

Record of Officer Decision

Decision title:	Approval for the provision of consultancy services for Ecology and Habitat Regulations Assessment for Council plans and projects by Capita PLC.
Date of decision:	30/05/2022
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:	Capita PLC to provide specialist ecology consultation and review infrastructure projects for the Council.
Reasons for decision:	<p>Currently, the council does not have sufficient in-house ecological expertise to carry out Habitats Regulation Assessments and provide consultation responses of council plans and projects.</p> <p>HRAs are required for plans or projects that could potentially affect Natura 2000 sites. The requirements are set out within Regulations 63 and 64 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, often known as the 'Habitats Regulations'. Herefordshire Council as a competent authority, must carry out a HRAs on all plans and projects undertaken by the council or reviewed by the local planning authority to ensure that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of designated sites due to new projects. This requires expert ecological knowledge.</p> <p>Due to a skills gap of ecologists nationally a decision has been taken to recruit a consultancy. Capita PLC have been identified as having the requisite ecological expertise and experience of assessment of projects under Habitats Regulations.</p>
Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:	If the council decides not to adopt this request then there is a high chance of adding delay to projects meaning the council will be at risk of not being able to approve planning applications and complete council led projects leading to a loss of funding to implement council projects and potential refunding of planning fees.
Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:	The council previously advertised for a permanent ecologist position on separate occasions but have been unable to recruit candidates with the appropriate skills and expertise. Following from this the decision was made to reach out to consultancy firms to obtain prices. From those that had the expertise require Capita PLC had the relevant expertise required.
Details of any declarations of interest made:	None

Signed



Date: 30 August 2022