Agenda Item No:	6
Report To:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	23 February 2022
Report Title:	Final Report of the O&S Task Group's Review of the Planning IT System Delivery
Report Author: **Job Title:** **O&S Task Group Chairman**	Abi Sheppard Policy and Scrutiny Officer Cllr. N Ovenden

Summary:	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to form a Task Group to review the lessons learnt during the project to deliver the new Planning IT System with Arcus Global. The Group also wanted to ensure that where issues had been experienced they were not repeated for future transformation projects.

Key Decision:	NO
Significantly Affected Wards:	All
Recommendations:	**The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would like to endorse the following recommendations to Cabinet:**

I. **Projects of a certain size or importance require a professional project manager and this role should not be in addition to normal duties.**

II. **Unnecessary and historic data should not be transferred to new systems and any data migration should be considered during the early stages of a project. A data retention policy should be agreed and adopted for implementation in the project.**

III. **Internal and external user testing should be thoroughly scoped, agreed through PMG and carried out for any future system implementation or upgrade.**

IV. **Detailed scoping of Officers time should take place when considering project resources.**

V. **Consultation with external customers should take place at the outset of a project to inform its delivery.**

VI. **PMG should determine the governance arrangements of future projects, including frequency of highlight reports setting out key risks and challenges.**

VII. **Portfolio Holders should be kept informed of project updates for key projects in their Service on a regular basis, which is defined from the outset of a project.**

VIII. **System rollouts should foremost be designed to improve the customer experience and processes need to be mapped with this in mind.**

Policy Overview: **Financial Implications:**	There are no financial implications resulting from the review.
Legal Implications:	There are no legal implications resulting from the review.
Equalities Impact Assessment:	Not Required
Data Protection Impact Assessment:	Not Required
Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):	Not Required
Sustainability Implications:	Not Required
Other Material Implications:	Not Required
Exempt from Publication:	**NO**
Background Papers:	None
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Foreword from the Task Group Chairman

1.   In this report, the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group presents its findings and recommendations from the review that examined how the new planning IT system was delivered at the council.

2.   The review has highlighted that there were issues during the delivery of the Arcus Global system, some of which could have been avoided. The Witness Sessions, conducted during the review, allowed for in depth discussions over each stage of the project and I would like to commend Officers for working tirelessly on what was a challenging project and note the endeavours of all involved. One of the key lessons learnt was to ensure that enough resources are in place for future large scale projects. Although the system did get to the 'go live' stage, the pressure to do this compromised other important aspects of the project such as external consultation. Additionally, the Task Group felt that the reputational risk of the project was overlooked because the focus of the project was not developed with the customer in mind.

3.   The findings are a reflection of discussions conducted between Councillors and key Officers involved in the project. I would like to acknowledge the time and effort dedicated from Task Group Members, Portfolio Holders and Officers to attend meetings and participate in discussions.

Introduction and Background

4.   The Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified that there had been issues with the delivery of the new planning IT system with Arcus Global. It was agreed that a review should be prioritised in the work programme and undertaken by a dedicated Task and Finish Group.

5.   The aim for the review was to understand what issues had been experienced during the project and also what lessons could be taken forward in future transformation projects and system rollouts. In particular, Members were aware of plans in 2023 to develop the Arcus Global system further with the Planning and Development Service and also upgrade the system used by the Safety and Wellbeing Service. Therefore, it was important for the Task Group to understand the lessons that could be learnt from the delivery of the planning IT system project.

Review Scope

6.   The Task Group assembled 5 Members; Cllr Ovenden (Chair), Cllr. Ledger, Cllr. Harman, Cllr. Mulholland and Cllr. Hayward to review the success of the project delivery of the new IT system in the Planning and Development service and, if required, make some recommendations to improve the process for future system rollouts or projects.

7.   A scope was initially compiled for the review to establish where scrutiny could be most beneficial. During discussions about the scope, it was important to Members that the purpose of the review was not to apportion blame for issues that occurred throughout the project, but to understand any lessons that could be learnt to inform similar projects in future.

8.   The Task Group agreed that speaking to key individuals involved in the project would be the best way to understand issues completely. It was proposed that three or four 'Witness Sessions' would take place for Members to have a question and answer style discussion with the;

      a. Project Manager
      b. Assistant Director for Planning and Development
      c. Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development
      d. Head of IT
      e. Digital Transformation Manager
      f.   External consultant
      g. Main contact from Arcus Global

9.   The scope also identified a set of questions which were provided to the witnesses in advance to allow them time to prepare and aimed to guide discussion with Members at the Task Group meetings.

