

Report to **Policy & Resources Committee**
Date **18 September 2025**
By **Procurement Manager**
Title of Report **Procurement of Specialist Planning Advice for Landscape, Ecology and Archaeology**

Decision

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- 1. Approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the establishment of a framework agreement, or agreements, to provide specialist planning advice for landscape, ecology and archaeology to SDNPA for a period of up to 4 years.**
 - 2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to award a framework agreement, or agreements, for the above, following a competitive process carried out under the terms of the Procurement Act 2023.**
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I. Introduction

- I.1 Since 2013 Service Level Agreements (SLAs) have been in place with East Sussex County Council (ESCC) and Hampshire County Council (HCC) to support the SDNPA planning teams by providing planning consultation responses for landscape, ecology and archaeology. The current agreements end in April 2026.
- I.2 The specialists provide support to the SDNPA's in-house planning team, and to other local authorities who deliver planning services on behalf of the SDNPA (the host authorities). During the 2024-25 financial year there were 4,830 planning applications validated by the SDNPA, with 985 consultation requests being made to the service for landscape, archaeology and ecology; 88 for landscape, 622 for ecology, and 275 for archaeology.
- I.3 Both ESCC and HCC have indicated that due to recent restructuring they cannot guarantee being able to continue with the specialist provision after April 2026. This has created uncertainty in the provision of current arrangements, increasing risk to the SDNPA were we to lose a service that is critical to the planning function.
- I.4 Therefore there is a need to tender for a replacement service, to ensure continuity for the planning service. Should Committee grant approval, it is intended to go out to tender for a Lotted framework to cover each of the specialist advice categories. The Lots would be divided by both specialism and area of the National Park (Hampshire and Sussex) for a total

of six Lots in all. Depending on the response to the tender, these services may be delivered through a single framework agreement or through a number of framework agreements for the different specialisms and/or geographical areas.

1.5 The below table shows the lot structure for this procurement:

Lot 1-Landscape Advice Hampshire	Lot 2 Landscape Advice Sussex
Lot 3 Ecology Advice Hampshire	Lot 4 Ecology Advice Sussex
Lot 5 Archaeology Advice Hampshire	Lot 6 Archaeology Advice Sussex

1.6 A review of the provision and methodology used within the current SLA is being undertaken ahead of going out to tender. To provide stability to the service during the period of devolution, the framework agreement will be for a three-year initial term with an option to extend further by one year (the maximum term allowed for a closed framework under the Procurement Act 2023).

2. Issues for consideration

2.1 Any reduction in specialist provision would have a negative impact on the consideration of planning applications. There are limited internal resources for these specialisms, with those resources already at capacity in supporting applications for called in applications and recovered areas of the planning service. To continue to provide the quality and level of the current service, additional support of external specialists is required.

3. Options & cost implications

3.1 The total cost to SDNPA for this service for the 2024-25 financial year was £54,378.91 (excluding VAT). HCC have moved to full cost recovery for all services provided, and as such their fees for 2025-26 were significantly increased. Specialist costs for HCC were £61ph in 2024-25 and £77ph for 2025-26.

3.2 The total value of the Lots to be procured under a new framework is estimated at £65,000 (excluding VAT) per year, £260,000 excluding VAT over the lifetime of the agreement (including the 1-year extension).

3.3 Due to the anticipated total value of the new framework being above the level of approval delegated to officers, it is for the P&R Committee to agree the arrangements for the procurement and to authorise the entering into of the contract in accordance with Contract Standing Orders.

4. Next steps

4.1 Should the Committee approve the procurement process, a tender document for the full requirement will be openly published on our procurement portal In-tend, along with the government’s Find-A-Tender portal in line with the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023 as this will be an over threshold procurement. It is intended to publish the tender notice and documents in late September 2025, to allow sufficient time to award the Lotted contract(s) and have all arrangements in place by 1 April 2026.

Tender Evaluation

4.2 The Award Stage will be carried out using the Most Advantageous Tender (MAT) criteria for awarding the contract, using a combination of quality factors, such as Approach to the Contract, Project Resourcing as well as price. The evaluation panel will be looking at the sustainability aspects of any approach.

4.3 Evaluation is carried out by a number of officers scoring independently, before meeting on a panel basis. The evaluation programme will also allow for a process of clarification on all aspects of bids and due diligence before the award is made.

5. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	SDNPA has sufficient resources in place, both in terms of staff qualified to undertake the procurement exercise and revenue budget to meet the costs of the on-going contract.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	The competitive tender process is aimed at delivering value for money.
Which PMP outcomes/ Corporate Plan objectives does this deliver against	<p>This framework will help to effectively deliver SDNPA's statutory planning function, which supports the delivery of the partnership management plan. In particular, the specialist advice procured through this contract will contribute to the following PMP outcomes:</p> <p>Outcome 1: Landscape & Natural Beauty; Outcome 2: Increasing resilience; Outcome 3: Habitats & Species; Outcome 4: Arts & Heritage; Outcome 9: Great places to live; Outcome 10: Great places to work.</p> <p>The framework will also contribute to the following Corporate Plan objectives:</p> <p>CP2: provide specialist advice in respect of Conservation, Design and Landscape across the organisation.</p>
Links to other projects or partner organisations	None
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	The provision of specialist advice for planning applications mitigates for development in the SDNP, minimising negative impacts on the South Downs and assisting the Authority to reach its climate change objectives.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	Social value may improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area. The new contract will be above the relevant GPA Threshold and the Procurement Act 2023 will apply. Bidders will be required to propose a Social Value offer which will be evaluated as part of their bid with a 10% weighting.
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes. The procurement exercise and the terms of the subsequent Framework will meet the terms of the Equality Act 2010.
Are there any Human Rights	No

Implication	Yes*/No
implications arising from the proposal?	
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	No. All due diligence will take place during the evaluation of tenders.
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	No. All due diligence will take place during the evaluation of tenders.
Are there any Data Protection implications?	No. All Due diligence will take place during evaluation of tenders.

6. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Commercial Risk: The price objectives are not achieved up front or costs arise during the term of the awarded framework	2	4	A thorough tendering process will keep the risk of hidden costs to a minimum. A detailed specification of requirements will enable the contractor to accurately calculate their costs and price the contract realistically, therefore keeping changes to costs at a minimum.
Technical Risk: Inability to specify the desired outcomes or suppliers in the market being unable to deliver to the specification.	1	4	Procurement is working closely with the technical users of this to ensure the most appropriate solution and the correct specification is identified.
Performance Risk: The supplier fails to deliver the required outcomes over the course of the framework.	2	4	Regular framework monitoring will be used to monitor performance over the term of the framework.
Contractual Risk: Unable to remedy the shortcomings in the contractors' performance without severely damaging the framework and	2	4	Proactive framework management including regular meetings should minimise performance issues, with the support of SDNPA's Legal Team who can assist with contractual issues if they arise.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
unable to avoid relying on the contracted supplier as the framework develops.			
Legal Risk: In public procurement there is a legal risk where a procurement is found unsound in law.	2	3	This Procurement is over the GPA threshold and therefore subject to legal challenge. Trained procurement staff and our legal team will ensure compliance.

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 Appendices: None
 SDNPA Consultees: Chief Executive; Director of Landscape and Strategy; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Business Service Manager
 External Consultees: None
 Background Documents: None

