

SSRO-C-154 Security and Information Risk Advisor (SIRA) services

CLARIFICATION QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

No.	Clarification Question	Date Received	SSRO Response
1	Morning, We're looking to apply for the SSRO SIRA services contract but currently are not a sponsor for national security vetting applications and do not have access to the National Security Vetting Solution. Do you have the contact details for the DSA for SSRO to allow us to apply to be a sponsor for NSV applications please?	14/01/2026	<p>The SSRO's Government sponsor department is the MOD. For MOD vetting queries, UKSV is the gateway and enquiries are routed internally to the Departmental Security Authority. The UKSV contact details are on their home page https://www.gov.uk/guidance/united-kingdom-security-vetting-contact-us.</p> <p>Bidders must note that all individuals delivering services under the contract must hold UK HMG security clearance at SC level or above. As explained in the Invitation to Tender, bidders whose proposed personnel do not currently hold UK HMG security clearance at SC level or above may submit a Tender, but the security clearances must be held prior to contract award. Bidders are cautioned that if the bidder ranking first in the evaluation process cannot evidence this mandatory requirement by the contract award date of 20 March 2026, the SSRO may proceed to award the contract to the next highest-scoring bidder who is able to evidence compliance with the mandatory requirements.</p>
2	Staff Training: If successful, are there any specific training or onboarding requirements for the staff we provide? (Are year 1 days front loaded for kick-off and familiarisation?)	20/01/2026	There are no specific training requirements. As set out in the specification, there may be some transition activity with the incumbent, however the SSRO does not expect this to be significant. The year 1 days are not front loaded.
3	Day Rates and Budget: Is there a maximum allowable day rate? Are you expecting fixed/firm/ T&M pricing?	20/01/2026	Bidders should refer to the Invitation to Tender and Pricing Schedule for detailed information on pricing. Bidders must quote on the basis that the rates or prices included in the Pricing Schedule remain fixed for the period of the contract, including any extension periods. The SSRO has not stipulated a maximum allowable day rate, however bidders should take note of the advertised contract value and that the price criteria has an overall weighting of 40%.
4	What is the cadence of planned days, what are the fixed days annually/planned activities?	20/01/2026	The the SSRO is contracting for a fixed requirement of 15 planned days of service per annum for the purposes of the programme of planned activities. Please refer to paragraphs 3.5-3.7 of the Specification for the programme of planned activities.
5	What is the anticipated lead-in time for ad-hoc days? Will the incumbent just work with the end team and plan days	20/01/2026	The SSRO is unable to provide an anticipated lead in time for additional or ad-hoc services as these relate to additional optional service requirements which may emerge that cannot be covered by the rolling work programme or ad hoc queries for security advice of a low level of effort which only become known at the time the work is requested. To date, however, the SSRO has worked with the incumbent to plan in the required work.

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6	What are examples of equivalent qualifications and would you accept Associate CII Sec and UKCSC Principal?	20/01/2026	<p>As explained in the Invitation to Tender, all individuals delivering services under the contract must hold at least one of the following credentials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) SIRA Certified Cyber Professional (CCP), as accredited by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC); ii) Membership of the Chartered Institute of Information Security (CII Sec); iii) Chartered Cyber Security Professional (ChCSP) status; or iv) An equivalent certification to any of the above. <p>The SSRO does not maintain a definitive list of "equivalent" certifications or qualifications. Bidders may propose alternatives which they consider to be equivalent to those listed above, but it is for bidders to demonstrate equivalence in their Tender submission. In assessing equivalence, the SSRO will consider whether the proposed certifications or qualifications are broadly comparable in terms of level, scope, rigour and professional standing, including requirements relating to competence, experience, assessment and ongoing professional obligations.</p> <p>However, the SSRO confirms that Associate CII Sec and UKCSC Principal are not objectively equivalent qualifications to those listed and are therefore not acceptable.</p>
7	What is the anticipated volume of work- average number of pen tests/how many reviews undertaken. Is there any expectation to do any remediation/retest reviews?	20/01/2026	<p>The SSRO undertakes an annual ITHC/pen test, the results of which feed into the Secure by Design reporting. The Secure by Design support days are included within the 15 planned days per annum. The SSRO contracts separately for the ITHC/Pen tests.</p> <p>As set out in 3.6 of the Specification, Secure by Design reviews are undertaken quarterly with the 4th quarterly review being the annual review.</p>
8	Please can we clarify the on-site requirement? What facilities will be available to our team when working on-site (e.g., office space, internet access)?	20/01/2026	As set out in the Specification, much of the work can be delivered at the Supplier's site(s) and this is how the incumbent currently works. Full or part day attendance at the SSRO's office (100 Parliament Street, London) may be required on occasion, and where this is the case a desk, meeting room(s) and GovWiFi will be available for use.
