



HOW TO READ A SPEC AND BUILD A WIN THEME

The difference between answering questions and winning the bid

An AssuredBid bid-readiness resource

Most providers read a specification looking for instructions. What do they want, how long can the answer be, when is it due. That gets you a compliant bid. It rarely gets you a winning one.

The providers who win repeatedly read a spec differently. They read it to work out what the commissioner actually cares about, what is keeping them up at night, and what a great answer would look like through their eyes. Then they build a small number of themes that run through every answer, so the whole bid tells one clear story instead of twenty disconnected ones.

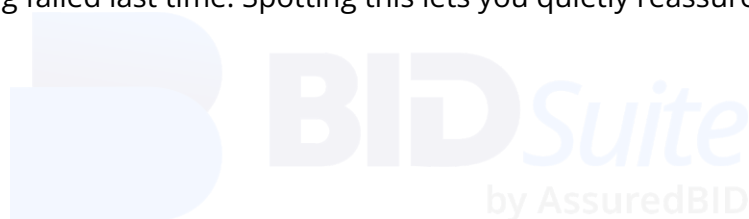
This guide shows you how to do that. It is technique, not regulation, built from how strong bids are actually put together. Used well, it is often what separates the provider who scores in the 70s from the one who scores in the 90s.

Part 1: Read the spec like a detective, not a clerk

A specification is written by people with a problem they need solved. Your job on the first read is to find that problem, not to start drafting answers. Read the whole thing once without writing anything, then read it again with these questions in mind.

What is the commissioner really worried about? Look for what they repeat, what they emphasise, and what they spell out in unusual detail. If a spec keeps returning to safeguarding, or to reducing hospital admissions, or to continuity of staff, that repetition is telling you where their anxiety sits. Solve that and you are most of the way there.

What has gone wrong before? Specs often carry the scars of a previous contract. Unusually specific requirements, strict reporting demands, or pointed clauses usually exist because something failed last time. Spotting this lets you quietly reassure them you will not repeat it.



Who is this service really for, and what does good look like to them? Behind the commissioner are the people using the service. The strongest bids show you understand the lived experience of those people, not just the contractual outputs.

Where are the marks? Find the evaluation criteria and weightings early. They tell you where to spend your effort. A question worth 20% of the score deserves far more of your energy than one worth 2%, however interesting the small one feels.

By the end of this read you should be able to finish the sentence: "What this commissioner most wants is..." If you cannot, read it again. Everything else depends on getting that right.

Part 2: Turn what you have found into win themes

A win theme is a short, clear idea about why you are the right provider, grounded in what the commissioner cares about. It is not a slogan. It is a thread you can weave through answer after answer so the bid feels coherent and deliberate.

Most strong bids run on three or four win themes. More than that and they blur. Fewer and the bid feels thin. Build yours like this.

Start from their priorities, not your strengths. This is the step providers get wrong. They lead with what they are proud of. Winners lead with what the commissioner needs, then show they deliver it. If continuity of care is the commissioner's worry, "stable, consistent staff teams" is a candidate theme, and you build it from your retention and rota approach.

Make each theme provable. A theme you cannot back with evidence is just a claim. For each one, ask what proof you have. Outcomes, case examples, retention figures, local knowledge, track record. If you cannot prove it, it is not a theme, it is a hope.

Make them yours, not generic. "We provide high-quality, person-centred care" is not a win theme. Every bidder writes that. A real theme says something a competitor could not honestly say, or could not say as credibly. Your specific local relationships, a particular model that works, a record in exactly this kind of service.

Keep them few and sharp. Pick the three or four that matter most and commit to them. Write them down in a sentence each. These become the spine of the bid.

Part 3: Thread the themes through every answer

This is where the work pays off. Once your themes are set, every answer should visibly carry one or more of them. The evaluator should finish your bid with the same three or four ideas lodged in their mind, because they met them again and again.

- Open each answer by connecting to the relevant theme, so the assessor sees the through-line.
- Use the same language for a theme across the whole bid. Consistent wording makes it land and stick.
- Back every theme with evidence each time it appears. Repetition without proof gets irritating. Repetition with fresh proof builds conviction.
- Make sure the themes also answer the actual question in front of you. A theme is a lens, not a substitute for responding to what was asked.

A useful test before you submit: pick any answer at random and ask which win theme it serves. If the honest answer is "none," that answer is either off-strategy or pointing to a theme you have missed.

Part 4: A simple worked example

Say a council is commissioning supported living, and the spec returns repeatedly to three things: keeping people settled with consistent staff, supporting independence, and strong local partnership working. That repetition is your map. Three win themes follow naturally.

- **Consistency people can rely on**, evidenced by your staff retention figures and rota model.
- **Real progress towards independence**, evidenced by outcomes from similar services and how you measure them.
- **Rooted in the local area**, evidenced by named partnerships with local health, housing and community organisations.

Now every answer, whether about staffing, safeguarding, or mobilisation, opens by connecting to one of those three and proves it with something real. The bid stops being a list of replies and becomes an argument for why you are the obvious choice.

The whole thing in one line

Read the spec until you can say what the commissioner most wants. Build three or four provable themes around that. Then make every answer carry them. Do that and you are no longer answering questions. You are making a case.

Want a sharper edge on your next bid?

AssuredBid helps care and housing providers read specs strategically, build win themes that fit the commissioner, and write bids that hang together as one argument. If your answers are solid but your scores are stuck, this is usually the missing piece. Talk to us.

Get in touch: www.assuredbid.com

This resource is general guidance for the care and supported housing sector and reflects professional bid-writing practice rather than legal or procurement rules. Always follow the specific instructions and evaluation criteria in the tender you are bidding for. © AssuredBid.

