

## OFFICER DECISION RECORD SHEET

**Name of decision maker:** James Doe

**Service Area:** Planning

**Title of Decision:** Approval to use the Bloom Consultancy Framework to appoint Hyas Associates on a call on / call off basis to continue to provide Project Management advice and additional resource capacity to the South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan programme

**Decision made and reasons:**

**Decision:** Approval to use Bloom award a contract for to provide Project Management advice and additional resource capacity for a fifteen (15) months period to Hyas Associates

**Reason:** Hyas Associates have been providing ongoing capacity support to the South West Herts JSP programme since 2021. This has been procured utilising a Certificate of Authorisation with a contract ceiling of £74,999. Looking ahead to the work programme for 2024/25 and 2025/26, this cost ceiling will likely be exceeded within the next two months. Given the desire of the JSP programme team to facilitate continuity of support from Hyas Associates, procurement advice is that the most appropriate route to appointing Hyas Associates to continue to provide this support would be to use the Bloom Consultancy Framework. This framework works on a direct award to Bloom (a NEPO framework) who will coordinate a quote from Hyas Associates to continue to support the JSP programme.

**Commissioning process:**

The tender approach and associated specification was approved by the DBC Commercial Board at its meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

**Tender process:**

Given the desire of the JSP programme team to facilitate continuity of support from Hyas Associates, procurement advice is that the most appropriate route to appointing Hyas Associates to continue to provide this support would be to use the Bloom Consultancy Framework. This framework works on a direct award to Bloom (a NEPO framework) who will coordinate a quote from Hyas Associates to continue to support the JSP programme.

**Commercial Board:**

The contract award was approved by Commercial Board at its meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

**Reports considered:**

Procurement report not required.

**Officers/Councillors/Ward Councillors/Stakeholders Consulted:**

Sara Whelan, James Doe, Yvonne Salvin, Ben Hosier, Sue Foster, Commercial Board members.

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**Financial Comments:** Following review of the JSP finance tracker with Chris Outtersides I would recommend for HYAS a 15 month span at £5k maximum per month (£75k). This would come to a total of £79k once the 5% (£3.8k) Bloom commissioning surcharge is included. See also commercial board paper for 30/1/24 meeting.

Darren Flanagan, People & Place Accountant 20/2/24

**Deputy Monitoring Officer Comments:** Officers should ensure that an appropriate contract for services is completed prior to award of contract.

**S151 Officers Comments:** The recommended ceiling of £75k of spend on this contract is within the projects current budgetary assumptions.

### Implications

**Value for Money:** Hyas have been supporting the JSP since 2021 and have played an important role in delivering the JSP programme on time and within the agreed budget, as agreed by the six SWH authorities.

This support has been particularly critical since July 2022, when the JSP Senior Officer left the role and the programme was unsuccessful in recruiting a replacement officer (after two attempts). It will become even more important to the successful delivery of the JSP programme after April 2024 when the JSP Director leaves his role. At which point there will be a need to backfill some areas of work that he has been leading on until a decision is made by the SW Herts partnership as to how to take recruitment forward.

Continuing to use Hyas on a 'call-on' basis to support the team is proposed for the following reasons:

#### Knowledge and experience

In the time that they have been supporting the JSP programme, Hyas have built up considerable knowledge and expertise in a wide range of key areas of work. This includes supporting the Government-funded digital Proptech projects which requires detailed digital knowledge and skills beyond those typically held by planning professionals. They also bring experience from other, strategic areas of work which they are supporting and have supported in the past. This includes the North Essex garden Communities Project. Hyas have also developed a strong and efficient working relationship with the JSP programme team as well as Officers from the other SWH authorities who are part of the SW Herts JSP programme.

#### Flexibility

One of the key benefits of using Hyas is that they offer considerable flexibility when compared to other agency resource. This is both in terms of the ability to match the most appropriate member of staff with the task in hand, the number of hours worked per month and the location of their offices.

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### *(a) Task*

As well as the examples of work areas referred to above, Hyas currently provide technical support in the management of the JSP website, including setting up online consultations. These are skills that would be unlikely to be held by a mainstream agency planner. For tasks like this, Hyas allocate the work to a junior member of the team who has a technical background. Conversely, when submitting funding bids to Government, advice has been sought from Hyas's Planning Director, due to his past experience in the civil service and hence understanding of how such bids are assessed.

### *(b) Workload*

Hyas are also able to accommodate peaks and troughs of demands in terms of what support the JSP requires in any given month. This does vary considerably depending on which projects are 'live' and whether or not the team is preparing for a public consultation or other key event. This need for flexibility will increase after Easter 2024 when the current JSP Director leaves to take up another role. There will be a delay in any move to backfill this role as this needs to be discussed and agreed with senior Officers in the SW Herts partnership and reflect a number of wider considerations regarding the scope and timetable for the JSP programme.

### *(c) Location*

In a small team such as that in place for the JSP, the ability to have face-to-face meetings is critical. Hyas are relatively locally based (Milton Keynes) and therefore able to easily attend in-person meetings which are being increasingly required – particularly for Government-funded projects. This is in contrast with the experience of some of the JSP partners who have had to employ staff based as far afield as Liverpool and Northern Ireland in order to obtain the right calibre of candidate.

### **Value for money**

A comparison has been made of the hourly / day rates of agency staff versus those for Hyas. These are as follows and are 'all in' costs, excluding VAT.

	<b>Hyas</b>	<b>Recruitment agency</b>
<b>Senior planner equivalent</b>	£60	£45-50
<b>Principal planner equivalent</b>	-	£55
<b>Team Leader equivalent</b>	£80	£75
<b>Director equivalent</b>	£90	£90

Whilst Hyas' rates are comparable to, or slightly above the agency examples given, when these are considered in the context of the flexibility the arrangement offers and the experience they can draw upon within the wider company, they are considered to offer very good value for money for the JSP programme.

**Financial:** The contract with Hyas would be for 15 months, and will be based on a £5k maximum spend per month (£75k). This would come to a total of £79k once the 5% (£3.8k) Bloom commissioning surcharge is included.

### **Risk:**

- a. **Incorrect procurement process followed, risk of legal challenge:**  
Addressed by ensuring that the Council's procurement policies are followed, by

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utilising the Bloom consultancy framework.

b. **That funding for the project is not available:** The approved JSP budget for 2024/25 and 2025/26 includes an allowance for this support in lieu of a full-time officer.

c. **Hyas are not able to undertake the work:** Hyas have confirmed that they are able to undertake the work in accordance with the specification set out in the draft Bloom Service Specification at Appendix 1.

d. **The cost of the project exceeds that which is allowed for within the JSP budget:** To mitigate this, the JSP team have liaised with Hyas, and they have confirmed an approximate fee based on the scope as set out in the Bloom Service Specification in Appendix 2. This will not exceed the cost of a senior officer as set out above and does not include the additional 5% service charge that will be imposed by Bloom.

**Officer Signature:**

Date: