Introducing CORNERSTONE: delivering external services for the NCSC

The NCSC is seeking industry feedback on a new delivery model for modernising external cyber security services.

The NCSC's existing services have developed strong standards, trusted market relationships and significant reach. But as demand grows, we need to consider how these services can be delivered in ways that are scalable, sustainable, and responsive to the UK's changing needs.

As a result, the NCSC is exploring how it can modernise the way its external services are designed, delivered and developed. We want to create an operating model that enables NCSC services to achieve greater impact, reach more organisations, respond more quickly to changing threats and technology, and make better use of the capabilities that exist across the cyber security industry.

CORNERSTONE is a multi-year project to develop a more scalable relationship between the NCSC and industry, with each focusing on where it can add most value. Our ambition for CORNERSTONE is not simply to outsource services currently run by the NCSC; we want to make our services more impactful, accessible and adaptable. This will allow the NCSC to focus on those areas where it brings unique insight as the national technical authority for cyber security.

What are we are looking for?

We want organisations with cyber security expertise and real-world experience of assurance and service delivery to challenge our thinking before any future competition. More specifically, we are seeking feedback on a proposal which sees industry partners delivering the following NCSC services:

- The CHECK assured penetration testing scheme
- The Cyber Resilience Test Facilities (CRTF)
- A new Protective DNS (PDNS) assurance service

Currently, CHECK and CRTF are distinct assurance schemes operated with significant NCSC involvement, while the existing PDNS contract is a different kind of service altogether. The proposed new PDNS assurance scheme would create something new rather than simply transfer the existing PDNS service into the arrangement.

The purpose of bringing these areas together is to explore whether there are common administrative, data and operating capabilities that can be provided more effectively. These could include:

- onboarding and managing assured organisations
- running scheme administration and assurance processes
- managing and processing data securely
- providing common tools and infrastructure where appropriate
- producing management information and insight
- supporting the provider community
- continuously improving the way services operate

Challenge our thinking!

Meaningful market engagement depends on hearing from organisations with real-world experience of cyber security assurance and operating at scale. We therefore encourage you to read the accompanying Market Engagement Prospectus (PDF), and provide feedback on the commercial and practical viability of our assumptions. These include:

- this phase of CORNERSTONE will operate as a self-funding concession model
- the NCSC will remain the root of trust for badging and assuring schemes and services
- the NCSC will remain the owner of the NCSC-assured brand
- organisations will work collaboratively with the NCSC to bring together expertise to deliver innovative new schemes and services
- delivery partners will work in accordance with our security requirements for managing and storing data
- delivery partners will ensure services are able to respond at pace to the changing technological and geopolitical environment

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Find out more at our Supplier Information Sessions (MS Teams meetings)

We're hosting two identical **Supplier Information Sessions over MS Teams on 2nd December and 9th December, 10:00 – 11:00.** During these meetings, we will talk through our plans and provide an opportunity for interested organisations to hear more about CORNERSTONE. Questions and answers from these sessions will be captured and made available to all interested parties. You can register your place by clicking on one of the dates below:

- 2 December, 10:00-11:00 | MS Teams Registration
- 9 December, 10:00-11:00 | MS Teams Registration

Timelines and next steps

We anticipate beginning the tender process in Spring 2027 and are considering a contract length of around five years. However, our longer-term ambition for CORNERSTONE is broader than the initial three services described above. We intend to explore a scalable operating model through which the NCSC can govern, assure and enable a wider portfolio of external services, including both cyber assurance and Active Cyber Defence services, where industry delivery is appropriate.

In the meantime, we welcome thoughts, comments and questions by 18th December at **cornerstone@ncsc.gov.uk**.

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