10.   The Task Group identified the following questions for the Witness Sessions:

      a. What were downfalls of the old system from an internal and external customer Point Of View and what did Arcus do to improve on them?

      b. What resources were allocated at the beginning of the project and was this sufficient?

      c. What have been the main issues during the project delivery of the Arcus Global system?

      d. How have the issues identified been dealt with and were they easy to resolve?

      e. What were the benefits and disbenefits of a service-led project management approach?

      f.   Were customers (including parish council's) consulted during the implementation process?

      g. What have been the barriers to pulling across more streamlined data?

h. What IT support was put in place for the project?

i. What learning has been explored from other councils and how has it been implemented?

11. External customer's direct feedback would not be required for this review as there were separate forums for customers to put their view forward. For example, Parish Councils had a training session scheduled separately on how to use the system. Members of the Task Group would also represent views of external users.

Review Findings

12. A number of key issues during delivery of the new Planning IT System were identified by the Task Group during the review. Issues have been categories within four main areas;

13.
    a. Project Team Resourcing
    b. User Testing and Data Migration
    c. External Customer Experience
    d. Governance and Communications

Project Team Resourcing

14. A main concern raised during the Witness Sessions related to the size of the project team in comparison to the size of the project. It was found that some officers who were key to delivering the project, had multiple work streams and it became difficult for them to manage the demands of the project and the running of the Planning Service. This indicated that the pressures of multiple work streams may have impacted officer's ability to deliver the project successfully, maximising the full benefits of the system. It was noted other authorities, that had recently implemented the same system, had dedicated teams of Officers in place to implement a project of this scale and this was identified as a key lesson to take forward from the review. The suggestion was made that better scoping of officer's time during the initial stages of a project should be undertaken to ensure realistic expectations over timings of project delivery and manageable workloads for officers. This would have made it evident that dedicated project management support was necessary. Overall, the Task Group agreed that more resources should be allocated to certain projects undertaken in future at the council. For example, those of particular importance to customers or those with significant financial or reputational risk. **(Recommendation V)**

15. Furthermore, Members agreed that the Project Manager should not be an additional role to normal duties for large-scale projects and should be considered a separate role. The review panel noted there was not a requirement for the Project Manager to have any professional project management qualifications. Although the hard work and commitment by the project team to implement the new system was acknowledged, it may have

been advantageous for the lead Officer to have project management qualifications to help move the project forward. **(Recommendation I)**

User Testing and Data Migration

16.   The Witness Sessions identified that there were additional pressures on Officers to deliver the project and 'go live' within a set timeframe.

17.   As part of the transition from one system to another, the migration of data was anticipated. The Task Group discussed the migration of legacy data and the time taken to do this part of the project. Issues arose around what data would be taken over and what wouldn't, for example, historic data. Due to time pressures of the project, the decision was made to migrate all of the data across. This went against the advice of the council's Corporate Information Governance Group and caused unexpected delays due to the additional time required to transfer the large set of data. The Task Group suggested that unnecessary and historic data should be identified during the early stages of a project and not migrated. This would avoid time delays, ensure a smoother transition process and be in line with the council's data protection and retention policies. **(Recommendation II)**

18.   Further issues were identified in regards to the User Acceptance Testing (UAT) conducted internally by Planning Officers. The purpose of conducting UAT was to test how well the system worked, raise any issues and resolve them prior to the system going live. It was suggested that there was not enough importance placed on the UAT due to the timescale pressures to get the system live. Additionally, there may have not been enough responsibility assigned to officers involved in user groups to ensure they understood the importance of the testing and prioritised it alongside their daily tasks. This resulted in incomplete testing and issues not being resolved prior to the go live date. Members agreed that explicit testing should be carried out with user groups and communicated to the project manager in order for issues to be understood and resolved in advance of going live with a new system. **(Recommendation III, IV)**

External Customer Experience

19.   The Task Group considered the implementation of the public facing (external customer) element of the Arcus Global system in detail. Following the system go-live date, a number of issues were identified with the public system and this resulted in negative feedback from some members of the public who used the system. An external survey was conducted to registered users of the Consultee Portal (including Members) of which 29 responses were received. The results found that 72% of respondents rated the usability of the system as only 1 or 2 out of 5 (1 being bad – 5 being good). When asked to elaborate on the scoring, a key issue highlighted by respondents was that the system was confusing.

20.   Overall, it was felt that the design of the system focussed on the needs of the Planning Service in the first instance. Although the back-office element of the system was the most significant part to implement, this suggested to the Task Group that the project was not designed with the customer in mind. It also

suggested that the reputational risk associated with the public facing part of the system had not been sufficiently considered.

