each year confirming the commitments achieved to date against your action plan. The Annual Report is simply completion of columns K,L and N of the Action Plan spreadsheet. Your Annual Report is sent to your contract manager if a contracted signatory or to bbc4sr@birmingham.gov.uk if voluntary.

What happens if I don't meet any of my anticipated outcomes?

The Charter is included in the terms and conditions of the contract and grants. The Council's contract manager will review the progress of the charter activities on a regular basis. If there is consistent failure to achieve the commitments of the Charter then the contract and the Charter status can be withdrawn due to non-performance. If there is consistent non-performance by a non-contracted charter signatory then the Charter status will be withdrawn.

What are High Priority or Matching projects and how do I get involved?

Matching projects are led by third sector organisations that need some support from charter signatories. These projects are pre checked by the Council to ensure that they address the key priorities. They are presented to Charter signatories for support. The outcomes from these projects can be included in the charter action plan as a commitment. For further details on matching projects email bbc4sr@birmingham.gov.uk

Who can I contact for help and support to complete an action plan?

Guidance documents are available on www.finditinbirmingham.com/charter to assist you in completing your action plan.

If you are completing your action plan in relation to a contract, contact your contract manager.

If you are a voluntary signatory or for general help and support around the Charter and social value email bbc4sr@birmingham.gov.uk