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Freedom of information request to support Work Package 2: Charting outsourcing in UK public planning

Context

Working in the Public Interest (WITPI) is a research project involving academics from the University of Sheffield, Newcastle University and UCL investigating the involvement of private companies in carrying out professional spatial planning work for local government, and the broader implications of the changing organisational delivery of planning. The project is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and has involved some joint work with the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI).

As part of the research project, and particularly to aid the overview of current practice in planning service provision which forms part of 'Work Package 2' of the project, an FOI request was sent to all UK local planning authorities. The FOI work was undertaken by Dr Ben Clifford at the Bartlett School of Planning, UCL, and did not directly involve the RTPI. This report summarises the findings from this exercise.

Method

An FOI request was sent in mid-July 2018 to every local planning authority in the United Kingdom, including all local authorities and National Parks with statutory responsibilities for town and country planning (incorporating minerals and waste issues with county councils in two-tier administrated parts of England). This means a request was sent to 433 authorities in total (363 in England, 11 in Northern Ireland, 34 in Scotland and 25 in Wales).

All authorities were sent an identical request, which asked (with the word 'authority' replacing the word 'council' for national parks):

Please can you address the following questions, if you hold information on them:

- 1. Has the council outsourced its planning department (responsible for town and country planning)? If so, who is responsible for providing these services?*
- 2. Has the council outsourced any part of its planning services (planning policy, development management, planning enforcement)? If so, who is responsible for providing these services?*
- 3. Please provide details of any company providing statutory planning services or service support for planning to the council. If such provision exists, how long has the company provided services to the council, how long does the contract last for and what is the value of the contract?*
- 4. Are planning officers responsible for delivering the council's town and country planning responsibilities employed directly by the council? If not, who are they employed by?*
- 5. Is routine use of private sector consultants made to process planning applications on behalf of the council? If so, which company/companies are used for this and how much was paid for such consultancy in the 2017-18 financial year?*
- 6. Is routine use of private sector consultants made to develop planning policy on behalf of the council? If so, which company/companies are used for this and how much was paid for such consultancy in the 2017-18 financial year?*
- 7. Is routine use of private sector consultants made to conduct planning enforcement work on behalf of the council? If so, which company/companies are used for this and how much was paid for such consultancy in the 2017-18 financial year?*

The request was put in multiple parts to attempt to cover various forms of routine use of private sector provision for public planning services, from full outsourcing of a local authority planning department to a private company through to use of private contractors to regularly process planning applications on behalf of the council. The wording was phrased so as to attempt to avoid staff having to spend additional time looking up one-off use of private consultants for individual pieces of work, which whilst potentially of interest was felt to be likely to be quite burdensome to answer.

Responses were received from the vast majority of authorities within or close to the statutory period, however where no response had been received by late September 2018 then a chaser email was sent. In the end, a response was received from all 433 authorities. In two cases, local authorities refused to address the query at all, in both cases claiming commercial confidentiality, but in both cases use of their internal review process yielded confirmation as to what sort of use of private consultants was being made, even if there was a refusal to reveal any contract value / price paid for the work.

The use of FOI was carefully considered before the request was sent. Clearly answering such a query does take officer time and so place somewhat of a burden on public authorities in a time of austerity. Indeed, Derby City Council have a standard line in their response about the cost of answering an FOI query (this request apparently cost the Council £18.75 to process) whilst another local authority officer explicitly stated that he felt it was inappropriate for academics to submit FOI request given the cost on public services in dealing with such queries.

Prior to submitting the request, attempts to find the information from websites were made but it soon became clear that there was huge variability between authorities as to the ease of finding information and amount made public on things like council contracts and expenditure. Looking through the responses to previous FOI requests in a number of authorities did not reveal any similar previous requests about planning outsourcing. The FOI request was framed in a way to try and reduce the burden in answering it, for example whilst information about all use of consultants might be somewhat interesting, only 'routine' use was asked about.

Only an estimated 1-2% of FOI requests sent to local government are from academics. Worthy and Hazel (2014) found that FOI has made local government more transparent and improved accountability but has not had much impact on decision-making, levels of trust or public participation.¹ Worthy et al (2011) felt that FOI had led authorities to be more proactive in publishing information, although the degree of openness of local authorities can vary considerably due to different administrative cultures, levels of political support and resource availability. They also highlight that costs are more immediate and easier to calculate than benefits such as accountability and responsiveness, leading to the risk of a biased view by some officers. Indeed, the benefits from increased accountability cannot always be seen immediately locally but may be from building up a 'bigger picture' and alongside other mechanisms such as use of the media and campaigns which can then have longer-term positive impacts.² We believe there may be positive benefit from greater awareness and understanding of the changing organisational forms and private sector engagement in delivering local authority planning, and are publishing the full results of our work openly, hopefully to the potential benefit of that some community who helped answer our query.

Results

Full outsourcing

A total of eight local authorities had outsourced their planning departments. All eight were in England. This represents just 1.8% of UK planning authorities or 2.2% of English authorities. The authorities included four under Conservative control, three under Labour control and one under No Overall control.

¹ Worthy, B. and Hazel, R. (2014). 'The Impact of the Freedom of Information Act in the UK', Chapter 3 in Bowles, N., Hamilton, J. and Levy, D. (ed.s) *Transparency in Politics and the Media*, IB Tauris, London, pp. 31-48.

² Worthy, B. Amos, J., Hazel, R. and Bourke, G. (2011). 'Town Hall Transparency? The Impact of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on Local Government in England' at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/foi/foi-and-local-government/town-hall-transparency.pdf> [Accessed 25.11.18]

Five of these eight authorities had followed what might be considered a traditional model of outsourcing with a private company now conducting planning work for the council: Barnet council in London, Breckland council in the East of England, North East Lincolnshire council in Yorkshire and the Humber, North Tyneside council in the North East of England, and Salford council in the North West of England.

Barnet Council has outsourced all planning functions to Capita Ltd via a joint venture company called Regional Enterprises Ltd under a ten-year contract running from 2013-2023 (with an optional five-year extension beyond that). The planning outsourcing involves planning policy and development management, building control, land charges, environmental health, trading standards and highways. Staff are employed by the joint venture. The company's public website is at <http://www.re-limited.co.uk/> and the contract between Barnet and Capita has been made publicly available at <https://open.barnet.gov.uk/dataset/regional-enterprise-ltd-re-contract>.

Breckland Council has outsourced all planning functions to Capita Ltd under a 15-year contract running from 2009-2024 (with an optional five-year extension). This includes planning policy, development management and planning enforcement. The annual core charge of this contract is £2,108,108 plus inflation. Staff are employed by Capita Ltd.

North East Lincolnshire Council has outsourced all aspects of its planning services under a 12-year contract running from 2010-2022 to Engie Services Ltd. The planning services were outsourced as part of a wider regeneration and technical services partnership that also includes regeneration, economic development, highways, facilities management and housing. The total lifetime value of the partnership contracts for all services is circa £150million, with planning approximately circa £1million per annum of this. Staff are employed by Engie Services Ltd.

North Tyneside Council has outsourced all planning services to a Technical Services Partnership between the Council and Capita Ltd. This is a 15-year partnership which commenced in 2012, and includes engineering, property, planning, building control and public protection. The contract is worth circa £150million. The partnership includes staff employed by both the council and Capita.

Salford Council has a much longer history of outsourcing. In February 2005, the Council was involved in the creation of a company called 'Urban Vision' which is part of the Capita group and is responsible for development management and development management but not planning policy. The contract ends in 2020, when services will return direct to council control. A management fee is paid for the overall development services. Most of the staff delivering planning responsibilities remain employees of the council, on secondment, although a number of staff employed by Capita help deliver the council's planning responsibilities. The company's website is at <https://www.urbanvision.org.uk/planning-building-control/public-sector/>. This includes details of services that can be provided to other authorities branded as a 'planning resilience' service: <https://www.urbanvision.org.uk/public/2017/11/Planning-Resilience-Brochure.pdf>.

The other three authorities with outsourced planning – Barking and Dagenham Council (in Greater London), Cotswold Council (in the South West of England) and West Oxfordshire Council (neighbouring but in the South East of England region) – have a very different type of arrangement. Barking and Dagenham Council retains all statutory powers but has contracted the administration of its planning service to Be First, a wholly owned subsidiary of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. Some officers are still employed by the Council to provide oversight, but most are now employed by the company.

Cotswold and West Oxfordshire, together with Forest of Dean and Cheltenham Councils, have set up an arm's length local authority owned company (a 'Teckal' cost sharing company) which is limited by guarantee and wholly owned by the four councils. This company is Publica Group Limited. It then provides a range of different services for each authority.

Cotswold answered that planning services are now administered by the company. They stated that with effect from 1st November 2017 the majority of Cotswold District Council employees have been

transferred to Publica Group Limited. The only remaining roles within the Councils are statutory roles which are required by law. Some employees have dual employment contracts with the Councils to enable them to carry out certain delegable functions including delegable planning functions. Planning Services has been included in the transfer to Publica Group Limited. Details of the services agreement can be found at <https://www.publicagroup.uk/about-us/publications-transparency/>

The overall contract value for the full range of services provided to Cotswold District Council in 2018/19 is £9,673,728. The element that covers planning and strategic housing is apportioned as £1,706,847, but this includes all planning services (including policy) and also strategic housing (including affordable housing delivery). The length of the contract varies in relation to the nature of the services – planning services sit within the general services category and are therefore subject to a seven-year contract length.

West Oxfordshire answered that Publica Group (Support) Ltd has been providing services to the Council since the 1st November 2017. The overall contract value for the full range of services provided to West Oxfordshire District Council in 2018/19 is £10,103,621. The element that covers planning and strategic housing is apportioned as is £1,302,306, again including all of planning and housing, and again as part of a general services seven-year contract.

For Cheltenham, they answered that although the Council is part of the Publica Group Ltd, and some services are delivered through them (e.g. Building Control), planning services remain fully within the borough council. Forest of Dean had not fully outsourced planning to Publica but partially outsourced it and is included in the next category.

Partial outsourcing

A total of 24 authorities responded to the FOI that they had partially outsourced their planning services. This represents 5.5% of UK local planning authorities, comprising 18 authorities in England (4.9% of total), one in Northern Ireland (9.1% of total), one in Scotland (2.9% of total) and four in Wales (25% of total). 11 of these authorities were Conservative controlled, one independent, four Labour controlled, six no overall control and two were not directly political authorities (Isle of Scilly / South Downs National Park).

The first category of outsourcing was with the private sector providing part of the authority's planning service on its behalf. This included 11 authorities, with four examples related to development management, one to policy, two to enforcement and four to advice or support functions.

Ealing Council, in Greater London, employs the services of Ivy Legal Limited for the investigation and enforcement of alleged breaches as part of the planning enforcement function. The service has apparently been engaged with Ealing since 2012. The Council is currently assessing tender submissions for a new contract to start in 2018. The value of the service procured in 2017/18 was valued between £200-250,000.

