Title of Report: Item - Update on Replacement of Northern Ireland Planning Portal (NIPP)	Officer Presenting: Director of Environment & Regeneration Author: Head of Planning Performance and Improvement

1   Purpose of Report/Recommendations

1.1   To update and advise members on the progress of the replacement NIPP project, the need for a new planning IT system for all Councils in Northern Ireland and to seek members' approval to the Memorandum of Understanding committing Council to this project so that a procurement exercise can commence.

2   Background

2.1   Members will recall that the 11 Councils and the Department of Infrastructure are engaged in a process to identify a replacement system for the planning function now firmly embedded within Councils.

2.2   The 11 Councils, the Department of Infrastructure and the Regional Property Certificate Unit use the NI Planning Portal (NIPP) system to process planning applications and consents, enforcement cases, property certificates, Tree Preservation Orders etc. There are almost 9,500 registered users in Public Access. During 2015/2016, the NIPP handled:

- Over 12,000 planning applications including 145 major development and 6 regionally significant development applications;

- Over 11,000 planning decisions;

- Almost 3,000 enforcement cases (opened) and

- Issued over 42,000 consultations including statutory, non-statutory advice and guidance.

2.3   The current NIPP IT system is a business critical system; however, the NIPP was first developed over 10 years ago when the Department was a single planning authority. While the system is still operational, it is reaching the end of its operational life and no longer meets all the needs of users. The contract for the maintenance and support of the system ends in March 2019.

2.4   Interim provision is being provided to extend the use of the current system and costs for this are being covered by DFI.

2.5   The Department for Infrastructure and local government have been working together to identify the way forward for any new planning IT system. This work was taken forward in stages: initially with a discovery exercise to identify the key requirements of any new planning IT system; followed by the development of a business case to identify the preferred option for a new planning IT system.

2.6   This work has been positive and there was widespread agreement on the key functions of any new planning IT system. The Department and local government will use the new planning IT system. The proposed main functions are as follows:

- Ability to accept on-line applications in order to move towards a paperless process;

- Ability to accept on-line payments;

- Ability to manage and monitor large volume of planning applications;

- Notifications and alerts for application updates for all users of the system;

- A consistent mapping service with easy to select mapping layers with each Authority having the ability to manage its own default filters;

- A search function that will allow users to search the system across several different search criteria, and enable each Authority to create and save its own standard searches;

- Ability for each Authority to manage, customise and maintain its own templates, and library of conditions and refusal reasons;

- Ability for each Authority to produce its own core reports including Key Performance Indicator reports.

2.7 The proposal included the provision of property certificates within the new system, however, this aspect will only be confirmed when a review of the service has been completed. This will conclude before the procurement phase commences.

2.8 The Discovery phase also identified four emerging business solutions:

   i.   One shared IT system that is collectively managed / controlled;

   ii.   One shared IT system that is collectively managed / controlled but with local control for specific functions;

   iii. One shared public facing IT system with back-office IT system for each Department and local council;

   iv.   Twelve stand-alone IT systems – one for each Department and local council.

2.9 The Business case examined available options, taking into consideration: - costs, timeframes, governance and funding arrangements. This has identified a preferred option for a new planning IT system, a single regional IT system shared between the twelve planning authorities.

2.10 This is an off-the-shelf solution, tailored to meet the agreed business requirements in the MVP. It will also provide flexibility that will facilitate some customisation for each authority e.g. reports, templates, searches etc.

3   Key Issues

3.1 The estimated cost of the preferred option is £26.7m (undiscounted costs) over the 11-year period, starting from 2019/20. This consists of £15.1m capital and £11.6m resource and no longer includes the costs of the current NIPP, which the Department will cover separately.

3.2 As the competitive procurement process has yet to be completed, these figures remain estimates. Upon completion of the procurement phase, the OBC will be revised with the actual costs and timescale and a Final Business Case (FBC) produced. The Department and Local Government will sign off the FBC before any award of contract.

3.3 The original proposal indicated that the Department would contribute £11m towards the total cost of the project this reflects: -

- £1m (resource) per year for 8yrs (system operational from 2022 and 2030) in line with the provision for historic day-to-day costs of the current system.
- £2m contribution to the capitol cost of the system.
- £1m to cover cost of the Department's project team.

3.4 After representation from SOLACE, the department has agreed to increase its contribution to £12m

3.5 As indicated at 2.3 the Department will also continue to maintain and pay for the current NIPP until the new regional IT system is operational. This cost is estimated to be in the region of £1m per annum until the new system is fully implemented.

3.6 Local government will pay the remaining costs, estimated at £14.7m over the period 2022 – 2030.

3.7 The distribution of costs between the 11 Councils has yet to be agreed but could be based on an equal split or proportionally on a fee intake basis.

3.8 All costs are based on 11 councils and the department signing up to, and contributing to this project.

4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement and other Implications

4.1 The costs relate to both the capital cost for the purchase and development of the system and on ongoing operational and support cost. As noted above, the distribution of costs between the 11 Councils has yet to be agreed but could be based on an equal split or proportionally on a fee intake basis. This will be the key factor in determining financial implications for Council. In the worst case scenario, Council would be required to set aside an annual sum of circa £160k to cover these costs. This would not be required during the 2019/20 financial year but will be a pressure contributing to the 2020/21 rates estimates process.

4.2 It is envisaged that over time the new system will provide both operational efficiencies and service improvements in terms of administrative processes and accessibility for users.

5   Recommendations

Members are asked to note the content of the report and financial implications and agree that Council sign the Memorandum of Understanding that will commit Council to this project.

Background Papers

Appendix   -   Memorandum of Understanding