WIRRAL

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 17 JANUARY 2023

REPORT TITLE:	PLANNING SYSTEM UPDATE
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report is to update the Committee on the implementation of the public portal for planning, building control and the regulatory services.

The portal affects all wards across the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION

The Audit and Risk Management Committee is recommended to note the report.

1. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

1.1. To provide Members with an update to review the progress of migration from legacy products for planning, building control and the regulatory services.

2. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

2.1. Remaining on the legacy product was not an option as the software was approaching it's end of life support.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1. As part of Wirral Council digital strategy, the application rationalization programme is to reduce the total number of applications in use across the organisation to reduce complexity and enable savings where possible.

3.2. Three legacy systems were in use across Building Control, Planning, Land Charges, Environmental Health, Licensing, Housing, Grants, Adaptations and Trading Standards.

3.3. The award of the new system was made after of two rounds of procurement to Tascomi, which was then acquired by Idox. No other supplier responded in full to the tender nor could fulfil all of the requirements of the specification.

3.4. The procurement exercise was completed using the Crown Commercial Services (CCS) Framework, 'RM3821 Data and Applications Solutions'. There are 14 suppliers on this framework under 'Lot 2b – Environmental and Planning'.

3.5. Idox group has positioned to become a market leader for regulatory software, having Uniform, Acolaid (legacy) and Idox cloud offerings. These are used by the majority of Councils across the UK.

3.6. The Idox cloud solutions first went live for Public Protection – Houses in multiple occupancy (HMO) and Selective licencing in August 2021. Landlords use the public portal to submit applications and payments.

3.7. Building Control went live October 2021.

3.8. Planning went live June 2022.

3.9. Public Protection phase 2 for regulatory services went live September 2022.

Planning Portal

3.10. The Planning service receives circa 2000 applications a year and all applications are available to view by the public on the planning portal. The Idox Cloud product has a different look and feel to the previous Acolaid system. It displays less information and users report that it is harder to navigate than the previous system

3.11. The planning service has a log of all issues raised by Members and the public, and as of the writing of this report 28 issues have been raised and logged, see Appendix 1 of this report.

3.12. Majority of issues raised are due to the functionality that the Idox portal does not provide compared to the previous planning system. While the Idox cloud portal is different, it is considered to be fit for purpose, as it exceeds the government's minimum statutory information requirement.

3.13. The one issue that is not functionality related is that of the email notifications going into the 'Junk' folder. Work is ongoing with Idox to resolve this issue.

3.14. Each of the Idox cloud modules has a corresponding log of project issues. Project risks and issues are reviewed daily by the Wirral project manager and on a weekly update call with the Idox project manager.

3.15. A monthly report is reviewed by the Digital Programme board and every three weeks by the Regulatory & Environmental Services Replacement Software (RESRS) project board chaired by the Chief Planner.

3.16. Issues that occur once a service has gone live are raised with the Idox service desk.

3.17. There have been three service outages since the system has gone live. On all three occasions it was related to issues with the server infrastructure. The longest outage meant the system was unavailable over a whole weekend. Idox have now migrated the system to the Amazon Web Services (AWS) cloud to mitigate these issues re-occurring.

3.18. Requests for product improvements are submitted to the Idox Ideas hub for consideration by the product development team. These typically take between 6 to 12 months to deliver once accepted by Idox.

3.19. Idox retains ownership of their cloud product which essentially is a single solution shared across all their customers. The Idox product team decides if any development will take place, when and what the deliverable will be like.

3.20. Participation in national user groups has begun and it is believed that greater customer pressure upon Idox can be made to direct the priority issues nationally.

3.21. From discussions with colleagues from Liverpool City Council it is understood that Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) have had discussions with Idox following issues raised by Councils.

3.22. The 'Search for planning applications' page on the Wirral Council website has been completely updated to provide advice on viewing and commenting on applications in the new planning system. This was based on feedback and issues raised by residents.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
4.1. There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS
5.1. The Wirral Council legal team has been consulted in relation to supplier performance and possible contract breaches.

5.2. The recommended outcome is to continue to work with Idox to a negotiated settlement of each issue which requires close management.

6. **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

6.1. It is envisaged that all project work will be carried out within existing resources.

6.2. The Head of ICT and Digital is working with the project board representatives from across all the service areas to deliver a corporate based application support team. This will provide a centralised team for supporting the new system while also managing the service provided by Idox.

7. **RELEVANT RISKS**

7.1. All project risks are captured within the Digital Programme. Once the project is complete risks will be managed through departmental risk registers and associated process.

8. **ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1. An issues log captures all feedback from Members and the public. The Chief Planner has also met with representatives from local groups who use the system to update them and listen to their concerns. The group advised that they would collate their issues to assist the service in responding to a group rather than individuals.

9. **EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1. There are no direct equality implications arising as a direct result of this report.

10. **ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1. There are no direct environment or climate implications as a direct result of this report.

11. **COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1. An effective public portal for planning, building control and the regulatory service is beneficial to residents, through helping to ensure effective businesses and supporting investment into the local economy.

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APPENDICES
Appendix 1 – Idox Cloud Issues Log

The information contained within the appendix of this report may not be suitable to view for people with disabilities, users of assistive technology or mobile phone devices. Please contact petermoulton@wirral.gov.uk if you would like this document in an accessible format.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Digital Programme Risk Register
Meeting minutes from meetings with Idox
Regulatory Service Tender Document

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Audit and Risk Management Committee in accordance with Section C of its Terms of Reference, "Risk Management and Control".

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date