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# Soft Market Test

For

Home to School Transport Commissioning Solution

West Northamptonshire Council

Ref: TC/JD/H2S/JAN25

# Section 1: Introduction

## General Requirements

* 1. WNC is currently reviewing its contract framework arrangements and is exploring new solutions to support its objective to deliver high quality and efficient home to school, social care & public bus transport provision.
  2. The Council’s current DPS is managed by an external provider. This is fully managed and includes operator invoicing and payments. It also provides a reverse auction platform through which transport requirements are tendered.
  3. Demand for transport is increasing across all areas, as is cost. The Council has recently reviewed its home to school transport policies, including entitlement criteria to help manage this demand. There has also been recent investment into new systems to ensure that route planning is optimised and management data is easily accessible.
  4. We still however have significant budget pressures which need to be mitigated. One key area of focus is the development of a new procurement strategy and introducing a new procurement process and framework. Excellent management information and data integration will be one of the main requirements for any new system the Council procures.
  5. **Please note:** this market testing exercise is **not** an invitation to tender or a request for formal expressions of interest. This document does not form any part of an invitation to tender. West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) is issuing this request for **information only**. Any supplier invited to present to WNC is doing so to support market research only and to help make any potential procurement process more focused and efficient. No supplier selection or supplier preference is implied.

## Confidentiality and Freedom of Information (FOI)

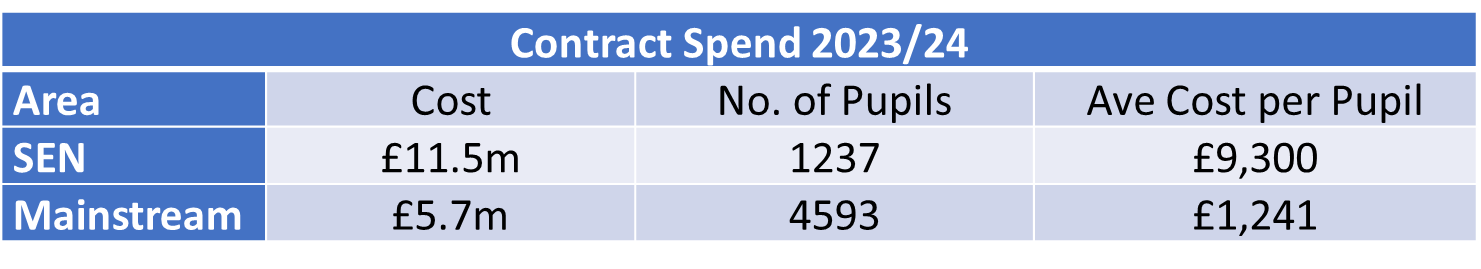
* 1. **Please note:** all information included in this Soft Market Test is confidential and only for the recipients’ knowledge. No information included in this document or in discussions connected to it may be disclosed to any other party without prior written authorisation.
  2. All responses will be treated confidentially. However, please be aware that we are subject to the disclosure requirements of the FOI Act and that potentially any information we hold is liable to disclosure under that Act. For this reason, we strongly advise that any information you consider to be confidential is labelled as such. In the event that a request is subsequently made for disclosure under FOI the request will be dealt with in accordance with the legislation.

## Background

We currently utilise SPROC (referred to locally as Adam) which is a dynamic procurement system based on the principles of a reverse auction. We have 118 operators on the framework who are approved to tender on our contracts with operators ranging from single vehicle taxi firms to operators with large bus and coach fleets.

Procurement includes Special Educational Needs, Child and Adult Social care, and Public Bus transport. The current framework can be used by our partner organisations including schools and colleges. Contracts are generally tendered by idividual route and the term is normally 3 years with the option to extend a further year. For the academic year 2023/24, we procured 327 SEN, 145 Mainstream & 218 SCH contracts (690 contracts)

The main bulk of tendering is during June and July, however we continue to receive late & ‘in year’ applications so procure throughout the year. Below is a suumary of the contract spend during the previous financial year.



## Soft Market Test Timetable

* 1. Please read this document and if you feel that your organisation is able to contribute to this exercise please complete the questionnaire at the end of this document and return, via email to Jordan Payne ([jordan.payne@westnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:jordan.payne@westnorthants.gov.uk)) by 7th February 2025.
  2. Following receipt of the questionnaires, a maximum of 10 respondents will be invited to attend separate workshop sessions to present and discuss their responses. A decision will then be made internally on the best procurement approach. The timetable is provided below:.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Stage** | **Date** |
| Deadline for receipt of responses to Soft Market Test. | 7th Feb 2025 |
| Workshop Week. | 3rd -7th March 2025 |
| Decision on way forward. | 24th-28th Mar 2025 |

* 1. Potential responders will not be prejudiced in any future procurement processes by either responding or not responding to this soft market test exercise.

Section 2: Identification of Requirement

## Current Situation

The current DPS, procurement process and operator payment mechanism is managed by SPROC. Weekly invoices are received along with detailed operator invoicing data and commitment data.

There are limitations. For instance there is no real mechanism to encourage operators to invoice in a timely manner and in some cases operators may not invoice for work undertaken for 6 months or more. This creates difficulties in managing and monitoring contract spend.

In addition, operators have been found to claim for journeys not undertaken either during school holidays, or where children may not have be travelling, essentially making false claims. Although the system does allow intermissions to be put in place, the ability to identify school holiday dates for academies (who set this themselves) and also training dates is cumbersome.

Easy, automated extraction of data is essential and currently not included with the scope of our current contract. We operate a number of individual systems and processes and therefore data integration is essential going forwards.

## Our Requirements

The Council has no pre determined view on the solution it will adopt and is exploring all options which could include:

* Fully managed - Framework/Procurement/operator payment mechanism as is the case now.
* Framework/Procurement platform only. Invoicing remains with Council
* Procurement platform only. Framework and invoicing remains with Council.

This does not have to be reverse auction but any potential supplier would be required to demonstrate how their platform achieves best value and evidence this.

# Section 3: Supporting information

## Section A: Organisation and Contact Details

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Response** |
| Name of your organisation |  |
| Registered office (if applicable) |  |
| Trading address (if different from office) |  |
| What if any local connections do you have with the authority? |  |
| Name of person whom an queries relating to this questionnaire should be addressed |  |
| Telephone Number(s) |  |
| Email |  |
| Address if different to above |  |

## Section B: Questions

Please note: you do not need to resize the table; it will automatically adjust to fit your response.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Response** |
| What is the name of the solution you propose? |  |
| How will your proposal meet our need? |  |
| How long would your proposal take to implement? |  |
| If your proposal is already in use elsewhere: please give an example of your proposed solution in use and state how it has met the requirements of the customer. |  |
| Can you offer any data warehousing/Power BI platform alongside your product that the Council could utilise. |  |
| In which country/region is your solution hosted? |  |
| Any solution must include resources and systems that allow for regular automated and timely extraction of data into Council systems. Please outline how your solution achieves this. |  |
| How quickly could your solution be implemented and will it include all resources associated with data migration, cleansing and formatting if required. |  |
| Indicative costs of your solution, including implementation, annual licencing. Note: please base costs on current contract values and contract numbers outlined earlier, with up to 50 Council users. |  |
| What additional features does your solution offer that can help achieve the Council’s objectives outlined earlier. |  |