MID KENT AUDIT

PLANNING SUPPORT PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW

FINAL REPORT

DECEMBER 2014

Code	n/a		Service	Planning
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Executive Summary Report

Introduction

1. In June 2013 a joint Cabinet meeting of the three MKIP local authorities (Maidstone BC, Swale BC and Tunbridge Wells BC) agreed to enter into a planning support shared service. This new service would combine the administrative functions of the three councils' planning departments, leaving the development control and policy functions remaining in house. Bringing the services together also involved installing a single software package (IDOX) to replace the three previously in use, together with new document and workflow management software.

2. Although the councils did recognise the scope for benefits in the resilience of the larger service, as well as the opportunity to share best practice to continue to improve quality, the principal motivation was to achieve savings. The original business case quoted savings of around £150k per year.

3. Due to begin in April 2014, the service actually went live in June 2014. Since that time the service has suffered numerous and wide ranging difficulties resulting in delays, a backlog and poor service to customers. As a result we were commissioned in August 2014 to undertake an independent review of the project with the following objectives:

    -   Analyse the project plan and assess whether it was appropriately configured to deliver the aims of the project.

    -   Review the implementation of the project plan, in particular to establish a timeline and assess whether the delivery stage was completed in a manner sufficient to deliver the aims of the project.

    -   Consider what lessons can be taken from the design and delivery of the project to inform any future similar actions and continued improvement of the planning support service.

4. The review scope explicitly excludes examination of the original business case and decision to embark upon a shared service. Initial document review began in September 2014, with interviews across October 2014 as listed in Appendix II.

Summary conclusions

5.   To portray the project as a complete failure would be to misrepresent and also do a disservice to the hard work and dedication of many individuals striving to deliver a successful outcome. Indeed, the underlying logic of the plans and the improvement brought about by the software package (at its full potential) and the public portals are widely acknowledged. Also, some of the significant tasks required for success of the project, such as building a new team on a single location on unified terms, went largely to plan.

6.   However, across the lifespan of the project there were a significant number of missed opportunities, miscommunications and tasks not well completed. We set out in appendix I an overall timeline of the project that highlights some of these events, but in summary these issues can be set out in three major types.

Not employing a recognised project methodology

7.   The project ran as a Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP) project. The MKIP authorities (but not, specifically, MKIP itself) have well-developed in-house methodologies for project management that build upon more formal techniques such as PRINCE II. However this project only employed a very weak shadow of those approaches and employed it inconsistently.

8.   At the outset this could be explained by the project following a 'Project Gateway' approach, whereby the MKIP board requested a streamlined business case building on existing partnership agreements. However, post approval the project failed to build on this base and the project was not managed to a recognised methodology leaving some key missing features. These missing features include lacking a clear detailed project plan until relatively late in the process, inconsistent assignment and understanding of roles and responsibilities and not creating or monitoring a project risks register.

9.   Of course, not following a set methodology is only an issue insofar as it either causes problems or prevents resolution of matters as they arise and I believe this project suffered both consequences. Since Project Board meetings were not minuted it is unclear why the Board failed to select and pursue a methodology and why key documentation such as a detailed plan and risk register were not created and maintained. The lack of clear, detailed planning meant that tasks happened late in an uncontrolled manner that impaired their effectiveness (such as the late decision on how to build the Enterprise software). Failure to identify and manage risks also meant that issues that could have been anticipated and mitigated, such as the increase in planning applications in mid 2014, had significant adverse impacts.

3

Not fully establishing the project's scope and complexity

10. During interviews, many parallels were drawn between this project and previous work undertaken by the three councils, in various configurations, to create shared services. Such sharing had been successful in Revenues & Benefits, Audit, Human Resources, Legal Services and ICT. Consequently, many involved in the project and the broader decision to create the combined service regarded planning support as just another shared service, but this failed to acknowledge and account for several matters that added significantly to the complexity of the task. These included:

    - Involving all three partners physically moving to a single site.

    - Simultaneously commissioning and procuring a new software package (Uniform) only previously used in an earlier version at TWBC, and extending the scope of ICT reliance (by employing Enterprise for workflow management and moving to paperless working).

    - Splitting an existing service and combining the remnants. Planning support had not been clearly viewed previously as a distinct task to planning – indeed the reliance planning has on effective support is crucial - and the question of where planning began and planning support ended was not consistent across the three.

    - Complete re-organisation of business processes from cradle to grave to accommodate new software (including, crucially, new mapping software) and new approaches, leading to an approach new to all three councils and affecting planning support, planning and external agencies such as applicants and parishes. This includes a redistribution of work between planners and planning support.

    - Combining the services under a single manager whose experience of being a functional manager in planning support was not extensive with no direct experience of planning.

    - The simultaneous parallel delivery of a shared Environmental Health service that put pressure on availability of project management and especially ICT resources.

    - The overall novelty of the approach; contrary to something like ICT or Audit, there are very few authorities currently sharing planning services. My research identified only two such arrangements, both two-way and with the benefit of building on existing similarities (such as shared software suppliers).

11. Consequently, the decision to take a lead from other shared service projects in both the resources and timescales dedicated to the project left it substantially underpowered.

12. Also, the view to regard the 'ICT project' (the software implementation) as wholly separate, although clear throughout scoping, was difficult to sustain, even when considering that project broader in scope than simply Planning Support. This was evident right from the joint Cabinet meeting, where most questions were IT related and fielded by officers only from the 'main' project. Up until February 2014, links between the two projects were opaque and characterised by misunderstandings, differing priorities and timescales and several fundamental (and unrecognised) misapprehensions on what tasks were necessary.

