



Subject:	Award of contract to replace the Northern Ireland Planning Portal
Date:	21 July 2020
Reporting Officer:	Aidan Thatcher, Director of Planning and Building Control
Contact Officer:	Ed Baker, Planning Manager (Development Management)

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To advise the Planning Committee that a contract has been awarded to replace the Northern Ireland Planning Portal with a new IT system, expected to be implemented late 2021/early 2022. The replacement Planning Portal will allow applicants to submit online applications for the first time and is expected to greatly improve the efficiency of the Council's Planning Service. It will also support increased flexibility for remote working.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	Members are asked to note the report.

3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>The Northern Ireland Planning Portal (NIPP) provides the public website interface which citizens use to find information and comment on planning applications. It also provides back-office software that the Council's Planning Service uses to process planning applications and enforcement cases, as well as supporting the administration of regional property certificates.</p>
3.2	<p>The NIPP was implemented by the former Department of Environment in 2010 as a regional IT solution and was inherited by the 11 councils as a shared system in 2015 on the transfer of planning powers to local government. The NIPP is provided by a third-party supplier, DXC. The contract for the Planning Portal is managed by the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) and will expire at the end of December 2021.</p>
3.3	<p>Since 2016, DFI and the 11 councils have been part of a regional project to explore options for replacing the NIPP. In January 2019, DFI published an Outline Business Case (OBC) which recommended that the NIPP is replaced by another shared regional IT system, based on a "Commercial Off The Shelf" product with some local configuration for each Planning Authority. All 12 Planning Authorities signed up to the next phase of the project which was to undertake a procurement process. This was completed in March 2020. DFI subsequently published a Full Business Case (FBC) proposing to award the contract to TerraQuest Solutions, the preferred supplier.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Award of Contract</u></p> <p>In April 2020, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed the award of contract subject to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Department and a minimum of 10 councils agree the award of the contract by the end of June 2020; • the capital cost to Local Government will be split evenly between councils and operating costs will be split according to fee income (as set out in the Funding Proposal accompanying the Full Business Case), but fixed for at least three years to aid financial planning; • implementation of the six recommendations of the Gateway Review 3 report (independent assurance report); and • BCC is part of the first wave of councils to implement the new IT system (as previously requested).
3.5	<p>DFI and 10 councils (including BCC) have agreed the FBC and the contract has been awarded accordingly, with the new IT system to be shared by these 11 Planning Authorities. Only Mid Ulster Council has withdrawn from the process and it will procure its own standalone system. The new regional IT system is expected to be implemented late 2021/early 2022 and BCC will be part of the first wave. The award of contract is for an initial 10 years with 5 + 5 year options according to the performance of the new system.</p>
3.6	<p><u>New supplier – TerraQuest Solutions</u></p> <p>The contract has been awarded to TerraQuest Solutions. The company was one of five suppliers to submit Selection Questionnaires and these were shortlisted to two suppliers for the final tender stage. The procurement was based on Competitive Procedure with Negotiation overseen by the Central Procurement Directorate (Department of Finance). The tenders were assessed on the basis of 60% quality and 40% cost. TerraQuest Solutions' bid won in both categories.</p>

