

CABINET
16 June 2026

Tree Care Framework Award

Report by Director of Environment & Highways

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - (a) approve the use of a Tree Care Framework Contract model to deliver planned and responsive tree management activity for trees within the county council's responsibility as highway authority and property owner.
 - (b) To delegate the award of the contract, and any future extensions, to the Director of Environment & Highways in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways Construction and Repair

Executive Summary

2. This report details the need for a Tree Care Framework Contract and sets out the approach undertaken to secure the best mechanism and value for money provision to deliver service requirements.
3. A new framework is required to support the management of a very large tree stock, including an estimated 400,000 trees within the Highway Maintainable at Public Expense (HMPE) and additional trees on council-owned land, through a proactive inspection and maintenance regime.
4. The contract tender was launched in October 2025 and 19 bids were received. The tender submissions were evaluated on quality (48%), cost (40%) and social value (12%) outputs. The contract is awarded in Lots (x5), based on the current second tier authority areas (Districts & City), with each area defined as a Lot. The contract was tendered as an open framework with an 8-year (3+3+2) term under the new Procurement Act 2023.

Context

5. Oxfordshire is a predominantly rural county with a population of approximately 725,000 inhabitants. There are over 3,000 miles of road infrastructure, much of which is tree lined. Approximate numbers of trees within the Highway Maintainable at Public Expense (HMPE) are estimated to be 400,000 trees.
6. Trees provide many benefits and it is essential to maintain them to realise these benefits that contribute to the priorities of the council.

7. The current Tree Care Framework is the only method for the council to efficiently manage tree care operations generated by ~100,000 trees being assessed annually. The previous contract expired at the end of March 2026 and needs to be replaced. Currently, only urgent, small-scale works are being issued to preserve larger packages of work that can be awarded on approval of the Tree Care Framework contract.
8. Without a replacement Framework, the council would need to tender individual works separately, which would increase costs, delay response times, reduce service resilience, place additional pressure on officer capacity, and create greater risk of non-compliance with procurement and duty-of-care obligations.

Service Need

9. Tree Care in Oxfordshire is a perennial requirement. It comprises a range of annual planned works according to a maintenance schedule and a range of unplanned works required on an ad-hoc basis in response to service requests and natural events.
10. A proactive, strategic management plan has been developed for trees within the HMPE that was implemented from 1 February 2020. Oxfordshire's Proactive Inspection of Trees on the Highway (OPITH). The management regime is based on a four-year cycle of inspection and maintenance. This involves surveying a quarter of all parishes (approximately 80 parishes per year) across the county annually and undertaking any necessary tree care within the following financial year. This equates to approximately 100,000 tree inspections annually; likely resulting in >70% of the trees inspected requiring some form of tree care. This is an estimate, since the tree stock within HMPE did not have any strategic management historically and therefore, there is a greater likelihood for tree care being required following each tree inspection.
11. Since implementation, the OPITH cycle has reduced insurance claims and brought the inspection commitment for insurance and legal purposes within the prescribed minimum of five years. This programme has enabled the service to become more proactive thus providing efficiencies related to:
 - reduced adhoc enquiry numbers;
 - more accurate financial forecasting;
 - increased customer engagement.
12. This has allowed a broader, specialist, professional service rather than the focus solely being on reactive Highway related inspections.
13. The council is responsible for trees on sites where it is the freeholder –there is some responsibility for trees on leasehold sites although the specific details are stipulated within any lease agreement. Many of these sites have trees present and some have been recorded on the Council's tree database, this figure is currently 61,000 trees but is estimated to be double that figure, approximately 120,000 trees.

14. A framework supports the ability for the council to complete any tree related operations across the entire estate. This enables the council to respond more effectively and efficiently to any tree related enquiry, thus improving customer service, simplifying processes and increasing officer output.

