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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Modern procurement strategies in the construction and infrastructure sectors have shifted from a focus solely on the lowest initial price toward broader value-based approaches. This transition has been driven by criticisms of traditional procurement models, such as single-stage tendering, which prioritize cost at the expense of social, economic, and environmental factors (Naoum & Egbu 2016). The tragedy of the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, along with subsequent reports like Dame Judith Hackitt’s Building a Safer Future, highlighted the perils of prioritizing cost-cutting and efficiency over safety and sustainability​(Assessment Brief). This has led both public and private sector clients to adopt procurement methods that promote collaboration, shared responsibility, and long-term value creation (Jaafar & Radzi 2012). This report explores the arguments for adopting a two-stage procurement model and critically evaluates the potential for using a procurement framework agreement in a public sector context, with the aim of delivering a ‘**green’ headquarters building for a local authority**.

**2.0 TWO-STAGE PROCUREMENT AND COLLABORATION**

The two-stage procurement model is designed to foster closer collaboration between client organizations and contractors (Arash & Claire 2022), allowing for a more integrated and value-focused approach to project delivery. Unlike traditional single-stage procurement, where the contractor is selected based on price and the detailed design is completed afterward, the two-stage model includes Early Contractor Involvement (ECI) (Finnie et al. 2019; Finnie et al. 2024). This approach allows contractors to contribute expertise during the design phase, significantly improving project outcomes by reducing risks and enhancing efficiency throughout the project lifecycle.

The two-stage process typically follows these stages:

* **Stage One:** Selection of the contractor based on non-price factors such as experience, sustainability credentials, and ability to innovate. This stage focuses on pre-construction activities like detailed design, cost planning, risk analysis, and value engineering. The contract is typically based on an open-book basis, meaning that pricing and costs are shared transparently between the client and the contractor.
* **Stage Two:** Once the design is completed and approved by all parties, the project moves into the construction phase, where the contractor finalizes the pricing. Since most risks have already been mitigated through early involvement, the project is less likely to face delays, disputes, or budget overruns.

**2.1 Case Study 1: Crossrail Project**

A prime example of the success of two-stage procurement is the Crossrail project in London. With a budget of £18 billion (Gov.UK, Department for Transport, Transport Spending Overview), this infrastructure project is among the largest in Europe, designed to enhance London’s rail transport system.

Figure I: The London Crossrail Project: Crossrail route



The complexity of Crossrail, involving tunneling, multiple stakeholders, and high regulatory standards, necessitated a collaborative procurement approach (Pelton et al., 2017).

Key Outcomes of Two-Stage Procurement in Crossrail

* **Early Problem Identification:** Through early contractor involvement, challenges like tunneling below ancient city structures and integrating new stations with existing ones were identified in the early stages. This significantly reduced the likelihood of unexpected issues during construction.
* **Risk Mitigation:** Contractors contributed to designing effective risk management strategies, avoiding the cost and time overruns common in complex infrastructure projects.
* **Value Engineering:** Continuous collaboration allowed the client and contractors to refine designs, identifying cost-saving measures without compromising quality.

Therefore, for public sector projects such as the proposed green headquarters, adopting a two-stage procurement model can ensure that environmental and social value objectives, such as achieving a BREEAM ‘Excellent’ sustainability rating, are embedded into the design from the outset. This prevents them from being compromised by budget constraints later in the project lifecycle.

**Table I: Benefits of Two-Stage Procurement**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Benefit** | **Explanation** | **Example in Crossrail** |
| Improved Risk Management | Early contractor involvement enables better identification and mitigation of risks, reducing the likelihood of cost overruns or delays (Song et al. 2009). | Early identification of tunneling risks avoided costly rework. |
| Enhanced Collaboration | Fosters a collaborative environment where clients, contractors, and suppliers work together to solve problems rather than competing for profit (Rahman et al. 2014). | Multiple stakeholders worked in tandem to address complex integration challenges between new and existing stations. |
| Cost Certainty and Flexibility | Allows more flexibility in adjusting scope and costs as more information becomes available. Avoids the rigid cost estimates common in single-stage procurement (Raman 2023). | Open-book pricing allowed the project team to adjust costs based on actual data from suppliers and contractors, rather than speculative bids. |
| Long-Term Value | Ensures that decisions prioritize sustainability and community impact over short-term cost savings. | Sustainability goals, such as reducing the environmental impact of construction,  |

**2.2 Incorporating Agile Project Management in Two-Stage Procurement**

In the context of two-stage procurement, Agile Project Management can further enhance collaboration and flexibility. Originally developed for software development, Agile is increasingly applied in construction projects to enable iterative development, early testing, and continuous stakeholder engagement (Chathuranga et al. 2023).

