



# Neighbourhood Planning Buying in services

Making sure you budget and use your resources wisely is an important part of managing your neighbourhood development plan (NDP) project. This guide note gives some basic advice on budgeting, managing contracts and buying in services.

## Do you need to buy in professional services?

Many groups jump straight to the conclusion that they need to pay a consultant to develop and write their neighbourhood plan. The thought of handing over the process to someone else to carry out for you is certainly very tempting.

Many neighbourhood groups have produced good plans without spending large amounts of money on consultants. The amount of financial support available to NP groups is limited and so it is important to spend your money wisely. It would be worth carrying out a skills audit to see what expertise there is within your community and what tasks can be carried out by volunteers (see also the guide note on Constitution and Structure for a Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group Steering Group.) Identify those things that you think will add value to the process – this may not be consultants, it could be on community engagement events and strategies, it could be on printing costs to make your questionnaires and newsletters eye-catching and engaging.

It will help to break down the process into the tasks identified in your project plan so that you can identify tasks that can be carried out by people in the community and identify any gaps that may need to be filled by consultants or other external providers. If you have limited finances, you don't want to pay people to do things which you could do yourselves. Remember that the Council can support your group with some services so always check with your Neighbourhood Planning Officer if any support is available. You can check the Funding and Support guide note on the toolkit to see if you are eligible to apply for technical support from [Locality](#) to help develop your Neighbourhood Plan.

## Writing a brief

If you decide that you need to buy in expert support either to produce your whole plan or to carry out specific tasks, make sure you are clear about the extent of the work, set it out in a brief and make sure that all parties are clear about timescales and tasks. (Remember, when considering the contract time scale, amendments may need to be made following consultation comments and this should be considered and factored into your brief). You would then advertise the brief and expect written proposals from potential suppliers. You might want to ask them to specify:

**Objectives** – do they understand what you want to achieve?

**Approach** – how do they propose to achieve the results you need? Is it reasonable and proportionate (and not something you could do yourselves anyway?)

**Results** – what are you asking them to produce? Is it a written report? What format do you need the finished result in?

**Roles and responsibilities** – be clear about who is providing input and information- they may need input at certain points from your steering group, to review progress or supply information. How much input do you want to have, do you want to review a draft document before the final version is provided?



**Expertise** – Are they the right people for the job – what skills can they bring to the process? You can ask them to provide examples of other work they have done so you can see evidence of their expertise. Contact other groups that they have worked with and ask if they were happy with the work provided.

**Price** – If you are clear about the approach and the required results you can be more precise about agreeing a price. If you can divide the price up into different elements of the work, then you could choose which parts you want the consultant to carry out. Are expenses included in the price?

**Timescale** – how does the piece of work fit with your project plan? Can you break the work down into milestones so that you can check that the supplier is on course?

Ideally you will want to have a few proposals to choose from and you may want to interview potential suppliers.

**Check your own rules** - You may have some rules on procurement within your Parish or Town council's constitution.

### Managing the Supplier

Actively manage the contract with the supplier to make sure they are on track. Having milestones in the agreed brief will help you to monitor progress and avoid unnecessary work and expenditure.

### Financial procedures

Your town or parish council may have its own financial regulations or procedures for contracts. The town or parish council is the qualifying body (see guide notes 'The Qualifying Body' and 'Constitution and Structure') for the production of the neighbourhood plan so the steering group may have to report to the town/parish council and follow their procedures. This will need to be included in the steering groups Terms of Reference which must set out their roles and responsibilities when developing the Neighbourhood Plan for their area.