East Hertfordshire Council, in the East of England, uses Aitchison Rafferty to determine some planning applications on its behalf. This is a four-month contract which started in September 2018 and that value determined on a case-by-case basis, with the Council having control over how much work is passed to the consultant.

East Staffordshire Council, in the West Midlands, reported that they sometimes use consultants on an ad hoc basis for development management work to support short term need, maternity cover, and where they have had recruitment difficulties. The Council's enforcement service is provided by a single individual who has his own company. For the 2018/19 financial year the total cost was £40,783.63.

Fenland Council, in the East of England, reported that they had brought in tree advice as and when required in planning matters from Arboricultural Solutions and the cost was £19,000 in 2017/18.

Hillingdon Council, in Greater London, has contracted out part of their development management function to a company called TerraQuest, who process minor applications. TerraQuest's Planning services are formed on a transactional commercial model and delivered through Service Level Agreements to meet local authority needs and regulatory requirements. They deliver an end-to-end planning application processing service; from providing pre-application advice, technical validation, checking consultees, evaluation of applications, delivery of planning reports and offering post application advice. All services and work provided by TerraQuest is supervised and reports prepared by TerraQuest employees are subsequently authorised by senior managers within the council. The contract for 10 years from May 2011 and the Council pays dependent on the volume of work undertaken. Between May 2011 and April 2018, the total cost has been £3,348,196.13.

Merton Council, also in Greater London, reported that they had outsourced a 'minor element' of their development management service to Regional Enterprises Ltd (the Barnet – Capita outsourced company). This was for householder applications, on a flexible basis when additional help was needed, which is currently about 5 cases per week.

North Somerset Council uses a company called Agilisys to do their planning application registration for them. This is included as part of an over-arching outsourced support service between the council and Agilisys Ltd, the contract running until 2020 and having an annual value of approximately £15 million.

Walsall Council in the West Midlands have outsourced historical conservation and ecology matters to Jacobs Consultancy as part of the planning policy team role in providing comments on planning applications to development management planners. This outsourcing of advice on conservation and ecology apparently began in June 2017 as a result of the council being unable to recruit staff and the arrangement will continue until they are able to recruit staff. The Council spent £13,392.22 on ecology and conservation services from Jacobs in 2017/18.

Leicestershire County Council in the East Midlands has utilised two private consultancies in relation to their planning responsibilities. Suzi Coyne Planning provides support for the passage of their Minerals and Waste Local Plan through its examination (since December 2017). Bond Planning Consultancy is used to process County Council Regulation 3 planning applications when capacity limitations require (since March 2016).

Aberdeen Council in Scotland has a consultancy contract with landscape specialists Doug Harman Associates to undertake assessments and provides background information to support a renewed landscape study informing Local Development Policies and Development Management decisions. This is a one-off contract to provide this information.

Causeway Coast and Glens Council in Northern Ireland reported that some legal services used to be provided by private organisation, Carson McDowell LLP, and they still provide legal services with regards to enforcement cases opened prior to the transfer of planning functions from the Department of the Environment to local government authorities in April 2015.

The second type of partial outsourcing was to a company owned by the council, as was seen in the case of one authority, Forest of Dean Council in the South West. The partial outsourcing was to Publica, already mentioned. For Forest of Dean, the outsourcing to this Teckal company owned by four local authorities related not to all planning functions but just to development management. The processing of applications is now undertaken by staff employed by Publica, but decisions are retained by the Council and made by officers with either joint contracts between Publica and the Council or those wholly retained by the Council. More complex applications are reported to the Council's Planning Committee for determination.

The third type of partial outsourcing was to another Council, with a different authority providing some planning services on behalf of the local planning authority. This involved three cases relating to development management, five relating to minerals and waste planning, and eight relating to specialist advice and support (for example on conservation or ecological issues). The scale and arrangements for such outsourcing did vary considerably between each case.

For Broxtowe Council in the East Midlands, this was simply an arrangement with a neighbouring authority to employ a Conservation Officer at the cost of about £10,000 per annum, an arrangement in place since November 2017.

East Hertfordshire Council, in the East of England, uses Place Services for heritage advice, urban design advice, some pre-application work and some application determination, in an arrangement which started in October 2018 and lasts for a year. This contract is determined on a piecemeal basis, per work completed, with East Hertfordshire controlling how much work is passed to them. Place Services is a traded service of Essex County Council which since 2014 has been providing landscape, arboricultural, ecological, urban design, conservation and Strategic Environmental Assessment services. Their website (www.placeservices.co.uk) states that they aim to help public sector organisations deliver their role in sustainable development and that they support over 30 local authorities in Essex, London and the East of England.

Fenland Council, in the East of England, buys in planning policy, Section 106 viability appraisal and management and ecology support from Peterborough City Council where they pay for 1.5 members of staff. This is a yearly contract which has varied over the last five years but in 2017/18 was worth £87,816.

Havant Council, in the South East, gets GIS, administration and technical support from East Hampshire Council (to cover a period of maternity leave since February 2018) and shares some specialist internal advice such as conservation and landscape. Although the planning teams are separate between the two councils, they share management of them (head of service and deputy head of service for planning). They also receive some technical advice regarding ecological and archaeological matters from Hampshire County Council.

The Isles of Scilly Council, South West, reported that development management was outsourced for 18 months, ending in March 2018. The contract was with the Exmoor National Park Authority, and planners employed by that authority did the development management work on behalf of the Isles of Scilly. This arrangement has now ended, with all work now handled directly by their own planning staff.

The New Forest District Council, South East, has outsourced some specialist functions, namely trees and conservation, to the New Forest National Park Authority. Staff employed by the National Park Authority then undertake this work on behalf of the District Council.

There is a shared service arrangement between Redditch and Bromsgrove Councils in the West Midlands, with Redditch Council responding to the FOI that this meant they had partially outsourced their planning services. Under a Service Level Agreement (SLA), Bromsgrove Council undertakes the development management function for Redditch Council with their own planners.

South Staffordshire Council, also in the West Midlands, receives conservation advice from a conservation officer employed by Lichfield District Council (with this amounting to one day per week funded time) and ecological advice from an ecologist employed by Staffordshire County Council on an ad hoc (as and when needed) basis.

Buckinghamshire County Council is receiving support from Northamptonshire County Council for the preparation of the Buckinghamshire Mineral and Waste Local Plan 2016-36 under a contract running from July 2016 to March 2019 with a total value of £75,173.

Aberdeen City Council in Scotland has an SLA with Aberdeenshire Council to provide their development management service with advice on developer obligations and archaeology. There is also an SLA with North East Scotland Biological Records centre (HESBrec), hosted by Aberdeenshire Council, to provide biological recording service (data which is used to inform planning policy and decision making on planning applications as well as other outcomes). A contract has been in place for these services since 2006, the current contract dates to May 2018 for three years with a value of £20,956.29.

Four different authorities in Wales reported outsourcing to other Councils in relation to their minerals and waste planning responsibilities. For Neath Port Talbot Council, there is an SLA with Carmarthenshire Council to assist with delivering their minerals development management service. For Pembrokeshire Council, there is an SLA with Carmarthenshire Council to deal with their minerals planning and minerals enforcement work. For Powys Council, there is minerals and waste outsourcing to both the North Wales Minerals Group (since 2011) and Carmarthenshire Council (since 2010). These are both rolling contracts, with the value of commission relating to workload. Vale of Glamorgan Council also reports that minerals and waste planning is undertaken on their behalf by Carmarthenshire Council via an SLA.

In Northern Ireland, Causeway Coast and Glens Council uses Mid and East Antrim Council's Share Environmental Services Department for Habitat Regulations Assessments. Legal services for planning are carried out on the Council's behalf by Derry City and Strabane Council's legal department.

Finally, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), in the South East, outsources much of its development management work to the district councils whose area it covers. The authority reports that the SDNPA is one of the largest planning authorities in England in terms of both the number of applications determined per annum and the geographical area covered. They do have their own planning department of approximately 33 staff consisting of development management planners, enforcement planners, policy planners and other technical specialists including design, conservation and landscape officers.

The authority apparently leads all of its own planning policy work, deals with all significant applications and all Minerals and Waste planning matters. About 80% of its development management decisions (including appeals and enforcement work) are, however, processed and determined by the five district councils whose areas include parts of the National Park: Chichester Council, East Hampshire Council, Horsham Council, Lewes Council and Winchester Council.

The SDNPA has Section 101 legal agreements in place with each of these councils delegating to them the determination of applications on their behalf (applying to planning applications, appeals and enforcement investigations that fall within their respective local authority area of the National Park). The SDNPA retains the ability to call in any planning application or enforcement case for its own determination (which it apparently does regularly) and remains the Local Planning Authority. All planning officers responsible for delivering the SDNPA's planning responsibilities are either directly employed by the authority itself or by the five Councils already mentioned.

Further to the above, Eastleigh Council in the South East responded that they had not partially outsourced planning as they still remain responsible for all elements of the service, however the development of their local plan is being prepared under an SLA with Southampton Council, who have provided officer support. This might potentially be considered a partial outsourcing to another local authority when considered against some of the examples above.

Routine use of consultants: development management

A total of 41 authorities responded to the FOI that they made routine use of consultants in relation to processing planning applications on behalf of the authority. All 41 of these authorities were in England, with a wide geographical spread across the regions. 25 were Conservative controlled, 14 Labour controlled and 2 No Overall Control. Some of these responses relate to the provision of agency planners and staff to cover shortages, but others relate to planning application processing on behalf of the council and there is some overlap with the 'partial outsourcing' already considered (categorisation here is according to how the authorities themselves responded to the FOI request).

Arun Council in the South East have used Terraquest for processing householder applications. The Council responded that Terraquest do not have responsibility for statutory planning services, but instead have worked on behalf of the Council with responsibility for decision making remaining with the Council as their officers sign off all decisions. This was on a short-term basis in 2017/18 and there is no current contract.

Ashfield Council, East Midlands, reported using Macdonald and Company in relation to planning application processing at a cost of £55,648.15 in 2017/18.

Aylesbury Vale Council, South East, have employed consultants via agencies to act as case officers but without decision making powers. The total spend on this in 2017/18 for development management services was £795,011.19 with use made of Adecco, Matchtech, Oyster Partnership, Park Avenue Recruitment, Vivid Resourcing and some directly contracted consultants.

Bassetlaw Council in the East Midlands responded that some of the more complex major planning appeals have been outsourced by the Council to private consultants through a bidding process. For more complex major planning applications where viability appraisals have been submitted, the Council will use specialist viability consultants for independent assessment of said viability appraisals.

Blackburn with Darwen Council, North West, have used Urban Vision (the Salford – Capita partnership) to support the development management team in 2017/18 to cover a period of staff shortages. This covered support in the validation of planning applications (£32,256) and the assessment of major applications (£14,000).

Bristol Council, South West, have a four-year contract with Ove Arup (running until March 2019), which cost £150,000 in 2017/18. Ove Arup staff act as case officers for a variety of planning applications on behalf of the Council.

