

Divisions Affected – N/A

CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES & SAFETY

22 September 2023

Library Stock Contract

Report by Executive Director:

People, Transformation & Performance

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to approve the continued participation of Oxfordshire County Council in the consortium for its library stock contract.**

Executive Summary

2. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) Libraries currently are part of a long-running consortium arrangement for the purchase of Library stock (books, audio-visual/AV materials). The current contract runs through to March 2024, and discussions have started on the renewal of this contract.
3. The contract is due to go to tender in October, and to be awarded in December; with the contract coming into operation from April 2024. The provisional term of the new contract will be two years, with a possible extension of a further two years.
4. OCC Libraries are seeking approval to proceed with this process, via the current consortium arrangement, in order to deliver service continuity, achieve best value for money, and to meet growing customer needs.

Background

5. Under the 1964 Public Libraries Act, local authorities have a statutory duty to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service”. It is a core expectation that library users will be provided with access to a collection of library stock, available for loan and suitable for all ages.
6. The Library Service has a contract with specialist provider(s) to supply library stock. This contract covers the purchase of the core principal categories of Library Stock, i.e. printed books and Audio Visual (AV) materials for the

service (i.e. 44 branch libraries, the Home Library Service, and HMP Bullingdon).

7. The current contract runs through to March 2024, and discussions have started on the renewal of this contract. The annual value of the Library Stock contract is in the region of £450k-£500k. Given the value of this contract, the Library Service sought advice from Procurement, and were advised on the correct decision-making processes - hence this report.
8. For several beneficial reasons, outlined below (section 3.3), OCC has been part of a consortium arrangement for more than 25 years. The consortium that OCC is currently part of is the Central Buying Consortium, (CBC), which is the largest library consortium of its kind in the UK¹. West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) is the lead authority for managing this particular contract for the CBC.
9. The prospective contract is due to go to tender in October; with the contract coming into operation from April 2024. The provisional term of the new contract will be two years, with a possible extension of a further two years.
10. Oxfordshire's library service wishes to extend our commitment to the consortium arrangement when the contract is awarded in December 2023. We are therefore seeking retrospective approval, at this juncture, to continue towards contract award.
11. We are already in advanced discussions with the Contract Review Group (CRG) to finalise the contract specifications, before West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) will issue the contract for open tender. Oxfordshire Libraries will be engaged fully in the evaluation of the bids, which will take place in November and result in the award being given to the successful bidder(s) in December 2023.

Options Appraisal

12. The following options have been considered, but are not being recommended for the following reasons:
13. The vast majority of library services across the UK purchase the principal categories of books and AV through consortia. There are nine library consortia in the UK and Ireland, and these are generally geographically focussed, enabling members to more easily collaborate and work together.
14. We could explore joining another consortium; however, their contracts are likely to be on different timelines; they may not wish to expand their operations; and they would not be in such geographic proximity to the CBC. Additionally, joining another consortium at this stage would be a very challenging timeframe and would be unlikely to achieve any better benefits than the current arrangement.

¹ Oxfordshire Libraries is one of 54 Local Authorities and school library services from across the southeast and London. A sub-group of 15 members forms the Contract Review Group (CRG) who oversee the scrutiny and accountability of the contract. Oxfordshire's representative is the Co-Chair of this group.

15. Oxfordshire could look towards having an individual contract with specialist library suppliers. An open contract and tender would have to be set up, requiring specialist capacity from OCC Procurement team and additional contract management support, akin to that provided by the WSCC procurement lead.
16. It is highly doubtful that the same level of terms would be achieved (i.e. discount levels, additional benefits), and value-for-money would likely be compromised to a significant degree.
17. Public libraries can and do buy books from commercial bookshops (online or high street), but this is generally on a very small scale; when, for example, a library contractor cannot supply our needs - unusual book title, local small press publisher, self-published niche interest etc.
18. For large-scale, full library service provision, it would be practically inoperable, and would undoubtedly reduce value-for-money for the council, as discounts (certainly the same level of discounts) would not be available.
19. A new contract would need to be put out to tender, which OCC would have to manage individually. Courier/delivery services would be separate and costly; and library servicing costs and provision (i.e. getting the stock shelf-ready and available for lending) would have to move in-house, as a commercial bookshop simply would not be able to accommodate this critical aspect of operation (and again, capacity and resource/budget would be a major barrier).
20. Finally, there is not enough time to complete the market research and undertake open tender to all bookshops, including online retailers, before the impending end of the current contract in March 2024.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