9	Please can we clarify the locations in scope and frequency of travel required for the contract?	20/01/2026	Based on experience to date, the frequency of travel to our 100 Parliament Street office is unlikely to exceed 1 day per quarter.
10	How are expenses being treated? Is there a maximum limit per day? Does the rate have to be inclusive of all T&S/within a certain areas?	20/01/2026	As stated in the Pricing Schedule, costs associated with attendance on site, including travel, shall be included in the price/rate(s) proposed by the bidder in the Pricing Schedule.
11	If using supplier provided systems are there any specific tools or platforms we are required to use for remote work and collaboration	20/01/2026	There are no specific tools or platforms required for use on Supplier provided systems
12	Can you confirm the Authority's rights to terminate or suspend the contract? Notice period etc.	20/01/2026	The contractual terms, including those concerning termination, suspension and notice period, are set out in the Terms and Conditions provided as Appendix 4 of the associated tender documents.
13	Is this a new requirement or is there an incumbent supplier? If so, who is the incumbent? And what is the transfer of service / handover plan required?	20/01/2026	The incumbent is Hex Security Limited. The SSRO does not expect a significant amount of transition activity will be required between the incoming and outgoing supplier (where applicable). However, the Supplier must carry out all required transition activity and take the necessary steps to ensure continuity of business services.
14	What is the expected process for knowledge transfer at the end of the contract?	20/01/2026	The SSRO does not expect a significant amount of transition activity will be necessary at the end of the contract. The process for knowledge transfer can be discussed and formalised during the course of the contract.

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15	Are there opportunities for additional work or follow-on contracts related to this project?	20/01/2026	No. This procurement relates solely to the service set out in the Specification. The SSRO is not committing to, nor does it anticipate, any additional work arising from these services. Any future requirements (including follow-on contracts), should they arise, would be subject to the SSRO's normal procurement processes and procurement law requirements.
16	For remote working is the presumption to operate on Supplier systems and if so what is the anticipated classification of work to be processed or will we be furnished with MoDnet or similar	20/01/2026	For remote working the Supplier is expected to work on their own systems. The classification of the work will be Official, including Official Sensitive. The SSRO currently does not have access to MoDnet or other similar MOD systems.
17	Would it be possible to request an extension on this tender submission deadline please? We would like to perform a thorough risk review on the T&Cs provided, and we would need more time than the current deadline allows to be able to do this.	06/02/2026	The SSRO has extended the tender submission deadline to 12pm on Wednesday 11 March 2026.
18	Have any clarifications questions been posted for this tender?	05/02/2026	The first set of responses to clarification questions was published on 21 January 2026. This document represents the full and consolidated set of all clarification questions and responses.
19	Can SSRO confirm the practical boundaries of "ad hoc support at no additional charge" (expected response times/volume; any reasonable cap/assumptions), given planned days are fixed and additional days are capped/optional?	22/01/2026	Information about ad hoc services is set out in paragraph 3.11 of the Specification (Appendix 1). Ad hoc queries would be limited in scope and complexity, would not require significant investigation, analysis or formal deliverables and would be matters that could be responded to promptly. Where the frequency, urgency or complexity of ad hoc requests increases to a level such that they cannot reasonably be accommodated, the Supplier shall notify the SSRO promptly. In such circumstances, the parties shall agree how the work is to be treated, including whether it is to be delivered as part of the programme of planned activities or as additional services.
