

Cabinet

29 January 2026

Printing of Electoral Registration and Election Materials – procurement arrangements For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr N Ireland, Leader of the Council, Climate, Performance and Safeguarding

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team:

J Mair, Director of Legal & Democratic

Report author and job title:

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Statutory Authority: Public Contract Regulations 2015, Representation of the People Act 1983, Election Act 2022

Report status: Public

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The council requires a supplier who is able to print all election and electoral registration materials in accordance with legislation, including the provision of an automated response service in respect of the annual canvass of electors.
- 1.2 The existing contract has reached the duration and value approved by Cabinet in 2021. Cabinet approval is therefore sought to extend the contract for a further six months to ensure continuity of service whilst a procurement exercise is completed. This will allow officers time to review the available routes to market, undertake appropriate market engagement, and, subject to Cabinet approval, complete a compliant procurement process.
- 1.3 Cabinet's approval is also sought to procure a new contract for electoral registration and printing requirements, following completion of the above review, either via a call-off from an existing framework or through an open procedure under the Procurement Act 2023.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To agree to a contract modification, in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015, Regulation 72, to the existing electoral registration and

elections printing contract extending the term for a period of 6 months to 31 August 2026. The value of the permitted modification under Regulation 72 is no more than 10% of the initial contract value of £805,000 i.e. £80,500.

- 2.2 To agree the commencement of a procurement exercise for a contract for electoral registration and election printing.

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 To ensure that the council is able to fulfil its statutory obligations in respect of the delivery of elections and electoral registration functions. The current supplier has provisionally agreed to an extension of the existing contract subject to our internal approvals.
- 3.2 In respect of the procurement of a new contract, Cabinet is required to approve all key decisions with financial consequences of £500k or more. The estimated value of the electoral registration and elections printing contract is £1.85m over the likely duration of the contract.

4. **Elections and electoral registration printing requirements**

- 4.1 The council requires a supplier who is able to undertake complex printing in respect of all election and electoral registration materials in accordance with legislation, often at short notice. This includes:
- Poll cards
 - Postal votes (both ballot papers and personal identifier forms) including the packing and postage to electors.
 - Ballot Papers (including large print ballot papers)
 - Corresponding number lists
 - Election count “grass skirts” – the forms used to count the election of multiple candidates to one parish/ward
 - Postal vote refresh letters (both printing and posting to postal voters)
 - All other related election materials
 - Annual canvass letters and forms that are sent to all households in the Dorset Council areas, including postage to electors/households
 - Invitation to Register forms including postage to applicants for Registration.
 - The provision of a full management service for automated responses during the annual canvass including those received via telephone, online or SMS text including the uploading of the response information to the council’s electoral software.
- 4.2 There are currently two known available frameworks in the marketplace. The Crown Commercial Service (CCS) RM6297 Print and Digital Communications framework includes election print and mailing within scope; however, there is no evidence of use by local authorities for electoral printing, and Electoral Services do not recognise the suppliers appointed to the relevant lot. The second option, the CPRAS Printing Products and Services framework (led by Warwick District Council), includes a specific lot for secure and election printing, but although scheduled to go live on 29 October 2025, it is not fully

operational as suppliers are still being onboarded. The incumbent supplier, Civica, is not on any applicable frameworks and has confirmed it no longer offers standalone election printing services.

- 4.3 As none of the suppliers on either framework are known to officers, both the electoral services and procurement teams would wish to undertake further research on both of these frameworks to determine if they are able to meet our specification. This is our preferred route to market over the alternative which would be for Dorset Council to run its own procedure under the Procurement Act 2023.
- 4.4 Cabinet is asked to agree a 6 month extension to the current contract to enable a detailed review of available frameworks to be undertaken. A modification to the existing contract would enable this approach and provide continuity of cover in the event of a snap election or an unscheduled by-election occurring prior to the award of the next contract.
- 4.5 Cabinet is also asked to agree the commencement of a procurement project for a new contract for electoral registration and election printing. The proposed contract term will be for 2 years with an option for a 2 year extension, plus a further 2 year extension if both the council and supplier are content that the contract is being fulfilled to a high standard and still providing value for money. The estimated value of the contract over a total 6 year period is £1.85m. Whilst the council has a number of scheduled elections during the contract period, the contract spend will be determined by the number of unscheduled by-elections and referenda that the council may be required to administer.

5. **Alternative options considered**

- 5.1 Due to the complex nature of the printing processes, there is no ability to carry out this printing work in-house, even for a short period of time. All election and electoral registration printing is prescribed in law so there is no scope to adapt our printing requirements. The council may call off a contract from one of the frameworks, but officers have no knowledge of the suppliers available and wish to undertake a proper review of their ability to meet the council's specification.

6. **Legal considerations**

- 6.1 There is no parliamentary election anticipated within the extension period, therefore the value of modification is permissible under the Public Contract Regulations 2025, Regulation 72(1)(f) on the basis that the value of the extension is below the public procurement threshold and less than 10% of the value of the contract.
- 6.2 In the unlikely event that a parliamentary election is called during the extension period, the contract could be further extended on the basis of Regulation 72(1)(b), subject to further approval by Cabinet.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The financial implication of the extension to the existing contract is a maximum of £80,500. This is provided for in the service budget.
- 7.2 The financial implications of a new contract are estimated to be approximately £1.85m over the contract period but this will be determined by the number of elections that the council has to administer during the contract period.
- 7.3 Whilst the council meets the cost of all electoral registration activity, it is only responsible for printing and postage costs for Dorset Council elections. This is provided for in the service budget. The costs for all other elections and referenda are reclaimed either from the Government's Electoral Claims Unit or from the relevant town or parish council.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 8.1 The natural environment, climate and ecology implications of the contract were considered as part of the procurement process for the current contract, and implications of any future contract will be considered as part of the procurement process against the council's agreed position.

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 The well-being and health implications were considered as part of the procurement process for the current contract, and any future contract will be considered as part of the procurement process against the council's agreed position.

10. Risk implications

- 10.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:
Current Risk: LOW
Residual Risk: LOW

7 11. Equalities

- 11.1 Equality implications were considered as part of the procurement process for the current contract, and the equality implications of any future contract will be considered as part of the procurement process against the council's agreed position.

12. Appendices

- 12.1 None.

13. Background papers

- 13.1 None.

14. **Report sign-off**

- 14.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Corporate Director Finance and Commercial (Acting Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)