

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

Back-Office Systems

Dear FOI Officer,

I am writing to make a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. To make this as straightforward as possible to respond to, I have set out the request in a numbered questionnaire format below. Where a question asks for a document, please provide a copy in electronic format.

Please note that this request relates specifically to the software systems used by your **Regulatory/Environmental/Planning Services** teams for processing applications (commonly referred to as the “back-office system”).

Section A — Current System

1. What is the name of the back-office software system currently used by your planning service for processing planning applications?

(e.g. Idox Uniform, Agile Planning, DEF, Arcus, Northgate M3, BOPS, other)

Answer: **Idox Uniform**

2. What version of this software is currently in use?

Answer: **This information is considered exempt from disclosure under Section 31(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act.**

3. How is the system hosted? Please select one:

- On-premise (hosted on council servers)
- Cloud-hosted by the software supplier
- Cloud-hosted by a third-party provider
- Other (please specify): _____

This information is considered exempt from disclosure under Section 31(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act.

4. What date did the current system go live at your authority?

Answer: **2017**

5. Which of the following services or functions use the current back-office system? Please tick all that apply:

- Planning application processing (householder)
- Planning application processing (major)
- Planning application processing (minor / other)
- Planning enforcement
- Planning appeals
- Pre-application advice
- Planning policy / local plan monitoring
- Building control
- Land charges
- Tree preservation orders
- Listed building consents
- Conservation area consents
- Environmental health
- Licensing
- Other (please specify): _____

Section B — Contract and Costs

6. What is the start date of the current contract?

Answer: **01/04/2023**

7. What is the end date of the current contract (excluding any extension options)?

Answer: **31/03/2026**

8. Does the contract include options to extend? If so: **N/A**

(a) How many extension periods are available and of what duration?

Answer: _____

(b) Have any extensions already been exercised? **N/A**

Yes (please state how many and the revised end date): _____

No

(c) What are the cost implications of each extension period? Is the extension at the same annual rate, or does the cost change? **N/A**

Answer: _____

9. What is the total contract value over the full contract term (Please set out costs for any extension periods separately)?

£: **£107,915.49**

10. What is the current annual cost of the system to the authority? Please break down if possible:

(a) Annual licence / subscription fee:

(b) Annual support and maintenance fee:

(c) Annual hosting fee (if separate):

(d) Any other recurring annual costs (please specify): £ _____

£35,971.83

11. Please provide a copy of the current contract (or most recent contract) between the authority and the back-office system supplier, including any schedules, service level agreements, and data processing agreements.

Exempt from disclosure under Section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act.

12. Please provide a copy of any variation agreements, change orders, or contract extension agreements that have been executed since the original contract was signed.

Not applicable

Section C — Procurement

13. How was the current contract procured? Please select one:

Open tender

Restricted procedure

Framework call-off (please specify which framework): _____

Direct award

Other (please specify): _____

14. Is a reprocurement or contract renewal currently planned or underway?

Yes — please provide the expected procurement timetable: _____

No — please state when reprocurement is next expected: _____

15. Has the authority undertaken any market testing, soft market testing, or preliminary market engagement in relation to the future procurement of planning back-office systems in the last 24 months?

Yes (please provide details or a copy of any published notice)

No

Section D — Project Delivery and Transition

16. Was the current back-office system delivered and go-live achieved on time against the originally agreed project timetable?

Yes

No — please state how long the project was delayed beyond the original go-live date:

(e.g. 3 months, 6 months, over 12 months)

17. Was it necessary to run the previous back-office system and the new system simultaneously during the transition period (parallel running)?

Yes

No

If yes:

(a) How long did the parallel running period last? **Approximately 1 month**

(b) What was the additional cost of maintaining the previous system during this period? **£0**

(c) Were there any additional licence, hosting, or support fees payable to the previous supplier during parallel running? If so, how much? **No**

18. When the authority transitioned off the previous back-office system, did the previous supplier charge any exit fees, data extraction fees, or any other costs associated with the transition away from their system?

Yes

No

If yes:

(a) What was the total amount charged? £_____

(b) Please provide a breakdown of what the charges were for (e.g. data extraction, data migration support, early termination, licence wind-down): _____

(c) Were these charges set out in the original contract, or were they imposed at the point of exit?

Section E — Integration and Third-Party Access

19. Does the current system receive planning applications electronically from the Planning Portal via a direct feed / connector (sometimes referred to as the “1APP feed” or “Submit-a-Plan” connector)?

Yes

No — please describe how Planning Portal applications are received: _____

20. Does the current system receive applications (whether planning, building control, licensing or any other) electronically from any source other than the Planning Portal?

Yes (please specify which sources): _____

No

21. Has the authority received any request from a third-party submission platform (other than the Planning Portal) to integrate with or submit applications to your back-office system in the last 12 months?

Yes (please provide details of the request and the authority's response)

No

22. Has the back-office system supplier indicated any restrictions on third-party platforms integrating with or submitting data to the system?

Yes (please provide details or a copy of any relevant correspondence)

No

Section F — Performance and Issues

23. Please provide a list of currently open / unresolved support tickets, issues, or service requests logged with the back-office system supplier as at the date of this request. For each, please provide:

(a) A brief description of the issue

(b) The date it was first reported

(c) The current status (e.g. open, in progress, awaiting supplier response)

(d) The priority or severity level assigned

This information is considered exempt from disclosure under Section 31(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act.

24. How many support tickets or service requests have been logged with the back-office system supplier in the last 12 months?

Answer: **17**

25. Has the authority experienced any unplanned system outages or significant service disruptions in the last 12 months?

Yes — how many, and what was the total downtime? _____

No

26. Has the authority formally escalated any performance, service, or contractual issue with the back-office system supplier in the last 24 months?

Yes (please provide details or a copy of any relevant correspondence)

No

Section G — Digital Planning Programme and Open Digital Planning

27. Is the authority a member of, or participant in, the Open Digital Planning (ODP) programme (formerly known as the RIPA / BOPS / PlanX programme)?

Yes — please state when the authority joined and in what capacity (e.g. funded council, pathfinder, associate member): **We do not hold this information.**

No

28. How much funding has the authority received from MHCLG (or its predecessor departments) for digital planning programmes in total, and for each programme or grant individually? Please list each programme, the amount received, and the period it covered:

(e.g. RIPA funding, Local Digital Fund, PropTech Innovation Fund, ODP pathfinder funding, Planning Software Improvement Fund, or any other MHCLG digital/planning technology grant)

(a) Programme name: _____ Modern _____ Planning Software_ - Planning Software Improvement
Fund _____ Amount received: £ _____ 150,000 _____ Period:
_____ 2023 _____

Total MHCLG digital planning funding received: £ _____ 150,000 _____

29. For each programme or grant listed in question 28, how much of the funding has been spent to date, and on what? Please provide a breakdown by programme:

(a) Programme name: _£30k and existing staff time _____ Amount spent to date:
£ _____

Brief description of what the funding was spent on: ___Consultancy _fees and staff costs to cover officers for the project duration _____

Note on exemptions

I understand that some of the information requested may be subject to exemptions under the Act, in particular the commercial interests exemption under section 43(2). However, I would ask that the authority applies the public interest test to any proposed exemption, noting that there is a strong public interest in transparency around public expenditure on technology systems and the extent to which incumbent suppliers may restrict competition in the planning technology market.

Scope and cost

If any part of this request is unclear, or if you anticipate that responding would exceed the cost limit under section 12, I would be happy to discuss narrowing the scope. I would prefer to receive a partial response rather than a refusal on cost grounds.

I look forward to receiving a response within 20 working days as required by the Act.