



ADUR & WORTHING
COUNCILS

Worthing Cabinet Member for Resources
and Adur Cabinet Member for Finance &
Resources

Decision Ref No: JAW/017/23-24

Date: 15 December 2023

Decision to be taken on or after 2 January
2024

Key Decision [Yes/No]

Ward(s) Affected: All

JAW/017/23-24 IDOX Cloud Planning System - Procurement

Report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability & Resources

Executive Summary

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report aims to obtain approval for acquiring a new cloud-based back-office system for Development Management and Building Control, sourced from our current software provider, Idox.
- 1.2. The report emphasises the need for more integration between the back-office system, Uniform, and the corporate document management system (NEC Document Management), negatively impacting the efficiency of the planning and building control service. Additionally, the public interface via the website could be more efficient for users, with limited search functionality and poor access to plans and documents. The existing back-office system has slow performance and lacks robust case management capabilities.
- 1.3. A budget allocation of £214,670 across the two councils was approved at the JSC sub-committees in September
- 1.4. During the budget process for 2023/24, it was identified that the new cloud-based solution could result in revenue savings of up to £70k.

However, due to the estimated implementation time of 9-12 months, these savings would not be realised until 2025/26.

- 1.5. The anticipated savings would be derived from reduced maintenance costs, including decommissioning the AWS cloud for Idox, cost savings associated with a hosted service and reduced administrative staff salaries. Although the overall cost of the project, including project management and implementation costs, would amount to £215k, the expected annual savings of £68k provide a compelling invest-to-save case, with the initial investment recouped in approximately years 3-4.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Cabinet Member is requested to agree to procure IDOX Cloud using allocated capital funds.

3. Context

- 3.1. In 2010, the Development Management and Building Control Services merged, and Idox, the software provider, successfully established a joint database across both Councils. This allowed for the registration and validation of planning and building control applications while maintaining separate records for each authority.
- 3.2. However, the current back-office system, Uniform, although functional, requires the capabilities of more modern, browser-based technologies. Consequently, Idox has initiated the implementation of a new cloud-based solution for all its existing customers. Notably, Idox provides planning and building control software solutions for a substantial number of Councils nationwide (69% and 100% of Scottish Councils). They have also acquired some competitors, such as Tascomi, which currently offers IT solutions for Environmental Health and Licensing.
- 3.3. Additionally, the Planning and Building Control Services have faced challenges due to the outdated and inflexible nature of the Uniform system. Poor integration with the Council's Document Management System (DMS), and the inability to integrate with Google have led to significant inefficiencies. For instance, saving a plan or email received in

Gmail requires several steps, including opening Outlook, Office Connect, and saving to our DMS, often resulting in time-consuming downloads for each document. This process hampers productivity as staff cannot perform other tasks during this period.

- 3.4. Moreover, the lack of an integrated document management system forces applications submitted via the Planning Portal (roughly 85% of planning applications) to be initially saved to the Council's network drives and then individually indexed to our DMS. Additionally, staff cannot seamlessly switch between Uniform and our DMS without having both systems open on their desktop. The recent upgrade to the DMS has exacerbated some integration issues and worsened matters in various aspects.
- 3.5. The public access our planning records in our DMS through our public access module on the website. However, the search facility on NEC Document Management is limited, providing few opportunities to filter searches for letters or plans. In contrast, the South Downs National Park utilises both Idox Uni-form and DMS, and their public-facing website pages offer more transparent and more user-friendly navigation for the public.
- 3.6. Given the problems with the planning and building control current solution a project was instigated in 2015. to implement a new IT solution. The Company started implementing a solution with Land Charges and then developed a solution with Planning and Building Control. The contracted company, ARCUS aimed to build a completely new solution but failed to deliver on the project within projected timelines. The resources required within the teams meant the project failed and was not proceeded with in 2019.

4. Issues for Consideration

- 4.1. After identifying the current problems, the Planning and Building Control Services and Digital have explored ways to improve their integration of IT systems. Initially, they considered implementing the Idox document management system alongside the existing Uniform setup to enhance integration. However, it became apparent that this solution would only address some of the inefficiencies. Idox indicated that the additional cost of transitioning to their new complete SaaS cloud-based solution would not significantly increase in cost. As Idox plans to move all its customers to the cloud-based solution eventually, it seemed like the most suitable option.

