

To: Cabinet

Date: 16 October 2024

Report of: Head of Planning and Regulatory Services

Title of Report Procurement of new Planning IT and Document Management System

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To seek project approval and delegated authority for the Executive Director (Corporate Resources) to procure a new IT system to replace the Council's Planning and Regulatory Services database and document management system.
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies, Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning
Corporate Priority:	Well-Run Council The migration of existing planning and regulatory services systems and services to a modern, cost-effective solution. This project aims to provide technological and financial benefits to the Council, whilst mitigating the risks associated with such a complex undertaking.
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2024-28

Recommendations:	That Cabinet resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Grant project approval for the procurement of a new IT system to replace the current Uniform and IDOX DMS system used by Planning Services and other departments, as well as the linked Document Management System (the full budget envelope is attached in confidential Appendix 2); and 2 Delegate authority to the Executive Director (Corporate Resources) in consultation with the Head of Financial Services / Section 151 Officer; the Head of Law and Governance; the Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused
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Services and Council Companies; and the Cabinet Member for Planning to award and enter into a contract following a procurement process as outlined in the report.

Appendices

Appendix 1	Risk Register
Appendix 2 (Confidential)	Project Budget

Introduction and background

1. Uniform and the IDOX document management system (DMS) is the primary database and case-management system that is used by many departments across the Council, including: Planning; Planning Enforcement; Applications; Building Control; Home Improvement Agency; ICT; Environmental Quality; General Licensing and Regulatory Services.
2. The current system is outdated, and the current contract expires in March 2026 and under procurement law cannot be extended. With the current system contract ending, it is imperative to secure a new, modern system that meets user needs and enhances efficient ways of working with improved data handling and reporting capabilities.
3. A third-party discovery study was commissioned by the City Council, collating feedback from officers across all departments that use the Uniform and IDOX systems. The study highlights that officers require an updated system that can meet evolving needs of teams and support the Council's operations effectively. It is therefore recommended that a procurement process is undertaken for a new database system to replace or update the Council's current system.
4. The renewal is also necessary to take advantage of modern technologies, such as automation, improved interoperability of data and cloud migration that offers improved efficiencies and data management capabilities.
5. In addition to this, it is also necessary to secure support from suppliers to help officers maintain the system and ensure flexibility in the procurement specification around emergent legislative and policy requirements.

Budget

6. The overall cost of running the current system is split between the system contract and the cost of hosting this system and associated data services in physical servers. Any new system contracts will need to be cloud hosted as we decommission the physical servers.
7. The anticipated full cost of the new system is in excess of £1m for a 7-year

contract. This is comparable to the costs for the current Uniform system which would also cost in excess of £1m in capital and revenue for a similar term.

8. It is intended for the budget to be redirected from the current software package to the new one once the new contract is implemented. There is also £125,000 set out for the project budget in the capital programme. The full budget envelope for the project is set out in a confidential appendix (Appendix 2 – Project Budget).
9. Additional annual cost savings are expected to be made in the project for a longer-term contract than the current 2-year contract (7 years) and long-term costs savings of hosting the system on the cloud.
10. The new contract will be cloud-hosted, whereas the current system is hosted by on-premises servers. As such, the discontinuation of the current hosting costs is tied to the ICT project to migrate existing systems to cloud hosting and some costs may be concurrent whilst that project comes into effect, for discontinuing on-premises hosting costs.
11. It is not possible to anticipate these costs with any certainty at this time, but any requirement for additional funding for this and the other systems held in the decommissioned data centre will come forward if and when required as part of the wider project.
12. To summarise, the capital and revenue costs of the project have been considered as part of the Council's budget, with capital and revenue costs for a new system contract to be covered by redirecting the budget from Uniform and funds from the capital programme.

The need for an improved system

13. To establish criteria for a new specification for a replacement database system, workshops were held across Uniform/IDOX user groups in different Council departments and a 'Discovery Report' was produced by third party consultants at TerraQuest to summarise the key findings.
14. The report highlights feedback from teams which use the Uniform and IDOX systems, focusing on the desired outcomes of a replacement system, such as: workflow automation; integration with online forms; improved integration with third party software; an integrated customer portal; improved mobile applications; futureproofing for technological innovations; enhanced reporting capabilities; improved bulk data inputting functionality; improved integration of data across modules; and improved user interfaces.
15. Functionally, while many of the modules meet core business needs, user feedback highlights that some functionality is outdated, lacking modern workflow and automation capabilities. This deficiency necessitates a shift to systems that reduce administrative tasks, integrate online forms, enable service requests and complaints logging, offer a customer portal for self-service, support integration with live data, and provide improved reporting and

dashboards for better case management and activity monitoring.

16. The report also highlights that resources for internal and supplier-side support for the system requires improvement and should be considered in the procurement of any replacement systems.
17. There is also the opportunity during this procurement process to migrate data services to the cloud, to help fulfil broader ICT digital transformation objectives and achieve more modern and efficient, scalable, and secure ways of working. It should be noted that migration to cloud services is also likely to incur higher costs.
18. Separately, it should be noted that recent legislation sets out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, (Part 3, Chapter 1, sections 84-88) that local planning authorities are expected to process data under emergent data standards, with an open license for some types of planning data and only use approved software. Although the implications of this legislation are yet to be set out in detail, it is important to ensure that suppliers are aware of this and can provide flexibility to accommodate for these provisions.
19. Procuring a new database system would secure improvements to the issues identified above. A specification list has been produced following the outputs of the discovery report to retain all existing functionality for users within IDOX software modules and add consideration of all emergent requirements too.

