

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

04 April 2024

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing & Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 AGILE SOFTWARE IMPLEMENTATION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The O&S Committee has asked to review the implementation of the Agile project and has asked the following specific questions, which have informed the following sections of this report;

- Was the procurement for the system discussed by Members?
- What was the budget and was it decided by Cabinet or officers?
- Has it been used in other Authorities and did we consult with them to see what worked?
- What are the timescales involved?
- When was the contract let?
- When was it supposed to be up and working?
- Why are we going backwards with regard to the usability of data such as List B?
- What works well?

1.1.2 The governance structure for this project includes the following key roles;

Person	Role	Responsibility
Eleanor Hoyle	Business product and project owner & Chair of Project Board	Representing directorate that will be the primary contributors and stakeholders of the solution and outcome throughout the lifecycle of the project. Senior Stakeholder accountable for project outcomes and benefits. Commercial escalation.

		Change Control co-approval. Issue management and escalation.
Sharon Shelton	Financial Sponsor	Provide finance support and approval. Change Control co-approval.
Ganesh Thangarajah	IT Project Manager/ Technical product owner	IT services will own the responsibility for coordination of technical implementation, availability management, integration.
James Bailey - Planning and Building Control Linda Hibbs - Housing Michael Campbell-Lenaghan – Environmental Health and Protection Anthony Garnett - Licensing	Senior representation/users	Responsible for coordination of business services, UAT and project sign off.
Agile	Project Manager	Primary project management with the overall responsibility for project delivery. Responsible for managing the project and provide high level updates to project board.
Nizete Vasconcelos	Project Coordinator (role later replaced with Business Change Project Manager, see below)	Main point of contact, liaison with Agile Applications project team. Liaison with internal Business and IT teams.

- 1.1.3 The Agile project is identified as a red risk on the Council's strategic risk register. This level of risk has been identified based on the challenges with service delivery in Planning and Building Control following implementation of their modules in October, the fact that the remaining APAS modules (Street Naming & Numbering, Land Charges and Land Terrier) are yet to be implemented and that there are still a number of project milestones to meet for PLACIS (Housing Improvement, Environmental Protection, Licensing and Food & Safety).

1.2 Areas for consideration

- 1.2.1 The procurement of the system was reported to Members on 15 March 2022 in a private report authored by the Director of Finance & Transformation. This also included proposed budget for implementation and ongoing revenue costs, as well as identification of where savings might be made. Members recommended to Full Council that:

(1) The outcome of the procurement process and the planning implementation programme, as set out in the report, be noted;

(2) The estimated annual saving of circa £50,000 compared to the current software platform from 2023/24 be noted; and

(3) The use of £100,000 from the Invest to Save Reserve be approved to support the implementation and training programme.

- 1.2.2 Full Council subsequently resolved to accept these recommendations and the contract was signed on 26 May 2022, which was later than anticipated due to lack of Legal resource internally to complete the work. However, as the project board inception meeting was not then scheduled until July 2022, it is considered unlikely that this had any significant impact on project delivery.
- 1.2.3 Agile is a SaaS (software as a service) product. This means that the council will have the use of the 'line of business application' (Agile) as a service via a cloud hosted platform by the vendor.
- 1.2.4 The Agile software system is utilised in a number of other Councils. Services took the opportunity to engage with other authorities after the procurement exercise was completed to understand what some of the implementation challenges had been, as this opportunity was not available during the procurement exercise.
- 1.2.5 The original timescale for delivery for both the APAS and PLACIS programmes was March 2023. This was amended in January 2023 to a split delivery programme, with an initial focus on APAS, with delivery for all modules targeted in October 2023. This was achieved for Planning and Building Control and a revision was made for the remaining APAS modules to end of March 2024. A revised PLACIS programme was requested in December 2023 to test whether delivery by the end of March 2024 was achievable. On review, it was clear that the amount of time required from services and the likely service delivery compromises on go live were too significant. The current revised programme puts PLACIS implementation in September 2024.
- 1.2.6 With regards to useability of data, every software system operates in a different way. The position reached with Uniform was developed over a number of years. The weekly list format has been developed since the inception of Agile to include features such as filters on spreadsheets and further enhancements remain on the work programme. However, these won't all be delivered in the short term, as some of them may require changes to functionality within the Agile system, which the Council can only influence. IT and service officers are joining Agile customer focus groups, which look at their 'roadmap' for delivery of enhancements to their system to ensure that we maximise this influence.
- 1.2.7 Agile is now live for Planning (applications, enforcement and appeals) and Building Control. These services are able to process applications, albeit that there are still a number of functionality issues that need to be addressed, which are resulting in backlogs. Staff confidence in the system is lower than it needs to be. The project team of senior officers are working very closely with Agile and the staff

end users to ensure that matters are resolved or working properly as soon as possible. Whilst a period of adjustment is fairly usual after the implementation of a new software system, the level of change needed to implement a system after over 30 years utilising the previous system was more significant than the original project timescale and scope allowed for.

