

REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 11 JANUARY 2022

**PORTFOLIO: LEADER/DEPUTY LEADER & COMMERCIAL,
BUSINESS, LOCAL ECONOMY & LEISURE**

**REPORT FROM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, TRANSFORMATION AND
CUSTOMER**

SUBJECT: 'CONNECT PROGRAMME'

1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 To approve the Digitisation of the Asset Register business case and drawdown of £135,248 from the Connect Transformation Reserve.
- 1.2 To delegate the approval of any unallocated funding for invest to save projects held in the Connect Transformation Reserve, for individual projects up to the value of £50,000, to the Assistant Director, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.
- 1.3 To agree that the underspend of £8,000 against the original budget of £20,000 allocated for East of England LGA resource be used to continue current programme management arrangements.

2 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Connect Programme is the Council's pathway to becoming a 21st Century council, with Members and staff as 21st Century Public Servants providing quality services to our residents and stakeholders through the implementation of digital solutions and cultural change.

3 SALIENT INFORMATION

Background

- 3.1 It was agreed by Full Council in February 2020 to create a Connect Transformation Reserve of £497,847 to fund Invest to Save projects, identified through the work of the Connect Programme. Drawdowns from this reserve are subject to agreement of separate business cases for individual Invest to Save projects to the Executive.
- 3.2 To date the following drawdowns have been agreed:

Project Name	Date Agreed	Summary	Amount (£)
govService Customer Experience Platform	9 September 2021	Temporary resource to provide a whole Council system solution to benefit both the organisation and customer experience through the implementation of the govService Digital Customer Experience Platform	201,200
SharePoint and OneDrive Migration	7 October 2021	SharePoint will streamline business processes within the organisation and encourage information sharing, transparency and collaboration, allowing staff to work quicker and therefore more efficiently. Members will be able to access their documents 24/7 from any device via OneDrive.	22,480
CMIS Update	7 October 2021	Upgrade of the current CMIS system so that complex processes involved in committee management are streamlined and automated to assist the Council in reducing the administrative burden associated with compiling and distributing multiple meeting documents.	3,800
Approved Spend to date			227,480
Digitisation of the Asset Register	Pending (13 Jan 2022)	Temporary resources to provide a whole Council solution through the updating, consolidating and digitisation of the Council's Asset Register, to replace current systems which rely on spreadsheets and other data sources held across various service areas.	135,248
Total Unallocated (subject to approval of the Digitisation of the Asset Register business case)			135,119

Digitisation of the Asset Register Business Case

- 3.3 The Digitisation of the Asset Register Invest to Save business case has been part of the Connect Programme pipeline presented to the Executive since 9 September 2021.
- 3.4 As part of the agreed governance and sign off process, the Digitisation of the Asset Register was considered by the Leadership Team on 3 November and 6 December 2021 and the Connect Programme Board on 23 November 2021 and 14 December 2021.
- 3.5 Any request for drawdown of funds from the Connect Transformation Reserve must be supported by an Invest to Save business case. Accordingly, the Digitisation of the Asset Register business case document is attached as Appendix A for consideration.
- 3.6 The premise of the business case is the creation of a whole Council solution through the updating and digitisation of the Council's Asset Register.
- 3.7 Collaborative work has been carried out by service leads to explore the opportunities for greater efficiencies and savings through the implementation of the project, to identify a range of compelling benefits to both the Council and its customers, as set out in the Business Case.
- 3.8 The key benefits to be realised are:
- A single maintained digitised asset list for key services to easily access.
 - The updating of the Uniform (IDOX) system to store the data in one place with the ability to run accurate and timely reports.
 - System alerts for lease expiry, rent reviews and prompting regular visits to monitor sites linked to valuations and condition surveys, ensuring that the service is compliant with governance and maximises income potential.
 - An asset database that can prompt emails and letters to Finance, Legal and Leaseholders.
 - Active alerts prompting site visits for officers.
 - Improved customer service through more efficient access to data.
 - Reduction in manual intervention time spent by Council officers when carrying out transactional processes, which will release capacity to focus on higher priority activities and/or those that provide maximum benefit to the customer.
 - Production of accurate and up to date reports on changes to assets.

