



**Dorset**  
Council

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# **Specification**

**Tender for Property Owner Finder Service**

**Reference DN720019**

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Dorset Council is a new unitary local authority. Formed in 2019, it was created from the original County Council and five district and borough councils.
- 1.2. During the last 5 years the Council has been developing its approach to local housing policy and services and this culminated in the publication of its new [Housing Strategy January 2024 – January 2029 - Dorset Council](#).
- 1.3. The [Dorset Council Plan - Dorset Council](#) and its associated delivery plan puts 'Creating Sustainable Development and Housing' at the forefront of the Councils short and long term strategy.
- 1.4. The [Dorset Council Delivery Plan](#) states that the Council will bring "*at least 10 long-term empty residential properties back into use for housing purposes, as part of a wider set of initiatives to reduce the number of potential homes remaining empty*"
- 1.5. To date the Council has focussed its empty homes programme on the most problematic long term empty homes. Houses that would not come back into beneficial use without the Councils formal intervention. Four cases are currently progressing to Compulsory Purchase Order.
- 1.6. While this robust enforcement approach will continue, Dorset Council are also seeking to develop and expand its approach. This tender opportunity forms part of that service development. For more information see [Empty homes - Dorset Council](#)

## 2. Scope of the Requirement

- 2.1. It is common for the owners or beneficiaries of long-term empty properties to be absent and their whereabouts unknown or difficult to trace.
- 2.2. Where it proves necessary, the Council currently carries out some limited property owner tracing, using existing available records and other sources of intelligence. This is time consuming, especially in the case of deceased owners. This can significantly delay or stop actions in certain cases, disrupting progress.
- 2.3. Professional probate research companies and other similar businesses provide free absent owner tracing services to public authorities.
- 2.4. Dorset Council will provide the supplier with the addresses (and other data deemed relevant) of long-term empty and unoccupied properties. The supplier is required to undertake suitable and sufficient research to identify the name and contact details of the owner, person liable for Council Tax or the nearest next of kin of the deceased owner.
- 2.5. From time to time, Dorset Council also requires the supplier to complete specific 'task and finish' project work. This may include but not limited to reviewing Council Tax Class F exempt properties (premises left unoccupied following the death of the Council Taxpayer).
- 2.6. The supplier is required to deliver the services in 2.4 and 2.5 in a professional, timely and ethical way in accordance with recognised good practice, which shares the principles of the Councils [Behaviour Framework](#).

### 3. Background

- 3.1. There are currently 1300 homes which are long term empty (empty for 6 months or more) in Dorset, of which 335 have been empty for 2 years or more (Council Tax data; October 2023).
- 3.2. As of July 2023, there were 1500 homes categorised as Council Tax Class F (premises left unoccupied following the death of the Council Taxpayer), of which 160 have been categorised as Class F for 2 years or more.
- 3.3. The Housing Standards Team currently has ongoing enforcement action relating to over 90 long term empty, unoccupied properties. This includes empty homes liable for the Council Tax Premium, abandoned second homes, Class F properties and others. Four properties are currently subject to compulsory purchase proceedings [Empty homes - Dorset Council](#)
- 3.4. The Councils evolving Empty Homes Enforcement Programme has been recognised nationally and is included in national good practice guidance and has achieved several awards. The service is aiming to expand and grow and this tender opportunity forms part of that service development.

### 4. The Requirements

#### Individual requests

- 4.1. From time to time, Dorset Council's Housing Standards Team will provide the supplier with the addresses (and other data deemed relevant) of long-term empty and unoccupied properties (the request).
- 4.2. The information supplied by Dorset Council to the supplier as part of the request in 4.1 may include but not be limited to the empty property address, postcode, last known occupant/person(s) liable for Council Tax and any other information considered relevant.
- 4.3. The supplier is required to use this supplied data and best endeavours to carry out 'all suitable and sufficient' enquiries from various information sources. The supplier is required to 'track and trace' the current owner/person liable for Council Tax. In the case of a deceased owner, if a valid Will is available, this will require the supplier to 'track and trace' the beneficiaries of the estate. In the case of intestacy, the supplier is required to 'track and trace' the nearest next of kin to the deceased.
- 4.4. In the case of a deceased person where no Will can be identified, the nearest next of kin shall be defined in accordance with the UK rules of intestacy.
- 4.5. In carrying out 'all suitable and sufficient' enquiries, the supplier is required to only employ lawful means of enquiry. All enquiries will be by 'desktop' investigation and the supplier is not permitted to carry out any personal visits as part of the enquiries outlined in 4.4 and 4.13.
- 4.6. Following 'all suitable and sufficient' enquiries, the supplier is required to have identified either the location of the current owner or person liable for Council Tax, beneficiary or nearest next of kin. Where core information