Attempting delivery within existing resources

13. The original Cabinet paper, in listing the roles and responsibilities of the Project Board, highlighted the role of Project Manager as 'to be appointed'. The MKIP Programme Manager eventually, de facto, filled this role but throughout 2013 (which was most of the project's lifespan) he retained his then current role of MKIP Programme Manager. This was a full time role with a workload including a large-scale feasibility study relating to the future of the partnership. While this was recognised to some degree, and provision made to appoint a temporary Planning Support Manager to assist, this recruitment was not undertaken. This lack of capacity, as well as delay from April to November in appointing to the role undoubtedly contributed to the delay in building on the 'Project Gateway' approach with detailed plans. Similarly, the Project Sponsor retained his existing responsibilities as Deputy Chief Executive of TWBC in addition to leading the parallel Environment Health project, and MKIP responsibilities were additional to day-to-day responsibilities right through the project, from ICT, to Heads of Planning, to planners themselves who made up the core group. Consultants provided the only wholly additional resource added to the project from the software supplier and that was delivered almost exclusively to support the 'ICT project'.

14. As a consequence, in addition to increasing the pressure on key individuals, crucial project tasks were delivered without the level of expertise or time required for success. An example here is work on tailoring and building the Enterprise workflow software. After a misunderstanding with ICT on timing and responsibility for this task (itself a consequence of the first two points above), responsibility was handed to planners who worked to the best of their ability but were ultimately given an impossible task. The impact of additional work on planners especially was significant, with additional requests (such as this example) arriving often with very little notice or support.

Overall conclusions

15. It is clear with hindsight that the decision to proceed with go live in June 2014 was a mistake. On whether it would have been apparent at the time is a different, and more mixed, question. The period immediately prior to go-live is characterised by inconsistent and mixed communication within the project, with no-one apparently having sufficiently detailed oversight of the full picture to make a decision to pause; a decision that, significantly, had been accepted without major concern by Senior Management and Members only a few months earlier when the original April go-live date was moved back to June.

16. The Project Sponsor sought, and obtained, assurances from key individuals in the project board including the MKIP Programme Manager and IT Project Lead that supported the go-live decision. However the people providing those assurances did not, in turn, have full insight into the difficulties and issues that were persisting on the frontline in the project. The lack of clear overall project plan, even at this late stage, meant that there was no overall checklist or independent analysis to verify progress and certain key tasks – such as end user testing – did not have their absence felt because they weren't clearly part of any one individual's responsibility.

17. The problems caused by failures in the project's management persist as some of the reasons for continuing difficulties in the service. However it is also true that matters arising since go-live, such as the increase in workload, lack of customer confidence, weaknesses in management and growing backlog have been laid upon an already shaky base and further destabilised the service. Its most pressing need at present is to reach, and then sustain, a period of 'normal' operation and only after that can the underlying merit of the shared service be fully evaluated.

Independence

18. We are required by Audit Standards to act at all times with independence and objectivity. Where there are any threats, in fact or appearance, to that independence we must disclose the nature of the threat and set out how it has been managed in completing our work. We have no matters to report in connection with this review.

Acknowledgements

19. This work has been supported by the time and engagement of a wide range of individuals, listed in appendix II. We would like to extend our thanks to all involved in contributing to this review, including those who took the time to complete the survey and individuals within planning support who took me through, in detail, the processes and workflows.

Report against review objectives

Analysis of the Project Plan

20. Although part of the original brief, it quickly became clear when beginning the work that this objective would be hampered by the lack of detail present in project planning. All through 2013, including in the lead up to securing Member approval and when identifying the time and resources the project would require, the most detailed project plan was little more than a high level summary.

Key Date		ICT	HR	Finance	Service/Support Manager	Planning Officers	Comms
Jun-13	CABINET DECISION	PROCUREMENT		AGREE COST SPLIT METHOD	DETERMINE LOCATION	USER SPECIFICATION	DECISION TO ALL
Jul-13		PROCUREMENT	MANAGER CONSULTATION			USER ASSESSMENT	
Aug-13	PROC DECISION	INSTALL AND TRAINING	APPOINT MANAGER	APPOINT ACCOUTING GROUP		USER ASSESSMENT	DECISION TO ALL
Sep-13		INSTALL AND TRAINING		ACCOUNTING GROUP WORK	AGREE LOCAL FUNCTIONS/ APPOINT ICT GROUP	ICT GROUP APPOINTMENT	
Oct-13		INSTALL AND TRAINING		ACCOUNTING GROUP WORK	SLAS AND CA START	SLA CONSULTATION	HEADS OF SERVICE CONSULTATION
Nov-13		INSTALL AND TRAINING	STAFF STRUCTURE	ACCOUNTING GROUP WORK	AMEND PROPOSED STRUCTURE	TRAINING AND INVOLVEMENT	
Dec-13		INSTALL AND TRAINING	STAFF CONSULTATION	ACCOUNTING GROUP WORK	ALIGN PROCESSES, POLICY AND TARGETS	TRAINING AND INVOLVEMENT	
Jan-14		INSTALL AND TRAINING	STAFF CONSULTATION	ACCOUNTING GROUP WORK	ALIGN PROCESSES, POLICY AND TARGETS	TRAINING AND INVOLVEMENT	
Feb-14		INSTALL AND TRAINING	AMEND STRUCTURE	ACCOUNTING GROUP WORK	CONFIRM NEW STRUCTURE	TRAINING AND INVOLVEMENT	DECISION TO ALL
Mar-14		INSTALL AND TRAINING	STAFF APPOINT	ACCOUNTING GROUP WORK	SLAS AND CA SIGN OFF	TRAINING AND INVOLVEMENT	
Apr-14	MODEL COMMENCE	INSTALL AND TRAINING	STAFF APPOINT	ACCOUNTING GROUP WORK	ALIGN PROCESSES, POLICY AND TARGETS	TRAINING AND INVOLVEMENT	COMMENCEMENT TO ALL
May-14		SHARED SERVICE DELIVERY SUPPORT	TEAM BUILDING AND SUPPORT	ACCOUNTING GROUP WORK	DELIVERY	SUPPORT	
Jun-14		SHARED SERVICE DELIVERY SUPPORT	TEAM BUILDING AND SUPPORT	ACCOUNT AGREEMENT SIGN OFF	DELIVERY	SUPPORT	
Jul-14		SHARED SERVICE DELIVERY SUPPORT	TEAM BUILDING AND SUPPORT		DELIVERY	SUPPORT	
Aug-14	PROJECT REVIEW	ONGOING SUPPORT	TEAM BUILDING AND SUPPORT		DELIVERY	SUPPORT	POST PROJECT BOARD REPORT