Procurement Approach

15. The existing framework is considered a resilient and value for money approach to provision of services that the council needs to procure in relation to tree management and care. As such, following consideration of alternative models, it was determined to evolve the existing arrangement by harnessing opportunities in the Procurement Act 2023.
16. As part of the business case evaluation, single provider and internal provision were evaluated, both of which failed to provide comparable value for money and these options significantly increased risk.
17. Without taking a framework approach, a tender would be required for every piece of operational tree care. On average, over 450 orders are issued per annum for tree care across the county. This approach would result in:
 - delayed response times;
 - increased tree care costs;
 - increased staff/internal costs;
 - reduced resilience;
 - increased officer time;
 - increased risk of foreseeable failure;
 - non-compliance with procurement regulations due to spend;
 - an inability to comply with duty of care.
18. The approach taken is to procure services for the framework in Lots (x5), based on the current second tier authority areas (Districts & City), with each area defined as a Lot. The contract was tendered as an open framework with an 8-year (3+3+2) term under the new Procurement Act 2023. The contract focuses on enabling tree works for all Local Authorities across Oxfordshire (Parish / Town / District / City) to reduce procurement need for other Local Authorities and abate challenges following Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) outcomes because the contract relates to Oxfordshire and all Local Authorities in the County.
19. The contract tender was launched in October 2025 and 19 bids were received. The tender submissions were evaluated on quality (48%), cost (40%) and social value (12%) outputs. Following evaluation, nine contractors are to be awarded the contract with a minimum of four contractors per Lot, ensuring geographic coverage and resilience while maximising distribution across multiple SMEs.
20. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) monitoring performance for every contractor on the Framework have been incorporated into the Contract as follows:

- (a) Health and Safety Audits
 - (i) Annual company governance (RAMS, Insurance, Staff Competencies)
 - (ii) Monthly on-site checks
- (b) Tree Care Specifications
 - (i) Quality
 - (ii) Timeframe
- (c) Communication
- (d) Meetings
 - (i) All contractors = Quarterly
 - (ii) Individual contractor = Biennial
 - (iii) Feedback
- (e) Social Value

Council Vision

21. Proactive tree care is supported by the [Tree Policy](#) approved by Cabinet in April 2022, which commits the council to achieve maximum life cycle benefits of tree assets, through delivery of proactive inspection and management, these are listed below:

- [Strategic Plan 2025-2028](#);
- [The Climate Action Framework](#);
- [Climate Action for a Thriving Oxfordshire](#)
- [Active Travel Strategy](#)
- [Oxfordshire Innovation Framework](#)

Council Priorities

22. The provision of the framework will ensure the council is effective and efficient in its management of trees, which supports the councils strategic plan priority of 'Greener Oxfordshire' in particular supporting creating improved public spaces and nature and biodiversity enhancement.

Financial Implications

23. The Tree Care Framework (TCF) is available for use by all Oxfordshire local authorities (including city, district, town and parish councils), providing a consistent, high-quality approach to tree care across the county and remaining accessible regardless of future local government reorganisation. Authorities opting to call off contracts from the framework will pay a modest access charge, set at Schedule of Rates plus 2.5%, which presents a small but ongoing opportunity to generate income, while responsibility for contract

management and performance monitoring will remain with each participating authority.

24. The Framework will be procured and funded through the existing service budgets within highways and property services, as detailed in the table below.

Budget	Revenue (Highways)	Revenue (Property)	Years of Contract	Total Value over maximum Term
Value	£630k	£50k	Up to 8	£5.44m

25. There will be no RPI or inflationary uplift clauses included in this contract; however, bidders will be permitted to review and revise costs, and the Council will retain the ability to add contractors at two points during the eight-year term. In addition, should there be a requirement to reduce expenditure, the Council reserves the right to scale back or reduce the volume of works delivered through this framework as necessary.

