Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

Update Replacement of the Planning Portal: • Letter from DfI	20 December 2017
Planning Committee	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and Enhancing our Environments and Assets
Outcome	Pro-active decision making which protects the natural features, characteristics and integrity of the Borough
Lead Officer	Head of Planning
Cost: (If applicable)	N/A

1.0 Background

1.1 The existing Northern Ireland Planning Portal is the IT system that allows Council to carry out its statutory Planning function. This includes processing planning applications, planning consents, enforcement cases etc. The system is also used by the public, planning agents, solicitors and consultees to view and make comment on planning applications.

1.2 The contract for the maintenance and support of the system ends in March 2019.

2.0 Details

2.1 A briefing note providing the update position from DfI is attached at Appendix 1. The 11 Councils and DfI have been working together to review the current processes involved in the Planning function and considering the key requirements for a new system to identify a minimum viable product for a new system. This Discovery Phase is now complete.

2.2 The discovery Phase identified the following potential business solutions:
- One shared IT system that is collectively managed/controlled
- One shared IT system that is collectively managed/controlled but with local control for specific functions
- One shared public facing IT system with multiple independent back-office IT systems for each local council and the Department
- Twelve stand-alone IT systems – one for each local council and the Department

2.3 The results of the Discovery Phase will now go forward to develop a Business Case for the replacement of the Planning Portal and PA Consulting have been appointed to undertake this work which is due for completion in early 2018.

3.0 Recommendation

3.1 **IT IS RECOMMENDED** that the Planning Committee note the update on the replacement of the Planning Portal.

Northern Ireland Planning Portal (NIPP) – Strategic Direction

Need for a new planning IT system

The NI Planning Portal's primary purpose is to assist the 11 councils and the Department with carrying out their statutory planning functions. This includes processing planning applications, planning consents, enforcement cases, etc. A separate but interlinked IT system is also operated by the councils' Regional Property Certificate Unit. The system is also used by the public, planning agents, solicitors and consultees and handled over 13,000 planning applications last year.

The NIPP was developed over ten years ago when the Department was the single planning authority for Northern Ireland. While the portal is still operational, it is reaching the end of its operational life and no longer meets all of the needs of users. The contract for the maintenance and support of the system ends in March 2019.

Plan for identifying a new planning IT system – Discovery

The Department and local government colleagues have been working together to identify the way forward for a new planning IT solution. The first phase of this work was to undertake a Discovery exercise over the summer to identify the key requirements of any new system. This work involved engagement with a wide range of stakeholders from local government, central government and other organizations, which helped to identify the key functions and features required. The key functions include:
- Ability to accept on-line applications in order to move towards a paperless process
- Ability to accept on-line payments
- Ability to manage and monitor large volume of planning applications
- Notifications and alerts for application updates for all users of the system
- A consistent mapping service with easy to select mapping layers with each planning Authority having the ability to manage their own default filters
- A search function that will allow users' to interrogate the system across several different search criteria, and enable each planning Authority to create and save their own standard searches.
- Ability for each planning Authority to manage, customize and maintain their own templates, and library of conditions and refusal reasons.
- Ability for each planning Authority to produce their own core reports including Key Performance Indictor reports.

At this stage the new system will also include property certificates although this will need to be confirmed.

The Discovery phase also identified the following potential business solutions:
- One shared IT system that is collectively managed / controlled
- One shared IT system that is collectively managed / controlled but with local control for specific functions
- One shared public facing IT system with multiple independent back-office IT systems for each local council and the Department
- Twelve standalone IT systems – one for each local council and the Department

Plan for identifying a new planning IT system – Business Case

The second phase of this project is to develop a business case and PA Consulting were recently appointed to undertake this work, which is due to be completed in early 2018.

As part of the business case, the consultants will be working with central and local government to identify the costs, potential savings and benefits of a new IT system. This will include meeting up to 13 potential IT suppliers during the first two weeks in December, as part of a market sounding exercise.

The consultants will use this information as well as the outcomes from Discovery to identify potential options for a new planning IT system or systems. A long list of options will be considered and sifted to produce a short list. The criteria used for sifting these options will be developed in the coming weeks. This will include the potential suitability of these options, such as the functionality of the proposal, as well as the feasibility of implementation with issues such as data migration and timescales for implementation.

These shortlisted options will then be appraised using HMT Green Book guidance and the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation to ensure a decision is reached which represents value for money. The key elements of this appraisal are outlined below and will be developed further during December to reflect the feedback from the market sounding exercise.
- estimate the monetary costs and benefits;
- identify and compare non-monetary benefits (such as usability by staff and public);
- risk assessment;
- outline affordability and funding considerations; and
- plan for the project to be appropriately monitored, managed and evaluated.

The outcome is for PA Consulting to develop a business case that will provide an impartial view of the available options and to identify a preferred option for a new planning IT solution, and recommend arrangements for implementation of this preferred option. The business case will then be considered by the councils and the Department to agree a way forward.