

OFFICER DECISION RECORD

CMT Officer: Carol Pilson, Corporate Director & Monitoring Officer	Service: Planning
Lead Officer: Matthew Leigh, Head of Planning	Delegated Power Being Exercised: Part 3 Responsibilities for Functions, Table 5, Para 8 – to approve any action within their functional area up to the value of £250,000
Subject of Decision: Contract extension for archaeology support services - planning	

Decision Taken:

To extend our existing contract for archaeology support services for a further 12 months.

Reason for the Decisions:

Specialist archaeology support has been in place for some time. This has been effective and is consistent with other Council's approach to maintaining service continuity and ensure the effective assessment of archaeological matters. The service underpins the Council's ability to make sound, timely, and legally robust planning decisions and to meet its statutory duties in relation to archaeological stewardship.

Continuity of specialist archaeology advice is particularly important to avoid disruption to decision-making and to ensure consistency in the application of policy, conditions and enforcement action. The existing provider has developed a detailed understanding of the Council's processes, priorities, and local archaeology issues, enabling advice to be delivered efficiently and proportionately.

Without continued archaeology support, the Council would be exposed to increased risks, including unsound or poorly evidenced planning decisions, delays in application processing, failure to adequately protect archaeology features and increased likelihood of appeals or legal challenge. Such outcomes could result in environmental harm, reputational damage and higher future costs.

Alternative Options Considered (if appropriate):

Option 1: Do Not Extend Specialist Support

Under this option, the existing contract would not be extended, and the Planning Service would operate without dedicated specialist support.

This option is not considered appropriate. The Council has statutory and policy responsibilities in relation to archaeological matters. Without access to specialist expertise, there would be a significant risk of unsound or poorly evidenced planning decisions, delays in application processing, and increased exposure to appeals or legal challenge. This could result in environmental harm through the loss or inappropriate management of important historical artifacts, together with reputational and financial consequences for the Council.

Option 2: Procure Archaeological Support from an Alternative Provider

This option would involve appointing an alternative external provider through a new procurement exercise.

This option is not considered appropriate at this time. It is not considered that a competitive tendering exercise would deliver an alternative provider. Undertaking a procurement exercise at this stage would be unlikely to deliver material additional value and would result in unnecessary delay and officer resource expenditure. In addition, the current provider has developed an in-depth understanding of the Council's planning processes, local policy context and appropriate issues across the district. Changing provider would result in a loss of continuity and require a period of familiarisation, creating risks to service resilience during an ongoing and time-sensitive caseload. Given that the proposed extension is intended to maintain continuity while service arrangements continue to be kept under review, re-procurement is not considered a proportionate or efficient option.

Background/Reports/Information considered and attached:

None

Legal and Procurement Implications

The Council has statutory duties in relation to the protection and management of archaeological remains under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and relevant national planning policy. These duties require decisions to be informed by appropriate technical evidence and specialist expertise.

Continued access to qualified archaeological advice is necessary to ensure that planning decisions, enforcement action and appeal responses are legally robust and defensible. Failure to secure appropriate specialist input could expose the Council to an increased risk of planning appeals, judicial review or claims arising from unsound decision-making, as well as potential reputational harm.

The proposed contract extension provides a lawful and proportionate means of maintaining essential specialist

Financial Implications

The proposed contract extension has a maximum value of £9,726 through to April 2027 and will be met from existing Planning Service budgets. The extension does not require additional unbudgeted expenditure.

Continuing with external archeological support is considered a cost-effective approach when compared to the costs and risks associated with operating without specialist advice, including potential delays, increased appeal costs and remedial action arising from unsound decisions. The arrangement also avoids the additional employment, on-costs, and long-term liabilities associated with establishing an in-house role.

Officer's Signature:

Matthew Leigh, Head of Planning

Date:

3 March 2026

Please forward to Democratic Services upon completion

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Implementation Date: 03/03/26
(if not called-in)

Democratic Services 04/03/26

(Allow 5 clear working days after publication of decision)

Circulation: Democratic Services, Portfolio Holder, Officer and Accountancy.