outlined in 4.7 is obtained by the supplier, this shall be referred to as a 'successful trace'.

- 4.7. A successful trace shall consist of the following core information relating to the current owner or person liable for Council Tax, beneficiary or nearest next of kin. Their full name, address, and postcode (personal details), relationship to the deceased (if applicable). Core information will also include a summary of the main source(s) of the core information sufficient to enable the Council to understand how the personal details were obtained. Core information may also include other relevant information that the supplier deems appropriate in the circumstances. Where the information indicates that more than one person is successfully traced, then the supplier is required to supply the core information about each person.
- 4.8. Following a successful trace, the supplier is required to notify Dorset Council, Housing Standard Team of the core information electronically in writing.
- 4.9. The supplier is required to provide a system for the secure sharing and processing of data outlined in 4.1, 4.8, 4.11, 4.12 and 4.14 which complies with the General Data Protection Regulations.
- 4.10. If after using best endeavours to carry out 'all suitable and sufficient' enquires from various information sources, the supplier is unable to identify or provide the core information outlined in 4.7, then this shall be an 'unsuccessful trace'.
- 4.11. Following an unsuccessful trace, the supplier is required to notify Dorset Council, Housing Standard Team of the reasons why they were unable to obtain the core information electronically in writing.

#### **Task and Finish Project(s)**

- 4.12. From time to time, Dorset Council's Housing Standards Team will provide the supplier with multiple details associated with certain groups or categories of long-term empty and unoccupied properties. This may include, but not limited to, details of specific Class F exemption Council Tax cases (where the person liable for Council Tax has passed away and the property is exempt from Council Tax).
- 4.13. The supplier is required to use this supplied data in 4.12 and best endeavours to carry out 'all suitable and sufficient' enquiries from various information sources. In doing this the supplier is required to achieve outcomes that improve the accuracy of the data set, including;
  - 4.13.1. identifying and amending any incorrect executor details,
  - 4.13.2. identifying cases where probate has been granted,
  - 4.13.3. identifying cases where the property is being occupied,
  - 4.13.4. identifying cases where the property has been subject to a change in ownership, and
  - 4.13.5. any other appropriate amendments and data improvements intended to ensure accuracy.
- 4.14. The supplier is required to provide a written report to Dorset Council's Housing Standards Team detailing the outcome of each enquiry in 4.13.

- 4.15. In completing a project as detailed in 4.13, the supplier is required to devise a written project plan for agreement by Dorset Council. The suppliers plan shall include, but not be limited to:
  - 4.15.1. How the project is initiated and managed to ensure maximum success
  - 4.15.2. How outcomes in 4.13, 4.16 and 4.17 are communicated to Dorset Council
  - 4.15.3. The project milestones and completion targets and dates.
- 4.16. The supplier is required as part of 4.13 to take steps to where appropriate inform property owners, beneficiaries or next of kin of the [Empty Property Services](#) provided by Dorset Council
- 4.17. In completing the project detailed in 4.13 the supplier is required to supply Dorset Council with a list of unoccupied, empty homes, which are suitable for further investigation by the Dorset Council, Housing Standards Team.

