

Delegated Officer Report

Decision Maker:	Paul Clifford, Director of Economy
Date of Decision:	22 February 2024
Subject:	Planning Skills Delivery Fund
Report Author:	Peter Richards, Head of Planning
Ward (s):	N/A

Reason for the decision:	To accept the award of £50,000 grant funding from the Planning Skills Delivery Fund (DLUHC) and agree the procurement of consultancy support using this funding to provide drainage advice related to the backlog of planning applications.
Summary:	<p>The Council have been awarded £50,000 of grant funding by DLUHC from the Planning Skills Delivery Fund (PSDF). This funding must be spent on addressing any backlog in the determination of planning applications. The Council had also bid for a further £50,000 of PSDF funding related to enhancing the skill set available to the Planning Service, but were not successful in this element of the bid due to the oversubscription of bids for the grant funding and the priority placed on addressing planning application backlogs by DLUHC.</p> <p>The bid for backlog PSDF funding focused on the backlog of applications that the council have awaiting comments from the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA). The LLFA is a statutory consultee for many planning applications, and are internal to the council, but the resources</p>

available for responding to planning application consultations in the LLFA is limited. As a result, the Planning Service has approximately 80 live planning applications (including discharge of condition applications) awaiting responses from the LLFA and cannot make a decision on those applications without drainage advice.

Therefore, in consultation with colleagues in the LLFA, it is proposed that the PSDF funding is utilised to bring in consultancy support to provide drainage advice on these applications on behalf of the LLFA (and with their scrutiny), and so address this backlog of applications over the next 6-9 months. XAIS Asset Management Ltd have been identified to provide this support and can be directly appointed through the Bloom framework before 31 March 2024 (a requirement of the MoU for the PSDF funding agreed with DLUHC).

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):

The PSDF funding has to be spent on addressing any backlog of planning applications. Whilst other aspects of the Planning Service and wider council services can contribute to a backlog of planning applications at times (for example the validation of planning applications, consultations on highways matters and environmental health / ground contamination matters), at the current time the lack of resource to provide drainage advice in the LLFA is the single most significant cause of a backlog in planning application decisions.

PSDF funding could also be utilised to employ temporary staff, or an agency contractor, but it is considered that consultancy support would be the most appropriate route in this instance given the need to speedily commit the funding by 31 March 2024, and to then spend the funding and address the backlog in the next 6-9 months.

The only other alternative is to not utilise the funding we have been granted, and return it to DLUHC.

Consultation: including any conflict of interest declared by relevant Cabinet Member consulted.

N/A

Recommendation(s):

That the PSDF grant award of £50,000 from DLUHC be accepted and utilised to appoint XAIS Asset Management Ltd to provide drainage advice on planning applications for the LLFA.

Implications:

*What are the **financial** implications?*

There are no further financial implications to the Council for accepting the Planning Skills Delivery Fund Grant of £50,000.

All costs following any subsequent contract award to XAIS Asset Management Ltd will be fully funded from within the £50,000 grant.

It has been confirmed by DLUHC that expenditure needs to be committed, not defrayed, by 31st March 2024, allowing the grant to be carried forward into 2024/25 for full utilisation.

(John Hoskins)

*What are the **legal** implications?*

The Council should comply with the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities relating to the award of the funding which was signed by the Council on 12 February 2024. Although the Memorandum is not legally binding there is an expectation from the Government that the terms of the Memorandum will be complied with by the Council.

(Alan Evans)

*What are the **procurement** implications?*

The appointment of XAIS Asset Management Ltd will be facilitated through Bloom as a direct award with a supported business case as detailed in the main body of the report. This will comply with the MoU and contract procedure rules.

(Dan Cheetham)

*What are the **Human Resources** implications?*

N/A

***Equality Impact** attached or not required because (please give reason)*

It is not considered necessary to carry out an EIA for this decision given that it relates to the acceptance of grant funding and the

appointment of consultancy support on which the funding will be spent, and so will not directly or indirectly impact any groups with protected characteristics.

*What are the **property** implications*

N/A

Risk assessments:

The MoU for the PSDF Grant Funding is appended. Any breach of this MoU on the part of the council risks the funding having to be returned to DLUHC, even if the funding has been committed / spent by the council. However, this risk can be mitigated through appropriate management of the funding and the consultancy support, as well as providing appropriate monitoring data to DLUHC.

Not utilising this grant funding poses a greater risk in terms of impact on the image of the council, when the award of the grant funding has been publicly announced by DLUHC.

Co-operative implications

Given this funding will help to enable decisions on planning applications, it will help to ensure co-operative principles are incorporated in fully informed planning application decision-making.

IT implications

N/A

Environmental and Health and Safety implications

N/A

Community cohesions, including crime and disorder implications

N/A

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution?

Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget?

Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council?

No

List of Background Papers under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:

There are no background papers for this report

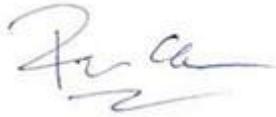
Report Author Sign-off:	
Peter Richards, Head of Planning	
Date:	22/02/2024

Please list and attach any appendices:

Appendix number or letter	Description
A	Countersigned Planning Skills Delivery Fund Memorandum of Understanding with DLUHC

In consultation with Director

Signed:



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Date: ___29/02/24