

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**
Date **20 March 2026**
By **Director of Placemaking**
Title of Report **Delegated Host Authority Arrangement – Winchester City Council Decision**

Recommendation:

The Authority is recommended to:

- 1. Agree that, in principle, the South Downs National Park Authority enters into a new Agreement under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 with Winchester City Council to provide a quality development management service from 1 October 2026 up to 31 March 2032.**
 - 2. Delegate authority to the Director of Placemaking to negotiate, complete and sign the Agreement referred to in 1) above, subject to any substantial issues being referred back to the Authority for consideration.**
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1. Introduction

- I.1 The SDNPA is one of the largest planning authorities in the country, both geographically and in terms of the number of applications and other related matters dealt with. To help manage this workload the SDNPA has contracts under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 with four Councils ('host authorities') for the provision of planning services:
 - Chichester District Council
 - East Hampshire District Council
 - Lewes District Council
 - Winchester City Council
- I.2 These Councils take decisions on approximately 80% of SDNPA's planning workload.
- I.3 From 1 April 2026, Lewes District Council will no longer be a host authority and all Planning Services will return directly to the SDNPA.
- I.4 The hosted arrangements have been in place in some form since the SDNPA became Local Planning Authority in 2011. These arrangements provide a number of benefits to the Authority including providing planning services via locally based officers, established and effective partnership working and by allowing the Authority to concentrate on the more significant applications, appeals and enforcement likely to have greater impact upon the Purposes and duty of the Authority.

1.5 The NPA meeting in March 2022 approved a two-year contract with Winchester City Council (WCC). An extension to the contract was agreed in writing up to 30 September 2026. The contract cannot be extended beyond this date and will expire on 30 September 2026. This report sets out the Authority's next steps with regard to future arrangements and proposes that the Authority enter into a new contract for a period of up to 5.5 years to 31 March 2032.

2. Background

2.1 The SDNPA has had S101 contracts in place with the Councils noted in paragraph 1.1 above since 2011. Until September 2017 the host authorities were paid a fixed fee per year but since October 2017 we have moved to a 'pay per application' model. Payment is now made to the host authorities on the following basis:

- Payment per planning application handled
- A payment for planning appeal work (based upon the appeal decisions received in the quarter)
- A fixed payment for planning enforcement work per quarter

2.2 The S101 contracts are subject to detailed Service Level Agreements (SLA) that set out the performance metrics required on a full range of planning matters. They also contain protocols in respect of planning enforcement, the Community Infrastructure Levy, Section 106 legal agreements and data recording arrangements.

2.3 The exact amount paid to the host authorities varies per year on account of the variation in the number of planning applications. However, the gross yearly payment to WCC is typically in the region of £400,000.

3. Proposed S101 contract – Key Terms

3.1 The new contract with WCC would continue with the payment per planning application model and with a fixed cost per quarter for planning enforcement and a fixed cost per planning appeal dealt with. It would run for up to 5.5 years to 31 March 2032.

3.2 Officers have been in discussion and negotiations with WCC. Subject to the important and understood caveat that this was subject to Authority approval, heads of terms have now been agreed at a senior officer level for an increase of 8% in all payments made to WCC. The new contract would be expected to add approximately £31,000 per year to the amount paid by the SDNPA to WCC.

3.3 WCC senior officers have taken a paper to their Cabinet meeting on 12 March 2026 to agree to the new contract and 8% uplift. A verbal update will be provided on the outcome of this meeting.

4. Key considerations in relation to the proposed new S101 contracts

4.1 There are two principal considerations:

- i) Whether the SDNPA wishes to continue with the host authority S101 contract with WCC.
- ii) Whether the proposal represents value for money.

Continuation of the S101 contract

4.2 If a decision is not made to put in place a new S101 contract with WCC it will expire on 30 September 2026 and, after this date, SDNPA will be responsible for all the planning work currently handled by WCC within the National Park. This would involve the transfer of WCC staff to the SDNPA under the Transfer of Undertaking (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) and would involve additional accommodation demands and staffing resource needs which would need to be met.

4.3 Whilst Recovery and TUPE is manageable within an appropriate timeframe, the SDNPA receive a good service from WCC officers and they process a smaller amount of

applications on our behalf compared to other host authorities (around 250 – 300 per year). Recovery at this point in time is not considered to be beneficial when a quality service is being delivered. Given the recent recovery of Lewes, continued host authority arrangements with WCC is the preferred option.

- 4.4 It would also undermine the established partnership approach that was encouraged at designation of the National Park (by Defra in 2009) and which has been followed since 1 April 2011. These arrangements provide other ‘softer’ benefits such as local delivery and partnership working which enables other work streams and functions to co-exist e.g. building control and licensing.
- 4.5 It is anticipated that WCC as an organisation will no longer exist beyond May 2028 as a consequence of Local Government Reorganisation. WCC have deliberately proposed a longer-term contract as a result of this. The contract means that our host authority arrangements will be adopted by the replacement Unitary Authority. The SDNPA will continuously monitor the impact on SDNPA services as a result of the transition from WCC to the Unitary Authority. We are not expecting this to be disruptive and will organise this transfer with WCC senior officers once formal programmes are in place.

Value for money

- 4.6 All host authorities, including WCC, are subject to regular performance management and review, including at a senior management level. The WCC officers provide the SDNPA with a quality service and an increase in the amounts paid to WCC has not been negotiated since 2022.
- 4.7 Given the quality of the service provided and willingness of WCC to work with the SDNPA well beyond the creation of Unitary Authorities, the extra financial provision sought by WCC (8% or circa £31,000 per annum) is considered to be appropriate. This increase has been budgeted for and the duration of the contract at up to 5.5 years allows easier medium term financial planning for the SDNPA.

5. Proposed way forward

- 5.1 To enable new S101 Agreements to be progressed in a timely and efficient manner, as in the past, it is recommended that the Authority delegates authority to the Director of Placemaking to negotiate, complete and sign the new Agreement with WCC, subject to any substantial issues being referred back to the Authority for consideration.

6. Other Implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	Yes – it will commit us to a contract with Winchester City Council for up to 5.5 years. Financial provision for this is made within the Authority’s budget.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	The new contract will incorporate an uplift but the new contract is considered to remain value for money compared to cost of TUPE and additional office accommodation against the backdrop of Lewes and (potential) East Hampshire recovery.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	No
Has due regard has been taken of the South Downs National Park Authority’s equality duty as contained within the Equality Act	Yes – no equalities implications arise directly from this paper. The provision of a planning service that is compliant with the NPA’s enhanced Public Sector Equality Duty is a key aspect of the

2010?	contracts.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	None directly arising from this report
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Data Protection implications?	Yes, because the host authorities handle significant data on our behalf when undertaking planning services. A data protection protocol will be included within the S101 contract.

7. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
The current Section 101 contract expires on 30 September 2026 without a new Agreement being in place.	Low to Medium	High	Agree to enter into new Section 101 Agreement.
WCC decline to enter into a new S101 agreement beyond 30 September 2026.	Low to Medium	Medium to high	WCC Cabinet Meeting is on 12 March 2026 and will set clear direction. In the event of recovery, short extensions to the contract can be agreed at subsequent WCC Cabinet and SDNPA Authority meetings.

TIM SLANEY

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Appendices: I. Summary of Host Arrangements

This appendix is not for publication as it contains exempt information within paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, being information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person including the Authority, and that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exempt information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

SDNPA Consultees: Chief Executive Officer; Director of Landscape and Operations; Chief Finance Officer; Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer and Legal Services.

External Consultees: None

Background Documents: March 2022 NPA Report – Delegated Host Authority Arrangements