3.7	<p>TerraQuest Solution's winning bid is made on behalf of a consortium which includes PortalPlanQuest (PPQ) and DEF Software (DEF). PPQ operates the Planning Portal in England (a national website that hosts around 90% of online planning application submissions in England). It is also contracted to deliver this service in Wales. DEF Software provides digital and cloud-deployed back-office systems to local councils for Planning, Building Control and related services. DEF currently has 35 live UK sites including council planning services in both England and Wales.</p>																					
3.8	<p><u>Benefits of the new IT system</u> The benefits are summarised in the table below.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="272 521 1465 1982"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="272 521 815 555">Public Access website</th> <th data-bbox="815 521 1465 555">Back-office IT system</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="272 555 815 667">Ability to submit online planning applications including online payments</td> <td data-bbox="815 555 1465 667">Automated uploading of applications, drawings and documentation (i.e. no need for manual data entry or scanning online applications)</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="272 667 815 808">Ability to submit online enforcement complaints</td> <td data-bbox="815 667 1465 808">Improved workflow for staff with assignment of configurable task notifications prioritised according to a Red/Amber/Green traffic light system</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="272 808 815 949">Ability to submit online requests for Property Certificates (part of the property conveyance process)</td> <td data-bbox="815 808 1465 949">Ability to assign, allocate, reallocate work electronically within the system, as well as checking reports and signing off decisions (to support a paperless office approach)</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="272 949 815 1090">Shared regional approach to online submissions providing consistency across the vast majority of NI</td> <td data-bbox="815 949 1465 1090">Automated notification reminders to staff, customers and consultees to complete tasks / submit information / provide a consultation response</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="272 1090 815 1272">The online process will drive quality applications at submission through identification of validation and configurable local information requirements</td> <td data-bbox="815 1090 1465 1272">Ability for each council to configure their own templates e.g. standard customer letters, delegated and committee reports, and model planning conditions</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="272 1272 815 1413">Improved access to information for customers including availability of planning constraint layers (both textually and GIS)</td> <td data-bbox="815 1272 1465 1413">Enhanced reporting and monitoring of performance and outcomes (by teams, individuals and wider service)</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="272 1413 815 1982" rowspan="6"></td> <td data-bbox="815 1413 1465 1525">Fully integrated Electronic Documentation Management System to support a paperless office approach</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="815 1525 1465 1666">Communications Portal to support communication within the system between BCC staff and customers, and BCC staff and consultees</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="815 1666 1465 1749">Module for monitoring S76 agreements; 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<p>3.9</p> <p>3.10</p> <p>3.11</p> <p>3.12</p>	<p><u>Implementation</u></p> <p>The Council has played a lead role in the project to date, being one of three councils to agree the specification for the new IT system on behalf of local government, representation on the tender panel and providing staff to the core project team. It is vital that the Council continues to have a lead role during the design and implementation stage to ensure that its requirements are met. A BCC Senior Planning Officer has been seconded to the core project through Interchange as the Business Lead, an influential role, and will represent BCC's interests well. BCC will continue to be represented on the Planning Portal Governance Board which has strategic oversight of the project.</p> <p>Officers have established an internal implementation team projected managed by a Business Support Officer within the Planning Service. This reports to an internal project board, chaired by the Director of Planning and Building Control, with representatives from the Planning Service, Digital Services and Audit, Governance and Risk Service and other services contributing as required. Planning and Digital Services staff will be drawn into the internal project team as and when required during the implementation phase.</p> <p><u>Governance</u></p> <p>The Planning Portal Governance Board will retain overall strategic control of the project. The Governance Board is chaired by DFI and includes the 10 councils. The new supplier is also represented. BCC is represented by the Planning Manager (Development Management) and Head of Digital Services.</p> <p><u>Contingency</u></p> <p>The current NIPP is supported until the end of December 2021. There is currently no contingency for technical support for the Planning Portal beyond that date. The new IT system is not scheduled to go live in full until February 2022, although BCC will be part of the first wave implementation planned for late 2021. Notwithstanding, the timetable may slip due to various risks including the Coronavirus pandemic. DFI is assessing contingency options for providing continued technical support for the current NIPP post December 2021 to ensure business continuity, and regularly reports to the Planning Portal Governance Board on this issue. The need to replace the current NIPP is a service risk, which is being continuously monitored.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Financial & Resource Implications</p>
<p>4.1</p>	<p>The cost of the new IT system will be shared between DFI and the 10 councils. The Department will fund 55% of the overall costs. In terms of local government costs, capital costs will be split evenly between the 10 councils with operating costs split according to fee income. The overall cost to BCC will be £2,062,000 over 21 years (£98k pa).</p>
<p>5.0</p>	<p>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</p>
<p>5.1</p>	<p>No adverse impacts identified.</p>