20	For pass/fail requirements, what specific evidence format does SSRO require (certificates, attestations, redactions) to avoid non-compliance?	22/01/2026	Please refer to the response to question 21 below.

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21	For pass/fail requirements, what specific evidence format does SSRO require (certificates, attestations, redactions) to avoid non-compliance?	22/01/2026	<p>For pass/fail requirements, the SSRO does not prescribe a specific evidence format. However, evidence must be sufficiently clear and complete to demonstrate compliance.</p> <p>Where currently held, acceptable evidence would typically include: Copies of relevant certificates (e.g. Cyber Essentials Plus); Membership certificates or formal confirmation from the relevant professional body; Confirmation of UK HMG SC (or above) clearance for named individuals; and Insurance certificates or broker letters confirming types, levels and period of cover.</p> <p>Redactions are permitted where necessary (e.g. sensitive reference numbers), provided that the individual/organisation name, accreditation/clearance type, issuing body, level and validity remain visible.</p> <p>Where not currently held, bidders must provide a clear, unqualified written confirmation (signed or formally authorised) that the specific requirement will be met by the contract award date.</p> <p>Failure to provide either appropriate evidence or a compliant written confirmation may result in rejection in accordance with paragraph 4.15 of the ITT.</p>
22	Can SSRO confirm whether the day volumes in the pricing template (incl. Years 4–5) are for evaluation only, with no commitment to purchase, and whether bidders should price assuming maximum optional days are called off?	22/01/2026	<p>The day volumes in section 2.1 of the pricing schedule (incl. Years 4–5) reflect the planned and fixed number of days required each year to deliver the work described in sections 3,4 and 5 of the specification (other than paragraph 3.8).</p> <p>The day volumes in section 2.2 of the pricing schedule (inc. Years 4-5) reflect the number of days the SSRO may commission during the contract period to carry out any additional services (as covered under paragraph 3.8 of the specification). The SSRO provides no commitment in respect of the additional services.</p> <p>For pricing the additional services, the day rate to be provided is fixed. Bidders must therefore provide the day rate which will apply irrespective of the number of additional days (if any) the SSRO commissions.</p>
23	For any extension years, is there any rate review/uplift mechanism (e.g., CPI / annual review), or must rates remain fixed?	22/01/2026	As explained at paragraph 4.22 of the ITT and section 1 (Pricing Guidance) in the pricing schedule, bidders must quote on the basis that the rates quoted remain fixed for the full period of the contract, including any extension periods.
24	SSRO has a termination for convenience on 2 weeks' notice. Can SSRO confirm payment for all work performed plus any committed/non-cancellable costs, and confirm exit/handback expectations (and whether chargeable)?	22/01/2026	<p>Clause 14.2 of the published Terms and Conditions (Appendix 4) covers termination without cause and clause 6 covers associated payment provisions. In the event that the SSRO exercises its right to terminate under clause 14.2, the Supplier will be entitled to payment for Services properly performed in accordance with the contract up to the effective date of termination, subject to submission of a valid invoice. The contract does not provide for, and the Supplier will not be entitled to, payment of anticipated profits, unperformed work, or costs which have not been properly incurred in accordance with the contract. The SSRO anticipates any exit or handover obligations to be minimal. As such, the contract does not provide for separate charges in respect of exit or handback activities. Any such activities would be expected to be delivered in accordance with the Supplier's general obligations under clause 4, including co-operation and compliance with SSRO instructions.</p>

