

Record of Officer Decision

Decision title:	Approval for contract of consultancy services provided by Telford & Wrekin for £50,000
Date of decision:	
Decision maker:	Interim Service Director Highways, Environment and Waste
Authority for delegated decision:	Operational decision under the scheme of delegation, section 71 <i>“To act on behalf of the council in respect of all land use planning matters administered by the Local Planning Authority under the Town and Country Planning Acts, secondary legislation and any related statutory instruments...”</i>
Ward:	All
Consultation:	Head of Service for Environment, Climate Emergency & Waste, Service Manager for Built & Natural Environment, Commercial Services Team. Finance Team. Legal Team.
Decision made:	Telford and Wrekin contract for £50,000 to carry out the professional duties of a Development Management Planning Ecologist.
Reasons for decision:	<p>Due to a skills gap of ecologists nationally the council does not have sufficient in-house ecological expertise to provide ecological technical expertise to the planning service. Recruitment has been unsuccessful on a number of occasions to the principal post and consultancy services are therefore required. The council is currently advertising for the principal ecologist position. This has led to a backlog of ecology consultations for the planning service, causing a delay in the decision making process.</p> <p>Telford & Wrekin has previously provided the required services to the council under a previous contract and has demonstrated that they have the skills and capacity required by the council. Due to the technical nature required by the Habitat Regulations Assessment it has also been difficult to procure other consultancy services. Telford & Wrekin have the required expertise and specialist understanding and knowledge of assessing the nutrient load of developments in particular agricultural which is highly contentious is sought after nationally.</p> <p>In addition, with the new ‘phosphate credits’ to be traded by the council and the larger number of applications that will require Natural England’s calculator budgets, the applications will be more complex. Not all consultants have the expertise, good understanding or the initiative to deal with these cases.</p> <p>The council’s planning team has established a positive working relationship with the ecologist at from Telford & Wrekin who to date has provided expertise in the form of written advice, attendance at meetings with developers and expert witness role at planning appeal.</p> <p>Therefore the decision was made to extend Telford & Wrekin consultancy contract to the value of £50,000.</p>
Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:	Potential reimbursement of planning fees sought by applicants and agents due to the delays in processing of planning applications. Telford and Wrekin have extensive expertise in Habitat Regulations Assessment, without this knowledge the council is potentially exposed to the risk of legal challenge..
Details of any alternative options	Advertisement for recruitment of ecologists is ongoing, however the council has yet to find a suitable candidate due to a national shortage.

considered and rejected:	Several alternative consultants have been approached but did not have either the capacity or expertise and experience Telford and Wrekin possess.
Details of any declarations of interest made:	

Signed



Date: 09 May 2022