

PROJECT BRIEF

South Derbyshire District Council

Project: WorkSmart - Housing Modernisation

Transformation Theme: Technology

Date: October 2020

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Version Control

Version	Description of version	Effective Date
1.0	DRAFT	October 2020
1.1	Initial review with Project Executive	October 2020
1.2	Structured review with Project Executive	November 2020

Approvals

Approved by	Date
Transformation Theme Chair – Technology	November 2020
Head of Housing	December 2020

Associated Documentation

Description of Documentation
Transformation and Business Change Plan 2020-2024
Transformation Annual Plan 2020 – Housing Modernisation
Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service Review - HQN Audit Report (August 2018)

Once your Project Brief is complete check the document against the following Quality Criteria:

- It is brief as its purpose, at this point, is to provide a firm basis on which to initiate a project.
- The Project Brief accurately reflects the project mandate and the requirements of the business and the users
- The project approach considers a range of solutions such as: bespoke or off-the-shelf; contracted out or developed in-house; designed from new or modified existing product etc.
- The project approach has been selected which maximizes the chance of achieving overall success for the project
- The project objectives, project approach and strategies are consistent with the organization’s corporate social responsibility directive
- The project objectives are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound (SMART)

1.0 Corporate Governance

The project outcomes contribute towards the corporate plan objectives identified below:

Corporate Theme	Description	X
OUR ENVIRONMENT Keeping a clean, green District for future generations	Reduce waste and increase composting and recycling	
	Reduce fly tipping and litter through education, engagement and zero tolerance enforcement action where appropriate	
	Enhance biodiversity across the District	
	Strive to make South Derbyshire District Council carbon neutral by 2030	
	Work with residents, businesses, and partners to reduce their carbon footprint	
	Enhance the appeal of Swadlincote town centre as a place to visit	
	Improve public spaces to create an environment for people to enjoy	
OUR PEOPLE Working with communities and meeting the future needs of the District	With partners encourage independent living and keep residents healthy and happy in their homes.	
	Support and celebrate volunteering, community groups and the voluntary sector	
	Help tackle anti-social behaviour & crime through strong and proportionate action	
	Support social mobility to ensure people have the opportunity to access skilled jobs, higher and further education.	
	Have in place methods of communication that enables customers to provide and receive information.	
	Ensuring consistency in the way the Council deal with service users	X
	Ensuring technology enables us to effectively connect with our communities.	X
	Investing in our workforce	
OUR FUTURE Growing our District and our skills bas	Attract and retain skilled jobs in the District	
	Support unemployed residents back into work	
	Encourage and support business development and new investment in the District	
	Enable the delivery of housing across all tenures to meet Local Plan targets	
	Influence the improvement of infrastructure to meet the demands of growth.	
	Provide modern ways of working that support the Council to deliver services to meet changing needs.	X
	Source appropriate commercial investment opportunities for the Council	

2.0 Project Definition

2.1 Background

The provision and management of social housing is one of the greatest responsibilities owned by a local authority.

The Council maintains a stock of 2900 homes having a market value of approximately £297 million generating an annual rental income of £13 million.

To ensure the safety and wellbeing of its tenants and maintain the capital value of its housing stock and the council must exercise effective management of an annual budget totalling £13 million which includes a maintenance budget of approximately £4.3 million, a staff budget of £2.3 million and a software commitment of £211,000

In order to achieve effective operational management, a clear strategic vision must be embedded and perfectly aligned with an engaged and informed workforce who are equipped with the best tools for their tasks.

With the introduction of the Transformation and Business Change Plan 2020-2024 a commitment was made to provide the Council with resource and a unified approach to support the changes needed in people, technology and processes to achieve its Corporate Plan objectives.

The WorkSmart programme is a four-year collection of projects included in the Transformation and Business Change Plan to review and improve key service areas through the Council. The nature and scope of the projects are agreed through the Transformation Steering Group however with 2020 the inaugural year it was also included in the narrative of the Committee Report to the Finance and Management Committee 4th July 2020 which approved the Transformation and Business Change Plan.

Following on from several audit reports and an independent external assessment of housing services in 2018/19 recommendations were made to address certain weaknesses in the management of the councils housing. In addition, the authority is aware that having been procured some time previously, key software assets used to help deliver housing services were becoming increasingly outdated as a result of advancing technologies and that a strategy to address these and other concerns was required

Therefore the first participant in the WorkSmart programme is the Council's Housing Service which through this Project Brief will set out a number of key areas to modernise.