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25	Can SSRO confirm how “completion”/acceptance will be determined for ongoing advisory services (e.g., monthly invoicing in arrears; acceptance window; deemed acceptance; cure period before fee reduction/re-performance)?	22/01/2026	<p>The SSRO confirms that the position on completion, review and payment is set out in the published contract terms (Appendix 4). In summary, bidders are referred in particular to:</p> <p>Clause 6 (Charges and Payment) – invoices for Core Services are to be submitted within 30 days of completion of the relevant part of the Core Services, and invoices for Optional Services are to be submitted within 30 days of the completion of the work contained in each Order. The SSRO will pay undisputed sums within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice.</p> <p>Clause 11 (Stages and Performance) – sets out the SSRO’s right to review performance at completion of the Services or any Stage (where applicable), and the remedies available where Services are not provided in accordance with the Contract (including re-performance or a proportionate fee reduction).</p> <p>Clause 14 (Termination) – which addresses breach and remedy periods.</p> <p>The Contract does not provide for a formal “deemed acceptance” mechanism. Completion will be assessed by reference to the relevant Services delivered in accordance with the Specification and any agreed Stages or milestones, or any further requirements set out in an Order.</p>
26	Please confirm whether any liabilities are intended to be uncapped (e.g., confidentiality/data/security breaches, IP infringement), and if so, which ones.	22/01/2026	<p>Clause 15 of the published Terms and Conditions (Appendix 4) covers liability. Clause 15.2 provides that the Supplier’s aggregate liability, whether in contract, tort or otherwise, shall not exceed the amount in respect of which the Supplier is required to hold professional indemnity insurance under clause 15.5(iii). Other than as provided under clause 15.4 (which covers standard exceptions to limitation for fraud, dishonesty and liability which cannot be excluded or restricted by law), there are no further categories of liability which are uncapped.</p>
27	Security schedules include OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE and SECRET measures. Can SSRO confirm whether SECRET will apply at all under this contract; if not, confirm SECRET measures are “not applicable.”	22/01/2026	<p>The SSRO does not anticipate that the Services will ordinarily require the Supplier to handle information designated as “SECRET”. However, the contract must accommodate the possibility that, in exceptional circumstances, information or material falling within that classification could be disclosed or become relevant to the performance of the Services. As such, Schedule 2 of the published Terms and Conditions remains applicable.</p>
28	Tender may not be “qualified”. Can SSRO confirm the correct mechanism for raising contractual assumptions/clarifications (via clarifications log/portal) without being treated as a qualified tender?	22/01/2026	<p>Any clarification questions including contractual assumptions/clarifications should be submitted to tenders@ssro.gov.uk by 20 January 2026.</p> <p>The clarification process is the appropriate mechanism for raising such points prior to submission of Tenders. Responses will be issued by 18 February 2026. For the avoidance of doubt, contractual assumptions, caveats or qualifications must not be included within a Tender submission itself. Any such qualifications or unauthorised alterations to the SSRO’s documentation may result in the Tender being rejected, as stated at paragraph 4.16 of the ITT.</p>

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29	Confirm the 90-day tender validity requirement and whether any pricing assumptions (e.g., FX, inflation) can be referenced via the formal CQ process.	22/01/2026	<p>In accordance with paragraph 4.26 of the ITT, Tenders must remain valid for acceptance for 90 days from the deadline for receipt of Tenders. If this requirement is excluded, amended or qualified, the Tender will be rejected.</p> <p>As set out in paragraph 4.22 of the ITT and section 1 (Pricing Guidance) of the pricing schedule, pricing must be fixed. No adjustment mechanisms (including for inflation, FX fluctuation or other assumptions) are permitted, and pricing assumptions must not be included within the Tender.</p> <p>Any clarification questions including pricing assumptions should be submitted to tenders@ssro.gov.uk by 20 January 2026. However, the inclusion of pricing assumptions, qualifications or conditionality within a Tender submission will render it non-compliant and may result in rejection.</p>
30	Please confirm scope of the declarations: bidder entity only or also parent/subsidiaries and key subcontractors, plus any lookback period SSRO expects.	22/01/2026	The Statement of Conduct covers the bidder entity, its parent and subsidiary companies, and any key subcontractors proposed to perform the contract. In line with the Procurement Act 2023, the SSRO will generally take into account relevant conduct occurring within the five years preceding the submission of the tender when assessing any grounds for disqualification.
