

# Brighton & Hove City Council

## Policy & Resources Committee

## Agenda Item 141

**Subject:** Procurement of Electoral Registration & Returning Officer Printing Services

**Date of meeting:** Thursday 12 May 2022

**Report of:** Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources

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**Ward(s) affected:** All

### For general release

#### 1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 To seek approval from Policy & Resources Committee for the procurement of an Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) and Returning Officer (RO) Printing Services contract, to be procured via the best value route to market. A mini-competition under the Efficiency East Midlands (EEM) - Printing, Fulfilment & Mailing Services Framework has currently been identified but Officers will continue to research alternatives. The contract will have an initial term of two years, with an option to extend for up to two additional years.
- 1.2 The annual spend for the first year of the contract is approximately £100k (based on estimated usage and current supplier/postage costs). The majority of this cost is postage - £77k. Over the course of the contract, it is forecast that increases in the cost of postage, which are outside the control of the print supplier, could lead to the contract exceeding £500k – therefore requiring committee approval.

#### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Committee agrees to the procurement of an ERO and RO printing services contract for an initial term of two years and up to two years additional extension.
- 2.2 That Committee delegates authority to the Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources to:
  - (i) Carry out the procurement of the contract referred to in 2.1 including the award of the contract; and
  - (ii) Grant the optional extensions to the contract referred to in 2.1 -should they consider it appropriate at the relevant time.

### **3. Context and background information**

- 3.1 The Electoral Registration Officer is appointed by the Council. Under Section 8(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council must appoint an Officer to the position of ERO. This position is responsible for maintaining the Electoral Register for the area. The Chief Executive is the appointed ERO for Brighton & Hove.
- 3.2 In maintaining the Electoral Register, the ERO is required to send a variety of statutory correspondence to households or electors including:
- (i) Annual canvass communications (Canvass Form, Canvass Communication A, Canvass Communication B)
  - (ii) Invitations to Register
  - (iii) Documentary Evidence Requests
  - (iv) Absent Vote Applications and Refresh Requests
  - (v) Entry Review Letters

This correspondence must meet statutory requirements which could include wording, paper size, inclusion of reply envelopes and timetable for sending.

- 3.3 The ERO must have a print supplier to print, enclose and post this correspondence to households and individuals. It is estimated that annually there will be 241,000 separate pieces of correspondence sent.
- 3.4 The ERO currently uses Civica Election Services for most of their printing with the remaining correspondence sent via GOV.UK's Notify service or printed and manually enclosed in-house. The ERO's contract with Civica Election Services ends in July 2022. A new 1-year contract, with a break clause, will be put in place to allow this procurement to be completed.
- 3.5 The RO will also send a limited number of communications, related to booking of polling stations and election staffing, via the new supplier. Statutory election printing for the RO including poll cards, ballot papers and postal voting packs is currently supplied under contract by Civica Election Services.

### **4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options**

- 4.1 The specification for the new service proposes two forms of printing:
- (i) Bespoke hybrid mailing – fully customisable low volume (<1000) mailings uploaded via printer driver. Ability to select postage class, return envelope, inserts. Dispatched within 1 working day.
  - (ii) Large volume bulk mailing – base templates designed and data supplied for merging into templates. Dispatch within 5-10 working days
- 4.2 While there are many suppliers that supply bulk mailing – the availability of customisable hybrid mailing is rarer. Customisable hybrid mailing is necessary to allow the ERO to meet legislative requirements which can set timelines, necessitate forms to be printed on A3 and/or require inclusion of reply envelopes.
- 4.3 A hybrid mailing system is also required to reduce dispatch timelines. The current supplier's process can result in significant delays to dispatch resulting in additional customer contact. The current timelines do not allow

the ERO to dynamically react to changing circumstances such as the calling of unscheduled elections and the proximity of registration deadlines. As a result close to deadlines resource is required to manually enclose correspondence – a hybrid system would removed this need.

- 4.4 The EROs preference is to minimise the number of suppliers used – therefore limiting office inefficiencies in using multiple systems. The bulk and hybrid printing requirements are therefore being combined. However, upon receiving bids, the ERO and RO will consider whether GOV.UK's Notify system can be used for some correspondence and whether the financial benefits outway the inefficiencies of using multiple systems.
- 4.5 The Efficiency East Midlands (EEM) framework has been identified as a potential route to market for the hybrid printing and bulk mailing fulfilment. The recent retendering at EEM ensures the Council are obtaining current framework pricing, UK thresholds have already been applied and the Council are able to leverage these prices free of charge - as the Council are a member of EEM. Social value and sustainability were evaluated as part of EEM's tender process, in line with current regulations.
- 4.6 Officers will continue to research potential alternative routes to market that offer best value and consider social value and sustainability factors. It is essential that any route allows the Council to access competitive postage rates via Royal Mail or a Downstream Access supplier as this forms the majority of the costs.

## **5. Community engagement and consultation**

- 5.1 The Council is procuring services on behalf of the ERO and RO. As such, they have been fully consulted during the process.

## **6. Conclusion**

- 6.1 The ERO and RO have a statutory requirement to send paper communications. The amount sent has been minimised by sending digital communications where legislation allows.
- 6.2 The requirement to have a flexible and customisable hybrid mailing system limits the number of available suppliers. The EEM Printing, Fulfilment & Mailing Services Framework has been identified as a potential procurement route but alternatives are being researched - with the aim of finding the best value.
- 6.3 Following approval from Policy & Resources Committee, procurement of ERO and RO printing services will take place via the best available route to market.
- 6.4 A contract will be awarded for an initial term of two years and up to two years additional extension.

## **7. Financial implications**

- 7.1 There are unlikely to be any material savings from the procurement of the new contract, though the service would be looking for some level of improvement in value for money. Information and data from the service indicates that the current level of spend on printing and postage is towards the £0.100m level each year, so in line with the expected first year contract fees.

Name of finance officer consulted: Peter Francis      Date consulted  
26/4/22

## **8. Legal implications**

- 8.1 The Council is required to comply with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 in relation to the procurement and award of contracts above the relevant financial thresholds for services, supplies and works. Using a Framework is a compliant route to market. The Council's Contract Standing Orders (CSOs) will also apply to this procurement exercise.

Name of lawyer consulted: Alice Rowland      Date consulted: 27/4/22

## **9. Equalities implications**

- 9.1 The Council's Code of Practice on equalities and Workforce matters is enforced in all procurement and is incorporated within the framework.

## **10. Sustainability implications**

- 10.1 The ERO and RO are working closely with the Council's Social Value and Sustainability Procurement Manager to develop the sustainability requirements within the specification. The specification will include Key Performance Indicators linked to reducing environmental impact. Submissions will be evaluated against these requirements.

## **11. Social Value and procurement implications**

- 11.1 The ERO and RO are working closely with the Council's Social Value and Sustainability Procurement Manager to develop the Social Value requirements within the specification – ensuring that outcomes have benefits within Brighton & Hove. Submissions will be evaluated against these requirements.