- Provision of Uniform Estate Management training to officers within the Assets and Commercial directorate, Digital Services and Customer Services to ensure that going forward the Uniform (IDOX) system is kept up to date and benefits identified by this business case are maximised.
- 3.9 The estimated annual non-cashable savings of **£16,739** are set out in Table 1 of the Business Case at Appendix A. Although the amount of officer time saved by introducing more efficient and effective processes through the Digitisation of the Assets Register will not be a direct cashable saving to the authority, it does release capacity for other work priorities.
- 3.10 It is proposed to secure specialist temporary resources to enable the Council to consolidate and replace multiple current systems which rely on spreadsheets and other data sources held across various service areas to achieve a single digitalised solution. The funding requested for this project is **£135,248** and is broken down in more detail at Table 2 of the Business Case at Appendix A.
- 3.11 This equates to an eight-year payback. However, as set out above, there will be wider operational and assurance benefits that are not directly measurable.
- 3.12 A high level timeline is included in the attached business case outlining key milestones in achieving the Digitisation of the Assets Register.

Connect Programme Governance for the Remaining Unallocated Funds

- 3.13 It is requested that the Executive delegates responsibility for approving further projects, each up to the value of £50,000, to the relevant Assistant Director in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, following a Check, Challenge and Probe process by the Leadership Team. Any amounts approved will be reported to the Executive as part of the regular PMO reports.

Connect Programme Management Resources

Programme resources of £120,000 were agreed by the Executive in February 2020 to support the delivery of the programme. These are now fully committed, with the exception of funding for an East of England LGA resource, of which there is an under spend of £8,000 against the original budget of £20,000. It is requested that this £8,000 be used to continue current programme management arrangements to support the delivery phase, to ensure the benefits outlined within each approved Invest to Save business case are realised for the Council and its customers.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The high level risks of the Connect Programme remain as set out in the Outline Business Case and will be reported to the Programme Board and quarterly to the Executive via the PMO.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Invest to Save: Digitisation of the Asset Register Business Case

- 5.1 The funding requested for this project is **£135,248**, as detailed in Appendix A. It is requested that this amount is drawn down from the Connect Transformation Reserve, leaving a residual balance of £135,199 available.

Connect Programme Governance for the Remaining Unallocated Funds

- 5.2 Further Invest to Save projects are likely to require relatively small amounts of Connect funding. Per paragraph 3.13 it is therefore requested that responsibility for approving any future Invest to Save projects requiring funding of up to £50,000 is through the Connect Programme Board.
- 5.3 This would be on the basis of support by the relevant Portfolio Holder and the current governance of robust business cases that clearly outline the anticipated benefits to both the Council and its customers being approved firstly by Leadership Team and then the Connect Programme Board.

Connect Programme Management Costs

- 5.4 At the Executive on 8 July 2020 approval was given for a change in approach to the 'Connect' Cultural and Transformation Programme Service Delivery Workstream; this has resulted in a saving of £8,000 from the original £20,000 budget agreed to fund external East of England resources.
- 5.5 It is requested that the remaining £8,000 is used to continue to fund continued programme management services for one day per month for a year from January 2022.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No legal implications.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are none arising from this report.

8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and found there to be no impacts (either positive or negative) on protected groups as defined under the Equality Act 2010.

I confirm that the above recommendation does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

LT Lead Officer Signature:  _____

Assistant Director, Transformation and Customer

Background Papers:-

None.

For further information please contact:

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If you would like this report in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.



Project Business Case – to support delivery of the Connect Programme

Project Business Case Name: Digitisation of the Asset Register

Date of document: 01/12/2021

Proposed Start & End Dates of the Project: From 01/03/2022 to 30/09/2023 (dependant upon appointment of successful temporary recruitment)

Project Lead: Darren McLoughlin, Senior Property & Asset Officer, Asset Management. darren.mcloughlin@rochford.gov.uk 01702 546366. Extn: 3616

Project Sponsor: Matt Harwood White, Assistant Director – Assets & Commercial

Does this Business Case impact across services or require cross-service working?

Cross service working is at the heart of this project and each service area involved has distinct requirements to be met and objectives to be delivered.

Services to benefit from the project are: Finance, Legal, Assets, Open Spaces, Planning and Customer Services.

1: PURPOSE OF THIS BUSINESS CASE AND DECISION REQUIRED

As agreed by the Executive on 5th February 2020, Connect will deliver investment in new technologies and the skills of the workforce to improve the way the Council interacts with residents and its delivery of services. This will ensure that the Council's services continue to be relevant and represent value for money.

The Council's Asset Register provides a record of the Council's land and buildings, of c.120 sites, incorporating c.50 leases, with further licences and easements. Other assets are being recorded separately outside of this project such as litter bins, benches and street lighting and will be captured through the inspection software GIS Application (Map Collector) which is suitable and quicker for teams use. There is an option to load this layer into Uniform once gathered or refer to in a separate Application as is currently the case which can be publicly accessible.