Figure 1: Project Plan January 2013

21. It is unclear on what basis tasks have been assigned timing and duration which consequently, as became clear, made it difficult to assess how the project's overall needs would be affected by missed deadlines. An example here is when the ICT procurement was delayed from June to November (see timeline for this and other details). The project plan above did not allow for ready analysis of the impact of that delay and so there was no subsequent discussion about whether the project was still on course for overall delivery.

22. Also, on the basis of the above, it is immediately apparent that some key tasks are missing. The most notable absence is end user testing of the new processes and systems that some in the project assumed (but did not confirm) would be an ICT responsibility, but that would have been unusual in a project of this nature. It is also unclear from the above how the project intended on communicating to service users both internal and external.

23. By September there was a more detailed project plan in existence, see below, but this iteration also omitted testing. Also missing from both versions was clarity on who had responsibility for each task:

Workstream	Action	Note	Start	End
	Agree PSM arrangements		1/9/13	30/9/13
	Appoint consultation groups		1/9/13	30/9/13
	PSM introduction		1/9/13	7/10/13
	Agreement on investment each authority		1/8/13	31/10/13
	Identify and produce sub-plans for site specific issues		7/10/13	31/10/13
	Bid for capital monies		1/10/13	30/11/13
Startup	Back-fill at each site		30/11/13	1/7/14
	Validation decision		9/9/13	14/10/13
	Agree principles		9/9/13	21/10/13
	Produce a vision		1/10/13	21/10/13
Service design	Consult planning officer group		21/10/13	28/10/13
	Post arrangements		9/9/13	28/10/13
	Scanning arrangements		9/9/13	28/10/13
Service fundamentals	Printing arrangements (in paperless environment)		9/9/13	28/10/13
	ICT Timetable	More detail required	1/10/13	30/4/14
	Templates			
	Processes and user requirements			
ICT	Testing			
	Team building activities	More detail required	1/10/13	31/7/14
	CEx decision Transfer (or not)		1/10/13	1/11/13
	Staff structure design		21/10/13	4/11/13
	Project Board/Sponsor/HR sign off		21/10/13	4/11/13
	Grading structure/role descriptions/JDQs etc.		4/11/13	25/11/13
	Parking/Travel arrangements		21/10/13	25/11/13
	Staff consultation		25/11/13	24/1/14
	Amend structure		27/1/14	3/2/14
	Appointment process		3/2/14	10/3/14
	Adverts		3/3/14	24/3/14
HR	Recruitment to vacancies		24/3/14	21/4/14
	Work with planning support leads		1/11/13	31/3/14
	Standardise all processes and procedures	More detail required	1/11/13	31/3/14
Processes and Procedures	Agreement of planning officer group		1/11/13	31/3/14
	Appoint an accounting group		1/12/13	20/1/14
	Combine budgets		20/1/14	1/4/14
Finance	Agree payment methodology		20/1/14	1/6/14
	Collaboration Agreement		1/12/13	31/3/14
	Service Level Data Collection (performance)		1/9/13	1/10/13
Legal	Service Level Agreements		1/12/13	31/3/14
	Cost new structure (actual)		1/4/14	1/7/14
	Monitor other savings and produce savings plan		1/4/14	1/10/14
	Monitor other costs		1/4/14	1/10/14
	Benchmark performance		6/1/14	3/2/14
Business Case Monitoring	Report on service to each authority		1/10/14	31/3/15
	General updates - PSOs and POs		1st working day of every month	
	Action specific updates		As part of every action	
Communications	Project Communications		Within 2 days after every Project Board	

Figure 2: Project Plan September 2013

24. The more standard style of project plan did not emerge until January 2014, when the SBC Project Consultant of the core team drew up the first analysis that sought to break down and assign responsibility for individual tasks. It was also at this point that the MKIP Programme Manager, having been appointed MKPS Planning manager in late 2013, was able to devote more time to the project. This plan also included a view on resource requirements, including time requirements, but by this late stage the project had become deadline led. Furthermore, it became apparent that even the initial plan of five months to design new processes would be challenging as the scope of change required began to become clear in early 2014. However, the Project Board did not apparently consider adjusting the overall timescale for this realisation; tasks were scoped to fit the deadlines, rather than the other way around, so that what had been initially envisioned as five months of designing new processes became barely three, even as the increased size of the task became clear.

