

Decision Report - Officer Decision  
Forward Plan Reference: FP/23/09/25  
Decision Date - 28 November 2023  
Key Decision - Yes



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## Contract Award for Electoral Service Printing

Executive Member: Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications

Local Member(s) and Division: - All

Lead Officer: David Clark, Service Director for Governance, Democratic & Legal

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## Summary / Background

1. Somerset Council have responsibility for providing electoral services within their geographic area. In a general election we also provide the Acting Returning Officer for 3 cross boundary constituencies on behalf of neighbouring authorities. The entire election process from registration through to voting generates a significant amount of printed material including canvas forms, poll card, postal votes and ballot papers. Somerset has over 400,000 electors registered to vote and all must be provided with a variety of printed material to ensure they can actively participate in an election. Prior to vesting day all 4 district councils were using the same external company for their electoral printing and postage needs without issue but some of the arrangements in place were informal or as rolling contracts. This report details the process that has been undertaken to reach the decision to award a new formalised electoral services 2 year printing contract. . This will cover the next Police and Crime Commissioner and General Elections to ensure consistency and continuity of service.
2. To ensure that Public Procurement Regulations are complied with a framework has been used which allows a direct award to the chosen supplier. Prices have been confirmed with the supplier which offer continued value to the council whilst also confirming continuation of the proven quality of the service already achieved. The chosen provider is based in the south-west and their premises are easily accessible should the need to physically attend their premises arise.

3. The details of the contract are set out in confidential Appendix A

### **Recommendations**

4. The Service Director – Governance, Democratic and Legal Services agrees to:
  - a. Award a 2-year contract to the supplier as detailed in the Confidential Appendix A for the provision of electoral services printing.
  - b. In consultation with the Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, to consider a 2-year extension on the basis of a positive contractual performance review.
  - c. Agree the case for exempt information for the Appendix A - Confidential Tender Evaluation Report, to be treated in confidence, as the case for the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing that information.

### **Reasons for recommendations**

5. This will ensure we are able to provide a compliant and effective election service which will include the next general election timeline giving confidence to the Returning Officer that the statutory requirements are all met.

### **Other options considered**

6. The opportunity to tender for this service was considered but the timeframe to complete and also to ensure that the service was maintained during the general election period was considered too risky. A general election could be called at any time with approximately 6 weeks notice. As a general election must take place by January 2025 a contract for 2 years with the option to extend by up to 2 further years will mitigate any risk. It is expected that once the general election has passed that a tender process will be considered.

### **Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

7. A strong, robust, value for money contract gives the Council the security it requires to carry out the needs of the service whilst bringing efficiencies.

8. An efficient electoral service ensures that everyone who wishes to participate in the elections process has the opportunity to do so. Democratic engagement and accessibility will directly contribute to all of the Council's priorities of creating a:
- A greener, more sustainable Somerset
  - A healthy and caring Somerset
  - A fairer, and ambitious Somerset
  - A flourishing and resilient Somerset

### Financial and Risk Implications

9. The estimated cost of this proposal will be more than £500,000. This will be met from a combination of budget provisions from the Cabinet Office, general fund budget and election reserves as and when appropriate.
10. Key risks during the course of the contract are:

Not having a contract in place at the time of the anticipated commencement date

<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Risk Score</b>	<b>3</b>
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Sudden and unexpected demise of the supplier

<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Risk Score</b>	<b>3</b>
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Deterioration of contract relationship between the Council and the supplier

<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Risk Score</b>	<b>3</b>
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Printers not having the relevant experience to meet the statutory requirement.

<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Risk Score</b>	<b>3</b>
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Printers do not have the relevant capacity to be able to fulfil the requirement of the contract

<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Risk Score</b>	<b>3</b>
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### Legal Implications

11. Legal advice has been taken on both the procurement route and the form of contract.

## **HR Implications**

12. N/A

## **Other Implications:**

## **Equalities Implications**

13. The Representation of the People Act sets out direction for the Acting Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer to do all in their power to ensure that citizens have the ability to register to vote and to cast their vote. There are statutory processes in place requiring the sending of printed letters and forms to enable citizens to register on the electoral role. The Council is required to post polling cards and absent voter ballot packs of all types to electorate to enable them to vote, and to provide ballot papers at polling stations for electorate wishing to vote in person. The contract will ensure all members of the electorate can be involved in the democratic process of voting in all relevant electoral events. All electoral printing material, where possible, is provided in different formats such as braille, large print and in several different languages by electoral services.

There will be no change to the service received by the public through the procurement of this contract. Electoral stationery will remain the same as in previous years so no negative impacts are anticipated. Some disabled people may be disadvantaged by the inability to produce ballot papers in any other format, however this is due to legislation regarding voting procedures rather than an inability of the printer.

## **Community Safety Implications**

14. N/A

## **Climate Change and Sustainability Implications**

15. The supplier is working towards being carbon neutral by 2030.

## **Health and Safety Implications**

16. N/A

## Health and Wellbeing Implications

17. N/A.

## Social Value

18. N/A

## Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

19. N/A

## Background

20. The current provider has been providing printing services to the district councils in Somerset for a long period of time and has proven to offer value for money and a reliable service.

21. Elections services are a statutory service and it is vital that it is carried out effectively and efficiently and therefore having a formal contract in place to achieve this provides reassurance to the returning officer that the council will be able to meet its obligations.

## Background Papers

None

## Appendices

- Confidential Appendix A

## Assurance checklist

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	7.11.23
Communications	Peter Elliott	N/A
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	27.10.23
Workforce	Alyn Jones	N/A
Asset Management	Oliver Woodhams	N/A

Executive Director / Senior Manager	Alyn Jones	1.11.23
Strategy & Performance	Alyn Jones	1.11.23
Executive Lead Member	Cllr Bill Revans	7.11.23
<b>Consulted:</b>	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members		on publication
Opposition Spokesperson	Cllr David Fothergill	1.11.23
Scrutiny Chair	Cllr Bob Filmer	sent 1.11.23