There is an exciting opportunity to provide a whole Council solution through the updating and digitisation of the Council's Asset Register, to replace current systems which rely on spreadsheets and other data sources held across various service areas. Full benefits of this project can be found below.

Accordingly, this business case outlines the resources needed to review and consolidate the Asset Register and upload the register and key information to the Council's existing database 'Uniform'.

It is proposed that once the project is completed the Asset Register will be maintained using existing resources.

2: Background

2.1: Current process:

Two of the corporate objectives in the Council's Business Plan are:

1. To become financially sustainable and
2. To maximise its assets

It is necessary, for the reasons set out below, to ensure the Council has complete confidence in its Asset Register; however, there is currently insufficient capacity within the Asset Team or other teams to carry out the necessary comprehensive consolidation, review and digitisation of the Asset Register.

Currently several teams within the Council hold asset information for their own purposes and in various formats. These have evolved over time and have been useful for those individual service areas to carry out their specific functions. However, it would be more efficient, save officer time and provide better customer service if the information was consolidated, updated and digitised into one single definitive list.

The key teams holding property related information are Assets, Legal, Finance and Open Spaces. The current information is held in various forms such as spreadsheets and Word. Some key information has been transferred onto the Council's software package known as 'Uniform' but requires updating.

Currently there is no formal process for updating the Asset Register. Additionally, staff have received limited training in the use of Uniform, particularly the Estate Management function, meaning this system is not being updated and used as efficiently as it could be.

This project will ensure that the Council's Asset Register is digitised and readily available for service areas to access key information such as: land registry title, deed pack references, boundary lines, lease and licences information, covenants, financial information and contact details. Lease information and landlord tenant responsibilities can also be collated. The system can also generate reminders to officers about pending tasks required.

2.2 Risks:

There are operational risks in not holding a single source Asset Register. It could impact on the accuracy of information used to prepare the financial accounts, management information, insurance records and rent reviews. This could lead to loss of income and/or financial penalties being incurred by the Council.

There is also reputational risk to the Council if asset data cannot be accessed efficiently to respond to queries from customers and colleagues, or if inaccurate information is used to respond to external requests from the council's auditors or insurance providers.

The Council's Internal Audit team made the following recommendation as part of an Asset Management Audit, Report 6 (2017/18) which was reported to the Audit Committee on 16/1/2018. It was raised again, in wider context and with a higher priority, in the Insurance Administration Audit, Report 6 (2018/19) which was reported to the Audit Committee in 26/2/2019.

- To establish an internal project team to create a master list of assets using land registry information to produce a single document that all internal teams will refer to and keep updated. Due to the different requirements of the finance, legal and assets teams, each service area also retains supporting documentation to supplement this for their own records.

While key service areas did form a workgroup and land registry data was reviewed and consolidated on a spreadsheet, further work has not progressed due to pressures across individual service areas.

2.3 The Solution:

In line with the Council's commitment to delivering a digital first approach, this business case seeks funding for resources with the required specialist skills and experience to consolidate the Asset Register and upload the register and key information to Uniform.

Uniform is an integrated suite of spatially enabled land and property solutions for local authorities and is used by over 250 UK authorities. The Council already uses Uniform but currently does not utilise its full potential, including functionality available within the Asset module to retain information on:

- Ownership
- Asset Register
- Acquisition & Disposal
- Leases & Assignments
- Maps and plan information

A data cleanse and consolidation of all data using the land registry list is required before the full functionality can be utilised. Existing site information needs to be interrogated to verify its accuracy and completeness.

A temporary resource is therefore required to carry out the following functions:

- Act as a single point of contact and project manager for the Asset Register project.
- Lead on the creation of a single digitised Corporate Asset Register
- Work with all relevant service areas of the Council (to include Assets, Finance, Legal and Open Spaces) to review the current asset information.
- Identify any potential un-registered land and work with Land Registry to record ownership where required.
- To review deed packs and upload key data into Uniform.

In addition, to ensure the Asset Register is kept up to date once the project has been completed, Uniform training is required for key officers across the following teams: Assets, Digital Services, Customer Services, Finance and Legal.

2.4 Description of what is to be achieved or changed:

- Ensure the Council maintains its reputation for managing its asset base effectively.
- A single maintained digitised asset list for key services to easily access.