25. It is also by this point that the role of Project Manager has become fractured. The MKIP Programme Manager, by this time Planning Support Manager, was clearly focussed on

staffing and structure, leaving design of the new processes to the core group led by the TWBC Executive Support Manager. Meanwhile, the SBC Project Consultant was leading on consultation with parishes and ICT had its own project lead. Therefore, at this time, depending on how the question was referenced, any one of four individuals might have been described as 'Project Manager'.
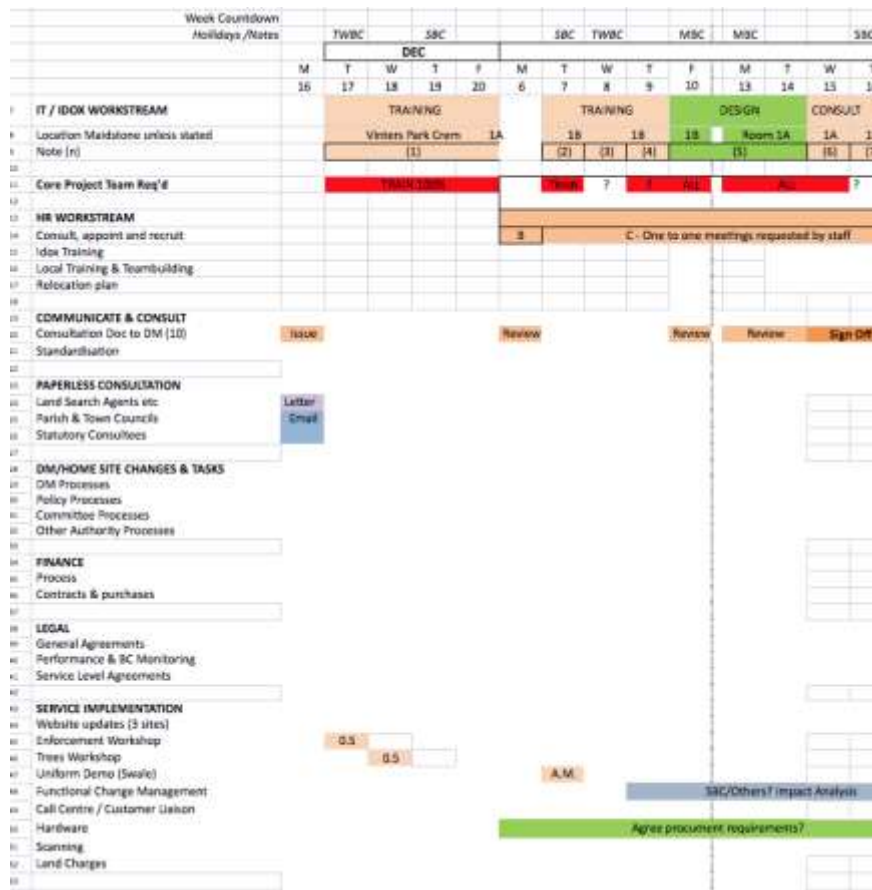

Figure 3: Project Plan January 2014 (extract)

26. This meant that even project plans such as the above that sought to encompass the scope of the work were limited in the detail that they could provide. The above example, completed by the SBC Project Consultant, lacks detail in the ICT and process re-engineering tasks which were outside of his direct scope.

27. The 'ICT project' meanwhile had been provided with an indicative project plan from the supplier, which was detailed in its timelines and requirements. This plan was, however, not adopted in part because of it being 'too complicated' and in a format that was not easily read within the councils. In a sense though, this was moot as the supplier plan envisioned a start in June 2013 and so was substantially out of date by the time it became necessary.

28. Instead, the ICT Project Lead produced a new project plan in Excel that was used to track the ICT project. This plan included plenty of ICT detail but was hazier on the process for training staff (seen as largely outside ICT's scope) and again omitted testing, which was seen as being a service responsibility. In particular, on the question of data transfer, ICT were clear that responsibility for testing and acceptance of the transferred data lay with the service, not least because ICT would not be in an expert position to be able to identify errors.

29. However, the 'main project' appears to have had a much more expansive view of what constituted 'an ICT issue'. This meant that when the 'main project' received updates from ICT, indirectly through the MKIP Programme Manager or directly from February 2014, the Board misunderstood the nature and extent of the assurances being offered.

30. Another key element of successful project management is the identification and tracking of risks. Where the project plan enables completion of tasks, a risk register allows the board to track issues, inside and outside of the project, that could have impact and allow for the project to remain live and agile to changes.