21. **Libraries & Heritage Strategy** [Libraries and Heritage Strategy \(oxfordshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/libraries-heritage-strategy)
Specifically, the following sections:
 - Support for reading (page 6)
 - Current performance (page 14) - per date of report
 - Priorities (page 22) - Increase libraries and heritage contribution to learning and promote library's role in fostering literacy and a love of reading; and,
 - Maximise partnerships at local and national level to improve the sustainability of services
22. **Oxfordshire County Council Corporate Plan**
This contract will enable the library service to meet the following five out of the nine council priorities as set out in Oxfordshire County Council Corporate Plan 2023-2026:

- Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work through the provision of books which support knowledge and understanding of the climate emergency
- Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire through the provision of books for all ages and needs across the breadth of 44 library buildings, a home library service and inclusion of an HMP Prison library
- Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents through the provision of books which support knowledge and understanding of many of the health and wellbeing needs of local residents, whatever their age.
- Support carers and the social care system through the development of collections of books which meet the needs of carers as customers of the library service and residents who use the home library service or are supported through reading groups in care settings
- Create opportunities for children and young people to reach our full potential through the provision of books in libraries specifically for the needs, interests and curiosity of children and young people aged 0-18 years and their families.

Financial Implications

23. The current total CBC contract is worth c.£11M in total, and OCC's element of this is c.£480k. The emerging stock contract will be of a similar scale, but the total consortium contract value is yet to be finalised.
24. OCC Libraries' participation in this consortium contract is reliant upon an estimated annual spend of between £450–£500K (variations dependent on Section 106 investment and wider service budget level confirmation).
25. The revenue for this contract comes from a dedicated budget line – Library Collections (M37000), within the Library Service budgets.
26. There are no capital budget implications.
27. Bick Nguyen-McBride, Assistant Finance Business Partner has signed off this report from a Finance perspective (8th September 2023).

Legal Implications

28. Jonathan Pool, Solicitor (Environmental Contracts) has signed off this report from a Legal perspective (8th September 2023).
29. This contract will enable OCC to comply with its statutory duties. this contract will also enable OCC to fulfil its contractual agreement with HM Prison Service to provide library services at Bullingdon Prison.

Staff Implications

30. None applicable.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

31. This is not a new proposal, therefore an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been produced. However, the Library Stock Policy ensures that collections are acquired with all due consideration of the diverse communities that OCC Libraries serve.
32. For note, the proposal has also been assessed against equalities criteria by WSCC, which found no negative impact, particularly for those with protected characteristics.

Sustainability Implications

33. This is not a new proposal; therefore a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) has not been produced. However, within the contract specification is a core requirement for suppliers (and their supply chain) to demonstrate sustainability and environmentally conscious operating practices (i.e. waste management, transport, carbon footprint). Additionally, OCC Libraries have a strategic priority around Climate Action, and specifically engage local communities through our collections and activities in this area.

Risk Management

32.

Risk	Mitigating Action
If OCC do not enter into stock contract, supply of library books will be at risk	Procurement exercise via WSCC
If OCC do not proceed with consortium arrangement, supply of library books will be at risk and discount levels, value for money, and specialist servicing requirements will not be sustained	Continue with a consortium arrangement
The current discounts available from library suppliers are not able to be sustained	Market research suggests that the remaining providers in this market have made competitive offers to other consortia despite the declining spend from library authorities

Consultations

33. None applicable.

NAME Stephen Chandler, Executive Director: People, Transformation & Performance

Annex: None applicable

Background papers: None applicable

Other Documents: Current contract (2020-2022+ 2024) tender posting October 2019 [Decision - Procurement: Central Buying Consortium Library Group FRC01 19/20 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Contact Officer: Jane Mason
Library Operations Manager (stock & reader services)
Oxfordshire County Council
Email: jane.mason@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Contact Telephone: 07881 268231

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