- 4.2. Although the possibility of a tender process was considered, using the Government's Framework agreement appeared to be a quicker and more cost-effective route for the Council to achieve substantial efficiency gains.
- 4.3. The proposed cloud-based Idox solution would tackle several issues. It includes an embedded document management system, ensuring instant access to documents. Utilising web browser technology, documents can be easily dragged into the relevant file without the current laborious indexing process. The cloud-based approach would enable planning and building control teams to download documents directly from the Planning Portal, with back-office fields automatically populated (e.g. applicant, address, and application descriptions), saving significant administrative time.
- 4.4. As previously mentioned, the public interface would also benefit from improved data access; while planning and building control customers would experience advantages in terms of case management and understanding application status in the planning process.
- 4.5. The total cost of the software purchase would amount to approximately £110k, with the need to appoint a Digital Project Manager to oversee delivery and ensure relevant staff in planning and building control can focus on project design and implementation. Overall, the cost, including expenses for external suppliers transferring data to the new embedded document management system (e.g., NEC), would be around £215k. However, these costs would be offset by significant revenue savings of approximately £111k per year. This project can, therefore, be considered an 'invest to save' initiative, with implementation costs recouped in approximately two years.
- 4.6. The potential revenue savings include reduced maintenance costs, decreased AWS cloud expenses, and the elimination of one full-time administrative position. A breakdown of project costs and potential revenue savings is appended to this report for reference.

5. Engagement and Communication

A project team has been set up to assess the options and this team has included planning and building control representatives, digital, finance, legal and procurement.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. The budget allocation was approved at the JSC sub-committees in September and the shortfall in the budget for the replacement planning system will be funded from the contingency budget. Funds are approved for the project up to a budget of £214,670 across both councils

6.1.1. Project Costs

There will be revenue implications in terms of the support and maintenance of the new software as set out below:

Existing True Cost (Yearly)

Uniform and Public Access (Paid to IDOX) **£55,530**
Application Upgrade (Paid to IDOX) **£20,000**
AWS Hosting and Storage (Paid to ANS) **£25,000**
NEC Document Management (Estimated £ as shared across multiple services) (Paid to NEC) **£7000**
TOTAL = £107,530

6.1.2. New Proposed True Cost (Yearly)

Idox Cloud (Includes Uniform, Public Access & IDOX DMS) **£55,767**
Office 365 licence - **£7,553**
=£63,320

6.1.3 Proposed Revenue Savings (Yearly)

Idox - Upgrade carried Idox (Service) **£20,000**
Decommissioning the AWS Idox Environment (Digital) **£25,000**
NEC Document Management **£7000**
Staff Savings (Service) **£24,000**
=£76,000

Total Annual Saving = £68,210
(net of £7,790 additional Public Access costs).

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1. Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or which is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.

- 7.2. s1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the Council to do anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation.
- 7.3. Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 (LGA 1999) contains a general duty on a best-value authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 7.4. s1 Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 confers power on the Council to enter into a contract for the provision of making available assets or services for the purposes of, or in connection with, the discharge of the function by the Council.
- 7.5. When entering into a public contract, the authority is required to comply with the Councils' Contract Standing Orders found at Part 4 of the Councils' constitution. Where the Contract is an above threshold contract for goods and/or services as defined by the Public Contract Regulations 2015 any procurement exercise to contract for those goods and services must be conducted in accordance with those Regulations (which is retained law by virtue of s29 of the European Union (Future Relationship) Act 2020).

Background Papers

- [Crown Commercial Services Framework Agreement - Agreement ID RM3821](#) -

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Sustainability & Risk Assessment

1. Economic

1.1. Matter considered and no issues identified

2. Social

2.1. Matter considered and no issues identified

3. Social Value

3.1. Matter considered and no issues identified

4. Equality Issues

4.1. Matter considered and no issues identified

5. Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

5.1. Matter considered and no issues identified

6. Human Rights Issues

6.1. Matter considered and no issues identified

7. Environmental

7.1. Matter considered and no issues identified

8. Governance

8.1. The project lifecycle, scope, milestones and benefits tracking will be completed within the project board.

8.2. IDOX as the supplier of the new system will be part of the project board