31. However, the 'main project' never operated with a clear risk register. This is contrary to the established project management methodologies, but its absence does not appear to have been noted by the board. This deficiency was also present in the 'ICT Project', even though there remains a belief among some on the project board that the 'ICT Project' was fully tracking risks. In reality, the 'risk register' was sketchy and not a source of continuing reference:

Risks			
Server infrastructure / build	Low	Have contingency options in place	
Missing deadlines - services	High	With so many services going at the same time and complexity of the system then likely to miss	Have built a couple of weeks into the project plan
Missing deadlines - ICT Transform	High	Three main work streams in place (Tony - Paternity leave) quality of data matching from services	ICT are stretched, therefore no real cover if Tony were to depart before live date. Tony working on Housing we could split this out and do as a separate phase. Data quality - get users to sign off and deal with issues post live or move live date

Figure 4: ICT Project risks register

32. This left the project unreasonably vulnerable to changing circumstances as it had failed to identify any factors outside of its immediate task list. A prominent example of a risk that might have been identified was the changing workload that would be faced by the service. Although it is not especially seasonal, the numbers and nature of planning applications can fluctuate significantly over time driven by wider economic circumstances. The original business case in December 2012 quoted planning numbers from 2011/12, at the time the most recent full year available.

33. However, even though 2012/13 data will have become available during the project, these 2011/12 numbers remained in use as the basis for forecasting workload and therefore staffing need. Therefore, when planning applications increased significantly

(including a disproportionate increase in major applications) in mid-2014[1] as the economy moved forwards it came as a shock to an already fragile service attempting to introduce a whole new way of working with unfamiliar staff in a new location. A risk register would, at the least, have prompted discussion of application numbers at Project Board and so allowed for consideration of whether staffing and workload levels anticipated at the outset remained valid.

34. We also note that there was at no stage an independent assessment of the project's management while it is in progress. This is an important and, in some environments, standard element of major projects to give the Sponsor and the Board assurance that its plans are sound and reasonable.

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[1] This increase is difficult to verify with certainty given the different ways in which authorities categorised applications and workload before the shared service. National figures show a marginal increase in overall activity but the increase in local planning income (which would point towards more major applications as well as overall activity increase) and reports of people working in and with the service suggest an increase of up to 25% in Mid-Kent.

Project Plan Implementation

35. The lack of detailed plan meant that implementation could appear to those involved as disorganised, even haphazard. People were handed tasks with little notice and with only a limited understanding of what was required. There are specific examples of this, such as with the creation of workshops (and later a core group) tasked with redesigning business processes. Partly due to late organisation, these workshops suffered from inconsistent membership that hampered progress and limited the amount of information that could be reliably passed back to planners. It was only really after a couple of month's work, when the task at hand had clarified and a more consistent structure, leadership and membership had developed, that the group really started to function effectively. That lost time could have been avoided with better advance planning.

36. The lack of effective planning is also apparent in the results of the staff survey run as part of this review. Upwards of two thirds of respondents did not feel well informed or confident that they understood the changes to their day-to-day work. More than 4 in 5 did not perceive the project as well planned and under control.

37. A further example is the planned simultaneous implementation of paperless working. Until the SBC Project Consultant's project plan in January 2014, this seemed not significantly further developed than an idea, even though planning teams had taken their own initiative to visit other authorities (such as Eastbourne). However, there was little attempt to progress this element of the project during 2013, including uncertain engagement with ICT (paperless working was not a feature of any ICT project planning) and not connecting with the wider user base until early 2014. This included parishes, many of whom were (and are) simply not equipped to adopt a paperless approach. While this limitation was, to an extent, considered in project planning (for instance by restricting paperless in the first instance to correspondence only) it is clear that parishes understood this as a late, awkward and imposed change.

38. The lack of clear consultation within the service and with ICT meant that when the sample hardware for paperless working was delivered it was soon apparent that it could not be used. The tablet computer software could not integrate with the main planning software and the devices themselves were also not sufficiently robust for field use. Consequently the move to paperless working, which was such a feature of the project in its initial discussion with planners, was at first postponed to September then indefinitely.

39. Above all else though, the lack of control in implementation is evident in the amount of testing conducted. In early April the core group concluded its work and produced a new and revised set of procedures, with this milestone welcomed across the project group. At this stage, with training also beginning to get underway and the two-month delay to June from April giving some breathing space, it appeared that successful go-live lay

ahead. However, events of the next few weeks undermined that position and meant that revisions to the processes were required right up to, and in to June. In particular, the following challenged the assumptions under which the revised processes were created:

- The move back to a paper based planning system,

- Using a non-standard build of Uniform, which was still in early April under construction,

- The Enterprise workflow management software, not clearly understood by any in the core group, was still being built by TWBC planners and would be under construction until early June,

- The GIS mapping function, crucial to planning, was not developed.

40. Consequently the training that was possible was delivered against the 'standard' Uniform and Enterprise systems, which did not exactly resemble the versions that would come to be used. Similarly, the test systems being used for training were incomplete, owing to a lack of mapping information but also the continuing data transfer work. This data transfer was completed by ICT broadly in line with agreement, but there was then confusion between the 'main' and 'ICT' projects on where responsibility lay. The ICT project was clear that checking the transfer was the service's responsibility, and that would indeed be the usual approach. However, it is unclear what expectations existed around the work necessary by the service to check the data and consequently when the MKPS Manager accepted the transfer the two parties had different expectations on what that acceptance meant. Those two perceptions did not collide until after go-live when gaps and errors became apparent.

41. Insofar as testing had ever been a part of the plan (which was itself unclear, see above) this continued task of attempting to manoeuvre a variety of independently moving strands alongside one another to arrive at a unified, workable system meant that any testing that had been done would have been of limited use. The system in all its components, Uniform, Enterprise, scanning, document management, business processes, did not exist in a single form until the very point at which it was required to move directly into use.

Lessons Learned

42. In reviewing the Planning Support Project we have identified a number of key lessons that should be learned to take forward to future projects. We present these below as a ten-question checklist for projects.

