

Cabinet

Report Title	Procurement and award of tree maintenance contract
Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 10 September 2025
Report Author	Ben Percival - Service Director – Environment & Public Protection Matt Gardner - Countryside Maintenance Manager
Lead Officer	Executive Director - Place
Lead Cabinet Member(s)	Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways
Why is this a key decision?	To be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
Wards Affected	(All Wards);
Identify exempt information and exemption category	Open
Is the report urgent?	No
Reasons for urgency (only where applicable)	N/A
Appendices (if any)	1.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks authority to undertake a procurement exercise and award through a framework contract to a minimum of three contractors for tree maintenance services across the borough for up to a 4-year term.

2. Recommendations

The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Place to undertake a procurement exercise for the delivery of tree maintenance services with a contract term of up to 4 years for the period 2025-2029;
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways, to award and enter into framework contracts with all successful bidders on terms to be agreed with the Executive Director for Place in consultation with the Service Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer, for tree maintenance services over a contract term of up to 4 years for the period 2025-2029;
- 2.3 The Service Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised execute any documents necessary to give effect to the proposal in recommendation 2.1 and 2.2 above.

3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations

- 3.1 Sandwell Council is responsible for the care and upkeep of approximately 280,000 trees. Not every tree needs maintenance annually, but those located along highways and on housing sites generally require attention every 3 to 5 years. This schedule helps ensure safety and tree health, balancing the need for oversight with practical maintenance intervals.
- 3.2 This report seeks to renew the current arrangement of appointing to a multi-contractor framework agreement for the management and maintenance of Sandwell's tree stock. Trees are a vital component of our urban environment, contributing to biodiversity, aesthetics, air quality improvement, and the overall well-being of residents. Sandwell Council owns a significant number of trees (approximately 280,000) across public spaces, parks, Housing sites and highways, necessitating regular maintenance to ensure they remain healthy, safe, and do not become a source of complaint from residents.
- 3.3 Maintaining trees is essential for ensuring both the health of the environment and the safety of people and property. Regular tree maintenance, including pruning, trimming, and thorough health assessments, is crucial to fostering trees' proper growth and structural stability. Such care minimises the risk of falling branches or entire trees, which can lead to personal injuries, damage to homes and vehicles, and disruption of public utilities like power lines. Identifying potential hazards through regular inspections allows for the removal of dangerous branches or deadwood before they become serious threats. Moreover, tree maintenance helps in early detection of diseases or infestations, providing opportunities for effective treatment, which preserves

the trees and prevents further safety hazards. Additionally, healthy and well-maintained trees contribute to public safety by improving visibility on roads and pathways, reducing the likelihood of accidents. Trees also play a crucial role in absorbing stormwater, thus reducing the risk of flooding and related safety issues. Overall, diligent upkeep of trees is vital not only for ecological and aesthetic reasons but also to safeguard communities against potential natural hazards.

- 3.4 Proper care addresses common resident concerns such as overgrown branches, obstructed views, and interference with property. Well-maintained trees contribute positively to the aesthetics of neighbourhoods and the quality of life for residents, fostering community pride.
- 3.5 The tree maintenance contract is set to span a duration of four years. The framework arrangement will ensure comprehensive care and management of the trees, ensuring their health and safety throughout the contract term. The allocation of funds is strategically planned to cover all necessary maintenance activities, such as trimming, pruning, disease management, and emergency interventions, to preserve the vitality and beauty of the treescape. The contract sets agreed prices (indexed) for approximately 30 standard tree jobs and effectively works as a measured works call-off contract, giving officers the ability to instruct contractors against an agreed cost schedule.
- 3.6 The estimated maximum value of £2.8 million over this period. It is important to note that whilst £2.8m is the estimated maximum value, there is no obligation on the council to award work to this value should these works not be required or not be deemed affordable. The valuation reflects the previous four-year contract expenditures. Additionally, larger scale projects concerning parks and highways are anticipated within the forthcoming four years, influencing this estimate. The valuation is reflective of both past financial patterns and anticipated future projects.
- 3.7 The procurement process will be conducted in an open market, inviting competitive tenders to ensure transparency and equitable opportunity for all interested parties. The intention is to select three successful contractors to become Sandwell Council's designated tree maintenance contractors. This framework agreement offers a dynamic and adaptable structure, allowing the council to engage multiple contractors simultaneously, fostering flexibility in responding to the varying demands of tree maintenance. This method not only streamlines operational processes but also enhances efficiency, as it facilitates faster resolution of issues and rapid deployment of resources when needed. By having multiple contractors on board, the council can optimise resource allocation and leverage the expertise of diverse service providers, ensuring that the highest standards of tree care and management are consistently maintained across Sandwell. An example was in Storm Darragh in 2024, when, by being able to call upon the services on 3 contractors, the