- Confidence in Uniform data being updated with the ability to run accurate and timely reports.
- System alerts for lease expiry, rent reviews and prompting regular visits to monitor sites linked to valuations and condition surveys, ensuring that the service is compliant with governance and maximises income potential
- Optimising income for the Council to support the Business Plan for becoming Financially sufficient
- An Asset database that can prompt emails and letters to Finance, Legal and Leaseholders. (IDOX is already compatible with Outlook 2016/M365)
- Active alerts prompting site visits for officers
- Improved customer service through more efficient access to data .
- Reduce manual intervention time spent by Council officers when carrying out transactional processes, which will release capacity to focus on higher priority activities and/or those that provide maximum benefit to the customer
- Produce reports on changes to assets in year to inform and update the information used in the financial statements, ensuring up to date, accurate and complete.
- Provide Uniform Estate Management training to officers within Assets and Commercial, Digital Services and Customer Services to ensure that going forward the Uniform system is kept up to date and benefits identified by this business case are maximised.

3: Interdependencies

The scope of the project excludes scanning of all historic paper based deed packs and drawing plan records. This is to be considered within the Corporate Data Scanning Project.

The Council subscribe to EPAM (Essex Property Asset Maps) This is a map layer that highlights publicly owned assets within Essex. It is a useful reference for viewing sites within our own district and neighbouring authorities that have property on the Council boundary or within our District. In order for EPAM updates to be made annually our own Asset Property Register must be accurately reliable and updated.

4: Monitoring

A fortnightly update and quarterly progress review with Project Lead, Darren McLoughlin, will be conducted to gauge progress, identify any issues and note actions to maintain progress of key updates being maintained.

5: Business Drivers

Rochford Business Plan Outcomes 2020-2023

1. **Being Financially Sustainable**
2. **Maximise our Assets**

Priority: We will improve our efficiency through modernising services and changing the way we work to meet residents' needs through reviewing our assets and maximising their use for residents and communities.

Outcome: By 2023 we will have made best use of underutilised assets by improving the supporting processes and their use.

How: Accurate and complete asset information will allow the Council to work efficiently and effectively thus saving officer time, will ensure compliance with our Financial Regulations and manage our financial and reputational risks, and maximise our income potential through timely rent reviews.

Specific Connect Outcomes -

- Enhanced customer experience. ✓
- Maximise IT and technology benefits. ✓
- Deliver accessible high-quality services and customer experience for everyone – efficient, professional, adds value and meets changing individual needs – new ways of working for staff, members, and customers. ✓
- Increased efficiencies (reduced resources – time/money). ✓
- Staff are developed, trained and supported to provide the best customer experience. ✓

Reduce insurance risk – identifying assets are appropriately insured and obligations are being met by the Council and leaseholders ✓.

6 Which Council value(s) is/are supported by this Business Case -

- a. Customer focussed ✓
- b. Proactive ✓
- c. Maximise potential ✓
- d. Innovative ✓

7 Success Measures –

- A single digitised Asset Register held on Uniform to include all the Council's land and built assets. (Not including litter bins, benches street lighting and signage while information is being gathered and added to separate system for that purpose). This is being stored on separate GIS Application - Map Collector that is more suited than Uniform which is for Property Ownership Information.
- Confidence in the accuracy and completeness of the single Asset Register leads to a reduction/removal of locally held asset records within individual service areas
- A reduction in officer time spent on locating and checking asset records e.g. for insurance claims, financial and legal queries
- Enhanced customer service via increased efficiency of dealing with landlord and tenant queries.
- Confidence in the accuracy of rent information results in the council's income being maximised, via rent reviews being carried out, and bills sent out, on a timely basis.

8 Benefits and Costs -

- a. Benefits – Financial (non-cashable but will free up officer time for other work)

Table 1: Officer hours and equivalent cost per annum saved

Service area	Approx Hours saved	Approx Equivalent cost p.a. £
Assets	480	11,040
Open Spaces	72	1,548
Finance	23	577
Legal	96	2,365
Customer Services	60	1,209
TOTAL PER ANNUM		£16,739

In addition to officer time saved the project should provide the following, non-quantifiable, financial benefits to the Council:

- Ensuring adequate and appropriate insurance cover is maintained, to ensure all claims can be paid in full
- System will support identification of lease expiry to allow teams to plan for new lease negotiations in advance and optimise income streams.
- Uniform database will support the identification of prompt rent reviews to ensure any market increases can be negotiated and recovered.
- Highlight void properties with no income and prioritise for disposal, refurbishment etc. to maximise revenue or capital receipts.

