

**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S  
REPORT TO CABINET**

**16<sup>th</sup> July 2024**

**Report Title: Award of short form services contracts to a consortium of Architectural Service providers.**

**Submitted by: Service Director- Regulatory Services**

**Portfolios: Community Safety and Wellbeing**

**Ward(s) affected: All**

<p><b><u>Purpose of the Report</u></b></p> <p>To request Cabinet approval to enter into legal agreements and short form services contracts with a consortium of suitably qualified architectural service providers to support the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) process.</p>	<p><b><u>Key Decision</u> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></b></p>
<p><b><u>Recommendation</u></b></p> <p><b>That Cabinet:-</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the portfolio holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing to award short form service contracts to a consortium of carefully selected service providers to provide architectural services in relation to significant adaptations or extensions of dwellings to support the DFG process.</b></li> </ol>	
<p><b><u>Reasons</u></b></p> <p>Officers have undertaken a tendering process to establish a proposed consortium of contractors that meet the specified needs and Cabinet approval is required in order to proceed.</p>	

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Council has a legal duty to administer Disabled Facilities Grants for the benefit of residents needing adaptation to their home to maintain independence or be cared for at home. In some cases, this may necessitate significant alterations or the building of an extension. These adaptations require an Architect/Technician to draw plans, complete structural calculations, design technical details, achieve Planning and Building

Regulation Approval and provide on-site supervision of the technical aspects.

## **2. Issues**

- 2.1 The Council expects to complete approximately 15 extensions per year. Typically, these may be for wheelchair users who need ground floor accommodation or children with severe behavioural disabilities who need specific room layout and equipment to ensure they can be safe at home.
- 2.2 The current provider of architectural services is a legacy from the previous DFG commissioned service. This was initially retained to ensure continuity of service. Officers believe a procurement exercise is required to follow and comply with the Councils governance procedures and to ensure the best service is achieved.
- 2.3 Officers, with advice from the Procurement Manager commenced a tendering process to establish a consortium of contractors; a number of local architectural services, who were registered with either Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) or Architects registration Board (ARB) were invited to make written submissions and provide proposed fees for the required services.
- 2.4 The written submissions were reviewed, and three local Architectural Service providers identified who meet the required specification and submitted similar pricing schedules for their services that provided fair and consistent value to the public purse. Other tender submissions were rejected as their pricing schedules were disproportionately higher or they were not professionally registered providers.
- 2.5 As extension adaptations can take over a year from referral to completion it is suggest that the short form services contract be for a period of 2 years with the option to extend for a further 2 years.

## **3. Recommendation**

### **3.1 That Cabinet:**

Delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the portfolio holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing to procure and award short form services contracts to a consortium of carefully selected service providers to devise architectural plans and any subsequent structural calculations in relation to adaptations of private dwellings under the terms of the DFG process.

## **4. Reasons**

- 4.1 Officers have been advised that a procurement exercise is required to follow and comply with the Councils governance procedures and have commenced a tendering process to establish a consortium of providers.

## 5. Options Considered

- 5.1 An option is to continue with the current arrangements, however as part of taking the service back in house and developing and progressing it, having a consortium of Architectural Services is an improvement officers have identified.
- 5.2 An option is to require DFG applicants to procure and engage Architectural Services themselves, claiming the fee's involved as part of their application. Experience of working with the DFG process has shown that this is a considerable undertaking that few applicants feel able to take on and look to the Council to support them in this activity.
- 5.3 To do nothing would not be a viable option as these significant alterations or extensions must be compliant with the relevant planning and building regulations and therefore this is a specialised service that must be made available.
- 5.4 The skills required are not available in house and would be cost prohibitive to have in house services based on the number of extensions per year.
- 5.5 Neighbouring Authorities in Staffordshire have undergone a similar process of taking the service in house and looking at ways to develop it, no opportunities to share this service or joint procure have been identified.

## 6. Legal and Statutory Implications

- 6.1 The local authority has a statutory duty under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 Act to provide adaptations for those who qualify for a DFG. Architectural services are required to complete the adaptations that require significant alterations or extensions.
- 6.2 Entering into a contract will require a review of the contract terms and provisions by Legal Services.

## 7. Equality Impact Assessment

- 7.1 The ratification of the consortium of providers is intended to have a positive effect on a protected group, and improve equal opportunities, as they will provide architectural services for significant alterations or extensions for those who are disabled.

## 8. Financial and Resource Implications

- 8.1 The provision of this service would be paid for via fees from the Disabled Facilities Grants, the grant monies are received from Central Government via Staffordshire County Council Better Care Fund. Spending is governed

by a pass porting agreement and our published Housing Assistance Policy. The Housing Assistance Policy specifically includes fees associated with a grant to form part of a mandatory or discretionary grant.

- 8.2 Officers have reviewed the tender submission of fees from Architectural service providers who responded to the procurement exercise and have elected a consortium of providers that have provided a fair and consistent pricing schedule for their services. Other providers have been rejected as being disproportionately expensive to the public purse for the same services or were not professionally registered providers.
- 8.3 The estimated value of the aggregate contract for the consortium over a four-year period would be in the region of £300,000 making this a key decision.

## 9. Major Risks & Mitigation

- 9.1 An initial risk was that the new service provider(s) will be more expensive than the existing provider. However, this is mitigated by having gone through the procurement exercise setting out qualification and service requirements.
- 9.2 Risks associated with the provision of the DFG service are assessed and managed under a specific GRACE risk assessment.

## 10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)

10.1 The proposal, by achieving a consortium of suitably qualified Architects contributes towards the following UNSDGs



## 11. Key Decision Information

11.1 This is a key decision as it involves expenditure of more than £100,000.

## 12. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

Housing Assistance Policy

<https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/policies-1/housing-assistance-policy>

**13. List of Appendices**

N/A

**14. Background Papers**

N/A