2.2 Project Objectives

To define a vision for operating Housing Services at the Council with an associated action plan to set out a short to medium term roadmap addressing the immediate risks and to provide a stable platform (People, Process and Technology) from which to provide best in class services to residents and partners whilst satisfying Corporate Plan dependencies

2.3 Desired Outcomes

Prioritisation of key projects within Housing Services, based on risk, costs and timescales

A plan to address prioritised projects and mitigate current risks arising from the use and availability of key software assets, including delivery considerations such as human resource.

A clearly defined Business Case to understand the financial impact, efficiency returns and risk mitigations of modernisation as a programme of work in addition to clearly identified benefits of each project in scope.

Better utilisation of assets, both physical and human.

An engaged workforce which is well trained with clear accountabilities and targets.

2.4 Project scope and exclusions

The implementation of a modern housing management suite which will include:

- Property asset management
- Reactive and planned repairs
- Void Management
- Homelessness (Choice based Letting and Homelessness)
- Disabled Adaptations
- Housing Administration

2.5 Assumptions

Management commitment, resource allocation or availability of appropriate skills.

Project teams always work under some limitations and restrictions and a balance will need to be struck between members of a virtual team who are contributing to the discussion and evaluation and their substantive responsibilities.

Current service provision to customers will not deteriorate during project delivery.

Currently supplier and operating model remains intact until new model is implemented.

2.6 Stakeholders and Interfaces

Transformation Steering Group

Customer Services

Business Change, IT, Digital

Financial Services

Housing Services

Operational Services

Planning and Strategic Housing

Organisational Development

Environmental Services

Legal and Democratic Services

Residents, Customers, Businesses, Central Government

Housing Services (Staff)

3.0 Outline Business Case

In addition to the objectives and definition in Section 2, the complexity of housing and tenancy management means that the council is obliged to employ software systems to hold property and housing data if it is to deliver effective tenancy services. By virtue of their specialist nature such software systems represent a significant capital and revenue commitment which is usually continued well after the initial acquisition contract period has ended.

A detailed report outlining the provider and use of each core solution can be found in Appendix A.

After review of audit documentation, third party assessment and an internal evaluation the following areas have been identified as risks and / or opportunities for improvement.

Timeliness of application for Disabled Facility Grants as well as the robustness of the application processes. A report had previously been approved by members in 2020 to invest in a new solution therefore it is sensible to amalgamate this project into a programme of improvements, sharing resources, skills and approach.

The Choice Based Lettings system will be out of support and contract in the near future. The current system has not been invested in on an annual basis so is outdated. Given the software provides administration of housing applications its redundancy poses a big risk.

Any further investment in Housing ICT systems without a review of contractual commitments could be in breach of financial regulations, constitution, and procurement regulations.

Any further investment in Housing ICT systems without a review of operating models and efficiencies could result in substantial overspend.

3.1 Risk mitigation

This work will help to mitigate SD3 and SD7 as defined in the service delivery risk register.

3.2 Option 1: Minimal further investment and maximise the return on the existing assets

The council has invested in major software assets that are not being fully utilised or kept updated. Where these systems remain viable, they should be updated and exploited to their maximum extent.

Orchard Housing

The product is currently awaiting core updates and these outstanding patches should be applied to form a stable platform prior to the implementation of further modules.

Voids

With the objective of replacing the excel spreadsheets currently used to track and report progress and performance of the repair and re-let process it is recommended that the Orchard voids module be re-implemented. Reporting available through Orchard/ business objects should provide an ability to assess performance on demand and reduce reliance on back office staff whilst increasing the visibility of data across a wider cohort of staff such as housing officers.

Reactive repairs

The council already subscribes to the Orchard standard contractor interface which can be used to link Orchard with the 'Impact' electronic appointment scheduling software used by Novus.

By establishing an interface between these two systems the manual task of entering Orchard completions from contractor provided spreadsheet data could be reduced. Additionally, by using the appointment scheduling functionality already used by Novus, SDDC could transfer responsibility for arranging day to day electrical repair appointments to the customer services team, so removing the need for the repairs team to separately call the customer to arrange a visit. This would remove an estimated 350 repair calls month from the repairs team. Non-electrical repair appointments would remain within that team/ DLO.