Ten Questions for Projects	Satisfied?
1. Have we selected a clear and appropriate project methodology?	
2. Do we have a detailed project plan, which includes a comprehensive task list with reasonable time allocated to each task?	
3. Do we have a risk register in place consistent with the Council's policy?	
4. Have we clearly identified roles and responsibilities, both for the project's management and individual tasks within the plan?	
5. Is the level of responsibility and extent of role required of each individual deliverable alongside his or her wider role?	
6. Have individuals with key responsibilities on the project sufficient understanding and experience in those roles?	
7. Do we have the full scope of the project represented at (or reported fully into) this Board? Does that include any associated or parallel project?	
8. Has anything like this project been undertaken here or elsewhere before and, of so, have we investigated and understood the lessons from that past experience?	
9. Have we sought independent assurance on the project management?	
10. Have we arranged a project closure report so that other projects can learn from our experience?	

43. Although these are not formal audit recommendations, it is important in ensuring the lessons from this project are learned that each council, individually and as a partnership, acknowledges the findings of this report and commits to incorporating its conclusions appropriately within future projects. This might be by including these ten key questions clearly within their project methodology documents, perhaps as a standing item for Project Boards or as an item to be considered as part of project initiation and then periodically reviewed and updated.

44. There is also a clear role outside of the Project Board for the relevant executive function, be that the MKIP Board, senior management of the authority or even Member Overview and Scrutiny or Cabinet. Those bodies must seek assurance at the outset, and perhaps at key defined points thereafter, that the Project Board is functioning effectively and retains appropriate oversight of the project, perhaps using an update or extract of the key questions above as a framework for that discussion. It is also important that assurance, insofar as is practical, looks beneath the headline messages and understands the underpinning evidence. For significant projects it may be that the answer to question nine – seeking independent review – will become the key vehicle to provide those outside the Project Board with reliable assurance.

45. We were also asked to consider messages that support continuing improvement in the service. At this point, although many of the issues have stemmed from problems in implementation, many are new inefficiencies arising since. Many of these come from the dissipation of what was originally a fair amount of goodwill and support for the project as problems have persisted. Therefore the system has had further inefficiencies imposed upon it, as planners feel it necessary to double check work and even users objecting to planning applications as they are unconvinced that appropriate documentation will be made available on time.

46. In order to restore that trust and confidence the service must move quickly to a 'normal' working practice, with standard and agreed procedures and trained, supported staff. It is clear from the staff survey that confidence in the service and its management is low (only one in ten felt current management was effective). Restoring that confidence will be crucial to establishing a successful service, but it is unclear the extent to which that can be achieved with current management, given their involvement in the project implementation. Consequently, the councils should consider, if only temporarily, introducing a new dedicated Head of Service, to work above the operational manager, and provide an independent assessment of the service's current limitations and challenges and give to stakeholders a clear, consistent and trusted recovery plan.

Appendix I: Project Timeline

The scope of our review formally begins with the joint Cabinet decision to go ahead with the shared service project on 12 June 2013. Therefore events before this date are noted only in general terms and where necessary to the understanding of the project.

Early 2012	Administration of planning applications identified by MBC Members away day as potential further service to put into MKIP. There is no appetite for merging planning as a whole; view shared by all three councils that 'executive' functions remain sovereign. Separately, ICT 10 year development plan identifies potential efficiencies from procuring and managing a single planning software package (to also support Environmental Health).
Summer 2012	Initial exploratory work with staff and Heads of Service on the notion of sharing planning support.
November 2012	ICT project to deliver single software package approved by MKIP Board. Envisions procurement in April 2013 and implementation by December 2013 with 4 months for data migration, testing and training. ICT saving estimated at £75k-£175k over 5 years.
December 2012	MKIP Board approves Planning Support shared service, under a single manager at a single site. The outline project plan at this time borrows the ICT timescales (so delivery in January 2014) but adds HR and service strands. Key dates are appointing manager in April 2013, and eight months of service re-design. The report is authored by the MKIP Programme Manager and identifies key members of project board.
April 2013	ICT procurement begins, three months later than originally scheduled. At the same time (though apparently unconnected) April 2014 is mooted as start date. Separately, TWBC planners begin to be aware of extent of change that will be necessary and push for early involvement, but not taken up at this stage.
12 June 2013	Joint Cabinet decision approves shared service project on single site – Maidstone. TWBC had received previous full Council approval ahead of Cabinet decision. The outline project plan presented gives April 2014 as start date, with now 2 months for service re-design. Assumes procurement decision in August 2013 and 6 months training ahead of go live. The report is clear that the ICT project is separate, a point also made clearly in discussion (although ICT is the focus of a majority of Members questions in the discussion and there are no ICT officers present).
June 2013	ICT procurement drops to single supplier as 3 of 4 companies who had expressed interest decline to bid. Two of the companies who withdrew cite, among other reasons, concerns on the feasibility

of implementation within desired timescales.

Project board begins regular meetings. There is no regular ICT attendance and the Project Manager role is still formally vacant, although the MKIP Programme Manager is effectively operating in that role. No decision is taken, or discussed, on project management methodology. The high-level plan and risk register presented to Cabinet are not elaborated.

