

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

26 June 2025

### Part 1 - Public

#### Matters for Information



Cabinet Member	Martin Coffin, Cabinet Member for Finance, Waste and Technical Services
Responsible Officer	Damian Roberts, Chief Executive
Report Author	Gill Fox, Policy, Scrutiny & Communities Manager

#### Consultant Use 2024/25

### 1 Summary and Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide information on the spend and use of consultants by the council during 2024/25. This report fulfils the recommendation agreed at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2024 that the Council continue to closely manage future use of external expertise, and an ongoing review of consultant use at the Council be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.

### 2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

- 2.1 Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council.
- 2.2 Taking steps to monitor the use and spend on consultants, along with consideration of specialised skills, retaining talent and building in-house capacity contributes to ensuring value for public money and delivering excellent, efficient services for the borough.

### 3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That the information provided in the summary of consultancy spend in 2024/25 at Annex 1 be noted;
- 3.2 That information on consultancy spend continues to be provided to this Committee annually.

### 4 Introduction and Background

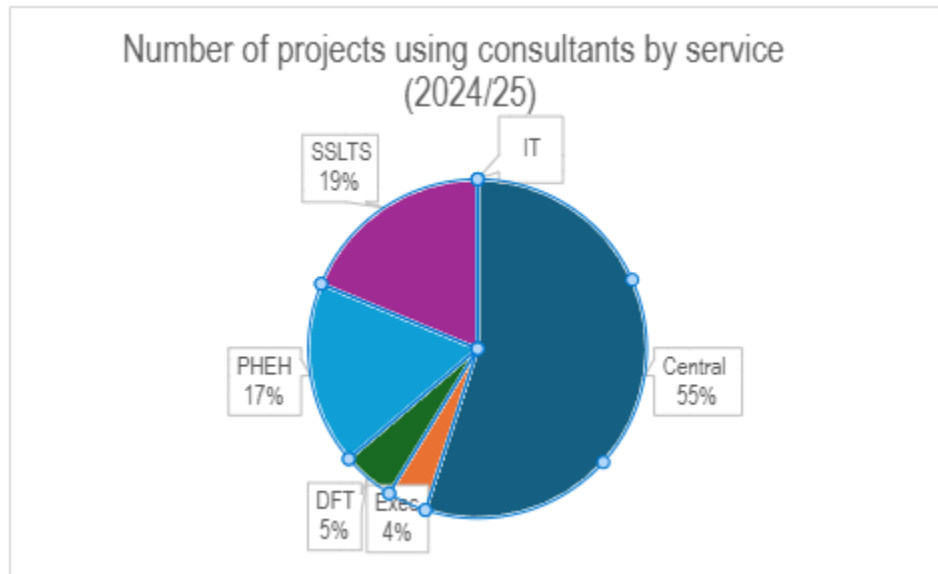
- 4.1 Last year the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested a review of the Council's use of consultants. A report on consultant use and spend was

considered at the 11 September 2024 meeting of that Committee. The following was agreed to define consultants: *“consultancy work which is providing knowledge, techniques and assets to improve performance that is outside of the Council’s “business as usual”. This would include the use of external third parties, providing expertise that is typically not available internally. Focusing on this aspect, would rule out the use of contractors who fill vacancies and are used for the day-to-day operational resources to maintain departmental function.”*

- 4.2 Recommendations from the review were agreed and are currently being implemented. For example, Human Resource Service and Communications, in collaboration with Management Team, have developed and launched a new Workforce Development Strategy, Behaviours and Appraisal process for staff. The associated process, policies and procedures are appropriate for following up on the Overview and Scrutiny recommendation that “the Council maintain its effectiveness at retaining specialist talent, to reduce the need for external experts going forward”. Similarly, services to continue to look for opportunities to collaborate with other councils as appropriate to service needs.
- 4.3 That report discussed at Overview and Scrutiny on 11 September focussed on the use of external expertise and not persons employed to provide day to day operational resource. As the first report into the use of and spending on consultants by the council, that report provided summary information for the period since 2020 to the report date. This report and summary information provided in the Annex 1 of this report covers the consultant use during the latest financial year, 2024/25.

