Background
Thames Water Utilities is the UK's largest water and waste water company; it serves more customers than any other and provides a service throughout large parts of southern England.

Factors such as rising consumer demand and increasingly stringent environmental regulations have meant that the company has had to upgrade several of its water and sewage treatment works.

Thames Water was also required by the water regulator, Office of Water Services, to reduce the number of properties registered as being at risk of flooding from sewer overflows by implementing improvements such as increased sewer capacity and by constructing flood-storage chambers.

In a typical year, Thames Water spends several million pounds on site investigations at hundreds of locations throughout the UK.

To help eliminate costs and delays, the company procures most of these works through framework agreements rather than through competitive tender. This helps to establish mutually beneficial relationships with contractors and provides greater control over quality and reliability. Contractor performance can be easily monitored, and project costs are more accurately predicted. Furthermore, health and safety performance is improved because staff training and health and safety are made integral parts of the framework.

Framework agreement
In 2005, Structural Soils (an RSK company) entered into a framework agreement to provide site investigation services to Thames Water. To date, these services have been worth over £4.5 million.

The duration of the agreement was originally understood to be five years. However, Thames Water has chosen to extend the agreement into AMP5, and it is now expected to have a duration of 7–10 years.

Contract management
Structural Soils appointed two members of staff to manage the framework, act as the first points of contact for the client, coordinate works undertaken within the framework, and ensure that the client's specific technical and procedural requirements are met.

Their duties under the agreement include issuing monthly financial and health and safety reports, attending quarterly performance review meetings, ensuring that staff members meet the client's training standards and maintaining that information on its construction skills database. Deliverables, such as test results and reports, are issued to the timescales agreed with the client.

A two-hour in-house training course was developed by Structural Soils to brief site and project managers on the client's procedures, such as the permit-to-work system and reporting protocols. Many staff and some approved subcontractors were given additional external health and safety awareness training to qualify them for the client's construction skills passport.

Today
The framework agreement continues to be mutually beneficial to both parties. Following an internal reorganisation within Thames Water, most of its AMP5 spending on ground investigation projects will be made by joint-venture enterprises formed from two or more construction contractors. Thames Water has defined the framework agreement for site investigation services as a mandatory framework to be used by these enterprises.

Structural Soils has been successful in winning several AMP5 projects, including a £150,000 investigation at Beckton sewage treatment works.

Services provided
- Ground investigation services
- In situ testing
- Geotechnical laboratory testing
- Chemical laboratory testing
- Forensic investigations of ground conditions for existing infrastructure
- Investigation and analysis

Projects
- Public highway sewer upgrades
- Improvements to water treatment works
- Improvements to sewage treatment works
- New reservoir projects
- Forensic investigations into existing infrastructure and ground conditions

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