Comments checked by:

Rob Finlayson, Strategic Finance Business Partner,

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Legal Implications

26. The Contract will be procured pursuant to the process set out in the Procurement Act 2023. We do not anticipate Contract award having any significant legal implications. Risk and liability under the Contract is, subject to council's compliance with its terms, limited, because the opportunity contains no minimum spend requirement and should the council's financial position change, and/or funds ceasing to be available or needing to be utilised elsewhere there is no legal requirement or commitment to procure services under the Contract where funding is not available.
27. This procurement pathway enables the County to adhere to responsibilities in the following legislation and regulations:
- (i) Highway Act 1980
 - (ii) Health & Safety at Work Act
 - (iii) Management of Health & Safety Regulations
 - (iv) Occupier's Liability Act
 - (v) Local Government Act
 - (vi) Town and Country Planning Act
 - (vii) Wildlife and Countryside Act
 - (viii) Procurement Act 2023
 - (ix) Public Services Act 2012

28. All contractors awarded the framework will need to agree to adhere to the Tree Policy of the council in the conduct of the Services and any other applicable council policies when undertaking tree care instructed by the council.

Comments checked by:

Name: Fiona Harte

Title: Team Leader (Legal Services)

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On behalf of the Director of Law & Governance (Legal Services)

Procurement Implications

29. The Procurement Strategy has been developed by the service and the Commercial Delivery lead. The procurement has been in line with Oxfordshire County Council policies and national legislation, using the competitive open framework procedure, to take advantage of the opportunities that the Procurement Act presents in terms of inclusion, value for money and enhancing resilience of work delivery.
30. Evaluation weighting has been placed on ensuring contractors deliver the Council's Social Value Policy. These include measures aimed at potentially boosting local employment, use of SMEs in the wider supply chain and climate change targeted actions.
31. This procurement exercise to appoint professional arboricultural services to delivery tree care operations has been completed in line with all relevant legislation and guidelines.

Name: Lauren Hawkins

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Staff Implications and Considerations

32. TUPE does not apply.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

33. An equality impact assessment (EIA) has been completed and provided a positive output score with no negative impacts identified. The EIA can be found in the annexes – 'Annex 1_TCF_EIA_May26'.

- 34. Equality and Inclusion are a core component of the contract. They will be delivered and monitored through adherence to:
 - (a) OCC’s Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) framework [Including Everyone - 2025 - 2029](#);
 - (b) [Social Value Policy](#);
 - (c) [Tree Policy](#).
- 35. Social Value forms a critical component to support EDI delivery across communities. Social Value is at the core of the Tree Care Framework. The two years that the previous contract was in place delivered just under £1m in Social Value, which equated to nearly 40% more than was committed under the contract terms between June 2023 – June 2025.

Table 2 – Social Value from Tree Care Framework 2023-2025

Committed SV £	Delivered £
£694,010.92	£969,441.05

Table 2 evidences that not only would the award of the framework have the contractual commitment to Social Value but that the commitments are delivered and have previously exceeded the contractual commitments.

Sustainability Implications

- 36. A climate impact assessment (CIA) has been completed and provided a positive output score of +45. The CIA can be found in the annexes – ‘Annex 2_TCF_CIA_May26’.

Risk Management

- 37. There are few risks with approving the contract award. There is no commitment by the council to commit a specific amount of funding with each or any contractor. Should any budget changes take place, there is no risk to the council directly. If a contractor is not performing, there are other contractors that can be utilised to complete the necessary works.
- 38. Some potential risks are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 – Risk Management

Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation
A contractor is unable to deliver the works for the price quoted within the SoR.	Increase in cost and less work completed Contractor withdraws from framework	Medium Low – Due to reputational damage	Work offered to another contractor on the framework.

Works marked as completed when not completed	Foreseeable tree failure	Low – Due to reputational damage and criminal impact	Regular Monitoring of works by OCC Officers
Multiple companies to manage	Increased Tree Officer administration	Low	Tree Officers (5) are assigned a Lot which enables partnership and relationship building with specific contractors, not necessarily all.

Paul Fermer
 Director of Environment & Highways

Annex:

Annex 1_TCF_EIA_May26

Annex 2_TCF_CIA_May26

Background papers: Nil

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