Cannock Chase Council, West Midlands, reported using temporary planners in 2017/18 to deal with the high volume of applications received, at a cost of £97,485 (off-set using the income generated through planning application fees). Matchtech and Oyster Partnership were used.

Canterbury Council in the South East had apparently used private consultants to help with development management at a total cost of £338,561 in 2017/18, utilising the services of Michael Parkes Chartered Surveyors, RSK Ltd, DHA Planning, Lee Evans Partnership LLP, Schofield Lothian Ltd and Lichfields.

Chiltern and South Bucks Councils, South East, who operate planning as a shared service, report using Sterling Planning Ltd (in Watford) to assist with certain application types at a cost of £48,288 (plus VAT) in 2017/18.

Copeland Council, North West, have apparently used Arup to provide some support to cover a vacant senior officer post for 2 days a week, at a cost of approximately £35,000 in 2017/18.

Corby Council in the East Midlands report using Pinsent Masons, Whiteland Strategies, Hawkins Historic Ltd, Geotechnics Ltd and Change Agents in support of the development management function in 2017/18. It is not clear if this was to process planning applications or just for more specialist advice.

Daventry Council, also in the East Midlands, responded that they only have contractors in to cover as and when necessary and this is published on the Council transparency pages although most of the individuals concerned set up their own companies, even if they get paid through an agency, so they redact the names if it would identify an individual. Consulting the excellent transparency pages (which make spreadsheets available for all Council spending over £500) reveals a total of £49,833.73 spend on consultancies for development management in 2017/18, of which £31,147.33 was to the Oyster Partnership for temporary staff and £18,686.40 to Kernon Countryside Consultants, Northamptonshire County Council, The Wildlife Trust and the Valuation Office Agency for various professional work done.

Fenland Council, East of England, have spent £416,000 in 2017/18 with Comensura, who are an agency that supply them with development management officers.

Gravesham Council, South East, responded that due to short-term capacity issues they currently have a one-year contract in place with Edwards Planning Consultancy to assist with planning application processing in 2018/19 but this was not in place for 2017/18.

Greenwich Council, Greater London, used Regional Enterprise (the Capita – Barnet partnership) to assist with development management in 2017, at a cost of £31,254 plus VAT in 2017/18.

Hillingdon Council, Greater London, reported they used TerraQuest to assist with development management in 2017/18 at a cost of £651,180.04. They also commented that “we understand that the London Borough of Hillingdon is not the only council to outsource part of its planning development management function.”

Ipswich Council, East of England, said that it was not routine to use private sector consultant companies to determine planning applications but that they have had to use agency staff on occasion and spent £7,537.60 with the Oyster Partnership for this in 2017/18.

Luton Council, East of England, responded that for development management they had spent £183,978 on the services of Boyer and £58,616 on the services of Alpha Planning in 2017/18.

Maidstone Council, in the South East, apparently have commenced in 2018 (after the 2017/18 financial year) a ‘framework service’ to allow flexibility within the development management service and react to peaks in application submissions. Four companies are engaged in the framework: Bailey Partnership, DLP Planning, HTA Design, and Schofield Lothian. All four have slightly differing contract values but these are based on the statutory planning fees for some and those fees plus 10% for others.

Merton Council, Greater London, use Regional Enterprises to process householder planning applications on a flexible basis when additional assistance is required, which is currently about 5 cases per week. They have also used Cnet for temporary staff in development management but are trying to move to a more permanent staff base.

North East Derbyshire Council, East Midlands, reported using 4 Planning Delivery at a cost of £13,912.65 and Aspbury Planning Ltd at a cost of £77,502.90 in relation to planning applications in 2017/18.

Northumberland Council, North East, had spent £36,322.80 on the services of Capita in relation to planning application processing in 2017/18.

Purbeck Council, South West, say that they occasionally use TerraQuest to validate planning applications at times of high workload and spent £9,935.25 on this in 2017/18.

Rushcliffe Council, East Midlands, have employed a private sector consultant, GHM Planning, who apparently ‘acts independently’. In 2017/18, £24,186 was paid for his services. Rutland Council, also in the East Midlands, report during consultants during periods of staff shortage only and in 2017/18, Oyster Partnership provided interim staff at a cost of £35,406.

Selby Council, in Yorkshire and the Humber, receive staffing resources for development management and enforcement from Macdonald and Company and spent £228,023 on this in 2017/18.

South Kesteven Council, East Midlands, also use consultants during periods of staff shortages and in 2017/18, GHM Planning provided planning services at a cost of £45,655.

South Staffordshire Council in the West Midlands reported using three self-employed planning consultants to assist with determining planning applications on an ad hoc basis as need has arisen with staff shortages in 2017/18. They were Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy, Paul Turner Planning Consultancy and Lufton & Associates, with a total cost of £19,390.75.

Stratford-on-Avon, also in the West Midlands, use a variety of agencies to provide staff for development management on a short-term basis, namely Oyster, Matchtech, Vivid, Park Avenue, G2, and Macdonald and Company. The contracts vary in duration and value but in 2017/18 the total cost was nearly £273,000.

Tameside Council, North West, responded that the use of private sector consultants to assist with planning applications was not routine but due to the need for additional capacity between July and December 2017, they had used Urban Vision (the Capita – Salford partnership). The total cost in 2017/18 was £68,126.

Tewksbury Council in the South West had used Matchtech (£32,924.93 plus VAT) and Oyster Partnership (£1,916.10 plus VAT) in 2017/18 to provide agency staff to support development management.

Torrige Council, also in the South West, responded that in 2017/18 they had experienced 'unprecedented turnover of staff' within the planning department and that to maintain acceptable levels of service they had engaged agency staff to cover for vacancies, spending £313,550 on this in total. They utilised Acorn Recruitment (£8,031), Oyster Partnership (£256,422), Macdonald and Company (£8,358), Matchtech (£6,000), G2 Recruitment Solutions (£16,721) and Vivid Recruitment (£18,018). At the time of responding to the FOI request, they were down to just one agency planner as maternity cover and one private consultant being used only.

Uttlesford Council, South East, apparently have two temporary agency planners processing planning applications and are paid at an hourly rate.

Warrington Council, North West, receive support from Urban Vision when required to deal with the number of planning applications. This is an ongoing contract, with a case by case fee. At the time of responding to the FOI, they were only processing householder planning applications whilst there was planning department restructure and recruitment ongoing. The cost in 2017/18 was £29,337.

Windsor and Maidenhead, in the South East, responded that they do not currently routinely use a private consultancy to process planning applications, but Capita Regional Enterprises were used for additional planning application capacity (covering a number of development management team vacancies) for part of the 2017/18 period, for which they were paid £84,792.

Wycombe Council, also in the South East, use one consultant to deal with peaks and troughs in the householder planning application workload beyond their own employed planning staff. For 2017/18, the cost of this service from Sterling Planning was approximately £50,000.

Wyre Council, North West, responded that they use private sector consultants only where necessary to cover short term vacancies (such as maternity leave), where posts are unable to be filled, or due to a temporary increase in workload. Various consultants / agencies were used in 2017/18, at a total cost of £117,849.90.

Finally, three county councils with minerals and waste planning responsibilities reported use of private sector consultants for development management work. Buckinghamshire, in the South East, had made 'non-routine' use of private consultants from GMKC and Pertemps to assist with planning applications for their areas of responsibility at a cost of about £38,000 in 2017/18. Leicestershire, in the East Midlands, responded they had used Suzi Coyne Planning (at a cost of £5,011.95 plus VAT) and Peter Bond Consultancy (at a cost of £10,263.45) on development management issues in 2017/18. Somerset, in the South West, also confirmed use of private consultants in relation to development management.

In addition to this, the following Councils answered 'no' to the question about routine use of consultants to process planning applications, but then further added to their response something along the lines that use was made but it was ad hoc rather than routine, primarily to deal with workload peaks or recruitment gaps but sometimes for specialist advice on particular applications:

- Ashford (South East)
- Blaby (East Midlands) (who responded that there was no routine use of consultants but occasional use of temporary agency planners. Oyster Partnership, costs for 2017/18 £94,011)
- Bolsover (East Midlands)
- Braintree (East of England) (who reported used of Oyster Partnership and Park Avenue)

- Broads Authority (East of England) (who report occasional development management support from NPS Property Consultants Ltd, with whom they have no fixed contract as work is done on a case by case basis as needed, an arrangement in place since 2000)
- Broxtowe (East Midlands) (who reported development management received support (but not processing) planning applications from a variety of consultants with use in 2017/18 of £4,950.00 plus VAT – Savills - Viability Review; £560 plus VAT - Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust 2 - Advice on planning applications; £3,827.50 plus VAT - GHM Planning Ltd - Conservation work; £1,365.00 plus VAT - JMS Engineers (Midlands) Ltd - Stapleford Crossing Hicklings Lane; Total - £10,702.50 plus VAT)
- Cambridgeshire (East of England)
- Cherwell (South East)
- Christchurch and East Dorset (South West) (who responded that the Councils do employ staff from various employment agencies as and when required to provide assistance in Development Management. The companies used depend on who is available at the time of the request, such as Matchtech, Park Avenue Recruiting, and Oyster. The cost to the Partnership in 2017/18 was £279,630.72)
- Cotswold (South West)
- Crawley (South East)
- East Riding of Yorkshire (Yorkshire and the Humber)
- East Staffordshire (West Midlands)
- Exeter (South West)
- Gloucester (South West) (who reported occasional use of agency staff. In 2017/18, the company was Oyster Partnership and the amount paid was £42,836)
- Hartlepool (North East England)
- Hastings (South East England)
- Hertsmere (East of England)
- Hinckley and Bosworth (East Midlands) (who responded that it was not routine to employ private sector consultancy other than to cover for staff vacancies and that in 2017/18 they paid £8,474.80 for consultants to deal with planning applications)
- Lincolnshire (East Midlands) (who reported that they have instructed a planning consultant, Natalie Dear Planning Consultancy to undertake work on two specific planning applications, with the contract running until the applications are determined which is expected to be by the end of the year at an expected cost of £25,000)
- Melton (East Midlands) (who reported GMH Planning Ltd have assisted us in 2017/18 with a total expenditure of £8,035)
- Mendip (South West)
- New Forest (South East) (who reported they would use consultants when they required particular specialist advice, for example agricultural appraisals)
- Newark and Sherwood (East Midlands)
- Norfolk (East of England) (who responded that planning officers have been sourced from employment agencies to fill vacancies on a temporary basis pending recruitment of staff on a permanent basis. No private sector consultants have been used to process planning applications during the financial year 2017/2018. A private sector consultant was used to provide an appeal statement in relation to an application refused by members against officer recommendation)
- North Devon (South West) (who responded it was particularly the case that if something went to appeal they might use specialist consultants or if something went to appeal after the officer had recommended it but members refused it)
- North Dorset, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland (South West) (who all responded that it was not routine but that consultants would be used to backfill vacancies or hard to fill posts such as sickness absence and maternity cover. All agency employees come through an umbrella company Commensura and could be from a variety of consultancies signed up to Commensura)
- North Lincolnshire (Yorkshire and the Humber)
- Nottingham (East Midlands)
- Oldham (North West) (who reported an agreement in place with Urban Vision to provide additional staff if workloads requires it although that has not yet been required)

- Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (who reported ongoing use of planning consultant – Prospero Planning used on an ad hoc basis to backfill any staff shortages with a cost in 2017/18 of less than £15,000)
- Rochford (East of England) (who reported that they use agency staff on an ad-hoc basis only and recruit via various external companies where the need arises. For Development Management this involved Oyster Partnership at a cost of £115,028.82)
- Slough (South East) (who reported they use interim planning officer support from Carrington West, Matchtech and Osborne Richardson at a cost of £204,141.88 in 2017/18)
- South Hams and West Devon (South West)
- South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse (South East)
- South Somerset (South West) (who responded that it was not routine to use private sector consultants to process planning applications but there had been spend on development management agency staff of £41,490 in 2017/18 and the company used was Matchtech)
- Southampton (South East) (who reported use of Hays for agency staff)
- Stroud (South West)
- Tendering (East of England) (who replied that agency consultants are not routinely used to process planning applications but are contracted where necessary if recruitment campaigns are unsuccessful, with use of Oyster, Vivid, Matchtech, Macdonald and Company to supply these)
- Welwyn Hatfield (East of England)
- West Oxfordshire (South East)
- Wolverhampton (West Midlands) (who reported no such use in 2017/18)

This is a total of 88 local authorities – all in England – who have reported use of private sector consultants in relation to development management work.

