



## SPECIFICATION

### CPD004/121/150

#### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This document sets out MHCLG's requirements for access to local-level data (defined as the "lower tier local authority level", in line with Office for National Statistics (ONS) output areas on high street vacancy rates and shop openings/closures.
- 1.2 The supplier of these data ("The Contractor") will provide MHCLG ("The Authority") this information through a) licencing the Authority to access these data (e.g. through an online database or portal) when required; and b) providing the Authority with "headline data" (e.g. on national/district level vacancy rates, store openings, and closures, and other data items to be agreed) in the form of a excel worksheet (on monthly basis).

#### **2 Background**

- 2.1 These data on high street vacancies, closures and openings will provide the department with up to date information on the health of high streets across England. This will help to support the MHCLG Strategic Objectives, (by providing greater precision around policymaking to that contributes "creating socially and economically stronger and more confident communities.)"
- 2.2 These data, since 2018, have formed part of a programme of work to build the evidence base around high streets and support the Authority to identify which high streets and town centres are most in need of targeted government action (including projects/programmes in excess of £3.6bn in support (namely, the [£1bn Future High Streets Fund \(FHSF\)](#) and the £2.6bn Towns Fund) to help to regenerate local areas, as well as provide greater depth in understanding how government policy is affecting high streets and town centres.
- 2.3 The minister is committed to announce places successfully awarded capital funding as part of the FHSF this autumn. In order to robustly monitor and evaluate the impact of MHCLG investments (and inform future policymaking) in high streets and town centres the department is committed to produce an annual report on the health of high streets that have been successfully awarded funding that is to be shared to with local authorities. A robust assessment of vacancy rates is crucial to this as it is a key indicator of the success against the stated objectives of FHSF as set out in the [prospectus](#).
- 2.4 Our previous subscription of these data (which commenced in 2018) expired in August2020, resulting in a significant evidence gap for the department, while the FHSF progresses and a commitment to reporting on vacancy rates continues to be priority. We are therefore looking to procure local level data on vacancy rates that can be accessible via data download (ideally in excel format) through accessing a data portal from the Contractor's website. The Authority will also require the Contractor to send headline data on trends in vacancy rates on monthly basis (in excel format) covering specific data items and geographies to be agreed at an inception/introductory meeting.

#### **3 Objectives**



- 3.1 To access up to date data on vacancy rates and to use this data to understand how different local areas and individual high streets and town centres are performing in order to inform policy making.
- 3.2 To provide robust evidence on the impact of MHCLG investments in high streets and town centres – particularly for the commitment to produce a robust monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the £1bn FHSF (which includes a wider dissemination of trends in vacancy rates as part of annual report to produced by MHCLG)
- 3.3 To use these data to inform ministerial briefing on towns, cities or regions in advance of departmental visits, in response to parliamentary questions, ministerial correspondence and in conversations with external stakeholders.

#### **4 Scope**

- 4.1 The initial contract is for data provided for a period of 2 years with the option to extend for a further year. (2+1y)
- 4.2 The Contractor will provide the Authority this information in the form of an excel worksheet (on a monthly basis) of on update to date headline information on vacancy rates at a national and local area level (specific data items to be agreed between both parties) at the introductory/inception meeting.
- 4.3 The Contractor will licence the Authority access data on vacancy rates (e.g. via the Contractor's database/online portal) to download any specific data points of interest at the local, regional (e.g. districts or ONS consistent sub national regions) and national level.
- 4.4 These data made available to the Authority (via online access to the Contractor's database/portal and/or headline information sent to the Authority in an excel worksheet on a monthly basis) must include information on the following:
  - Vacancy rates of retail units, including where possible information on their former use classification (to enable trend analysis)
  - Vacancy rates of leisure units (e.g. restaurants, bars, cafes)
  - Openings and closures of retail units (for example as a monthly summary of all openings and closures of units in local areas)
  - Openings and closures of leisure units
  - Information on the persistency of vacant units (e.g. how many/what percentage of units have been vacant for less than 1 year, 1-2 years 2-3 years and 3+years)
- 4.5 In addition:
  - The data must be available at a local level: The Authority needs to be able to monitor vacancy rates and openings/closures in individual towns and at sub-regional levels. Therefore, data must be provided at low geography levels. As a minimum data must be available at "lower tier local authority (district) level" (as defined by the Office for National Statistics).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/41828627a5ae4f65961b0e741258d210\\_0](https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/41828627a5ae4f65961b0e741258d210_0)



- The data must be able to be aggregated to a national or regional level.
- These data provided must be updated regularly (i.e. on a monthly basis): the Authority requires up-to-date information on current vacancy rates and recent openings/closures.
- Historic data on vacancy rates must also be provided (going back to at least January 2015).

4.6 As well as headline figures on vacancy rates, openings and closures for the above units (provided to the Authority in a monthly excel file) we also require additional information about the nature of units. This includes (but is not limited to):

- The type of use of the unit (for example the type of retail or leisure unit) e.g. the annual retail mix, by local authority in the lower tier output area
- Information on change of use (where applicable)
- The length of use or length which the unit has been vacant.