- b. Benefits – Non Financial

- Enhanced customer service via more efficient access to asset information
- Increased assurance over the accuracy of information used for the Financial Accounts and other external reporting purposes, reducing the risk of reputational damage

c. Financial Costs**IT Costs**

There is no additional cost for the Uniform Software Licence as the Estate Management module is included within the existing budgeted software package.

Temporary staff Resource:

It is proposed to employ two fixed term staff members to support delivery of the project for 18 months.

1. A fixed term 'Estate Officer' with specialist experience to lead on the work to consolidate the Asset Register and upload to Uniform. The skill set to oversee this project should include capability of interrogating property information and understanding of legal and conveyancing terminology.
2. A fixed term 'Asset Business Technical Assistant' role is also necessary to deal with the administration of existing records and provide support to the Estate Officer.

There is a small risk of redundancy strain payable if the new staff members are transferring from employment with continuous Local Government Service leading to over two years' service.

Training

Training will be required for the fixed term staff and other identified officers to ensure updates continue once the project is completed. A contingency is included for three separate training Consultancy days. If any of these are not required this will deliver a small saving.

Other Costs

Any land or buildings that is identified as un-registered or further data to be cross-referenced with Land Registry to confirm ownership will require budget for searches to be made at £3 per search.

Project Management Support

Project Management Support: To provide support to the Project Lead for the Asset Digitisation Register project. A block of 12 days to be used to support the creation of a detailed project plan, risk register and all associated project documents. This will keep the project on track and give confidence of delivery, monitor progress and realisation of benefits.

Table 2: Costs to deliver the project

Description	Costs	Detail
Estate Officer	£ 67,648	P.O. 4 Scale - Based upon 18 months Fixed Term Contract. Includes on-costs such as: NI, Tax and Pension contributions. This equates to circa £34,000 p.a.
Asset Business Technical Assistant	£ 48,150	Scale 5 (Subject to Job Evaluation) - Based upon 18 months Fixed Term Contract Includes on costs such as: NI, Tax and Pension contributions. This equates to £24,500 p.a.

Uniform training for using the Database	£1,250	Estate Officer Course Introduction - Up to 8 attendees
Uniform Training for using the Database (more detailed functions of the system)	£2,500	2 Day Course - All aspects of the System - Up to 8 attendees
Training Contingency	£2,700	Consultancy Day Rate Support (3 Days x £900 per day)
Land Registry and Legal Searches	£500	For land registry and other associated queries that may be necessary as the register is reviewed.
Revaluation of all assets	£5,000	Estimated based on £100 for 100 assets, but existing budget of £5,000 to offset) Revaluation of all assets to ensure valuations reflect current boundaries and lease arrangements. This is reflective of all assets on the asset register and additional assets that are created through asset separation
Project Management	£7,500	EELGA External PM Resource
TOTAL	£135,248	

The total non-cashable financial savings of **£16,739** from Table 1 equates to an eight year payback.

However as set out above there will be wider operational and assurance benefits that are not directly measurable.

9 Delivery Approach –

- The project will be delivered via the fixed term posts set out in this business case, overseen by the Senior Property & Assets Officer Darren McLoughlin, acting as Project Lead.
- The Estates Officer will be the Project Manager, working closely with external providers such as Uniform and sharing expertise with other Local Authorities who have already implemented the system.
- The Connect Programme Manager will support the Project Manager in developing the required documentation to in monitor the project plan and deliverables to ensure the full benefits are realised.

10 Anticipated High-level Timeline:***March 2022 – April 2022: Introduction and Familiarisation.***

Fixed term posts appointed. Introductions made to Service Area Officers. Familiarisation with all of the various paper based files and Uniform. Uniform Training rolled out in March and April. Existing Property records, Deed Pack, filing re-organised and referenced. All electronic records reviewed on Server and Uniform database. Successful recruitment is a dependency.

May 2022 – August 2023: Database Updates

During the project fortnightly updates will be produced by the Estate Officer for review by the Senior Property & Assets Officer

December 2022: Interim Project Review and Summary and Report

Mid-point review of project timeline and assessment of progress made

August – September 2023: Project Review at Completion

Single Asset List consolidated with key information uploaded to Uniform. Training delivered and objectives set for continuing updates in the system to ensure the database remains reliable to use.

11 Appendices

- **Appendix A – EIA - Digitisation of Asset Register**