Routine use of consultants: policy

A total of 26 authorities responded to the FOI that they made routine use of consultants in relation to planning policy work. The original question said ‘to develop planning policy on behalf of the Council’ and a number of authorities responded that they made use of consultants in relation to gathering the evidence base for planning policy, but actual policies were developed by their own staff and this also seems to be the case for some of the 26 here, although in other cases it does indeed appear that private consultants have assisted in developing policy and actually writing plans. All 26 of these authorities were in England, with a wide geographical spread across the regions. 18 of the 26 were Conservative controlled, 5 Labour, 1 Liberal Democrat and 2 No Overall Control.

Aylesbury Vale Council in the South East had used WS Atkins, Opinion Research Services, Wessex Economics, Land Use Consultants, Jeremy Benn Associates, Intelligent Plans, AECOM, and Bradley Murphy in 2017/18 at a total cost of £141,109.61. The services undertaken by these companies on behalf of the council was not specified but it appears likely it was in relation to developing an evidence base for planning policy work rather than directly writing the local plan policies.

Blaby Council, East Midlands, reported that they were making occasional use of a temporary consultant to assist with their planning policy work, this was from PTP Planning Services, with a cost in 2017/18 of £33,465.

Blackburn with Darwen Council, in the North West, have commenced work on a new Local Plan in January 2018. To support this work, the consultancy services of Urban Vision (the Salford – Capita partnership) have been secured at a cost during 2017/18 of £11,000.

Chorley Council, also in the North West, explained that consultants have prepared evidence for the emerging joint Central Lancashire Plan (encompassing Chorley, South Ribble and Preston), producing housing and employment land studies during 2017. In 2017/18, Chorley Council’s share of jointly-procured consultancy services in respect of the work on the Objectively Assessed Housing need and Strategic Housing Market Assessment was £17,257.

Corby Council, in the East Midlands, responded that they had used consultants in relation to planning policy and directed us towards their online budget books, but these do not actually provide specific details in relation to this.

Cotswold Council, in the South West, reported that private sector planning consultants are routinely used to support planning policy development. This information is made available on their website under the payments made to external suppliers, with a different monthly spreadsheet for all Council expenditure over £500.

East Hampshire Council, in the South East, have used two consultants to support planning policy work during 2017/18: Adam Integra (for £12,045.90) and AECOM (for £378.00). Eastleigh Council, also in the South East, are receiving support from GL Hearn on assessing housing delivery as part of the local plan process. The Local Plan team have also been provided with ongoing support by Adams Hendry (since October 2016) and Paris Smith (since January 2017) and have appointed a range of consultants to undertake specialist pieces of work: Carter Jonas (retail/leisure); Opinion Research Services (Gypsies and Travellers); Lambert Smith Hampton (employment sites); Allies and Morrison (masterplan); Hampshire County Council (link road feasibility study); JBA (Hydrology / Flood risk); Systra (transport); Dixon Serle (viability); Continuum Sport and Leisure and LUC (sport / leisure); UEEC (habitats); Arcadian (habitat surveys); White Young Green (Great Crested Newts); and LUC (sustainability). £705,708.52 was paid for all of this consultancy in 2017/18.

Forest Heath Council, in the East of England, do not make routine use of private sector consultants to support the development of planning policy, but have required additional resource to support the preparation of the local plan at peak times of policy preparation. A planning policy officer from Essex County Council's Place Services (already mentioned) has provided support for the local plan preparation (SIR and SALP) in 2017/18 at a cost of £8,694.40 (contract ended October 2017). A planning policy officer from JCW Planning provides support for the preparation of policy and guidance under an ongoing contract, for which £23,703.65 was spent in 2017/18. As planning is a joint service with St Edmundsbury Council, this was the same for that council as well.

Havant Council, in the South East, had spent a total of £209,141.85 in 2017/18 to private consultancies in assistance with local plan work. The work undertaken and consultancies providing this were: Borough Wide Transport Assessment – Hampshire Services; Partnership for Urban South Hampshire Air Quality Assessment – Ricardo; Air Quality element of Habitats Regulations Assessment – Ricardo; Phase II ecological survey of East of 54 Long Copse Lane – Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre; Critical Friend for Biodiversity Strategy – Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust; Focussed Review of the emerging Local Plan – Intelligent Plans and Examinations; Play Pitch Strategy and Open Space Assessment – 4Global; Infrastructure Delivery Plan and CIL charging schedule support – LJ Planning; Hayling Island Tourism Study – Hemmingway Design; Southleigh Masterplan – Levitt Bernstein and GVA; Hayling Island microsimulation model – Systra; Automatic Traffic Counts of Hayling Island developments to calibrate microsimulation model – Vantage Surveys; Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment – Opinion Research Services; Local Plan and CIL viability Study – Dixon Searle Partnership; Winter bird surveys – Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre.

Luton Council, in the East of England, had spent £161,432 in 2017/18 on assistance for its planning policy function from Troy Planning.

Northumberland Council in the North East reported that they had used three consultancies in 2017/18 to help develop planning policy; WSP UK Ltd (£4,186.04 spend), Urban Vision Partnership Ltd (the Salford – Capita company) (£2,000 spend) and KJM Planning and Management Ltd (£6,000).

Purbeck Council, in the South West, has used consultants when necessary to produce expert advice for use as evidence in their current local plan review. In 2017/18 this involved commissioning work from GL Hearn (£13,696), Dorset County Council (£408), Land Use Consultancy (£26,257) and Systra (£3,743.75).

Selby Council, Yorkshire and the Humber, had received planning policy officer staffing resources (agency staff) through Richard Wood Associates, Simplicity, Macdonald and Company, Oyster Partnership and Matrix SCM in 2017/18 at a total cost of £77,0909. They had also used consultants to provide evidence to support the local plan, with work from CP Viability, GVA Ltd, Watermans, Aspinall Verdi, Opinion Research Services and North Yorkshire County Council costing a total of £88,655.23 in 2017/18.

Thurrock Council in the East of England had spent £230,102.97 in 2017/18 on planning policy related work by constants, and had paid this to: Catriona Riddle & Associates Ltd, David Lock Associates Ltd, Knight Kavanagh & Page Ltd, Land Use Consultants, Opinion Research Services, Peter Brett Associates LLP, Plumb Associates Ltd, POS Enterprises Ltd and the Sport England (English Sports Council)

Torridge Council in the South West uses private companies in support of the production of its local plan and in 2017/18 expenditure was £500 to CACI and £7,970 to Leisure and the Environment.

Uttlesford Council in the East of England has received additional support from Troy Planning for elements of their local plan work on an ad hoc basis when specific additional resources have been required to progress the local plan. In addition to this, private consultants are used for specific expert advice such as transport advice and modelling, heritage and landscape support for assessing impacts on local plan policies. The budget book on the Council's website shows that £175,000 had been budgeted for consultants supporting planning policy work in 2017/18

(https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/media/6695/2017-18-Budget-Book/pdf/Budget_Book_2017-18.pdf).

Warrington Council in the North West uses a number of consultancies to provide technical evidence base in support of the preparation of their local plan. In 2017/18 they spent a total on £97,485.08 on such work undertaken by consultancies with the companies used and work undertaken as follows: AECOM – Masterplanning, Transport Model and associated Transport assessment, Sustainability Appraisal (SA) /Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA); ARUP – Green Belt Assessment, Site Assessment; GL Hearn – Housing Needs Assessment; BNP Paribas – Local Plan Viability Assessment; BE Group – Economic Development Needs Assessment; Urban Vision – Minerals and Waste evidence; JBA Consulting – Strategic Flood Risk Assessment; Nexus Planning – Retail Needs Assessment; Opinion Research Services - Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment.

West Oxfordshire Council, in the South East, responded that private sector planning consultants are routinely used to support planning policy development.

Windsor and Maidenhead Council, in the South East, are apparently currently developing three local plans: the borough local plan, minerals and waste local plan and a Traveller Local Plan. Private sector consultants are not routinely used to develop planning policy on behalf of the Council although they are used routinely to help the Council develop evidence base. In the case of the Borough Local Plan and the Traveller Local Plan the policy making functions are the sole responsibility of the Council. The Minerals and Waste Plan is being jointly prepared by Windsor and Maidenhead, Bracknell Forest, Wokingham and Reading Councils. Hampshire County Council has been engaged on a consultancy basis to help the four Councils develop the evidence base and policy for the plan. This is a 'one off' example of the use of a private sector consultant to develop planning policy, rather than routine use. The cost of the consultant is being spread across the four Councils. In 2017/18 the cost was £61,000, which includes both policy development and evidence base preparation tasks.

Wyre Council, in the North West, are using agency staff or private sector consultants where necessary to cover short term vacancies (e.g. maternity leave), where posts are unable to be filled, or to assist with temporary increase in workloads. The total cost during the 2017/18 financial year was £19,165.00.

Hertfordshire County Council, East of England, report occasional use of specialist consultants for their Minerals and Waste responsibilities, procured as required or via a call off framework contract with Land Use Consultants. The specialist work in 2017/18 related to Sustainability Appraisal, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Habitats Regulation Assessment, site selection work and capacity studies.

At present the framework contract is with Land Use Consultants, but in the past they have also used Entec and SLR.

Kent County Council, South East, have been receiving support for their local plan work since 2015 from BPP Consulting LLP at a rate of approximately £50,000 per annum. This includes technical and planning support to the plan making function. Amey are supporting the County Council in its plan making work with Sustainability Appraisal and technical advice. Somerset County Council also reported receiving support for their minerals and waste local plan, with details apparently available through the expenditure section of their website.