4.7 The data must be able to support the Authority to undertake the following work:

- Tracking vacancy rates of individual town centres over time.
- Providing briefing and background on high streets and town centres for individual towns, cities or regions.
- Undertaking detailed analysis of vacancy rates, openings and closures on town centres, retail sectors (for example analysis on convenience stores) and analysis on individual retailers.
- Facilitating the production of GIS maps and allowing the Authority to undertake spatial analysis of the data.
- Where permitted, dissemination of selected headline results/commentary (in exceptional cases and at an appropriate level of aggregation, to be agreed with the Contractor) e.g. where these data are crucial to resolve Ministerial requests, Parliamentary Questions and/or to inform policy decisions.

4.8 /Additional items (such as ad-hoc requests):

- On request, the Authority may require specific insights to deal with commissions from Special Advisors to Ministers. This may require a bespoke data analysis services (e.g. from the Contractor's Analytical team or a download of additional fields outside of the existing of the scope of the data subscription as set out in Section 4.4-4.6 above).
- **[REDACTED]**
- The Authority will endeavour to discuss the nature of any ad-hoc requests with the Contractor as/when these are required. Where this is possible, the Contractor is to advise the Authority on what data items and technical support are available to address such requests and the likely costs incurred (e.g. in terms of the cost preparing of bespoke downloads and/or any further analytical support required from the Contractor) in addition to the cost of the Deliverables set out in Section 5 below.

## **5 Deliverables/Outputs and Performance Measures**



5.1 The Contractor will provide the Authority access (through an online portal/database) to download the following:

- Vacancy data for (as a minimum) retail and leisure units. Vacancy data on other use would also be desirable (e.g. through an online portal, or downloadable from a database).
- Up-to-date data on unit openings and closures of the same variety of unit types. Summaries of openings and closures (ideally on monthly basis)
- Data on the above which is available at a sub-regional level, preferably data which is available for individual properties/units. As a minimum data is required at a lower tier (district) local authority areas.
- Historic data for the above to be provided going back to Jan 2015.
- Additional information on the length of occupancy/vacancy of units and detail about type of unit use is desirable (and where appropriate any change of use)

5.2 The Contractor will provide the Authority the headline vacancy rates information on monthly basis in the form of an excel worksheet. Where specific data items or a format/template is required for the output required for this headline information, this will be agreed between the Authority and the Contractor during an inception/introductory meeting.

5.3 Data must cover the whole of England in as much detail as possible. At a minimum data is required for towns with a population of greater than 10,000 (according to the 2011 census). Data is not required for Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

5.4 Data must be provided to the Authority in a format compatible with Microsoft Excel and/or via accessing an online platform / database of vacancy rates information that allows the Authority to download/convert data into a Microsoft Excel format and enables spatial analysis using GIS software. This could include summary tables by geographical extent (town centre, local authority, region, national levels etc) and the underlying input data to these tables (e.g. by individual hereditaments in a readily customisable Excel template to be agreed with the Authority) that enables further analysis.

5.5 Where applicable, training on how to access the Contractor's database/online portal to download and analyse the data must be provided to the Authority.

## **6 Approach**

6.1 The Contractor will set out their methodological approach to collect this information, including a full justification of the methods and evidence that the data has been thoroughly quality assured and is of acceptable accuracy.

6.2 Where possible, a timetable/schedule of any planned revision(s) to capture any adjustments to these data that may have a material impact on the interpretation of output(s) e.g. in light of Covid-19, where the latest data may be provisional/contain gaps in coverage. In such cases the Contractor is required to provide further methodological guidance e.g. around the nature of the adjustments, which data points are subject to revision, at what frequency and/or any safeguards to ensure robustness of the information.



## **7 Key Dates**

7.1 The following Contract milestones and deliverables will apply:

- Access to the Contractor's database/online data portal (three user logins/licences, on the first day of contract ("Contract Award"))
- Inception meeting with the Authority's Analyst team (within 1 week of Contract Award, via teleconference) to determine specific requirements e.g. for the monthly headline information (format, template, data items required for the excel file to be provided to the Authority each month).
- At least two contract review meetings via teleconference – one within 12 months of the Contract Award and a final review meeting between 3-6 months prior of scheduled expiry of the contract (i.e. 2 years from Contract Award).

## **8 Contract Management Arrangements**

8.1 The Contractor will be required to attend an inception meeting (via teleconference) one week after contract is awarded.

8.2 Two contract review meetings to be held with Contractor (via teleconference) within 12 months of the Contract Award and 3-6 prior to Contract Expiry.

8.3 The Contractor will promptly inform the Authority of any actual or anticipated problems relating to provision of the Deliverables during the term of the contract.

8.4 The contract may be extended for a further year, subject to the outcome of the final review meeting.

## **9 End of contract**

9.1 The Authority must delete all the deliverables including any data sets downloaded in the case that are no longer under licence.

## **10 Glossary (optional)**

10.1 Authority – the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

10.2 Contractor – the supplier of vacancy rates data

10.3 Contract Award – the first day of successful award of contract

10.4 Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) – MHCLG will invest £1bn to help local areas' plans to make their high streets and town centres fit for the future. Please refer to the [prospectus](#) for more information.

10.5 Headline information – monthly excel file to be provided by the Contractor the Authority on vacancy rates (specific data items to be agreed by the local authority)

10.6 Lower tier local authority area – as defined by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This comprises of local authority districts, unitary authorities,



metropolitan districts, London boroughs. Please refer the ONS [website](#) for more information.

- 10.7 Towns Fund – MHCLG invest £3.6 billion into over 100 towns (£1bn of this comprises of the FHSF), as part of the government's plan to level up our regions. Please refer to the [prospectus](#) for more information.