July 2013	SBC planners, having been uncertain of the changes that the project will bring about for some time, take these concerns to an opposition Member. In meetings following, though accounts differ, SBC planners are apparently told that there will be no changes to how they undertake their work.
	As part of a tender, the supplier produces a detailed implementation project plan (which includes 131 days for data migration, 100 days for training and 10 days data testing) but this project plan is not adopted.
August 2013	Actions envisioned within the high-level project plan this month; ICT procurement, beginning install, appointing shared service manager. All are delayed but the project plan and deadlines are not revised at this stage.
September 2013	Procurement concludes with award of contract to IDOX for their Uniform system (an earlier version of which is used in TWBC) and Enterprise task management system (new to the shared service). However, owing to ongoing legal negotiations no contract is signed – and IDOX do not supply the product – until November.
October 2013	The MKIP Programme Manager is appointed Mid Kent Planning Services (MKPS) Manager, to take up the role in November. No other candidates were considered. He retains the role and responsibilities of MKIP Programme Manager until January.
	Workshops begin to examine process re-design, attended by representatives of each authority. Initial progress is slow, with the group hampered by inconsistent membership, uncertainty of objectives and lack of clear leadership.
November 2013	ICT arm of the project begins in detail following delivery of IDOX product. However, within the ICT project there is a disconnect with the main project on required outcomes, in particular what is part of Phase I and what is part of Phase II. Accounts, and documented evidence, show different expectations exist and begin to harden.
	Also at around this time the project board begins to consider June as implementation date rather than April. The reasons for the decision at this time are unclear but possibly reflective of the delayed start of the ICT project. However, the 'decision' is not

	consistently communicated at this time, with project board members seemingly working to different deadline expectations as late as February 2014.
December 2013	Workshops continue, with output quality increasing as initial issues resolve. ICT continues server building, which began in October.
January 2014	Formal consultation with affected staff begins. The 'HR process' proceeds largely as expected from this point onwards. Consultation begins with parishes on paperless working, first formal notification of the project to service users (although informal contact with key agents and developers had continued through 2013). Workshops evolve into a 'core team' developing shared business processes. Under the direction of TWBC Executive Support Manager, reported that this arm of the project becomes significantly more directed and productive. Heads of Service and MKPS Manager receive reports of outputs and are involved in key decisions but largely leave the core team to define processes itself. SBC Project Consultant produces the first detailed project plans, initially targeting April go live date, but these plans do not go into detail on ICT elements.
February 2014	The different expectations under which ICT and the main project are operating become apparent, as the ICT Project Lead becomes the first direct ICT attendee at project board (previously ICT updates were delivered through MKIP Programme Manager, although invitations had been extended previously to ICT to attend in person). Although already discussed, decision formalised at this stage to delay implementation to June to allow for issues to be resolved. This delay is accepted by senior decision makers without significant adverse comment, the prevailing view being that if extra time is needed to ensure success then it should be granted. The service insists, in line with ICT's project plan that Enterprise is delivered as part of Phase I. However ICT does not have resource to deliver, and so the task of rebuilding the out-of-the-box Enterprise software is allocated to TWBC planners. At the same time, the project agrees that some elements originally intended to be delivered at this time will move to Phase II (for example Land Charges) at request of ICT. A new MKIP Programme Manager, replacing the officer now working as MKPS Manager, but she has limited detailed involvement in the project.

March 2014	Training of 'superusers' delivered by IDOX. Reports differ on the quality of training, some describing it as little more than a demo of a system that will not be used (as ICT are rebuilding Uniform to shared service spec) but others satisfied they were equipped to broadly understand experience. No further superuser training is arranged.
March 2014 (cont)	ICT take receipt of sample hardware (mainly tablet computers) for paperless working, but these reportedly lie untouched for some weeks after breakdown in communications. Staff are interviewed for roles in the new planning support team structure.
April 2014	Core group workshops conclude with revised business processes and agreed templates (these are, however, based on an understanding of paperless working and compiled without reference to the software as it will exist as bespoke building of Uniform and Enterprise is ongoing). ICT begin data migration, now condensed down to three weeks in order to meet June go live. The IT hardware for paperless is identified and established as unsuitable. The decision is taken to postpone paperless working until September. At project board, the Project Sponsor seeks, and receives, specific verbal assurance from ICT that the project is on track for delivery in June.
May 2014	Staff are appointed to the new structure and moved to MBC terms and conditions (although physical move not until June). Staff training on Uniform (the out of the box version) continues. Data migration complete, and data signed off by MKPS Manager. Test environment constructed to allow training, but it is incomplete lacking the still-under-construction Enterprise build and having no mapping function, plus limited or no availability of revised templates. Also the test data is limited and so does not allow users to examine the entire process (in response, some planners make the unauthorised move to place test data in the live environment to help them understand the new system). Procedures originally completed in April, are redrafted in the light of changes to software build and decision to continue with paper files. Immediately before go live, the Project Sponsor again seeks, and receives, specific verbal assurance from MKPS Manager and others that all is ready for go live.
June 2014	Go live on 2 June. Enterprise build completed just in time, but without ability to

undertake detailed training or testing (outside of the build team). Revised procedures are delivered, untested, directly to planners and planning support staff.

At end of week one, action log kept by ICT runs to 131 issues, but general reports are of a service suffering no more than expected glitches and teething problems. However, it is acknowledged that some of these issues could quickly become serious if not addressed quickly, in particular access to GIS Mapping software, constraints data, printing and the interface between Uniform and scanning.

By late June, begins to emerge that there are both more serious issues impairing performance and continuing issues with matters identified in the first week, which are then communicated to Members and the public.