Finally, Surrey County Council, South East, responded that 'the development of planning policy is never routine, and consultants will be used as necessary where external expertise is required'. They have an ongoing contract with BPP Consulting who are providing critical friend and data services as required during the current important period of Waste Plan policy development and paid them £23,565 in 2017/18 excluding VAT.

Furthermore, the following Councils answered 'no' to the question about routine use of consultants to develop planning policy, but then further added to their response either that use was made but it was ad hoc rather than routine or that use was made but this was to gather an evidence base on a particular topic, such as, housing market, retailing or landscape character assessments, but all planning policy would be developed in-house:

- Barnsley (Yorkshire and the Humber)
- Basildon (East of England)
- Bracknell Forest (South East)
- Broads Authority (East of England)
- Bury (North West)
- Cannock Chase (West Midlands) (who responded that some of the evidence base required to support the production of the Local Plan comes from private sector consultancies because of the specialist knowledge required. Newgrove were employed on this basis at a cost of £5,695 and the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust at a cost of £3,616 during 2017/18)
- Cherwell (South East)
- Conwy (Wales) (who reported £64,268 expenditure in 2017/18 on the provision of technical evidence)
- Copeland (North West) (example given of Sustainability Appraisal)
- Crawley (South East) (who further responded that in the 2017/18 financial year with the Manor Royal Business District BID they had jointly commissioned Lichfields to undertake a "Manor Royal Impact Study" for which they paid £13,576.25)
- Croydon (Greater London) (who reported £13,700 expenditure on consultancies for planning policy in 2017/18, comprising: AECOM – Sustainability Appraisal - £2,310; Thomson Ecology – Ecological Surveys - £3,890; AECOM – Noise consultant - £1,528; Landmark Chambers – legal advice - £5,972)
- Dartmoor National Park (South West) (who reported the following contracts were let in 2017/18 for research or appraisal work to support policy development: Housing Viability and Technical Support (Three Dragons and Associates) (£29,960); Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment (Enfusion Ltd) (£41,800); Employment Land Review (DLP) (£10,375))
- Derbyshire Dales (East Midlands) (who report spending £28,955 in 2017/18 on consultants to assist with the local plan Examination in Public)
- Dover (South East) (who reported 2017/18 expenditure of: DHA - £43,633; Tetlow King - £2,162 ; TLJ Planning - £10,352; VLH @ Associates - £21,297)
- Dudley (West Midlands) (who report a preference for joint commissioning with other Black Country local authorities to reduce costs, but had solely commissioned an Historic Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Leasowes Park and Gardens which cost £9,225 in 2017/18)
- Ealing (Greater London)

- East Lindsey (East Midlands) (who replied that consultants are only employed when there is not the technical capacity within the team to deliver key pieces of evidence work for the Local Plan and that in 2017/2018 no consultants were employed)
- East Riding of Yorkshire (Yorkshire and the Humber) (example given of a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment)
- Eden (North West) (who report support to the planning policy team as follows in 2017/18: Land Use Consultants – strategic masterplan for Penrith - £49,218 + VAT; Hunter Johnstone –services in relation to the development of the masterplan for Penrith - 11,080 + VAT; Weareintro – services in relation to the development of the masterplan for Penrith - £7,150 + VAT; PFK – Annual Monitoring Reports for 2015/16 and 2016/17 - £8,000 + VAT and disbursements)
- Elmbridge (South East)
- Enfield (Greater London) (who reported a budget of circa £300,000 for various study commissions)
- Gateshead (North East)
- Great Yarmouth (East of England) (example given of Strategic Flood Risk Assessment)
- Greenwich (Greater London) (who reported 2017/18 expenditure of £13,987 for Land use Consultants for a Green Infrastructure Review and £25,000 for BDP/Ramboll/GL Hearn to produce the Greenwich Peninsula Site GPE Planning brief)
- Hackney (Greater London) (who said they regularly use private sector consultants to prepare evidence base items to underpin development plan documents, but the only example from 2017/18 where consultants were engaged to directly develop planning policy was the use of Allies & Morrison Urban Practitioners for the Shoreditch Area Action Plan at a cost of £57,000)
- Hambleton (Yorkshire and the Humber) (Total spend in 2017/18 of £114,561.74 using the services of AECOM, ARCUS, Astral PS Ltd, David Allenby, GL Hearn, Intelligent Plans and Examinations, JBA Consulting, Keppie Massey, Land Use Consultants, Louise Wickham, Rob Meetham, Strategic Leisure, and WSP UK Ltd)
- Harlow (East of England)
- Hart (South East) (who reported spending £386,256.06 in 2017/18 including £12,036 to Adams Hendry Consulting Ltd, £16,100 to Adams Integra Ltd, £35,121.05 to AECOM (London), £15,015.29 to AECOM Infrastructure & Environment UK Ltd, £89,186.44 to East Hampshire District Council, £49,264.37 to Hampshire County Council, £23,435.80 to IPE Intelligent Plans and Examination, £6,963.77 to Land Use Consultants, £400 to Stephen Gorys, £14,090 to SYSTRA Ltd, and £8,300 to Wessex Economics)
- High Peak (East Midlands)
- Kingston upon Hull (who responded that they commission technical consultants to do detailed studies on issues such as housing, travellers, flood risk etc to help inform our in-house policy writers and that this is common practice in the vast majority of authorities)
- Lake District National Park (who report assistance for their local plan review in 2017/18 from Curtins for a transport and movement study, JBA for a Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment and a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, CBen for renewable percentage research, and LUC for a landscape capacity study at a total cost of £33,169)
- Lincolnshire County Council (East Midlands) (who responded that there was no routine use but some consultancy support was used during the last financial year as the Council was taking its Minerals and Waste Local Plan site allocation Document through examination. This was provided by Natalie Dear Planning Consultancy and was to a value of £20,000)
- Maidstone (South East) (who answered that private sector companies are used to produce parts of our evidence base. The companies which are used vary based on specialisms and a procurement exercise is undertaken before. For 2017/2018 the total paid for external consultants for such work was £76,165.51).
- Malvern Hills (West Midlands)
- Mansfield (East Midlands) (who detailed expenditure on evidence base and staffing cover from private consultants at £191,456 in 2017/18 comprising K Keeley Urban Planning and Regeneration - Project Management - £15,000; Horizon Planning - Preparation of the HELAA - £4,700; AECOM - Mansfield Transport - £71,218; Withheld [an individual consultant] - Local Plan Support - £7,500; WHS - Mansfield Central Flood Risk Study - £8898.50; NEMS - Retail Study Market Research - £7,935; Peter Brett Associates - Mansfield retail study - £9,765; Intelligent

Plans - Local Plan Advice - £3,580; Vivid resourcing - Local Plan consultant support senior planning officer - £15,843.00; AECOM - Preparation of the Sustainability Appraisal - £16,320; WYG - Preparation of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan - £30,696)

- Melton in the East Midlands (example given of Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and Housing Needs Assessments)
- Merthyr Tydfil (Wales) (who report use of private consultants for planning policy in 2017/18 as follows: Retail and Commercial Leisure Study - Lichfields - £11,500; Renewable Energy Assessment – Regen SW - £1,000 ; Employment Land Review - BE Group - £7,879.50 (plus £7,879.50 held in reserve for payment in 2018-19); Strategic Flood Consequence Assessment - Wallingford Hydrosolutions - £8,997; Flood Peak Flow Estimate for the River Taff and Nant Morlais Convergence - Wallingford Hydrosolutions - £3,565; LDP/CIL Development Viability Appraisal - £15,000 (held in reserve for payment in 2018-19))
- Mid and East Antrim (Northern Ireland)
- Milton Keynes (South East)
- New Forest Council (South East)
- Newcastle-under-Lyme (examples given of Employment Land Review and Strategic Housing Market Assessment)
- Newry, Mourne and Down (Northern Ireland) (who further responded that they had commissioned Inaltus Limited to carry out an appraisal of a Retail Impact Assessment by end of July 2018, at the cost of approx. £3,000 during 2017/18)
- North Devon (South West) (who gave the example of using consultants to assess the level of affordable housing contribution to ask for through the local plan policies)
- North Lanarkshire (Scotland) (who report that they have individual contracts with Ironside Farrar Limited for specific pieces of work within a multi-disciplinary consultancy framework agreement also involving South Lanarkshire, namely Policy Advice on the Strategic Visioning – Mixed Use Town Centres, the contract value is £22,000; State of the Environment Report and SEA Support, the contract value is £29,000)
- North Somerset (South West) (who report expenditure of £31,228 in 2017/18 to Wardell Armstrong LLP for landscape sensitivity consultancy)
- North West Lincolnshire (East Midlands) (who report that in 2017/18 they commissioned work as follows: AECOM £2,536 Sustainability Appraisal in respect of Local Plan; DTA Ecology £1,200 Habitats Regulations Assessment in respect of Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document; Edwards and Edwards £4,170 Highways assessment in respect of Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document; Planit X £30,910.69 Consultancy support in respect of Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document)
- Nottingham (East Midlands)
- Nottinghamshire (East Midlands) (who responded that they use consultancies to prepare technical documents and give technical advice in respect to flood and transport issues in relation to Minerals and Waste Local Plans with approximately £15,000 to AECOM for this in 2017/18)
- Nuneaton and Bedworth (West Midlands)
- Pembrokeshire (Wales) (who confirmed they undertake some evidence base papers in house but others are commissioned externally, with a budget of £46,110 for this in 2017/18, some of which can be recovered from the Welsh government grant assistance)
- Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (Wales) (examples of landscape assessment and development viability appraisal given)
- Pendle (North West)
- Rutland (East Midlands)
- Sevenoaks (South East)
- South Downs National Park (South East)
- South Kesteven (East Midlands)
- South Staffordshire (West Midlands) (who pointed to their website for current contracts in relation to planning policy <https://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/council-democracy/contract-register.cfm>, which showed £7,262.72 to Warwick Economics & Development Ltd for an economic development needs assessment, £8,134.56 to Lepus Consulting Ltd for a Sustainability Appraisal for the local plan review and £4,951 to Atkins Global for a Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Site Allocations document)