31	Can SSRO clarify how it interprets "conflict" for suppliers with defence clients (MOD/defence primes), and what mitigation is acceptable (ring-fencing, info barriers, named personnel restrictions) so disclosure doesn't automatically disqualify.	22/01/2026	<p>Bidders should refer to paragraph 8 of the Invitation to Tender and clause 34 of the Terms and Conditions (and the definition in clause 1) for the meaning of "Conflict of Interest," which includes any actual, potential, or reasonably perceived conflict between duties owed to the SSRO and the interests of the Supplier, its Affiliates, Group Undertakings, Connected Persons, Sub-Contractors, or personnel.</p> <p>Operating in the defence sector, contracting with the Ministry of Defence, or working with a Defence Contractor (including being party to, or in a group that includes a party to, a Qualifying Contract) does not automatically result in exclusion. However, where any of these circumstances (or any other Conflicts of Interest) apply, the bidder must demonstrate clearly and convincingly that such conflicts can be effectively managed and mitigated and must address them in accordance with paragraph 8 of the ITT and clause 34 of the Contract.</p> <p><u>All bidders</u> must submit a completed Conflict of Interest Schedule (Appendix 7) and a Conflicts of Interest Policy as part of their Tender. This is a mandatory pass/fail requirement and applies whether or not a bidder identifies any current conflict. Policies must demonstrate robust, proportionate, and auditable arrangements for identifying, managing, and escalating conflicts throughout the Contract Period. Bidders should ensure all proposed mitigation measures are clearly documented and demonstrably effective.</p> <p>The SSRO will evaluate conflicts and proposed mitigation strictly in accordance with the ITT and contract requirements. Relevant mitigation measures may include structural separation, information barriers, technical and personnel access controls, named personnel restrictions, governance arrangements, and independent assurance mechanisms.</p>

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32	<p>My clarification question is with reference to:</p> <p>All individuals delivering services under the contract must hold at least one of the following credentials:</p> <p>i) SIRA Certified Cyber Professional (CCP), as accredited by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC);</p> <p>ii) Membership of the Chartered Institute of Information Security (CIISec);</p> <p>iii) Chartered Cyber Security Professional (ChCSP) status; or</p> <p>iv) An equivalent certification to any of the above.</p> <p>Question: What level of membership to the CIISec will be accepted.</p> <p>Question: What are accepted equivalent certifications? For example, an MA in CISM with 25+ years across MOD security assurance as a SAC.</p>	19/01/2026	<p>Please see responses to questions 6 and 38.</p> <p>As explained in the Invitation to Tender, all individuals delivering services under the contract must hold at least one of the following credentials:</p> <p>i) SIRA Certified Cyber Professional (CCP), as accredited by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC);</p> <p>ii) Membership of the Chartered Institute of Information Security (CIISec);</p> <p>iii) Chartered Cyber Security Professional (ChCSP) status; or</p> <p>iv) An equivalent certification to any of the above.</p> <p><u>CIISec Membership Level:</u></p> <p>The SSRO requires full membership (MCIIISec) or higher of the Chartered Institute of Information Security. Associate or student-level memberships do not meet the mandatory requirement.</p> <p><u>Equivalent Certifications:</u></p> <p>The SSRO does not maintain a definitive list of "equivalent" certifications. Bidders may propose alternatives in their Tender submission, but it is for the bidder to demonstrate equivalence. In assessing equivalence, the SSRO will consider whether the proposed certifications or qualifications are broadly comparable in terms of level, scope, rigour and professional standing, including requirements relating to competence, experience, assessment and ongoing professional obligations.</p> <p>Qualifications or memberships that do not demonstrate equivalence in these areas will not be accepted. Bidders must clearly explain why and how any proposed certification meets the required standard.</p> <p>Qualifications such as an MA in CISM, even with extensive experience (e.g., 25+ years in MOD security assurance), would need to be supported by evidence that they meet these criteria. The SSRO will evaluate equivalence on a case-by-case basis, and any proposed certification or qualification must provide demonstrable assurance that the individual has the necessary competence to perform the services under the contract.</p>
33	Based on previous experience, with the incumbent supplier, what percentage of time has been required to support on-site activities at the clients premises?	12/01/2026	Based on experience to date, the frequency of travel to our 100 Parliament Street office is unlikely to exceed 1 day per quarter.