## 5. Performance Requirements

- 5.1. The supplier is required to acknowledge the request in 4.1 in writing with Dorset Council within 48 hours of its receipt by the supplier.
- 5.2. The supplier is required to ensure that 90% of requests detailed in 4.1 are completed to a 'successful trace' or 'unsuccessful trace' within 10 working days of receipt by the supplier.
- 5.3. The supplier is required to ensure that 90% of requests detailed in 4.1 are 'successful traces' as detailed in 4.7.
- 5.4. In completing projects detailed in sections 4.12 to 4.17 the supplier is required to progress and complete the project in accordance with a project plan detailed in section 4.15

## 6. Other Requirements

- 6.1. Following a successful trace as detailed in 4.7, the supplier may offer those subject to a successful trace certain additional paid services. This will normally include an introduction to appropriate legal and other services by the supplier, to enable a deceased owner's estate to be regularised and distributed.
- 6.2. Any additional paid services detailed in 6.1 do not form part of this contract.
- 6.3. The supplier is required to ensure that any additional paid services outlined in 6.1 are administered fairly and ethically and free from any form of 'pressure or hard selling' and act in the best interests of the owner, person liable, beneficiary, or next of kin.
- 6.4. The supplier is required to have a documented system for receiving, managing, and responding to formal complaints made about the service(s) outlined in 6.1.
- 6.5. If services are offered as detailed in 6.1, the supplier is required to keep a record of all formal complaints received, the investigation undertaken, and the outcome of that investigation. The supplier is required to make

summary details of formal complaints available to Dorset Council at the contract management meetings detailed at 8.2.

- 6.6. The supplier is required to provide a schedule of fees associated with the paid services detailed at 6.1 above to Dorset Council within 20 calendar days of contract award and at any time upon a written request by Dorset Council.
- 6.7. The supplier is required to inform Dorset Council in writing of any change to the fee's detailed at 6.1 and 6.6 and the Supplier shall only increase the charges detailed in 6.1 with the prior written consent of Dorset Council.

## 7. Implementation Requirements

### Supplier

- 7.1. The supplier is required to provide a standard format and system for the sharing of information outlined in 4.1, 4.8, 4.11, 4.12 and 4.14 within 30 calendar days of contract award.
- 7.2. The supplier is required to notify Dorset Council of a named person responsible for managing this contract with Dorset Council within 20 calendar days of contract award.
- 7.3. The supplier is required to provide Dorset Council with a documented system for receiving, managing, and responding to formal complaints made about the service(s) outlined in 6.1 within 30 calendar days of contract award.
- 7.4. The supplier is required to complete and submit to Dorset Council Schedule A of the Data Processing Schedule in the Dorset Council [standard purchase terms and conditions](#) for the supply of goods and/or services within 20 calendar days of contract award.

### Dorset Council

- 7.5. Dorset Council shall provide the supplier with the necessary contact details for the sharing of information detailed in 4.8 and 4.14 within 20 calendar days of contract award.
- 7.6. Dorset Council shall provide the supplier with a named person responsible for managing this contract with the supplier within 20 calendar days of contract award.

## 8. Contract / Service Management Requirements

- 8.1. Dorset Council shall set up a contract initiation meeting with the successful supplier within 15 calendar days of contract award which both parties will attend.
- 8.2. Dorset Council shall set up a regular contract management meeting with the supplier which both parties will attend. The contract management meeting will assess:
  - 8.2.1. the performance requirements detailed in section 5,
  - 8.2.2. information relating to fees paid for services provided at 6.1.

- 8.2.3. the outcome of formal complaint investigations detailed in 6.4 and 6.5 and;
- 8.2.4. the progress with the implementation, management and delivery of task and finish projects as detailed at 4.12.
- 8.3. Dorset Council shall notify the supplier of the date of the first meetings detailed at 8.1 and 8.2 within 10 calendar days of contract award. Contract management meetings shall occur at least quarterly or at some other appropriate interval as defined by the Council and determined by service requirements and/or supplier performance.
- 8.4. Dorset Council shall provide no less than 6 calendar weeks' notice of the intention to commence a project outlined in sections 4.12 to 4.17.

## 9. Contract Terms

- 9.1 Dorset Councils [standard purchase terms and conditions](#) for the supply of goods and/or services apply.
- 9.2 In consideration of the service outlined above, Dorset Council offers a nominal sum of £1.00.