- Staffordshire Moorlands (East Midlands)
- Stevenage (East of England)
- Stoke on Trent (West Midlands)
- Sunderland (North East)
- Surrey Heath (South East) (who reported consultants used for evidence gathering in 2017/18 as follows: Base Planning Consultants – Affordable Housing Viability – £22,550; Opinion Research Services – Gypsy and traveller Accommodation Assessment – £780; AECOM Habitat Regulations Assessment, Surrey Heath Infrastructure Needs Assessment and Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath Water cycle Study – £15,858; Land Use Consultants – Surrey Heath Local Plan Appraisal of Sites – £41,614)
- Swale (South East) (examples given of Employment Land Needs Studies, Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy and Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs)
- Teignbridge (South West)
- Telford and Wrekin (West Midlands) (who report one off commissions as required, but that there were none at all in 2017/18)
- Tewksbury (South West)
- Tonbridge and Malling (South East of England)
- Wakefield (Yorkshire and the Humber) (who reported that in the 2017/18 financial year the following was spent: £14,289.52 (including VAT) to fund the production of the Wakefield Design Guides (The Wakefield District Residential Design Guide and the Wakefield City Urban Design Framework, both of which are adopted Supplementary Planning Documents). These were produced by Cultural Industries Quarter Agency, trading as Integrate Plus; £11,976 (including VAT) to fund the production of the Wakefield Industrial Land Market Assessment to provide evidence to support the emerging Wakefield District Local Plan. This was produced by Cushman & Wakefield Debenham Tie Leung Limited; £11,976 (including VAT) to fund the production of the Wakefield Office Market Assessment to provide evidence to support the emerging Wakefield District Local Plan. This was produced by Cushman & Wakefield Debenham Tie Leung Limited)
- Waltham Forest (Greater London)
- Warwick (West Midlands)
- Watford (East of England) (who report that in 2017/18 they used the services of the following private consultants to prepare evidence studies for the preparation of their local plan at a total cost of £42,984: Amec Foster Wheeler for a stage 1 Green Belt study joint with Three Rivers Borough Council - £12,480; Project Centre to undertake a study on Local Plan Parking Standards - £18,750; Clearview to undertake our Sustainability Appraisal of the Issues and Options work - £11,752)
- Welwyn Hatfield (East of England)
- Westminster (Greater London) (who report that the Planning Policy team do make use of consultants to prepare evidence base for the team to support their draft policies, or to suggest options for policy, but not to develop the policies themselves. The company used is BNP Paribas and t£10,950 was paid in 2017/18)
- Winchester (South East)
- Wolverhampton (West Midlands) (In 2017/18, total expenditure for the preparation of evidence on particular technical issues was £55,758. The consultancies that we employed were Opus Consult, KKP Consultants and the Black Country Core Strategy Review Programme Manager)

Additionally, some Councils responded that it was not routine to use consultants to develop planning policy but that staff shortages meant use of private sector consultants for planning policy work. Hinckley and Bosworth Council (East Midlands) reported they had used consultants to cover staff shortages and in 2017/18 they had paid £71,715.75 for consultants for planning policy.

Mansfield Council's response has been noted already above. Slough Council (South East) reported that the cost of agency staff to support the planning policy service for the last financial year was £3,334.38 (sourced via Matrix SCM Ltd).

Similarly, South Somerset Council (South West) noted that it was not routine to use agency staff to write planning policy on behalf of the Council, however, due to staff leaving and to cover a period of

transformation they have been using an agency planner to support the planning policy team and ensure the Local Plan review progresses. The spend on this was £62,220 in 2017/18 and the company used was Matchtech.

Tunbridge Wells Council (South East) reported they had used one private consultant to cover a planning policy officer on maternity leave during 2017/18.

In total, there are thus 106 different local planning authorities, from all parts of the UK, who have directly reported use of private sector consultancies in respect to their planning policy function (24% of the total).

Routine use of consultants: enforcement

A total of 23 authorities responded to the FOI that they made routine use of consultants to conduct planning enforcement work on behalf of the Council. All 23 of these authorities were in England, with a wide geographical spread and mix of both Conservative (13) and Labour (10) controlled authorities.

Ashfield Council in the East Midlands reported that a company called Matchtech had been used to undertake enforcement work for the Council, at a cost of £35,102.04 in 2017/18.

Ashford Council in the South East explained that there was no policy to use consultants 'routinely' but that long term staff shortages have dictated the need to use consultants for enforcement work intermittently for approximately the last three years, with a number of different contractors used.

Aylesbury Vale Council in the South East had apparently used the Oyster Partnership as a recruiting agent and a directly contracted consultant in relation to planning enforcement, at a cost of £61,430 in 2017/18. Canterbury Council in the South East had also used the Oyster Partnership at a cost of £47,427 in 2017/18.

Castle Point Council in the South East had not made routine use of private consultants for enforcement work in the 2017/18 financial year but explained that they had recently signed a contract with Regional Enterprises (the Barnet – Capita organisation) for enforcement case support for an eight week period at a cost of approximately £10,000.

Corby Council in the East Midlands had used Hays to provide agency staff to undertake planning enforcement work for them.

Ealing Council in Greater London had external provision to support planning enforcement work, but this has already been discussed above under 'partial outsourcing', as for East Staffordshire Council in the West Midlands.

In Greater London, Hackney Council explained that they had just entered into a framework agreement with Ivy Legal (Ivy Planning) for direct action related to planning enforcement work, however this had only been implemented in 2018/19 so there was no expenditure in 2017/18. Harrow Council, meanwhile, said that they employed a company called Enforcement Services to undertake direct action on their behalf as and when required, for example demolition of unauthorised development. Hillingdon Council responded similarly that they do not employ private sector consultants to undertake the day-to-day work of planning enforcement but may on occasion use a private company to help undertake specific enforcement action such as direct action to stop an unlawful use to continue.

Havant Council, in the South East, responded that although it was not routine to use planning consultants to undertake enforcement work, they had utilised consultants (S Andrews) to fill gaps in service delivery. In 2017/18 there had been a spend 'in the region' of £48,000 but all services had been provided by in-house staff again since May 2018.

Hyndburn Council, in the North West, employed a planning enforcement officer from an agency named Park Avenue for three months for £15,740.93 due to difficulties associated with recruiting an enforcement officer. Ipswich Council, in the East of England, had similarly used agency staff to help with

planning enforcement work on a needed rather than routine basis in 2017/18, using the Oyster Partnership at a cost of £33,417.

Merton Council reported that they had used Regional Enterprises for some 'minor' planning enforcement work for three months this year only.

Rossendale Council in the North West have been using a consultant enforcement officer since April 2018 only.

Sedgemoor Council in the South West have used agency resource in planning enforcement 'on and off' over the last two years to support the function at a cost of £35,868 in 2017-18 but apparently no longer rely upon this to conduct their enforcement function.

Selby Council, Yorkshire and the Humber, had also used private sector agencies to provide staffing resources to support development management and enforcement in 2017/18 at a cost of £228,023 for both.

Stratford-on-Avon Council in the West Midlands have used one person from a small planning consultancy, MSC Planning Ltd, to assist with enforcement work when the need arises and also filled a post by agency staff from Park Avenue for six months in 2018.

Surrey Heath Council, in the South East, had used Ivy Legal to support one particular enforcement case in 2017/18 at a cost of £89,057.12. Waltham Forest Council, Greater London, were also using Ivy Legal to undertake some of their enforcement work.

Wyre Council in the North West reported that they use agency staff or private sector consultants for enforcement work only where necessary to cover short term vacancies (e.g. maternity leave), where posts are unable to be filled, or where there are temporary increases in workloads. Various consultants or agencies may be used depending on the outcome of a procurement process (assessing cost and quality) and in 2017/18 a total of £15,377.49 had been spent on this.

Finally, Hertfordshire County Council, in the East of England, had secured additional resource for enforcement via a specialist consultancy, 3rE Planning Ltd, due to staff shortages and pressure of casework.

In addition, although they answered that they did not make 'routine' use of private consultants in relation to planning enforcement, there were a number of authorities who did add a note to explain that they had to make use of agency staff in relation to planning enforcement. These were:

- Cherwell Council (South East) (reported occasionally using some agency staff for planning enforcement when workloads peak)
- Christchurch and East Dorset Councils (South West) (highlighted that they do employ staff from various employment agencies as and when required to provide assistance in enforcement, and to undertake specific projects for their shared service partnership. The cost was £130,094.65 in 2017/18)
- Gloucester Council (South West) (report occasional use of agency staff for planning enforcement. In 2017/18, the company was Oyster Partnership and the amount paid was £88,187)
- Isles of Scilly Council (South West) (reported they had used agency staff for enforcement but not in 2017-18)
- Rochford Council (South East) (had spent £2,697.78 with Hays Recruitment for agency staff in relation to planning enforcement in 2017/18)
- Slough Council (South East) (had used agency staff to support enforcement at a cost of £51,568.66 in 2017/18 with use of Matrix SCM Ltd)
- Tewksbury Council (South West) (reported they had used agency staff for enforcement but not in 2017-18)

This gives 31 local planning authorities responding to the FOI with direct evidence of using private consultancies to support their planning enforcement function. All 31 are in England.

Other issues: agency staff, shared services and other support

Agency staff

The FOI did not directly ask about the use of agency staff to provide planning functions. Some authorities did indicate such use with respect to the questions on the use of consultants, as already discussed. Some others volunteered information about the use of agency planners elsewhere in their responses (in relation to companies providing support for planning or as to who employed planners).

Arun Council replied that the Council has used a number of agency staff from time to time when needed. Agency staff work within the Council offices and work in the same way as a member of staff.

Basildon Council, East of England, reported that they have used a number of temporary staff to help deliver statutory planning services and support services for the planning function of the Council. In total nine different temporary staff have been used at a cost of £273,542.27 in 2017/18. Some of these staff have been procured through specialist agencies and employed on temporary contracts and some have been employed directly by the Council.

Brent Council, Greater London, reported that at the time of responding they had two agency staff in planning: one employed by Giant Professional Ltd and one employed by Liberty Bishop UK Ltd.

Corby Council, East Midlands, responded that they had used agency staff in planning from Oyster, Carrington West, Hays and Park Avenue.

Croydon Council, Greater London, reported that when they do need to use temporary agency staff in planning these are sourced through Adecco.

Hackney Council, Greater London, use agency workers on occasion (recruited through a council-wide framework agreement with Matrix) but not for posts that have delegated authority to make decisions on planning applications or related matters.

Haringey Council, also in Greater London, reported that the majority of planners are directly employed by the council, but some come from Hays. Of the 39 occupied posts (there are 2 vacant posts), 26 were permanent staff and the other 13 were agency staff (at the time of responding to the FOI request).

Harlow Council, East of England, had agency cover for one development management planner on maternity leave (from Matchtech Ltd) and one agency consultant (from Macdonald and Company Ltd) in the forward planning team at the time of responding.

Hart Council, South East, responded that they have used agency staff to periodically cover staff turnover with use of Macdonald and Company, the Oyster Partnership and Vivid Resourcing Ltd.

Islington Council, Greater London, report a 'small number' of agency / contract workers in development management to deal with planning applications. They are sourced through Reed (who are the Council's agency contract holder). Lewisham Council, also in Greater London, similarly report use of Reed.

Milton Keynes Council, South East, reported that they have employed staff on temporary contract to bridge the gap whilst permanent recruitment occurs and on occasion to provide some additional, temporary capacity. These staff have been employed through the following recruitment agencies: Hays, Oyster, Macdonald & Company.

South Somerset Council, South West, were employing five agency staff at the time of responding to the FOI request, each for between three- and six-month appointments. These staff were sourced from different recruitment agencies: Oyster Partnership, Carrington West, Park Avenue, Matchtech and Red Berry. Although they are employed by the recruitment agencies, they are interviewed and tested by the Council before engagement and are then either managed or controlled by permanent council planners or set bespoke task and finish projects by those permanent staff.

