

Title: North East Trade and Investment Strategy – Contract Award
Portfolio: Welcoming Home to Global Trade
Responsible Director: Phil Witcherley, Director of Economic Growth and Innovation
Report Author: Lizzie Lunn, Inward Investment Manager

Purpose of the report

This report seeks approval from the Director of Economic Growth and Innovation to award a contract to deliver the North East Trade and Investment Strategy and Delivery Framework to OCO Global Limited at a cost of £89,000. The invite only tendering exercise yielded tender submissions for two organisations of which OCO Global Limited emerged as the preferred provider. The contract will be funded through the Regional Investment Framework (RIF) grant. This grant funding (totalling £210,000) was accepted by the North East MSA as outlined in the Delegated Decision titled 'Regional Investment Framework (RIF)', approved in September 2026.

Recommendations

The Director of Economic Growth and Innovation is recommended to authorise award of the contract to deliver the North East Investment and Trade Strategy and Delivery Framework to OCO Global Limited at a cost of £89,000.

Executive Summary

A. Context

1. Background

The North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (North East MSA) recognises international trade, inward investment and global engagement as key drivers of economic growth, supporting the creation of high-value employment opportunities, increased productivity, business competitiveness, and raising the international profile of the North East. These are clearly referenced in the Local Growth Plan and the Corporate Plan.

The North East MSA has a clear ambition for the North East to be recognised as a leading location for international trade and investment. Achieving this ambition will require a more coordinated, evidence-led approach to investment attraction, trade development and international engagement. To support this, the North East MSA proposes to procure a North East England Inward Investment and Trade Strategy, underpinned by robust market intelligence, stakeholder engagement and economic analysis.

The commission will support a shift from a predominantly reactive approach to a more proactive, targeted and intelligence-led model of inward investment and trade delivery. It will enable resources to be targeted towards the opportunities with the greatest potential economic impact and ensure that partners are aligned around a shared set of priorities.

The strategy will provide a clear long-term vision, priorities in terms of target markets and sector opportunities, and a delivery framework for inward investment and trade activity across the region. A key output of the commission will be the development of the evidence base, and options appraisal required to inform a Full Business Case for a future North East England Inward Investment and Trade Delivery Service, with the intention of seeking Cabinet approval and funding for implementation in March 2027.

The commission supports delivery of the North East MSA's economic growth ambitions and Local Growth Plan by identifying opportunities to increase investment, support export growth, create high value employment and strengthen the region's international profile. It will ensure that future investment and trade activity is aligned to the region's wider economic priorities and growth sectors. The findings will help ensure that the resources are targeted towards activities that deliver the greatest economic impact and value for money.

The Department of Business and Trade (DBT) has awarded £210,000 to the North East MSA through the Regional Investment Framework (RIF) grant. The funding will be deployed across a series of connected activities designed to strengthen inward investment capability, support delivery of the regional growth priorities and build longer-term investment capability. This Commission will be funded through the RIF as agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DBT and the North East MSA.

2. Procurement

Specialist support is required to develop the North East Inward Investment and Trade Strategy and Delivery Framework. The commission requires specialist expertise in inward investment and trade strategy development, analysis of data, stakeholder engagement and delivery framework design which is not available within existing North East MSA resources. Procuring external support will ensure the strategy is informed by best practice, robust evidence and stakeholder engagement, and is developed within the required timescales.

A tender process was conducted through Bloom Procurement Services between 3rd September 2026 and 17th September 2026. Two tender submissions were received through Bloom Procurement portal from organisations with experience in developing inward investment and trade strategies, delivery framework design and business case development. An evaluation panel of two officers from the North East MSA and inward investment officers from Newcastle City Council, Sunderland City Council and Durham County Council has been established. Following independent scoring, scores were then moderated by the evaluation panel and checked against agreed weighting.

OCO Global Limited emerged as the preferred provider with the highest overall score following moderation of scores. OCO Global Limited have excellent experience in Inward Investment and Trade strategy development and delivery.

A steering group has been established to provide strategic oversight and direction. The group comprises representatives from the North East MSA's Inward Investment and Business Growth teams, and the constituent Local Authorities.

B. Impact on North East Mayoral Strategic Authority Objectives

The funding supports North East MSA's Corporate Plan and mission statement 'A welcoming Home to Global Trade'.

C. Timetable

Milestone	Forecast Date
Work Order Agreed for Investment and Trade Strategy and Delivery Framework (ITSDF)	28/09/2026
Contract start date for ITSDF	28/09/2026
Contract completed for ITSDF	18/12/2026
RIF funding spent	31/03/2027

D. Key risks

Risk	Mitigating Activity
Delays to delivery timelines	The procurement process will select a provider who has set out a clear structured timeline for delivery with accompanying risk register. Any risks to the timeline will be identified early and dealt with to avoid delays.
Difficulties in acquiring correct data for the project	Early engagement between MSA officers and key data holders prior to project inception.

E. Corporate Implications

E1. Financial and other resources implications

As per the delegated decision report, published in September 2026, 'Department for Business and Trade: Regional Investment Framework (RIF)' the North East MSA accepted £210,000 from national government to strengthen regional investment capacity and capability, supporting the delivery of the UK Industrial Strategy and Infrastructure Strategy. Funding is targeted towards the region's investment priorities and will complement existing resources and services, enabling activities that enhance investment promotion, investor engagement and the attraction and landing of transformational investment opportunities.

Cost Heading	2026/27	Total
Inward Investment Strategy and Delivery Framework	£89,000	£89,000

E2. Legal implications

The comments of the Monitoring Officer have been included in this report.

E3. Equalities implications

The North East MSA complies with the [Public Sector Equality duty](#) and this report has due regard to the need to achieve the objectives set out under s149 of the Equality Act 2010.

E4. Consultation and engagement

Consultation and engagement has taken place throughout the process between DBT and North East MSA. The seven constituent local authorities have been consulted (via the Investment Gateway Meeting) on the programme of activity and are supportive of the approach.

F. Appendices

None

G. Background papers

Delegated Decision Report: Regional Investment Framework (RIF) (September 2026)

Delegated Decision Report: Regional Investment Framework (RIF) – Procurement (September 2026)

H. Contact officers

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I. Glossary

North East MSA	North East Mayoral Strategic Authority
DBT	Department for Business and Trade
RIF	Regional Investment Framework
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding