

Report to **Policy & Resources Committee**  
Date **2 February 2024**  
By **Procurement Manager**  
Title of Report **Procurement of Planning Administration System**  
**Decision**

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**Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:**

- 1. Agree that SDNPA aims to consolidate into a single contract the two existing Planning Administration System contracts that are due to expire on 31 March 2025.**
  - 2. Approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to provide a Planning Administration System for a period of 3 years (and up to 5 with extensions) from 1 April 2025.**
  - 3. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to award the contract for the above, following a competitive process carried out under the terms of the Crown Commercial Services Framework Agreement.**
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**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) is the statutory planning authority for the National Park and is one of the largest planning authorities in the country in terms of the number of planning applications received each year.
- 1.2 Idox Ltd are the current supplier of the systems that SDNPA and its partner authorities (under delegated arrangements) use to deliver the administration of planning and other applications across the National Park.
- 1.3 The current contracts with Idox Ltd are coming to an end on 31 March 2025. No further extensions to the contracts can be awarded, and the contracts therefore need to be re-tendered.
- 1.4 This paper is being brought to Committee to enable the procurement process to be completed by mid-May 2024, as should a new supplier be selected, a 10 month lead-in time will be required in order to transition from the incumbent to the new supplier.

**2. Policy Context**

- 2.1 Planning is a statutory function, and this contract supports the efficient delivery of the planning service. The Planning Service provides a key role in supporting SDNPAs economic, social and sustainability objectives set out in the high level targets in the [Corporate Plan](#).

**3. Current Services and Products contracted with Idox Ltd**

1. Hosted infrastructure
2. Infrastructure maintenance and upgrades
3. Uniform Software suite
4. Document Management System (and redaction licensing)
5. Public Access
6. Consultee Access

7. Idox Data Management Tool
8. Idox Mobile (on site apps)
9. Planning Portal, Idox Mobile and Exacom Connectors
10. All software upgrades & patching
11. UKPlanning Scanning, Indexing and Redaction Service
12. Exacom CIL software

3.1 The first 11 items above are currently delivered under a single contract and there may be an opportunity to include Exacom into a single contract.

3.2 Based upon figures from the current contracts the estimated value of the consolidated contract over the three year initial term is £596,600 excluding VAT.

#### **4. Hosting Options**

4.1 The principal hosting consideration is simply whether to host any solution in-house or not. Given the size of the organisation, SDNPA will never be in a position to purchase and maintain a fully supported, robust and resilient IT infrastructure of its own, so in order to take advantage of highly efficient and highly available platforms the strategy at SDNPA has, for some time, been to use hosted and/or cloud services wherever possible.

4.2 The secondary hosting consideration that follows is whether to host the solution with the system supplier or on the infrastructure of another third-party provider. Hosting on the infrastructure of the system supplier is preferable as the support model is much simpler and exposes SDNPA to significantly less risk. The supplier themselves are generally best able to provide the most robust and timely support (of what is their system) at every level of the solution from the base infrastructure, rising up through the various software and technology components to the delivered user interface(s). The alternative where the system supplier supports the system remotely on the infrastructure of another third party introduces much more complexity, and consequently risk, into the support model of what is a business critical system for SDNPA.

4.3 Note, the infrastructure supplied by SOTA to support SDNPA's file and mail servers isn't suitable for the purpose of hosting of our business critical planning system as the contract with SOTA wasn't scoped with that in mind.

4.4 The current systems are in a hosted environment being supported and maintained by the same supplier, Idox Ltd, and have proven to be extremely robust and reliable.

#### **5. UKPlanning Scanning, Indexing and Redaction Service**

5.1 Approximately 80% of planning applications are now received through the Planning Portal. Documents are subsequently passed through a dedicated connector and stored into a document management system (DMS) that is accessible by the planning system and are available for access by the public after review by the relevant support team. UKPlanning ensure that these documents are indexed appropriately with some basic redaction applied. UKPlanning also receive a considerable volume of documents by email directly from the SDNPA Technical support team, and to a lesser degree the 5 host support teams for the purpose of uploading, indexing and redacting documents on an ad hoc basis for Planning Applications, Appeals and some Enforcement casework.

5.2 The solution currently in place is extremely well 'joined up' and successfully delivers the above functionality within a single contractual arrangement with a single supplier. Tight integration of the systems for document capture, storage and subsequent access is a key requirement and separation of the above elements into multiple contracts with different suppliers is something we seek to avoid as it would introduce complexity, and consequently risk, into the support model of what is a business critical system for SDNPA.

#### **6. Supplier Options**

6.1 Whilst IDOX Ltd are the current supplier, there are other suppliers that may potentially be capable of providing a suitable planning solution and they include:

1. DEF Software Ltd
2. Civica UK Ltd

- 6.2 Idox in addition to the current Uniform solution, are now offering alternative Idox Cloud solution, which is a rebranding of a Tascomi product, Tascomi being a Cloud based developer of local government software who bid for our last planning tender and were subsequently acquired by Idox.
- 6.3 SDNPA has unique requirements for its planning system and it is essential that any proposed solution:
- a) is an out of the box solution that requires little significant bespoke building or configuration.
  - b) is able to accommodate the seamless processing of large numbers of planning applications by local host authorities on behalf of SDNPA using S101 agreements.
  - c) is hosted by the supplier.
  - d) includes tight integration between the component systems of the proposed solution.
  - e) includes details with costings of the migration path from the existing solution to any proposed new solution and should include, but not be exclusive to, data transfer and training for a wide user base.