Surrey Heath Council, South East, reported using agency staff from Matchtech to cover staffing shortages in development management at a cost of £34,160.16 in 2017/18.

Tandridge Council, South East, responded that they sometimes used agency staff with use made of Park Avenue, Oyster Partnership Matchtech and Carrington West as well as temporary use of consultants Aspect Planning with some additional use of agency staff recently due to a Council transformation project called Customer First.

Windsor and Maidenhead Council, South East, had two agency staff in development management and two agency staff in planning policy at the time of responding to the FOI request.

Woking Council, also in the South East, reported two agency staff in planning, recruited from Oyster Partnership and G2 Recruitment.

West Sussex County Council, South East, have backfilled planning policy vacancies with staff from two consultancies: Adams Hendry (a 20-month contract worth £150,000) and Blueprint Planning and Development (a seven month contract worth £90,000).

The following reported some agency staff without providing further details or just the name of the companies providing those staff:

- Ashfield Council (East Midlands)
- Ashford Council (South East)
- Bassetlaw Council (East Midlands)
- Bolton Council (North West)
- Bournemouth Council (South West)
- Bromley Council (Greater London)
- Charnwood Council (East Midlands)
- Ealing Council (Greater London)
- Greenwich Council (Greater London)
- Hastings Council (South East) (who said this was two staff at the time of responding)
- Mole Valley Council (South East) (who said they use Hays)
- Nottingham Council (East Midlands)
- Oxford Council (South East)
- Sutton Council (Greater London) (who said they use Adecco)
- Taunton Deane (South West) (who report use of Vivid, Park Avenue and Oyster Partnership)
- Tower Hamlets (Greater London) (who said they use Adecco)
- Waltham Forest (Greater London)
- Warrington (North West) (who said they use Matchtech, Oyster Partnership, Park Avenue and Urban vision)
- West Somerset (South West) (who report use of Vivid, Park Avenue and Oyster Partnership)

This gives a total of 36 local authorities, all in England, reporting using agency staff in planning as part of their response in relation to support for planning and/or the employment status of staff.

Shared services

The FOI did not directly ask about shared services, but with the spectre of austerity within local government, a number of authorities across England have entered into shared service arrangements. Sometimes this includes all services, but sometimes just some services; sometimes this is as a prelude for more formal local government reorganisation with council mergers but in other cases it appears that the two authorities will remain separate for the foreseeable future.

In their responses to the FOI, it was reported planning was run as a fully shared service between the following councils:

- Adur and Worthing (in the South East)

- Babergh and Mid-Suffolk (in the East of England) (who said they operate a shared service for all services, including planning, but each Council retained their own members and remained separately sovereign)
- Bromsgrove and Redditch (in the West Midlands)
- Cherwell and South Northamptonshire (in the South East / East Midlands) (but this may end due to local government reform in Northamptonshire)
- Chiltern and South Bucks (in the South East)
- Christchurch and East Dorset (in the South West) (who explained that this will change again 2019 as all existing councils in Dorset will then be merged into two larger unitary authorities with Christchurch being in one and East Dorset in the other, as detailed at <https://futuresdorset.co.uk/>)
- Eastbourne and Lewes (in the South East)
- Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury (in the West of England) (who operate together under the banner 'West Suffolk' and will formerly merge in 2019)
- North Dorset, West Dorset and Weymouth and Portland (in the South West)
- South Hams and West Devon (in the South West)
- South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse (in the South East)
- Suffolk Coastal and Waveney (in the East of England) (who operate together under the banner of 'East Suffolk' and will formerly merge in 2019)
- Taunton Deane and West Somerset (in the South West) (who reported that the same staff work on planning across both authorities and the two authorities will formerly merge in April 2019)

East Hampshire and Havant Councils, in the South East, reported that both authorities still have separate planning teams, but the management of those teams is shared with one head of planning and one deputy head of planning for both authorities, and some sharing of specialist internal advice such as conservation and landscape.

Richmond and Wandsworth Councils, in Greater London, have a shared staffing arrangement (detailed at https://www.richmond.gov.uk/council/how_we_work/wandsworth). Each borough retains a separate development management teams, but planning policy, conservation and urban design and planning enforcement are shared services across both boroughs.

Rutland Council, in the East Midlands, said that they have a shared service arrangement with South Kesteven Council (also in the East Midlands) which consists of the secondment of South Kesteven employees to support the planning functions of Rutland Council on the following basis: Strategic Director (70% of time); Planning Policy Manager (40% of time); Development Management Manager (40% of time); and Conservation Officer (20% of time).

Broxtowe Council, East Midlands, reported that they share a Conservation Officer with a neighbouring authority, contributing approximately £10,000 per annum themselves in an ongoing arrangement in place since November 2017.

Swale Council, South East, have a shared service for planning support (validation, registration and scanning) with Maidstone Council.

West Lindsey Council, North Kesteven Council and Lincoln Council (all in the East Midlands), have a joint policy unit reporting to a joint strategic planning committee to produce a Central Lincolnshire Local Plan.

Derbyshire County Council and Derby City Council (East Midlands) are working together on a joint waste plan with an officer working on this employed by the city council.

In Scotland, South Lanarkshire Council reported that they are a member of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Strategic Development Planning Authority (GCVSDPA). The GCVSDPA provide strategic planning advice to South Lanarkshire Council. The current annual contribution for this service for South Lanarkshire Council is £72,437.50. South Lanarkshire Council has been a member of GCVSDPA since local government reorganisation in 1996. The eight local authorities involved are East Dunbartonshire,

East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire Councils.

South Lanarkshire Council also reported that they were a member of West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS). WoSAS provide archaeological advice to South Lanarkshire Council. The current annual contribution for this service for South Lanarkshire Council is £17,784. South Lanarkshire Council has been a member of WoSAS since local government reorganisation in 1996. There are currently eleven local planning authorities involved: Argyll and Bute, East Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, North Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire, West Lothian, and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.

South Lanarkshire Council also reported that they are a member of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Green Network Partnership (GCVGNP). GCVGNP aims to make the Glasgow metropolitan region one of Europe's most attractive places to live, work and play through the creation of a large functional Green Network and it coordinates action at a strategic level. The current annual contribution for South Lanarkshire Council is £16,497. South Lanarkshire Council has been a partner of GCVGNP since 2006.

Snowdonia National Park Authority, Wales, reported that they receive mineral and waste advice from a shared service set up North Wales local planning authorities in March 2010. This shared service is run by Flintshire Council as lead authority, is set-up as a permanent service, and costs Snowdonia £1,942.57 annually.

Breckland Council, East of England, reported that some services are shared with neighbouring South Holland Council (in the East Midlands), but not planning, which remains separate between the two authorities. Bournemouth and Poole Councils (in the South West) similarly responded that some services are shared by not planning. Cambridge, South Cambridge and Huntingdonshire Councils have some shared services (including Building Control) between the three councils (branded '3C Shared Services) but not planning.

Other support

A range of other support being provided to local authority planning departments was also reported in various responses to the FOI request.

Arun Council, South East, reported that they use a company called Terraquest in the validation of householder applications under an annual contract worth about £20,000.

Ashford Council, South East, said that the Council does take specialist advice from outside organisations if relevant to the development proposal being considered, for example specialist retail and viability advice.

Birmingham Council, West Midlands, reported that Arup are providing planning support for the Langley sustainable urban extension. This is for a 9-month period that commenced in July 2018 with contract value of £94,560.

Blaby District Council, East Midlands, receive service support from Leicestershire County Council who advise on ecology, archaeology, trees and historic environment matters in the determination of planning applications, and in supporting the local plan process. It is a service level agreement and is ongoing. Ecology and archaeology advice has been provided by the County Council for 15+ years. Trees – approximately 10+ years. Historic environment – approximately 8 years. In 2017/18 they provided forestry advice for £23,387, contributions to environmental records for £10,446, environmental planning for £18,720 and building conservation support for £11,157. They also use Alkiki for urban design advice, since October 2015 and no end date to the contract nor any fixed value to this contract.

Blackburn with Darwen Council, North West, reported that a contract is not in place specifically for statutory planning services, but they have a partnership with Capita for property and highway services. This partnership also allows the Council to request non-core support work, outside of the

contracted services, as and when required. The current partnership has been in place since 2016 and lasts for 3 years.

Bracknell Forest Council, South East, responded that they get built conservation advice from Jacobs UK. The current contract at the time of answering the FOI was to the value of £63,395.00 (Inclusive of VAT) runs from September 2017 for a year, but Jacobs has apparently been providing conservation advice to the Council since August 2015.

Burnley Council, North West, receive external advice on ecological matters from the Greater Manchester Ecology unit on a case-by-case basis but at a cost per year of approximately £950 and advice on archaeological matters from the Lancashire Archaeology Advisory Service, again on a case-by-case basis and at a cost of approximately £1,800 per year.

Bury Council, also in the North West, receives advice on conservation issues from a consultant called M Nightingale, at a cost of £25 per hour plus travel expenses as and when required. This contract began in June 2016 and will end when a new member of staff completes their training. They also report receiving advice on retail issue on a major planning application in 2017/18 from Hollis Vincent at a cost of £5,260.

Cheshire East Council, North West, report that they receive planning support services from Civicance Ltd as part of a broader administrative support contract to the Council which commenced in April 2015. The contract runs for seven years at a value of approximately £1,700,000 per annum.

East Hampshire Council, South East, have received ecological advice from Hampshire County Council since 1999 as part of an annual contract with a value of £25,484. They also receive archaeological advice from Hampshire County Council as part of an annual contract with a value of £10,657.50. Urban Vision provide planning and design advice for the Whitehill and Bordon applications, which have been ongoing since 2015, at a £45,000 annual contract cost. Urban Vision also provided additional support for a particular application in December 2017 at a cost of £1,500.

East Lindsey Council, East Midlands, receive legal support at their Planning Committee from Mark Simmonds Planning Services as part of a contract running from May 2018 to May 2020.

Eastleigh Council, South East, have used GL Hearn as witnesses at public inquiries from development management appeals (five cases over the last three years, on a case-by-case rather than retained basis) related to housing delivery.

Elmbridge Council, South East, receive viability advice from Dixon Searle Partnership with the cost paid for by individual developers on a case-by-case basis. Surrey Wildlife Trust also provide specialist advice when required and have been doing this since 2010. The current contract costs £7,590 plus VAT per annum.

Epping Forest Council, East of England, report that they get historic environment / archaeological advice from Place Services (Essex County Council) at a cost of £16,392 per annum for an annual contract which has been renewed yearly since 2008.

Gravesham Council, South East, receive design support from Design South East under an annual rolling contract which has run from June 2005 and cost £12,420 in the last financial year. They receive archaeological advice from Kent County Council under an annual rolling contract which cost £7,802 last year. They receive specialist built heritage advice from a consultant under a contract that cost £45,045 and agricultural planning advice from Rural Planning Ltd on an annual contract in place since April 2005 at a cost of £2,400 last year.

Great Yarmouth Council, East of England, receive occasional specialist consultancy support to assist in the determination of planning applications or defence of appeals (for example specialist retail planning advice or viability assessment critiquing). They also receive advice on tree protection matters from an officer employed by Great Yarmouth Borough Services, which is a company owned 50:50 by Great

Yarmouth Brough Council and Great Yarmouth Norse (a company which is itself owned by Norfolk Country Council).

Greenwich Council, Greater London, report use of BPS and Christopher Marsh & Co. Ltd. To provide specialist viability advice for appeals at a cost of £7,210 in the last year.

Havant Council, South East, receive GIS, administration and technical support from East Hampshire Council to cover a period of maternity leave. They also receive technical advice regarding ecology and archaeology from Hampshire County Council.

Havering Council, Greater London, receive heritage themed planning support from Place Services (Essex County Council) under a demand driven arrangement in place since January 2017 due to the full-time heritage officer post remaining vacant.

Hertsmere Council, East of England, have a rolling contract (in place for nine months at the time of the FOI response) with Place Services (Essex County Council) for urban design issues.

Lewisham Council, Greater London, report some planning support from Idox and the Planning Portal but did not provide further details.

Mid Sussex Council, South East, get support for scanning and indexing of planning applications from TerraQuest.

Newham Council, Greater London, receive service support from BNP Paribas for independent financial viability services under a one-year contract (July 2017 – July 2018) with a value of £150,000 and environmental consultancy from Temple Group under a three-year contract (May 2018 – May 2021) with a value of £120,000.

Nottingham Council, East Midlands, reported use of a consultant to do planning related tree work as the permanent post has been vacant.

Reading Council, South East, have contracted out historic buildings advice to Jacobs (as part of contract also involving Bracknell Forest Council in place for three years) at a cost of approximately £20,000 per annum. Ecology advice is provided by GS Ecology Ltd on an annual contract of approximately £14,000 per annum.

Swindon Council, South West, receive ecological advice from Wiltshire Wildlife Trust as part of a two-year contract with a value of approximately £10,000 per annum.

Tamworth Council, West Midlands, report that JS Conservation Management and Town Planning provide advice on heritage matters under a two-year contract worth £19,000.

Warwick Council, West Midlands, use Idverde for arboricultural advice under a three-year contract worth £21,600.

Welwyn Hatfield Council, East of England, receive ecological and archaeological advice from Hertfordshire County Council at a cost of £13,100 for ecological advice and £4,800 for the archaeological advice per annum. They receive heritage advice from Place Services (Essex County Council) for one day per week under an 18-month contract with a cost of £47 per hour. They receive Section 106 and planning legal advice from Trowers & Hamblins on a case-by-case basis under a three-year contract. They receive visibility appraisal advice from BNP Paribas under a framework contract running for four years and paid for by developers when they submit viability appraisals as part of planning applications.

Wyre Council, North West, have a Community Housing Development Officer (whose role includes some support for planning on matters relating to housing provision) which has been undertaken by someone supplied by Vivid Resourcing under a six-month contract with a value of £24,000.

Northamptonshire County Council, East Midlands, reported that Idox maintained their planning application software.

Surrey County Council, South East, receive acoustic advice from RPS Environmental Ltd under a three-year contract (costing £28,857.17 in 2017/18), air quality and environmental advice from RPS Environmental Ltd under a three-year contract (costing £24,575 in 2017/18) and geotechnical advice from Peter Brett Associates under a three year contract (costing £27,042.74 in 2017/18).

Inverclyde Council, Scotland, report support for their document management systems from Idox with an annual contract which has been in place since 2008 with a value of £31,786 (including support for other council services as well as planning). Landscape architecture advice is provided by Land Use Consultancy and City Design Group on a case by-case but over five years, Land Use Consultancy have been paid £24,468 in relation to 16 projects and City Design have been paid £7,173 in relation to 10 projects. TGP Landscape Architects are also retained to provide archaeological advice but have not been used since 2016.

Midlothian Council, Scotland, receive biodiversity advice from The Wildlife Centre with an annual contract in place since 2008/9 (renewed subject to both parties being satisfied with performance and cost) with the current contract valued at £8,385 plus VAT per annum. East Lothian Council provide archaeological advice to Midlothian Council under a three-year service level agreement valued at £16,000 plus VAT per annum.

Moray Council, Scotland, apparently use Keith Hargest Retail Planning for specialist advice as and when required (relating to assessing the impact of large-scale retail proposals) with an average cost of less than £2,000 per annum. Carol Anderson landscape architect provides expert landscape advice at a cost of around £5,000 per annum. A service level agreement exists with Aberdeenshire Council to provide archaeological advice to Moray Council as a cost of £13,800 per annum.

North Lanarkshire Council, Scotland, report three individual contracts with Ironside Farrar for specific pieces of work, with the contracts awarded through South Lanarkshire Council's multi-disciplinary consultancy framework agreement. The first is policy advice on strategic visioning for mixed use town centres with a contract value of £22,000. The second is for a 'State of the Environment Report' and Strategic Environmental Assessment for £29,000. The third is for a planning appeals statement with a contract value of £5,645.

Derry and Strabane Council, Northern Ireland, have a service level agreement with Mid and East Antrim Council to assess and advise on environmental impacts as required.

Isle of Anglesey Council, Wales, apparently use 'WOOD' for unspecified planning service support on an ad hoc basis with a contract value of £49,095.60.

Brecon Beacons National Park, Wales, reported arboriculture advice (advice on works to trees with Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's), new TPO's, Works to trees in conservation Areas, effects on trees of development proposals) from Broadway Tree Services, an annual contract running for 5 years at £10,000 per annum.

Cairngorm National Park Authority, Scotland, reported receiving legal support from Harper McLeod, with fees for planning related advice / attendance at meetings in 2017/18 of £14,455.40.

Northumberland National Park Authority, North East, have a Service Level Agreement with an adjoining local authority for conservation advice. This is a three-year agreement, with a total of 15 days per year.

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, Wales, receive planning legal advice from Geldards under a three yearly contract worth less than £30,000 per annum. They receive ecological advice from Pembrokeshire County Council at a cost of less than £9,000 per annum. They receive archaeological advice from Dyfed Archaeological Trust at a cost of less than £4,000 per annum. They receive

agricultural advice from Carmarthenshire County Council on an ad hoc basis costing less than £4,000 in 2017/18.

These examples thus come from 42 different local planning authorities, located all across the United Kingdom. A common theme within the responses relates to specialist advice, particularly relating to archaeology, ecology and conservation / heritage matters.

Conclusions

As a result of the FOI, 391 examples of local authorities receiving support from other organisations to provide their planning services were provided by 225 local planning authorities (52% of the UK total): 86 involving other local authorities or authority owned companies and the rest involving the private or third sector (overwhelmingly the private sector).

There were eight authorities that might be considered having a fully outsourced planning department with planners undertaking development management, policy and enforcement tasks working for a company. Four of the five private sector outsourcing examples involved Capita. Three involved a local authority owned company.

Seen internationally, it might seem unusual that any local authority would have outsourced their planning function but compared to a number of other local authority services in the UK, there are still only a small number of authorities which have outsourced the full range of planning services.

A total of 24 authorities responded to the FOI that they had partially outsourced their planning services. There is clearly some overlap between this and the 90 authorities who reported routine use of private sector consultants in relation to processing planning applications, developing planning policy and undertaking planning enforcement work. No definition was provided of 'outsourcing' in the FOI request and only two authorities asked for clarification on this. There did seem to be a concern on some respondents to avoid saying that they had outsourced any part of planning, perhaps because this was seen as politically controversial, and in many examples there was a highlighting of the fact final decision making on planning applications or policy writing remained with council planners, even if much of the work leading to that had been done by private consultants.

It is also possible that some authorities used an interpretation of 'routine' to minimise examples of use of private sector consultants in relation to some of our questions under the FOI request. There were 41 authorities who reported routine use of private consultants in relation to development management, and a further 47 did mention non-routine use. Similarly, 23 mentioned routine use of private consultants in relation to planning enforcement, and a further 8 mentioned non-routine use but there were no obligations to mention non-routine use in response to our FOI request. One authority responded that it was widespread for authorities to use private consultants to help them process some planning applications.

This was even more noticeable in relation to planning policy, where 26 authorities reported routine use of private sector consultants but 80 more noted in their response that either there was non-routine use or that consultants were used to build an evidence base but not actually develop planning policy. It is possible that had we asked instead for any use of private consultants in relation to planning policy functions, every authority might have had examples. Indeed, one authority responded that it is standard practice to use private consultancies to prepare evidence base documents to inform policy development, but then have the planners who formulate policy directly employed by a council. The implications of this are of broader interest to the WITPI project and do potentially raise questions related to the power of knowledge and evidence in shaping planning policy and hence the way planning serves the public interest.

Some of the examples in relation to use of private consultants related to agency staff. There was no specific question about agency staff, but it is clear that widespread use of staff obtained through

specialist private sector recruitment companies like Mactech and the Oyster Partnership (amongst a number of examples) to help cover planner vacancies. Despite not being specifically asked, 36 authorities gave examples of this in addition to those mentioning this in response to use of private consultants. The amount being spent on agency staff could be fairly significant (up to £795,000 in a year). A number of potential implications arise from this, for example relating to continuity of work, and these have been raised in the focus groups conducted as part of the WITPI project.

There were also examples of private companies or consultants giving support to planning departments, such as registering applications or specialist advice when required in relation to things like conservation and ecological issues. This could also be provided through other local authorities, or a traded fund of a local authority such as Place Services in Essex. There were also examples of local authorities outsourcing parts of planning to other local authorities or operating it as a shared service between two or more authorities.

Overall, the FOI shows evidence of a number of different ways that the private sector is being used by local authorities in relation to the provision of planning services. This appears to be more widespread in England than elsewhere in the United Kingdom but there were examples from all parts of the UK and all regions within England. Reliance on agency staff and private sector consultants processing planning applications did seem more apparent in the south of England, and indeed one respondent from a southern English unitary authority added to their email that they thought the issue of the reliance on how private agency planners to deliver public planning was understudied and significant. Local authorities of all political control utilised the private sector in the various ways discussed in relation to their planning functions and there was no particular pattern of, for example, Conservative councils being significantly more prone to outsourcing than Labour controlled authorities.

A great deal of financial detail was provided by a number of authorities in their FOI responses. As these show, it is quite possible for an authority to be sending work out to private consultancies to assist in processing some applications in times of peak demand (particularly likely to be householder applications), develop evidence for a local plan, and provide specialist advice on particular cases and to also be receiving privately employed agency planners in to cover vacancies. This could easily amount to several hundred thousand pounds worth of work each year.

In order to fully understand the drivers, context and implications of this use of the private sector to help deliver local planning services, and the effect of organisational form on the realisation of the public interest in planning, the richer detail provided by qualitative study is required. This is provided elsewhere within the work packages of the WITPI project.

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November 2018

Acknowledgements

The WITPI team are hugely grateful to all the local authority officers who were responsible for responding to our FOI request.