34	Based on previous experience, where has on-site support been required?	12/01/2026	On site support would likely only be required at our 100 Parliament Street office.
35	Will the SSRO provide necessary IT equipment i.e. laptop, or is this the responsibility of the supplier to provide their own equipment?	12/01/2026	The Supplier is expected to work on their own equipment.
36	Regards return of tender documentation, some artefacts are marked OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE:COMMERCIAL. Does the authority require this information to be encrypted. If so, what is the preferred method?	12/01/2026	The Terms and Conditions set out requirements for the protection of Sensitive Information, including encryption. Unless the SSRO authorises otherwise, Sensitive Information shall be transmitted or accessed electronically (e.g., point-to-point computer links) via a public network such as the Internet, using a product that accords with NCSC Security Guidance (or equivalent) for encryption. Laptops holding any supplied or contractor-generated Sensitive Information must also be encrypted using a product that accords with NCSC Security Guidance (or equivalent). For the avoidance of doubt, the use of BitLocker is acceptable provided it is configured in accordance with NCSC Security Guidance.

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37	Please can you confirm if the SSRO will act as the sponsor for National Security Vetting (NSV) either initially or on an ongoing basis where this is required?	12/01/2026	The SSRO is unable to act as a sponsor for the NSV accreditation.
38	<p>In Section 3.2 of the Specification / also 3.2 of the Questionnaire, it states that individuals delivering services need to hold at least one of the following credentials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) SIRA Certified Cyber Professional (CCP), as accredited by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC); ii) Membership of the Chartered Institute of Information Security (CIIISec); iii) Chartered Cyber Security Professional (ChCSP) status; or iv) An equivalent certification to any of the above? <p>Can further information be provided on what certifications would be regarded as being equivalent to those listed in bullet points i) to iii)?</p>	09/01/2026	<p>Please see response to questions 6 and 32.</p> <p>As set out in the Invitation to Tender, all individuals delivering services under the contract must hold at least one of the following credentials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) SIRA Certified Cyber Professional (CCP), as accredited by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC); ii) Membership of the Chartered Institute of Information Security (CIIISec); iii) Chartered Cyber Security Professional (ChCSP) status; or iv) An equivalent certification to any of the above. <p>The SSRO does not maintain a definitive list of "equivalent" certifications. Bidders may propose alternatives that they consider to be equivalent to those listed above, but it is for the bidder to demonstrate equivalence in their Tender submission. In assessing equivalence, the SSRO will consider whether the proposed certifications or qualifications are broadly comparable in terms of level, scope, rigour and professional standing, including requirements relating to competence, experience, assessment and ongoing professional obligations.</p> <p>Qualifications or memberships that do not demonstrate equivalence in these areas will not be accepted. Bidders must clearly explain why and how any proposed certification meets the required standard.</p>
39	<p>We are interested in participating in the tendering process for: Security and Information Risk Advisor (SIRA) services</p> <p>We kindly request for the RFP for above opportunity.</p>	07/01/2026	<p>The tender documents are located in the Documents section of the Find a Tender notice - Security and Information Risk Advisor (SIRA) services - Find a Tender. They are listed towards the end of the notice under the sub-heading "Associated tender documents."</p>
40	<p>[REDACTED] would like to bid on this opportunity, could you please send us the documents or let us know where they are located? I couldn't see either of them on the mentioned on the Fnd a tender listing.</p>	07/01/2026	<p>The tender documents are located in the Documents section of the Find a Tender notice - Security and Information Risk Advisor (SIRA) services - Find a Tender. They are listed towards the end of the notice under the sub-heading "Associated tender documents."</p>