

Decision by Portfolio Holder



Report reference: PAG-001-2018/19

Date of report: 07-June-2018

**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Planning & Governance

Author: Simon Hill (Ext 4249)

Democratic Services: J Leither

Subject: Individual Electoral Registration – Canvass Printing Contract

Decision:

That the Assistant Director of Governance be authorised to place an order with Electoral Reform Services for the printing of Individual Electoral Registration confirmation letters, home enquiry and individual voter registration (IER) forms and mail despatch for 2018 on the following basis:

- (i) without the requirement for seeking at least three tender required by the Council's procurement rules for the reasons set out within section (14) of this decision primarily the risk to the success of the IER process were forms and scanning solutions provided by different Company;
- (ii) that following consultation with the Registration Officer and Portfolio Holder, the Assistant Director of Governance is satisfied that the proposed terms provide value for money; and
- (iii) that the total funding required for this process does not exceed the existing budget for 2018/19.

ADVISORY NOTICE: <i>A Portfolio Holder may not take a decision on a matter on which he/she has declared a Pecuniary interest. A Portfolio Holder with a non-pecuniary interest must declare that interest when exercising delegated powers.</i>	
I have read and approve/ do not approve (delete as appropriate) the above decision:	
Comments/further action required:	
Signed: Cllr J Philip	Date: 8 th June 2018
<i>Non-pecuniary interest declared by Portfolio Holder/ conflict of non-pecuniary interest declared by any other consulted Cabinet Member:</i> None	<i>Dispensation granted by Standards Committee:</i> Yes/No or n/a N/A
Office use only: Call-in period begins: 8 th June 2018	Expiry of Call-in period: 14 th June 2018

**After completion, one copy of this pro forma should be returned to
Democratic Services IMMEDIATELY**

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Portfolio Holder:

Reason for decision:

1. The Council is required to undertake an annual Electoral Registration Canvass each year. The Council's Electoral Registration System is provided by the company that has, for several years, printed the electoral canvass forms and despatched them via directly via the royal mail. In addition the company provide online services which provide daily integrated updates from those registering using online, sms and phone services.
2. The IER system requires Elections to check their records against those retained by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and then, based on that information, write to each household on the electoral register.
3. The Registration Officer is of the view that the nature of the Electoral Registration Service (ERS) integrated service provides the Council with the best current option in terms of its combined needs for the annual canvass. The Company could normally been engaged using a Council order form as this year's printing estimate falls below the threshold for the requirement to obtain three quotations but if postage charges (which are unavoidable regardless of who undertakes the contract) are taken into account the estimate is in the region of £36,000, which is within the current budget sums.

Options considered and rejected:

4. The Council could seek to obtain 3 quotations as may be required by Contract Standing Orders. This option has been rejected on the grounds that it introduces a high level of risk that using separate printing companies could adversely affect the ability of the Council to meet its statutory requirements for the process. Additionally compatible online registration can only be provided by ERS as a partner company of Xpress Elections Management Software.

Background Report:

5. In 2014 the Government introduced a new system for electoral registration. This year the Council will undertake its annual canvass between August and the end of November, the Council will be required to submit its elector data to the government to be matched against data held by the DWP using our existing software supplier.
6. Based on last year's Canvass, ERS have provided the following estimate of printing costs for the various stages:

Initial Run	Estimated Volume – 56,500	£4839.50
1st Reminder	Estimated Volume – 18,500	£1585.50
2nd Reminder	Estimated Volume – 8000	£714.00
3rd Reminder	Estimated Volume – 2500	£257.50
Total		£7396.50

7. The Council's Electoral Registration System is provided by Xpress, a company part of the ERS Group which now also includes the company that provides the Council's Committee Management System. ERS has, for a number of years, printed the electoral canvass forms and despatched them via directly via the royal mail and provided electronic registration services.
8. ERS has also provided the quote for online services which are unchanged from last year as follows:

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Portfolio Holder:**

Type	Cost
Contract Fee	£350.00
Monthly Charge	£200.00
Online Response	14.5p per response (12.5p if you also use ERS for canvass print)
Telephone Response	20.75p per response (18.75p if you also use ERS for canvass print)
SMS Response	20.75p per response (18.75p if you also use ERS for canvass print)
Email – ITR	£0.07 per response (£0.05 if you also use ERS for canvass print)

9. The Council's Procurement Rules allow such single order based contracts below £25,000. This year's contract however, including printing; online and postal charges is estimated at £36,000. Therefore the total cost to the Council will be as follows:

Printing costs to ERS (est)	£7,400
Online services element to ERS	£6,000
Postage costs (paid to ERS to Royal Mail) (est)	£18,800

10. Provision exists within existing resources to meet the cost of printing, and we also expect it to be supported by a Government grant as was the case last year. The final contract figures are difficult to estimate as it will depend on the number of matches with DWP data, public response to forms and take-up of electronic registering but are based upon previous years' experience.

11. At an estimated cost of £36,000, officers are normally required to obtain three quotations for such a contract. However, the variable printing element amounts to only £9,500 and online element £6,000 and printing may be less if electronic registration uptake is greater than expected.

12. Officers are proposing that again for this year, the contract be issued to ERS. Exceptions to the provisions of the procurement rules can be made on the basis that the Portfolio Holder is satisfied, on the recommendation of the relevant Director that the exception is of necessity and justified in special circumstances. In this case it is the interrelationship of the proposals to the back office electoral systems.

13. The letting of the contract on this basis would have the following safeguards:

(i) That the contract be let only following consultation with the Registration Officer and Portfolio Holder, and that the Director of Governance is satisfied that the proposed terms provide value for money; and

(ii) That the total funding required for this process does not exceed the existing agreed election print budget for the year

14. The exception in this case is justified for the following reasons:

(i) The forms printed for IER will be returned to the Council for scanning. If the company providing the scanning solution and the printers are different it introduces a significant risk to the canvass period being a success through incompatible forms and systems. The Council's canvass forms have never been printed by other than ERS or our own Print Section.

(ii) The printing solution includes the design and production of a compatible form and a security compliant secure upload from the electoral registration system straight to the print company. Transmission of nearly 55,000 house records containing personal details using another method would not be as secure.

(iii) ERS have access to cheaper methods of bulk postage at the Royal Mail.

Resource Implications:

Existing resources employed:

Current External printing budgets total:	£11,000
Canvass postal budget total	£28,000
Canvass Electronic Registration	£6,000
Total	£45,000

Proposed expenses:

ERS printing (Estimated only)	£7,400
Royal Mail postage (economail @ 25.1p pu)	£18,800
Canvass Electronic Registration	£6,000
Total	£32,200

Assumptions:

Estimated volumes based last year's figures. That initial response to ITR and HEF forms and reminders is similar or better at each stage than last year.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Procurement Rules require the Spending Control Officer to ensure that the Council obtains value for money (Rule 9.2) and that if the contract sum is greater than £25,000 to obtain three quotations (Rule 10). It is proposed that this rule not be followed in this instance for the reasons set out in the report.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications: None

Consultation Undertaken: N/A

Background Papers: Estimate from ERS dated 4 May 2018

Key Decision Reference (Y/N): N

Equality Analysis:

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. This means that the equality information provided to accompany this report is essential reading for all members involved in the consideration of this report. The equality information is provided as an appendix to this report.