- 1.2.8 Initially, internal project coordination was managed within the IT service as an additional task for an existing member of staff. However, due to the significant change management requirements working with services, as well as the level of configuration work and understanding required from those service users, this was insufficient to deliver the project.
- 1.2.9 Since May 2023, the Council has employed a contract Business Change Project Manager, reporting to the Director of Planning, Housing & Environmental Health, to provide internal project management for implementation, which was not part of the original project scope. This role meets weekly with all internal teams, liaises directly with Agile's project manager and provides project updates to DPHEH twice weekly at least. The BCPM has implemented project risk registers, delivery plans utilising project management software and manages a workstream focused on embedding Agile into the various teams to ensure it can be successfully managed in 'business as usual'.
- 1.2.10 The main remaining 'APAS' teams, Land Charges and Street Naming & Numbering, are due to go live in March/April 2024. These programmes are being delivered with significant project management input from TMBC to ensure that they move forward at pace and are balanced with ongoing business as usual requirements. Land Terrier requires additional configuration work, which Agile has committed resources to in Q1 of the 24/25 financial year.
- 1.2.11 Initial stage IT tasks were completed within agreed programme timescales and the IT service has continued to support the project to address data and document issues and deliver technical development activities such as producing internal Power BI reports or developing workflows in the system as part of configuration, whilst also upskilling service staff in the latter, as this is considered to be a service user task in the TMBC model.
- 1.2.12 The implementation has required a very significant amount of staff time in services, far above any expectations set with service users at the outset of the project. This, coupled with the internal approach to project management needing to be reset, meant that there was a lack of progress in the first 6-9 months of the project.
- 1.2.13 The Agile system is now embedding in Planning and Building Control, although with a number of key 'post go live' tasks and issues to be resolved. These are now not at a level that is considered unusual for a major software implementation, albeit the length of time between go live (October 2023) and conclusion of these matters is unsatisfactory and has taken significant senior officer resource from the

service to move forward. The BCPM and senior managers have worked closely with staff to ensure they are updating user guides and sharing knowledge about how to utilise the system. Validation timescales in planning have reduced significantly from a peak backlog in early 2024 of 5 weeks to around 2 weeks. The service is now starting to implement system enhancements, with costs offset by efficiencies, to improve service delivery and customer experience through automation, redaction and document management.

1.3 Legal Implications

- 1.3.1 The application contract is standard, as it is part of the Crown Commercial Service's Framework. It is used by number of other local authorities across the country, Hence, the terms involved are not bespoke to Tonbridge and Malling borough council. The Council has "onboarded" on to the supplier's hosted application platform, for which the terms are pre-set within the G-Cloud 12 Call-Off Contract.
- 1.3.2 There is indemnity insurance clause within the contract to cover damages costs and expenses incurred due to, information breach, accidental death or bodily injury and loss of or damage to Property of the buyer. However, given that this is a SaaS product and the contributing factors to the project delays involves both parties, it was not prudent for us to consider any 'Force Majeure' options as the alternative will cost us significantly higher operational revenue costs.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.4.1 Total Capital expenditure and for the Agile project thus far amounts to £99,600. The total cost product licences and project management was £75,600, of which £70,500 has been invoiced and £5k pending for payment. A sum of £24,000 was paid as part of the initial cost at the inception for the hosting charges for the cloud infrastructure during the pre-go-live implementation period of 6 months.
- 1.4.2 A further enhancement project has recently received Cabinet Member approval, with costs of £77, 460. This will cover automation, redaction and document management.
- 1.4.3 Ongoing annual SaaS costs of £48k for Agile is provided within IT revenue budget under Software Hire & Support. However, due to the Agile's contribution to the delays to the project, the first-year's annual cost (2023-24) was reduced to £30k. Some of the £18k saving was utilised in year for the additional training required for staff.
- 1.4.4 The costs to the Council of project management resource, from 1 May 2023 to end of October 2024, are £220,000.

1.5 Risk Assessment

- 1.5.1 Staff in PLACIS teams are working on 'super user' configuration, alongside Agile delivering data and document migration tasks. There is a significant service requirement to deliver these tasks, with 2 staff in each PLACIS team currently dedicating 2 days per week to Agile tasks. This inevitably puts pressure on capacity in these teams and lessens resilience should unexpected service issues arise. This is reviewed weekly by DPHEH and BCPM.
- 1.5.2 There are a number of APAS post go live tasks still to complete, reviewed weekly by DPHEH and Head of PMO at Agile. These continue to require service and IT resource to progress. Capacity and resources are discussed in weekly meetings of various staff involved in the project and any concerns are escalated to DPHEH or the Head of IT.
- 1.5.3 Land Charges and Land Terrier modules in APAS still to go live. There is a risk that sufficient resource from Agile and TMBC is not committed to these modules to ensure that they progress at an acceptable pace. BCPM and DPHEH review internally on a weekly basis and as go live dates approach, meetings with Agile's Head of PMO will commence to review these.
- 1.5.4 Whilst Agile is not a system hosted by our internal IT services within TMBC, currently a number of IT development resources are being used by the services to support in the development of skills to carry out business administration tasks such as creating letter templates and workflows. There has also been a need to reset the approach to ongoing support for service users and to change the approach with the internal TMBC IT Helpdesk to ensure that there is an ability to keep an oversight of issues being raised with Agile and to manage these as part of 'business as usual' contract management activity. This has put a strain on the already stretched IT resources and is inevitably impacting the IT development teams capacity to cater for the routine operational needs as well as other major digital transformation projects underpinning the council's corporate and digital strategies. Currently the HIT is carryout a mini-restructure within IT services to help cope with the growing demand.
- 1.5.5 Internal audit is carrying out a 'post implementation review' for the APAS phase of implementation. This will be finalised in April. This is considered an important interim step in reviewing the project to ensure that any lessons that can be learned from the APAS implementation can be implemented in the coming months as PLACIS is implemented.
- 1.5.6 The Audit Committee has asked to review Agile from a risk perspective and relevant officers will be attending the upcoming Audit Committee to discuss this matter.

1.6 Policy Considerations

1.6.1 Procurement

1.7 Recommendations

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to;

1.7.1 NOTE the information provided in response to the specific queries raised; and

1.7.2 NOTE that the Audit Committee is reviewing Agile from a risk management perspective at their next meeting.

Background papers:

Nil

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Eleanor Hoyle

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