## **7. Risks in changing the Solution**

- 7.1 Changing the solution that is critical to the delivery of SDNPA's Purposes and Duty would come with significant risks including, but not limited to, the following:
- a) Data problems resulting from the transition – missing, different and/or inconsistent.
  - b) Reporting problems resulting from the transition - delays, inconsistencies and/or unavailability.
  - c) Planning application information for staff, hosted authorities, Members and/or the public not being available, or delayed, when required.
- 7.2 Should a new supplier be chosen it will be ensured that appropriate mitigations to all the identified risks are put in place, and procuring the new contract at this early stage will ensure enough time is allowed for a smooth transition and testing.

## **8. Procurement Route**

- 8.1 The Crown Commercial Services (CCS) Framework contract "RM6259 Vertical Application Solutions" will be used. This framework provides a range of solutions for public sector customers who require software solutions to meet their specific needs, including in Lot 3, Housing, Environmental and Planning Solutions. CCS Frameworks benefit public sector buyers in pre-approving suppliers in terms of due diligence, and providing agreed terms and conditions and legal protections. To be accepted on to a framework, suppliers must demonstrate they can provide the services required to an agreed standard.
- 8.2 The procurement will follow the specified Framework process, using the CCS e-sourcing tool Expressions of interest will be invited from suppliers on the Framework, and a mini-competition held to allow those who respond to propose a solution that meets our unique requirements, based on our detailed specification.
- 8.3 Evaluation criteria are defined prior to issuing the Invitation to Tender, and are included within the tender document. SDNPA uses the MEAT criteria for awarding the contract, using a combination of quality factors such as approach to the Contract, Project Resourcing etc, and price using a total cost approach. Social Value will be included in the criteria with a weighting of 10%.
- 8.4 Evaluation will be carried out by a number of SDNPA officers scoring independently, before meeting on a panel basis, to ensure fairness throughout the scoring process. It will also allow for a process of clarification on all aspects of bids before Intention to Award.
- 8.5 In accordance with Public Contract Regulations 2015 transparency requirements, a contract notice will be published on the Find a Tender Service.

## **9. Next steps**

- 9.1 With Committee Approval, it is intended to commence the procurement process via the CCS Framework in the first week of March 2024. Two weeks will be allowed for pre-market

engagement (EOIs), with a minimum of 4 weeks for the further competition, with an additional 4 weeks for evaluation. A standstill period of 10 days will take place before award of contract which will take place in mid-May 2024.

## 10. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	Yes, the procurement process will require the input of time by SDNPA officers which would require to be absorbed with current staffing levels. Should there be a change of supplier this may have resource implications both for the Authority and host Authorities who deliver planning on the SDNPA's behalf.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	The use of a Crown Commercial Services framework and a mini-competition ensures that competitive proposals are openly sought from suppliers that have signed and accepted the terms and conditions of the pre-negotiated framework agreement.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	The Planning Administration Service, as a suite of software, underpins the delivery of the statutory planning function for the Authority and therefore supports the planning function in delivering against all PMP outcomes, and all Corporate Plan objectives.
Links to other projects or partner organisations	Chichester District Council East Hampshire Council Horsham District Council Lewes and Eastbourne Councils Winchester City Council
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	The Planning Administration Service, as a suite of software, underpins the delivery of the statutory planning function for the authority and therefore supports the planning function in delivering against all PMP outcomes, and all Corporate Plan 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 Public Procurement Regulations 2015 will apply. Evaluation of Social Value will be included at a 10% weighting, using criteria designed to ensure that proposed outcomes are achievable and proportionate to the contract. KPIs will be set with the successful bidder to ensure the social value outcomes are delivered during the contract.
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes. It will be ensured that public access elements of the contract are compliant with the Equality Act 2010.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the	None

Implication	Yes*/No
proposal?	
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Data Protection implications?	The successful bidder should acknowledge that this solution will hold personal data it would be expected that the solution will enable the authority to fulfil its GDPR obligations in the way that personal data is recorded and managed, including redactions, for and by all service users, internal and external to the authority. In addition, the supplier will be required to document their data security strategy, which would include reporting mechanisms should the hosted environment itself be compromised.

## 11. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
<u>Commercial Risk:</u> The price objectives are not achieved up front or costs arise during the term of the awarded contract.	2	4	An outcome based specification will be used for suppliers to develop their costed proposals against. A mini-competition using the Crown Commercial Service framework contract will help achieve our price objective.
<u>Technical Risk:</u> Inability to specify the desired outcomes or suppliers in the market being unable to deliver to the specification.	1	4	The incumbent supplier (Idox Ltd) has shown that the required outcomes are deliverable in the current contracts. Other suppliers in the market are signed up to a framework contract from Crown Commercial Services who are potentially able to deliver the outcomes required.
<u>Performance Risk:</u> The supplier fails to deliver the required outcomes over the course of the contract.	2	4	Key Performance Indicators and regular service monitoring will be used to monitor performance over the term of the contract.
<u>Contractual Risk:</u> Unable to remedy the shortcomings in the contractors' performance without severely damaging the contract and unable to avoid relying on the contracted supplier as the contract develops.	2	4	This is difficult to mitigate effectively with a contract of this nature – several suppliers are in the market but switching suppliers at any time, mid-contract or otherwise, would be both difficult and costly. Proactive contract management should minimise performance issues, with the support of SDNPA's Legal Team who can assist with contractual issues if they arise.
<u>Legal Risk:</u> In public procurement there is a legal risk where a procurement is found unsound in law, either through the remedies	2	3	Using the process specified in the CCS Framework RM6259 will ensure adherence to correct procedures.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
directive or the public procurement rules.			
<u>Risk of changing supplier</u> (see para 7 above for description of risks)	3	4	Please see para 7. above for mitigations.

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 SDNPA Consultees: Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services  
 External Consultees: None