

# Delegated Decision Report

Decision below £250k



<b>Subject:</b>	Consultancy Support for the Processing of Householder Applications
<b>Decision maker: Senior Officer</b>	Emma Barton, Deputy Chief Executive, Place
<b>Decision maker: Cabinet Member</b>	N/A
<b>Decision date:</b>	22 April 2025
<b>Report author:</b>	Martyn Leigh, Development Management Team Leader
<b>Ward (s):</b>	All

## Reason for decision

To help address the backlog of householder planning applications in the Planning Service caused by temporary vacancies / absences in the Service.

## Recommendation(s)

That an existing Call-Off Contract with Capita Property & Infrastructure Limited, which was made under the Crown Commercial Service Framework Agreement for Estate Management Services, for the processing of householder planning applications, is extended for a period of up to six months and modified to raise the existing cap for the total number of such applications processed by Capita from 100 to 200.

## Background

The Development Management Team within Planning handles all planning applications, listed building consent applications, advertisement consent applications and discharge of condition applications submitted to the council. It also provides a pre-application advice service. The team is made up of 13 posts under the Development Management Team Leader.

On 18 November 2024 Capita Property & Infrastructure Limited was engaged to support the processing of up to 100 householder planning applications over a six-month period. The initial term of the Call-Off Contract is due to end on 16 May 2025. The scope of the Call-Off Contract involves Capita considering the type of applications received and making recommendations to the Development Management Team Leader for signing off.

The council is not currently meeting targets for application determination on a regular basis, and risks losing income through having to provide refunds on planning applications and losing customers to the fee-paying (but optional) pre-application advice service. This situation will only

worsen as caseloads continue to increase for the remaining officers in the team whilst the number of applications coming into the service remains steady.

Planning is a regulatory service, and there are potential consequences for a local planning authority where they consistently underperform against national indicators for application decision-making, including the ultimate sanction of being placed in special measures. Whilst the council is not in that situation at the moment and have performed well against these measures in the past few years, it would not take long to fall below the national targets if there continues to be insufficient capacity in the service, and this could result in the council being placed in special measures, meaning that applicants can go directly to the Planning Inspectorate to have their applications determined if they wish (meaning the council misses out on those planning fees).

Householder planning applications make up over a third of all applications received by the service (sometimes as high as 45% of all applications received in a month) and the service regularly receives more than 40 householder applications a month. Householder planning applications can be quite simple, but can also become complicated, especially where the applicant (who is usually not familiar with Planning) does not submit all the information required.

At this time, Capita has been allocated 79 householder applications (which will continue to rise, given the current cap in place of 100 applications). The proposal is to utilise the extension period, which is available to the Council under the Call-Off Contract, and to simply extend the existing contractual arrangements with Capita for a six-month period (and to raise the cap to 200 applications).

Capita would continue to process householder applications on a fixed charge basis of £206.40. Until now, this has represented 80% of the application fee (£258). However, given the new planning application fees which are to come into effect on 1 April 2025, continued consultancy support will cost the Council 40% of the application fee received by the Planning Service where that application is considered by the consultant (on the basis that they will only be allocated householder applications to extend houses which, from 1 April 2025, will be associated with a fee of £528 paid to the Local Planning Authority).

If the Service were to utilise the consultant for the maximum 200 applications now being sought authority for in this report, that would total £41,280 for the full 12-month contract period. However, as explained above, an extension to the existing contract would represent even greater value for money beyond 1 April 2025 due to the increase in householder planning applications. Furthermore, the costs to the Council from this contract may be less, as the service will only utilise the consultants as needed, and so the total number of applications processed by them may not come to the full 200 applications.

### **Alternative option(s) to be considered**

Option 1 (as recommended) – to extend the Call-Off Contract with Capita Property & Infrastructure Limited for the available six-month period and, for the extended period, to replicate the number of applications which could be passed to Capita during the initial six-month term, to support the service in processing householder applications.

