

To: City Executive Board

Date: 10 April 2013

Report of: Head of Service, Housing

Title of Report: CONTRACT FOR THE PROVISION OF AN INDEPENDENT HOUSING ADVICE SERVICE

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: Request for delegated authority for officers to accept the most economically advantageous tender.

Key decision? Yes

Executive lead member: Councillor Scott Seamons

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan strategic priority of 'Meeting housing needs'

Recommendation(s): Delegated authority is granted to the Executive Director to accept the tender that is most economically advantageous to the authority, with the approval of the Executive lead member for housing.

Introduction

1. Under s179 of the Housing Act 1996, the Council has a legal duty to "secure that advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness is available free of charge to any person in their district".
2. This duty is discharged by the Housing Options team in the performance of its daily duties but there is a need to supplement this to provide an independent advice service to all the citizens of the City. The benefit of independent housing advice is that it provides access to advice to those members of the public who would not ordinarily look to the authority for advice and those who may want to obtain 'impartial' advice.

This need is illustrated by the following statistics provided by the current service provider. These include a large number of homelessness prevention cases:

Oxford City Council contract	Overall numbers of casework clients
Year 2009/10	181
Year 2010/11	520
Year 2011/12	482
Year 2012/13	391 to date (Feb. 13)

Source: Shelter

3. Executive Board agreed on 17 March 2008 that this service would be fulfilled through an open competitive tendering process with an estimated value of £80,000 per year. It is proposed that the same funding will continue. The contract will run for a 2-year period with the option of an extension for 1 year. The emphasis of the re-tendered service will continue to be on the prevention of homelessness.

Tendering

4. The intention is to commence the contract from 1st July 2013 , which means the process is under a tight schedule and deadline.

5. In order to meet this schedule and commencement date it will be necessary for officers to be given delegated authority to agree and accept the tender. This will be with the approval of the Lead member for housing.

6. The tender will be accepted on the basis that it is most economically advantageous to the Council balancing quality and cost.

7 .Level of risk: There is no risk to the authority due to contractual safeguards

8. Climate Change/Environmental impact: None specific to this report

9. Equalities Impact: The provision of independent housing advice will benefit all citizens of Oxford but particularly the most disadvantaged bearing in mind cuts to the legal aid service provided by the Legal Services Commission. Homelessness will be reduced through preventative advice and work.

10. Financial Implications: The cost of the service has remained the same for the last four years and will remain capped at £80,000 pa.

Legal Implications: There are none specific to this report.

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