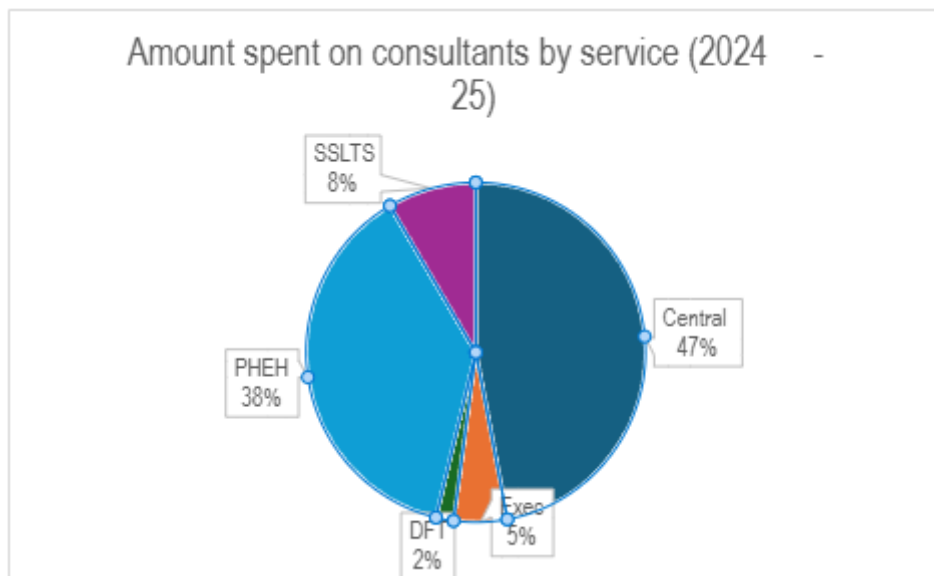
## **5 Overview of 2024/25 consultant spend**

- 5.1 Much of the consultant use is utilising external funding for time limited projects, without which, the projects would not be feasible, and the external funding would potentially be lost.
- 5.2 Where consultants have been necessary, they provide expertise that is not available in house. In these cases, recruitment of specialist staff with the relevant knowledge, is not feasible as they would be under occupied for most of the time, due to the specialist nature of the work.
- 5.3 In 2024/25 the council spent £986,732 on the use of consultants for 80 separate projects. Of these, 15 projects (or 19%) were ongoing multi-year projects, including providing evidence for the Local Plan. A breakdown of the use of consultants by number of projects for each service is shown in the following pie chart:

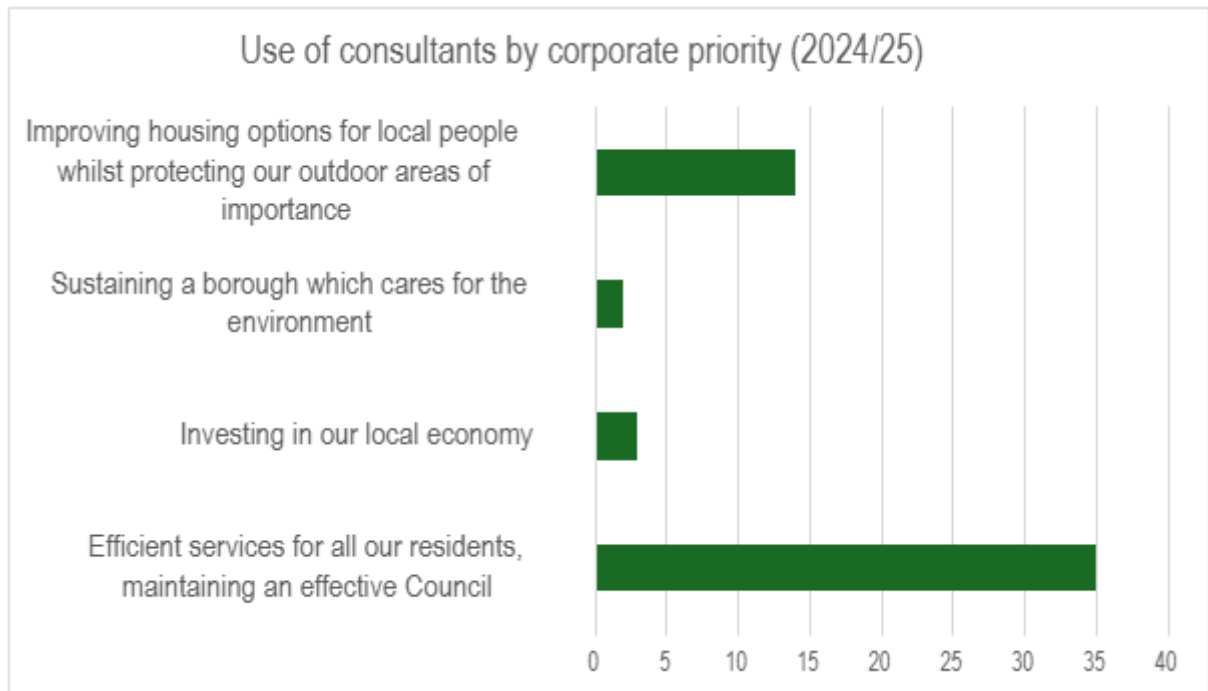


5.4 Services that made the greatest use of consultants were Planning, Housing and Environmental Health, in support of the emerging Local Plan, Central for the Tonbridge Castle Gatehouse works and Gibson East projects, and Street Scene Leisure and Technical Services for asset management and waste services consulting. However, when looking at total spending on consultants by each service, Street Scene Leisure and Technical Service spend is relatively low, accounting for only 8%. Together, work for the Local Plan and by Central services accounted for 85% of spend on consultants in 2024/25.

5.5 This information is shown in the following pie-chart:



- 5.6 The use of consultants by Planning, Housing and Environmental Health and Central Services is reflected in the breakdown of use by corporate priority. As shown in the following chart, most consultant use was in support of the priorities of 'Efficient services for all our residents' and 'Improving housing options for local people'.



Note: local government reorganisation work is included in the 'Efficient services' priority.

## 6 Other Options

- 6.1 There are no other options as Members requested the annual report on consultants use.

## 7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 7.1 In terms of spending, over half of all projects which made use of consultants (60%) spent £5,000 or less in 2024/25. Only two services, Planning, Housing and Environmental Health and Executive Services, have engaged consultants for multi-year projects for which spend in 2024/25 is a proportion of the overall project total. Again, these are mostly in relation to the emerging Local Plan and other significant projects that require specialist skills.

## 8 Risk Assessment

- 8.1 The risks associated with not using external expertise have been highlighted against each project in Annex 1.

## **9 Legal Implications**

- 9.1 Procurement is undertaken in accordance with financial regulations and council procurement frameworks. The use of a Waiver is undertaken in certain circumstances.

## **10 Consultation and Communications**

- 10.1 There are no further communications plans for this report.

## **11 Implementation**

- 11.1 Consultancy use will continue to be monitored, with 2025/26 consultancy spend collated and reported to this Committee during the next financial year.

## **12 Cross Cutting Issues**

### **12.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity**

- 12.1.1 Limited or low impact on emissions and environment.

- 12.1.2 Climate change advice has been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.

### **12.2 Equalities and Diversity**

- 12.2.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

### **12.3 Other If Relevant**

- Procurement
- Business Continuity / Resilience

Background Papers	None
Annex 1	Consultancy spend by Service 2024/25