Procurement Options Considered

20. The preferred option is to procure the new database system through a bespoke tender process tailored to the Council's specific requirements. This method is currently considered as the most suitable for the Council's circumstances after considering several options, including information gathered from the recent Uniform/IDOX contract.
21. **OPTION 1: Not to procure a new system:** No additional work or resourcing required for this option, although this would cause significant risk to future continuity of service given that the current contract expires in March 2026 and cannot be extended. There are also productivity risks associated with not taking a proactive approach to improving software, where officers have identified specific concerns which could be improved. This option is not viable as the current system is outdated and its contract is ending and therefore is not recommended.
22. **OPTION 2: Keep and invest into existing system:** Put internal or external resource into maximising the usage of the current system. Focus would be put into optimising unused and under utilised features for all teams as required. Whilst this would provide some improvement, it would not deliver against all desired outcomes. Return on investment would be limited as the solution would need to be replaced eventually. While upgrading or improving the software may be an option, it would be more advantageous to go to open tender to encourage competition and seek an optimal solution from different suppliers. It is likely that option 2 would be unlawful under

procurement law. This option is not recommended.

23. **OPTION 3: Build our system:** Leverage internal resources to task with migration of data and avoidance of third-party costs. The modelling of such data systems is complex, with over 10 modules in Uniform, also linked with geospatial data. There is a lack of in-house expertise and resources to take on this task, and this would require a lot of resources and time to set up, causing substantial risk to continuity of service function and financial risks to resource. This option is not feasible due to these issues and therefore not recommended.
24. **OPTION 4: Replace system with multiple 'best of breed' systems –** Instead of procuring a single software solution, multiple different software suppliers for each service could be sought to optimise the outcomes for individual teams. This, however, introduces complexity in managing multiple contracts and could mean that the interoperability of data across different pieces of software is constrained. As this option removes some key advantages of the existing software package and introduces additional complexity and potential risks, it is not recommended.
25. **OPTION 5: Procuring through a framework agreement -** During the recent procurement process to extend use of Uniform/ IDOX software for a short term, the Crown Commercial Service's Vertical Application Solutions framework (VAS) was used, however, it has been deemed unsuitable for the full procurement of a replacement as it did not give the flexibility required and therefore this option is not recommended.
26. **OPTION 6: Procuring through open tender process -** Allows for bespoke definition of contract requirements, ensuring the process delivers the system that best fits the Council's specific requirements. As such, this is the preferable route of procurement and the recommended option.
27. To minimise the risks associated with business continuity when implementing a major piece of software that impacts across multiple council services, and also to reduce annual costs of hosting compared to a shorter contract, it is anticipated that the contract will be awarded for a minimum term of three years with the option to extend up to 7 years. (3 years, +2, +1, +1).
28. A 'continuation obligation' will be included in the contract, which would facilitate an emergency contract extension period at the end of the contract period for up to a year in the event there is an unforeseen delay with the re-procurement.

Policy and Procurement Implications

29. No specific policy and procurement implications have been identified.

Financial implications

30. The anticipated cost for the new system over seven years is likely to be above £1m, similar to the cost of the current system.

Legal Issues

31. Under Parts 4.5(10) 4.5 (11) of the Council's Constitution, Cabinet is empowered to approve projects in excess of £500,000 and to award contracts in excess of £1,000,000. Under section 9E (3) (c) of the Local Government Act 2000 Cabinet is empowered to delegate its functions to officers.
32. Due to the anticipated value of the proposed contract, it must be procured in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015. Procuring officers need to continue to seek advice from the corporate procurement team and legal services to ensure the procurement complies with the law and appropriate contract documents are used. Procurement of a contract of this value and complexity needs to be well planned and resourced using realistic time scales due to the strict rules under procurement law that need to be followed.

Risk Management

33. Migration of data from the IDOX database system and implementation of a new system which manages officer caseloads, data and document management across many teams is likely to be a complex task. This will require working closely with suppliers and officers that use the system across different Council departments and planning for potential risks that could occur.
34. Thoughtful consideration should be taken in the procurement and contract mobilisation process to avoid or minimise the operational disruptions and costs associated with migrating to a new data system. This is considered in detail in the risk register summarised in Table 1 and Appendix 1.

Table 1: Risk Register Summary

Risk	Probability	Impact
Compliance and Regulatory Risks	3	5
Time Overrun	3	4
Legal challenge to the contract award	2	4
Budget Overruns	3	4
Inadequate In-house resource limitations	4	4
Dependency on Single Vendor	3	3
Cyber Security and Data Protection Vulnerabilities	3	5
Business Continuity During and Following Migration	3	5
Technical Complexity of Migration	4	5

Post-adoption technical support	3	4
Data Loss or Corruption	2	5
Best 'go-live' window for implementation and testing	3	3
User Adoption and Training	3	3

Equalities Impact

35. In considering the impact on equalities of migrating to a new software provider, addressing various aspects such as data protection, privacy, and security are essential components of an Equality Impact Assessment.
36. We will incorporate appropriate wording in the procurement invitation to tender to ensure that the process adheres to equalities legislation and promotes inclusivity.

Environmental considerations

37. Environmental impacts will be discussed with the awarded supplier and the Council to understand opportunities to minimise negative impacts within the contract scope.

Conclusion

38. In conclusion, the procurement of a new database system is essential for the continued efficiency and effectiveness of Council operations. The recommended open tender approach seeks to ensure that we obtain a system tailored to our officers' needs, and with a comprehensive risk management strategy in place to ensure successful delivery.

Report author	Lan Nguyen
Job title	Planning Digital Transformation Officer
Service area or department	Planning Services
Telephone	01865 252509
e-mail	lnguyen@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers:
None.

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