Option 2 – to seek to appoint Agency support to bring a suitably qualified individual in for approximately four months to act as a case officer on householder applications – this option is not recommended due to the cost of agency contractors (likely to be in excess of £25,000 for the four months), the time it would take to bring that person onboard and the fact they would be unlikely to be able to process as many as 100 applications in that time.

Option 3 – to seek to appoint a temporary Planning Officer as a member of staff for six months – this option is not recommended as, whilst it would be similar in cost (at approximately £21,000), it would take time to recruit to the post, be unlikely to attract many (if any) candidates of suitable quality / qualifications due to the temporary nature of it, and it would extend the period over which the backlog would be addressed.

Option 4 – do nothing – whilst this option would clearly have the greatest financial benefit, it would not address the challenges facing the service and would not mitigate the risk associated with the growing backlog of applications in the service, so it is not recommended.

**Consultation** *(include any conflict of interest declared by relevant Cabinet Member consulted)*

## Risks

The primary risk with the preferred recommendation would be the financial cost of the consultancy support. Whilst the council has (and will) receive planning fees that cover the cost of the consultancy support on the householder applications, it is in the context where planning application fee income as a whole is not at the level targeted by the service's budget.

The risks associated with not taking action to bring in staffing resource urgently to the service in one form or another are as set out in this report:

- That the backlog that is developing in determining planning applications will continue to grow, meaning that the service will consistently not meet its statutory targets for decision-making;
- That this then makes the service vulnerable to being placed in special measures by MHCLG – this has potential reputational and financial repercussions;
- That the backlog in pre-application advice will grow;
- That, as a result, refunds for planning applications and for pre-application advice may need to be given more frequently and customers are less likely to use the (optional) pre-application advice service in the first place going forward because of the poor experiences in response times they are getting now – all of which negatively affects planning fee income; and
- That loss of income would only create a larger deficit in the service's budgets, quite likely to a value larger than the cost of this contract.

## Implications

Financial	As per the previous report, the Consultancy support will cost the council 80% of their planning application fees which is £206.40 out of the £258 fee.
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	<p>This would mean the total cost for 200 householder planning applications would be around £41,280 of foregone income.</p> <p>The Council will however receive the remaining 20% of the planning application income which is £10,320.</p> <p>Planning exceeded their budgeted income targets by over £100k in 24/25 so the impact of foregoing 80% fee income for 200 applications is anticipated to be still within 25/26 budget limits.</p> <p>(Mohammed Hussain)</p>
Legal	<p>The Call-Off Contract is made under a procurement compliant Framework Agreement that is held by the Crown Commercial Service and made available to numerous public bodies, including local authorities (RM6168, lot 1).</p> <p>The term of the Call-Off Contract is 6 months, but provision is made to extend the term for another 6 months. The call-off terms and conditions require 3 months' notice of the extension to be served on Capita, but Capita can waive its right to receive 3 months' notice.</p> <p>Provided Capita is willing to accept less than 3 months' notice to extend, the term can be extended, and the services delivered in the extension period will be as per the original scope.</p> <p>If the terms of the Call-Off Contract are followed, the risk of challenge should be mitigated.</p> <p>Sarah Orrell – Commercial &amp; Procurement Solicitor</p>
Equality impact including implications for Children and Young People	n/a
Other	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
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## Background Papers under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

None

## Appendices

1. Original Fee Proposal from Capita Symonds



Appendix 1 - Original  
Fee Proposal from Ca

2. Existing Contract



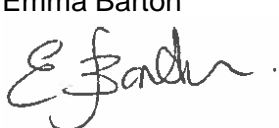
Appendix 2 - Existing  
Contract.pdf

3. Email from Capita Symonds confirming agreement to the extension of the existing arrangements.



Appendix 3 email.pdf

Report author sign-off	Martyn Leigh
Role	Development Management Team Leader
Date of sign-off	17/04/2025

Approval	
Officer approval sign-off	Emma Barton 
Role	Deputy Chief Executive, Place
Date of sign-off	22.04.2025