The scheduled final Project Board meeting is cancelled so as to not draw resource away from continuing implementation. Partly as a consequence of this calculation, but also similarly to other shared service projects there is no formal project close report.

Events beyond go-live are not specifically within the scope of the review and hence not included on this timeline. However, given the remit includes consideration of whether matters arising through the project are instructive of how to achieve improvement in the service, we did gather information about the period after June 2014 with key messages noted throughout this report where appropriate.

Appendix II: Interview schedule

We are grateful to the following individuals who gave up their time to interview in person or answer queries via telephone or email.

Cllr Richard Barnicott	Planning Committee Chair, SBC	Rob Jarman*	Head of Planning, MBC
Stephen Baughen+	Development Manager, TWBC	Andrew Jeffers+	Development Manager, SBC
William Benson	Chief Executive, TWBC	Deborah Jenkins	Parish Clerk, FPC & HPC & Assistant Clerk, SPC
Cllr Annabelle Blackmore	Leader, MBC	Abdool Kara	Chief Executive, SBC
Amanda Broadhurst	Parish Clerk, WFPC	Matthew Kennard+	Information & Research Officer, TWBC
Alison Broom	Chief Executive, MBC	Cllr Gerald Lewin	Planning Portfolio Holder, SBC
Geraldine Brown	Chair, YPC	Dave Lindsay	Chief Information Officer, MKS
Anna Burchett+	Validation Team Leader, MKPS	Jane Lynch*	Head of Planning, TWBC
Cllr David Burton	Planning Portfolio Holder, MBC	Cllr Alan McDermott	Planning Portfolio Holder, TWBC
Jane Clarke*	Programme Manager, MKIP (2014)	Jonathan MacDonald*	Deputy Chief Executive, TWBC. Project Sponsor
Nicky Carter*	HR Manager, TWBC	Ryan O'Connell*+	Manager, MKPS (2014) and Programme Manager, MKIP (2013)
Andy Cole*	Head of ICT, MKS	Ray Philpott	Procurement, MBC
Cllr Derek Conway	Planning Committee Member, SBC	Caroline Pieri+	Technical Team Leader, MKPS
Daniel Docker+	Tree Preservation Officer, TWBC	Tony Potter*+	Project Consultant, SBC
David Edwards	Director of Environment & Shared Services, MBC	Pete Raine	Director of Regeneration, SBC
Emma Eisinger+	Planning Officer, SBC	Cllr Julia Soyke	Planning Committee Chair, TWBC
Cllr David English	Planning Committee Chair, MBC	Cllr Val Springett	Planning O & S Chair, MBC
James Freeman*	Head of Planning, SBC (& former TWBC)	Rachael Stratton+	Technical Liaison Officer, SBC
Angela Gent	Parish Clerk, YPC	Michelle Tatton	Parish Clerk, TPC
Cllr Fay Gooch	Corporate Services Scrutiny Chair, MBC	Paul Taylor	Director, MKIP
Georgia Hawkes	Improvement Manager, MBC	Graham Thomas+	Area Planning Officer, SBC
Denise Haylett*+	Executive Support Manager, TWBC	Roger Wood*	ICT Project Lead, MKS

MBC = Maidstone Borough Council; SBC = Swale Borough Council; TWBC = Tunbridge Wells Borough Council; MKIP = Mid Kent Improvement Partnership, MKS = ,Mid Kent Services; MKPS = Mid Kent Planning Services; WFPC = West Farleigh Parish Council; YPC = Yalding Parish Council; FPC = Frittenden Parish Council; HPC = Harrietsham Parish Council; SPC = Staplehurst Parish Council, TPC = Teston Parish Council
* = Member of (or attended) Project Board; += Member of (or attended) Core Group

MID KENT AUDIT

Appendix III: Glossary

In the course of this report we use a variety of project management terms and concepts that bear some additional explanation or clarification in particular with regard to general expectations of particular roles and the functions of certain key documents. The glossary below is drawn chiefly from the Maidstone BC project management approach but the descriptions do not vary materially from standard definitions of these terms seen elsewhere. However it is important to note, as referenced elsewhere in this report, that the Project did not follow a recognised methodology. As a consequence, the descriptions below are not necessarily how the roles and documents were perceived by those involved.

Project Manager: The person given the authority and responsibility to manage the project on a day-to-day basis to deliver the required products within the constraints agreed with the Project Board.

Project Sponsor: This is the Executive in PRINCEII terms; the person with overall responsibility for ensuring that a project meets its objectives and delivers the projected benefits. This individual should ensure that the project maintains its business focus, that it has clear authority, and that the work, including risks, is actively managed. The Project Sponsor is the chair of the Project Board. He or she represents the customer and is responsible for the Business Case.

Project Plan: A high-level plan showing the major products of the project, when they will be delivered and at what cost. An Initial Project Plan is presented as part of the Project Initiation Documentation. This is revised as information on actual progress appears. It is a major control document for the Project Board to measure actual progress against expectations.

Risk Register: A record of identified risks, relating to an initiative, including their status and history. Registers more generally (including Issue, Risk and Quality Registers) are formal repositories managed by the Project Manager that require agreement by the Project Board on their format, composition and use.

User Acceptance: A specific type of acceptance by the person or group who will use the product once it is handed over into the operational environment.

Project Assurance: The Project Board's responsibilities to assure itself that the project is being conducted correctly. The Project Board members each have a specific area of focus for Project Assurance; business for the Executive, user assurance from Senior User, supplier for Senior Supplier.