In Agile, the project is broken down into manageable phases called "sprints," which allow for continuous reassessment and refinement of the design and construction phases (Rajagopalan & Mathew 2016; Cooper 2024). The Agile approach supports two-stage procurement by:

* **Continuous Feedback Loops:** Agile’s iterative cycles allow for constant feedback between the contractor and the client, ensuring that evolving project needs (like new sustainability targets or regulatory requirements) are incorporated in real time.
* **Stakeholder Involvement:** Like two-stage procurement, Agile emphasizes stakeholder engagement throughout the project lifecycle. This can be particularly useful for public sector projects, where community feedback and social value goals are crucial.
* **Flexibility in Scope and Budget:** Agile allows flexibility in adjusting the project’s scope based on regular reassessments, aligning well with the open-book nature of two-stage procurement, where cost adjustments are transparent.

For instance, if the local authority building project aims to achieve high sustainability ratings, Agile methods can ensure that emerging best practices and technologies for green construction are implemented efficiently throughout the project lifecycle, without waiting for formal design updates.

By integrating two-stage procurement with Agile project management methodologies, the local authority can ensure not only successful collaboration but also the flexibility and responsiveness needed to achieve long-term value in public sector construction projects. This combination would facilitate ongoing adjustments to the project’s sustainability targets and social value outcomes, ensuring that these objectives remain central throughout the project’s life.

**3.0 PROCUREMENT FRAMEWORK AGREEMENTS:** **Critical evaluation of their use for public sector projects like this one.**

Procurement framework agreements have become a prominent strategic approach in modern procurement, particularly within the public sector. These agreements involve long-term partnerships between a client and a group of pre-qualified contractors, offering a structured and efficient route to market for various projects (Arney et al. 2014). While they offer numerous benefits, it is essential to critically evaluate whether a procurement framework agreement is the optimal choice for the local authority’s green headquarters project, considering its specific sustainability goals and social value strategy.

Framework agreements are designed to promote consistency, reduce procurement time, and ensure compliance with pre-set standards (Eyo 2020). However, they are not a one-size-fits-all solution, and public sector bodies need to weigh both the strategic advantages and potential limitations of using a framework agreement.

**3.1 Case Study 2: The Crown Commercial Service (CCS) Framework**

The Crown Commercial Service (CCS) framework, widely adopted by public sector bodies in the UK (About Crown Commercial Service; website), provides a useful example of the advantages of framework agreements. The CCS framework offers pre-approved suppliers who are compliant with governmental standards, including sustainability and social value targets (Crown Commercial Service; Social Value; Sustainability). This framework has been used successfully for large infrastructure projects such as the Highways England road schemes, where speed, compliance, and cost-efficiency are critical.

For the local authority’s green headquarters project, utilizing a similar framework could provide access to contractors with the proven ability to deliver high standards of sustainability and economic value. Pre-qualified contractors within the framework would likely have experience in adhering to BREEAM ratings and supporting the local authority’s goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and maximizing social value.

**Table II: Advantages of Framework Agreements**

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| **Advantages** | **Explanation** | **Application to the Green Headquarters Project** |
| Efficiency and Speed | Framework agreements streamline procurement by providing pre-qualified contractors, reducing the need for lengthy tendering processes (Nolden et al. 2015). | The local authority, with little recent experience in capital projects, can fast-track procurement and avoid delays, essential for timely delivery. |
| Consistency and Compliance | Contractors in frameworks meet established standards for sustainability, quality, and social value, ensuring compliance with public sector requirements (Awuzie et al. 2017). | The Council can ensure that sustainability standards (such as BREEAM ‘Excellent’) and social value targets are met consistently across the project. |
| Cost Savings Through Economies of Scale | Framework agreements leverage economies of scale, as contractors can offer competitive pricing based on the volume of work available (Azeem et al. 2020). | The Council may benefit from lower costs due to pre-negotiated rates, helping to maintain the project within its £8M budget. |
| Reduced Administrative Burden | Frameworks reduce the complexity of procurement for public authorities, which may not have extensive in-house expertise. | Given the local authority’s lack of recent capital project experience, the reduced administrative burden of a framework could be highly beneficial. |

**Table III: Challenges of Framework Agreements**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Challenges** | **Explanation** | **Impact on the Green Headquarters Project** |
| Lack of Flexibility | Framework agreements limit the ability to select contractors outside the pre-approved list, which can restrict options for specialized needs. | If the project requires contractors with highly specific sustainability expertise, the authority may be constrained by the pre-selected contractors. |
| Risk of Complacency | Long-term relationships with contractors in frameworks can lead to reduced competition and potential complacency, impacting project quality over time. | The Council must monitor contractor performance closely to avoid any decline in quality or innovation, particularly concerning sustainability goals. |
| Misalignment with Local Goals | Framework agreements often include national or regional contractors who may not have strong ties to the local economy, undermining the authority’s social value strategy. | If contractors are not locally based, the Council may struggle to achieve its objective of maximizing local spend and community benefits. |

**3.2 Strategic Considerations for the Local Authority**

When deciding whether to use a procurement framework agreement, the local authority must critically evaluate several key factors:

1. **Project Specificity vs. Standardization:** Framework agreements work best for projects where standardization of outcomes (e.g., compliance with sustainability standards) is a priority (Castka 2020). However, the green headquarters project has unique sustainability and social value targets that may require more specialized contractors. While the framework provides efficiency, the Council must consider whether the contractors in the framework possess the niche skills required to achieve these goals.
2. **Alignment with Social Value Strategy:** The Council has committed to maximizing local economic and social benefits through its Social Value Strategy. If the framework’s pre-approved contractors are not locally based, this could undermine efforts to stimulate the local economy. Therefore, the Council should assess the geographic location of contractors and their track record in delivering community benefits. In some cases, it may be more beneficial to use a bespoke procurement process to select local contractors that better align with these goals.
3. **Long-Term Relationships vs. Flexibility:** Framework agreements foster long-term relationships with contractors, which can promote consistency and collaboration over time (Daboun et al. 2023). However, these relationships can also stifle innovation if competition is reduced. For a project that requires cutting-edge sustainability practices, such as achieving a BREEAM ‘Excellent’ rating (Haroglu 2012), the Council may require flexibility to bring in more innovative contractors. A two-stage procurement model combined with selective use of framework contractors might offer a more balanced solution, allowing for flexibility while benefiting from established relationships.
4. **Risk Management:** Framework agreements are often seen as lower-risk because they provide access to contractors with proven performance records (Gamage 2023; Lam & Gale 2014). However, in the context of this project, the Council must ensure that the framework contractors are capable of managing the specific environmental risks associated with the brownfield site. A robust risk management strategy should be integrated into the procurement process, regardless of whether the Council uses a framework or alternative methods.

Procurement framework agreements offer significant advantages for public sector projects, particularly in terms of efficiency, cost savings, and compliance with established standards. However, for the local authority’s green headquarters project, the decision to use a framework must be carefully weighed against the project’s unique sustainability and social value objectives. While frameworks can streamline the procurement process and provide access to experienced contractors, the lack of flexibility and potential misalignment with local economic goals pose challenges. A hybrid approach—leveraging the benefits of a framework agreement while retaining flexibility through two-stage procurement—may offer the most effective route to delivering the project’s ambitious environmental and social outcomes.

**4.0 CONCLUSION**

Modern procurement strategies have evolved significantly, moving away from traditional models that emphasize lowest cost and efficiency to approaches that prioritize long-term value, collaboration, and sustainability. For the local authority’s green headquarters project, the choice of procurement method is crucial to achieving the Council’s environmental and social objectives, which include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, attaining a BREEAM ‘Excellent’ rating, and maximizing local economic impact through the Social Value Strategy.

The two-stage procurement model presents a compelling solution by fostering early contractor involvement (ECI) and promoting a collaborative approach to project delivery. This model ensures that key risks are identified and mitigated early, allowing contractors to contribute their expertise during the design phase. The flexibility and open-book pricing characteristic of two-stage procurement provide opportunities to adjust scope and costs as the project evolves, ensuring that sustainability and community impact goals are met without compromising on quality. The success of large-scale projects like Crossrail demonstrates the effectiveness of this procurement model in managing complex projects while delivering value beyond initial cost savings.

On the other hand, procurement framework agreements offer efficiency, consistency, and compliance advantages that can benefit the local authority, particularly in its efforts to streamline procurement and reduce administrative burdens. The use of pre-approved contractors ensures that sustainability standards and social value considerations are built into the procurement process, which could be highly beneficial given the Council’s limited experience in managing large capital projects. The Crown Commercial Service (CCS) framework is a prime example of how framework agreements can successfully deliver public sector infrastructure projects within budget and to high standards of compliance.

However, it is critical to recognize the limitations of framework agreements, particularly their potential lack of flexibility and misalignment with local goals. In the context of this project, where specialized sustainability expertise and local economic stimulation are essential, the rigid nature of frameworks could hinder the selection of contractors with the niche skills necessary to achieve the Council’s ambitious environmental and social value targets. Additionally, long-term relationships within frameworks may lead to complacency and reduced innovation, which could be detrimental to the project’s success.

**4.1 Final Recommendation**

Given the unique requirements of the green headquarters project, the local authority should adopt a hybrid approach that combines the benefits of both two-stage procurement and selective use of framework agreements. This approach would leverage the collaborative and flexible nature of two-stage procurement to ensure that sustainability and social value objectives are embedded into the project from the outset. Early contractor involvement would allow for continuous feedback, iterative improvements, and effective risk management, especially regarding the environmental challenges posed by the brownfield site.

At the same time, the efficiency and compliance advantages of framework agreements could be utilized for specific aspects of the project, such as procurement of standard materials or services, where speed and pre-negotiated pricing are essential. This selective use of frameworks would enable the Council to fast-track certain procurement processes while retaining flexibility in choosing specialized contractors who can deliver on sustainability and local value targets.

By combining these two procurement methods, the local authority can achieve a balance between flexibility and efficiency, ensuring that the green headquarters project is delivered on time, within budget, and to the highest possible environmental and social standards. This approach will not only help the Council meet its current objectives but also set a precedent for future sustainable development projects in the region, fostering long-term value for the local community and environment.

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