'LifeSpan' Asset Management

The council is not using its asset management product effectively

- It is recommended that to increase confidence in the asset management software SDDC should plan to update and maintain its property stock condition survey data. The product has under-utilised import capabilities and as much of the asset data is already available in spreadsheets it is further recommend that super-users be identified and appropriately trained in the capabilities of the system.
- SDDC should investigate interfaces that might be used to receive property maintenance data arising from reactive repair activities raised via the HMS reactive repairs module and used to update substantive core property data.
- SDDC should investigate interfaces to the 'Foundations' disabled adaptations software that will pass completed adaptation data to update the property asset data in 'LifeSpan'.
- SDDC should consider more active use of the 'LifeSpan' functionality to provide reporting of HHSRS, Carbon reduction, Asbestos and Decent Homes data, using the data to provide accurate and reliable forward modelling of planned maintenance schedule.
- SDDC should use accurate stock condition data held within the asset management product to establish the ongoing financial viability of individual properties or schemes and from this devise a retention/ disposal strategy.

This approach has a low financial commitment but is not recommended.

3.3 Option 2: Re-Procurement of the core Housing Management System

3.3.1 Full re-procurement of a Housing Management System (HMS)

Re-procurement leading to the selection of a new HMS would be a high-risk option entailing a potential for customer service disruption, high acquisition capital cost and very significant internal support requirements over a protracted period.

For the purposes of soft market testing housing systems suppliers have been approached for indicative costings however not all have proved willing to engage in this exercise without a formal specification of needs.

The adoption of a new housing management system (currently Orchard Housing) would represent a very significant business risk and in the short to medium term this would not seem a viable course of action. The work involved in the change from various teams across the business such as Housing, Finance and ICT is not profiled into any plan.

The full re-procurement if a HMS does not also negate the need to procure other core solutions such as Choice Based Lettings or Disable Facilities Grants, though a new supplier might have integrated products which in time could remove the need for separate systems.

Not recommended in the short/ Medium term.

3.4 Option 3: Re-procurement with current HMS supplier and open competition for other solutions in place as appropriate.

A number of projects should be initiated or concluded to satisfy the following:

Housing Management System

The Orchard housing management system (HMS) is a suite of functional modules and maintained on a rolling annual maintenance contract. Several modules are currently unused or underexploited and it is recommended that the authority engage with the supplier through a formal procurement framework to identify requirements that reflect the Council's current position and enter into a new medium term contract to enable best value. This outcome will provide a robust platform from which to flexibly add other products from the same provider (if proven to be best fit after formal exercise) at minimum officer time and without legal challenge.

Once this is in place the Council will be able to make decisions on what other software solutions will need to be purchased and can undertake the relevant procurement process. A new contract may open up more efficiencies and financial savings as the current supplier offers a number of housing solutions that are in demand.

Disabled Adaptations

This project to replace the existing outmoded DFG access database is underway and expects to complete early 2021. This will deliver a functionally rich process workflow that will drive internal process efficiencies and result in improved communication and management reporting functionality across the various stakeholder groups.

Future automatic data transfer of adaptation completion data should be considered to ensure the timely update of property records held in the Orchard HMS and Lifespan asset management tools removing the need for manual intervention and its attendant risks.

Homelessness and Choice-based lettings

The replacement of the current Abris choice based letting software which has not kept pace with functional and legislative changes since its implementation in 2008 and now presents a significant operational risk that unless the software is replaced by 2022, SDDC will be unable to offer an accessible CBL service.

In addition, the separately procured Locata HPA2 module used to deliver homelessness services is approaching the annual renewal decision. As suppliers now offer integrated solutions this presents an opportunity to consolidate two separate software packages/suppliers.

The service is currently engaged in an exercise to soft market test with the objective of informing a procurement approach that will deliver an application that consolidates the software and ensures that the council does not breach its obligations under CBL.

Asset Management

The current software (Lifespan) is assessed to be fit purpose however the authority needs to review and restate the purpose of the software. Clarifying how the software is to be used is essential in gaining commitment from the officers to support the delivery of the asset management strategy.

The data contained within the LifeSpan software is partial, based on a condition survey of 10% of the housing stock. Historically this data has been inconsistently maintained with the result that it cannot be relied upon as a basis for the making of robust investment decisions. There is no evidence of the delivery of ongoing user training and with the departure of knowledgeable users the capabilities of the package have been only partially exploited. Functionality that would centralise and consolidate information currently held in disparate document stores is under-utilised and therefore the retrieval of important safety information such as data relating to the location of asbestos, remains unnecessarily resource hungry, inefficient and over-reliant on the knowledge of individual officers.