21.   The Task Group also found that external consultation may not have been prioritised, in light of the pressure to get the system live. Members suggested that if effective consultation with customers had taken place, it was likely to have reduced the issues that arose following the go live date. However, due to the focus on getting the system to the point of go live, customer consultation had not been addressed. The group suggested that consultation with external customers at the very outset was vital when implementing a new system of this size, particularly when the system would be used heavily by customers, as was the case with the planning system. The reputational risk to the council also needed to be fully understood and mitigated against. It was also recommended that external consultation should take place during the initial stages of a project and then inform its delivery. In order to achieve this, user groups would need to be set up from the outset of a project and their feedback incorporated going forward to ensure it is customer focused throughout. **(Recommendation VI)**

Governance and Communications

22.   The Task Group wanted to understand how project updates were being communicated and overseen by the council's senior management. Project updates were received by the Programme Management Group (PMG) at multiple points during the project. Members questioned why the decision had been made to go live despite issues raised in regards to the data migration and UAT. It was found that the issues were advised within project updates to PMG, however, assurance had been given that these risks were manageable. The Task Group agreed that the decision to go live should be more rigorously challenged by PMG when receiving project updates to ensure that timescales were deliverable and are not detrimental to the project outcomes.

23.   The Task Group questioned the governance of the project further and asked specifically what arrangements were in place for project reporting. Although several project updates were brought forward to PMG by the Project Manager throughout the duration of the project, there were no specific arrangements in place to ensure the group were updated at milestone points in the project. For example, it was suggested that PMG should clarify the frequency of highlight reporting to PMG to set out the key risks and challenges of the project at that time. **(Recommendation VII)**

24.   Furthermore, the Task Group also discussed how Portfolio Holders were kept updated on the progress of the project. It was found that some key issues were not communicated effectively to the relevant Portfolio Holder, in particular its scope and the impact that a new system could have on the council's customers. Members suggested that regular updates on the status of a project should be in place between the lead Service and Portfolio Holder to ensure there is Member oversight of project delivery. **(Recommendation VIII)**

25. Communications of some project issues relating to the external user experience were also not escalated. The Task Group found that these issues were not picked up at senior management level due to the lack of focus around customer experience. It was proposed that to improve system rollouts in future, they should be planned around improving the customer experience and the processes be mapped accordingly with this in mind.

26. Furthermore, it was found that a communications plan had been put in place initially, however, this was not fully implemented for the duration of the project. It was explained to the Task Group that the communications team had been involved at an early stage but the plan was not revisited when the 'go live' was introduced. Members agreed that a strong communications plan was essential for helping system users to smoothly transition from one system to another. **(Recommendation IX)**

Conclusion

27. The implementation of the Arcus Global planning system was a challenging project which required a lot of work undertaken to get the system live. The Witness Sessions found that, ultimately, the time pressure to get the system live meant that some important processes were overlooked. The Task Group noted that testing and consultation were two areas that were not carried out thoroughly and therefore issues were not properly reported or resolved prior to the system going live. A key lesson to be learnt from this would be to ensure that system rollouts are tested appropriately and are developed with the customer in mind.

28. Furthermore, lessons could also be learnt around ensuring that all large scale projects in future have a dedicated team to deliver them. This would prevent Officers having to balance the workload on top of normal duties in their service. The Task Group also concluded that there could have been greater challenge on issues at a senior management level and so the lesson to be learnt here would be to ensure that governance arrangements of projects are clearly outlined by the council's PMG.

29. The Task Group finalised their conclusions in a Wrap Up meeting. The recommendations reflect key points raised from discussions held during Witness Sessions over the course of the review. The recommendations aim to improve the process for future large scale projects and system roll outs. Following approval from Cabinet, it was proposed that the Task Group could receive updates on the next phase of system upgrades with Arcus Global in the Planning and Development Service and Safety and Wellbeing Service.

Recommendations

30. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would like to endorse the following recommendations to the Cabinet:

    i. Projects of a certain size or importance require a professional project manager and this role should not be in addition to normal duties.

ii. Unnecessary and historic data should not be transferred to new systems and any data migration should be considered during the early stages of a project. A data retention policy should be agreed and adopted for implementation in the project.

iii. Internal and external user testing should be thoroughly scoped, agreed through PMG and carried out for any future system implementation or upgrade.

iv. Detailed scoping of Officers time should take place when considering project resources.

v. Consultation with external customers should take place at the outset of a project to inform its delivery.

vi. PMG should determine the governance arrangements of future projects, including frequency of highlight reports setting out key risks and challenges.

vii. Portfolio Holders should be kept informed of project updates for key projects in their Service on a regular basis, which is defined from the outset of a project.

viii. System rollouts should foremost be designed to improve the customer experience and processes need to be mapped with this in mind.

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