council was able to effectively manage 250 fallen trees without risk to residents or significant disruption.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 **Option 1 - not to enter a four-year agreement with selected tree contractors could pose significant risks and challenges across multiple areas.** Without a long-term contract, emergency tree issues such as fallen branches or trees due to storms or age-related decline may not be addressed promptly, increasing the risk of injury to residents and damage to property and infrastructure. The health of trees would likely suffer without consistent maintenance, leading to hazards from weakened or diseased trees that are prone to falling or shedding limbs. This neglect could also lead to more extensive and costly interventions in the future. Furthermore, with reduced maintenance capabilities, the council would likely face an increase in residents' complaints, as overgrown or dying trees can affect the aesthetics and safety of neighbourhoods and public spaces. This situation would strain community relations and place additional pressure on council resources to respond to individual issues reactively rather than proactively. Choosing not to secure a long-term agreement effectively dismantles a strategic approach to tree care, leaving the council vulnerable to unplanned crises and community dissatisfaction.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 No specific consultation; report seeks to extend existing arrangements which have proven effective.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The tree maintenance budget for 2025/26 is £658,100. This includes the following elements:
- General Fund £400,000 (not recurrent)
 - HRA Funded (strictly ringfenced to HRA tree stock only) £258,100.
- 6.2 To ensure an appropriate General Fund allocation exists moving forward to cover the remaining 3 years of the contract period, a virement will be undertaken to reallocate existing Place Directorate revenue budgets without impact on service provision. These arrangements will then be reflected in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy as part of its next review.

7. Legal and Governance Implications

7.1 Legal Services and Procurement will provide support during the procurement process to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023, the Council's Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

8. Risks

8.1 Trees within Sandwell council owned land pose a variety of risks that need careful management to ensure public safety and environmental sustainability. One of the primary concerns is the potential hazard posed by falling branches or entire trees, which can result from storms, disease, or structural weakness, leading to property damage, injury, or even fatalities.

8.2 Additionally, tree roots can affect underground infrastructure, such as water pipes and sewer lines, and cause damage to roads and pavements, leading to costly repairs. Another risk involves the potential spread of diseases or pests that can compromise tree health and biodiversity, impacting local ecosystems. Trees may also obstruct sightlines for drivers and pedestrians, leading to increased chances of accidents.

8.3 The approach and proposals set out in this report enhance existing maintenance and inspection programmes and will allow for additional inspection and works to mitigate these risks.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

9.1 No direct or indirect equality and diversity implications have been identified as a result of the proposals in this report.

10. Other Relevant Implications

10.1 **Health and Wellbeing:** Trees play a crucial role in enhancing health and well-being by contributing to a healthier and more balanced environment. Their presence in urban areas leads to improved air quality, as trees absorb pollutants like carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide, and nitrogen oxides, while releasing oxygen. This purification process reduces respiratory issues and promotes cleaner air for communities. Furthermore, trees provide significant shade and cooling effects, mitigating urban heat and reducing the risk of heat-related illnesses. The calming nature of green spaces, enriched by the presence of trees, has been shown to reduce stress levels and improve mental health.

10.2 **Social Value:** Social Value and Community Wealth building commitments will be included within the tender evaluation criteria to ensure the successful contractor(s) complies with locally and nationally recognised standards and contributes to the council's Vision 2030 ambitions.

10.3 **Climate Change:** Keeping trees healthy and well-maintained plays a significant role in combating climate change by enhancing their ability to sequester carbon dioxide, one of the major greenhouse gases driving global warming. Healthy trees absorb more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, storing it as biomass, which helps reduce the overall carbon footprint. Furthermore, well-maintained trees are more resilient to diseases and pests, prolonging their lifespan and effectiveness as carbon sinks. Additionally, healthy trees contribute to biodiversity, supporting a range of species and enhancing ecosystem resilience against climate change impacts. Properly maintained urban forests and green spaces play a crucial role in mitigating local climate effects, such as reducing urban heat islands.

11. **Background Documents**

None

12. **How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?**

12.1 **Growing Up in Sandwell** Trees offer numerous benefits to children as they grow, impacting their physical, mental, and emotional development. Trees provide a connection to nature, offering a natural playground for exploration and adventure. Climbing trees, building forts, or simply running around them fosters children's physical health, enhancing their strength, coordination, and balance. Secondly, the shade provided by trees creates a cool and inviting outdoor space, encouraging more time spent in fresh air, away from screens and the indoors, which is crucial for their overall well-being.

12.2 **Living in Sandwell** Trees are vital to the residents of Sandwell as they enhance urban life in multifaceted ways. By absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen, trees significantly improve air quality, which is essential given the industrial backdrop of the area. Their presence provides much-needed shade, reducing the urban heat effect and offering cool spaces during warmer months, which is vital for health and comfort. Trees also play a crucial role in enhancing the community's aesthetic appeal, creating green avenues that boost mental health and foster recreational activities among residents. Their roots stabilize the soil, minimising erosion and managing stormwater, which helps prevent flooding during heavy rainfalls. Additionally, trees offer habitats for urban wildlife, contributing to biodiversity even in densely inhabited locations.

12.3 **Thriving Economy in Sandwell** Health-maintained trees contribute to a thriving economy by providing benefits such as increasing property values as residential and commercial properties in green neighbourhoods tend to be more attractive to buyers. Trees also reduce energy costs by providing natural cooling and windbreaks, thereby decreasing energy demands.

12.4 **Healthy in Sandwell** Trees improve air quality by absorbing pollutants and releasing oxygen

12.5 **One Council One Team** Multiple departments benefit from appointed tree contractors, including, Housing, Highways, Parks and Bereavement services, all these departments have a large number of trees under their ownership

Relevance Check

Budget Reduction/Service Area: Environment

Service Lead – Ben Percival / Matt Gardner

Date: 28/06/25

In what ways does this Budget reduction have an impact on an outward facing service? How will the service feel different to your customers or potential customers?

N/A

If not, how does it impact on staff e.g. redundancies, pay grades, working conditions? Why are you confident that these staff changes will not affect the service that you provide?

N/A

Is a Customer Impact Assessment needed? No