The aim of this project would be to improve the accuracy of data and conduct a market exercise to procure a solution, providing a single data source.

Mobile Repairs

The Council recognises the numerous opportunities that exist with a modern approach to a repairs service for all stakeholders. Currently the service operates on a largely paper based process. Customers are not able to book their own repair online. Operatives are not given the most effective and efficient tools to administer repairs.

An integrated solution allowing for a digital processing would be in keeping with the Council's Corporate Plan ambitions by allowing customers direct access to book their repairs which generates a workflow to a repair operative without the need for manual intervention or paper records.

There are several mobile repairs offerings in the marketplace, however these typically require upfront investment then an annual commitment of circa £30,000. At this point the investment and resource needed to conclude a fully automated mobile repairs solution is better placed in other areas. It is intended as part of this programme that the Council begin an immediate project to offer a proof of concept for an internal digital solution. This would allow repair tickets to be sent electronically to smart devices.

Recommended Option.

Financial Assessment

A procurement exercise will take place through a relevant framework to provide an up to date contract for a Housing Management System. This will represent an increase in support and maintenance costs of approximately £30,000 per annum as well as an initial investment of £120,000.

The soft market exercise for a procurement of Choice Based Lettings and Homelessness would be circa £60,000 capital with no increase in current revenue commitments.

The Disabled Facilities Grant project that has already been approved is approximately £25,000

To continue with the current asset management solution and upskill staff with training from the provider in addition to some consultancy on best use would be a one off cost of £13,500.

In order to manage the programme and provide resource to delivery the outcomes it is intended a temporary post be funded from the HRA. A job evaluation questionnaire would need to be completed as per normal processes however the total cost is anticipated at approx. £45,000 per annum for up to three years.

3.5 Value for Money

The recommended option provides value for money as detailed below:

Economy – There are no immediate economies to be made however by retaining and achieving better utilisation of the existing systems particularly the exploitation of electronic interface potential a direct benefit in officer workload and attendant reduction in over-contract hours might be reasonably expected.

Efficiency – Shortening the lines of communication or reducing the delay in which data is exchanged will improve operational efficiency. The use of electronic interfaces presents a significant opportunity to eliminate wasteful processes imposed by current practice. The better organisation of data and its regular maintenance and update will improve management reporting and reduce the resources needed to compile them. By improving confidence in the accuracy of data the council can be more confident in the results it presents to stakeholders both inside and outside the authority.

Effectiveness – By adopting hitherto unused functionality the council should expect to deliver an improved level of customer service. The removal of duplication and the consequent improvement in confidence in the data will benefit staff morale and motivation.

Equality – There are no implications for Equality and Diversity.

4.0 Project Product Description (project components and success criteria)

Project Name	Housing Modernisation
Project Purpose	A multi-year improvement programme compiled of several interdependent projects to provide core software and processes in the delivery of Housing Services
Composition: What are the major components, resources or activities needed to complete the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade of Housing Management solution • Procurement of CBL • Implementation of new DFG solution • Digitation of Repair Tickets and Proof of Concept for mobile working • Consultancy, Training and process re-engineering for current Asset Management solution
Skills Required	Internal super users Project management Technical evaluation Document management System interfaces
Customer Expectations	To be specified in the individual projects
Acceptance Criteria	To be specified in the individual projects

5.0 Project Approach

The project will use the corporate approach to change management as outlined by the Business Change team and report to the Transformation Steering Group periodically to provide highlight reports against the project plan.

If any additional investment is required via opportunities rising through the milestones, the project team will first evaluate the return on investment and subsequent payback period, after which if a favourable case can be made it will be presented to the Transformation Steering Group. Approval from Committee will be sought if applicable.

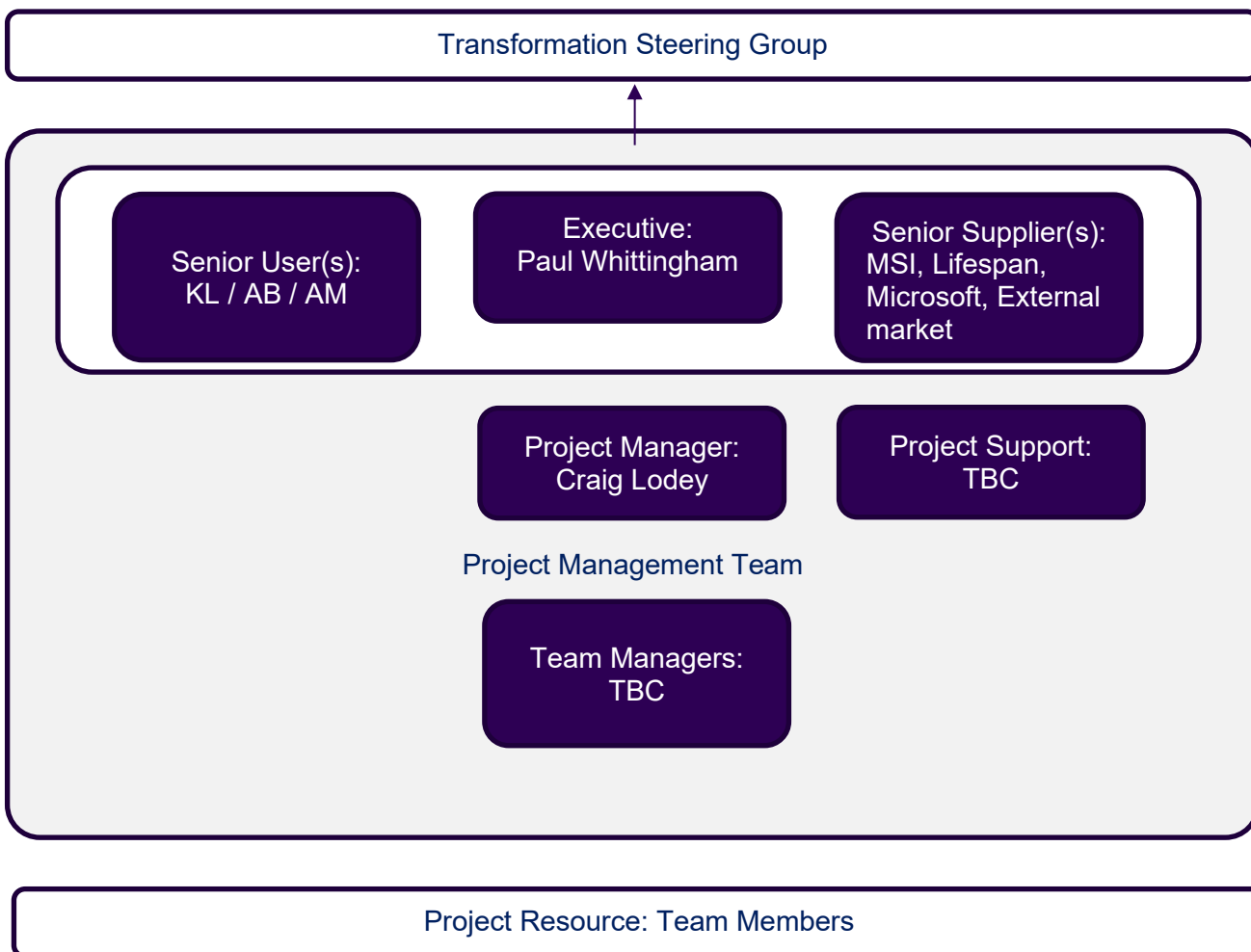
The project will clearly define the milestones in each delivery stage, working from an evaluation of high volume or high impact workloads as outlined below:

	2021	2021	2021	2021	2022
	Jan-Mar	Apr - Jun	Jul - Sep	Oct - Dec	Jan-Mar
Conclude the upgrade of Disabled Facilities Grant software and embed new processes					
Conclude a procurement exercise to ensure an appropriate contract is in place for the Housing Management System					
Establish a project to provide a proof of concept and first elements of mobile repairs service [Mobile Repairs stage 1]					
Establish a project to review stock condition data and maximise use of existing technology [Asset Management stage 1]					
Complete upgrade of Housing Management System (Supplier dependant)					
Procure and implement Choice Based Lettings Solution					
Using output from Mobile Repairs Stage 1 conduct review of options including procurement of new solution if required					
Using output from Asset Management Stage 1 conduct review of options including procurement of new solution if required					

5.1 Environmental considerations:
Guidance will be sought on a project basis.

5.2 Privacy impact:
DPO will be consulted on a project basis.

6.0 Project Management Team Structure



References

Transformation and Business Change Plan 2020-2024

Annual Plan 2020 – Housing Modernisation

Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service Review - HQN Audit Report (August 2018)