

Full Council	
Meeting Date	22 July 2026
Report Title	PlanX Software - Approach to Service Charge
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson Head of Place
Lead Officer	Carly Stoddart Digital and Improvement Manager (Planning)
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. That members agree that the service charge for PlanX is applied in accordance with paragraph 2.9 of this report.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 17 June 2026, Policy and Resources Committee agreed to recommend to Full Council that Swale Borough Council opt in to applying a service charge to all fee paying planning services to be delivered through a new digital platform called PlanX.
- 1.2 This followed the award of £23,500 of funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to purchase a subscription to PlanX. PlanX provides Local Planning Authorities with the ability to offer digital services to customers giving more accurate and quicker responses to customer queries.
- 1.3 The platform includes a service charge paid for by the customer which contributes to the maintenance of the platform and to discounts on the annual subscription going forward. The Council can choose to opt in or opt out of this service charge.
- 1.4 The application of the service charge would make a significant contribution to the annual subscription cost, enabling continued provision of digitally supported services for our customers in accordance with our commitment to improving digital service delivery.

2 Background

- 2.1 As part of their commitment to delivering the ambitions of the Digital Declaration, MHCLG works with Councils and industry experts as partners through the Open Digital Planning (ODP) community to develop products that are designed to improve the delivery of planning services through digital transformation. PlanX has been developed through ODP by Local Planning Authorities along with the product development company, Open Systems Lab (OSL) as a platform to deliver a wide range of services using open data provided by the relevant Council to a set standard that is consistent with other Local Authorities.

- 2.2 MHCLG is supporting the implementation of PlanX to assist Councils with the delivery of multiple digital services in a transparent, efficient and effective way for customers. The services created within the platform utilise spatial data provided by the Council to the required standard that is consistent with other Councils, allowing planning constraints relevant to a specific property to be checked. This improves the current situation for the customer as it provides for a more accurate, location specific response to enquiries in one place, as well as allowing connections and links through to other follow up services that the customer may like to follow.
- 2.3 Having received the grant funding from MHCLG, the Council is currently in the onboarding process for the implementation of PlanX. As part of that process, the Council needs to decide whether it opts in or opts out of applying the service charge. Following a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of both approaches, and alternative options, Policy and Resources Committee recommended that the Council opt-in.
- 2.4 By opting into the service fee, the subscription fee for subsequent years is substantially lower than when opting out given that the service charge contributes to a discount. The Council is to use £15,000 of the £23,500 MHCLG grant to pay for the first year subscription and would then be able to use the remaining £8,500 grant money towards all or a substantial part of the second year subscription fee.
- 2.5 For the purposes of moving towards obtaining funds to maintain the annual subscription after the first year, officers are seeking to transfer the Council's existing fee charging pre-application advice service as one of the initial services to be delivered through the PlanX platform, with other fee paying services to follow. This is to be provided alongside guidance services, such as 'find out if you need planning permission' which are free of charge to the customer. By introducing a fee charging service early on and opting into the service charge, it allows for funds to be built up contributing to a larger discount towards the subscription fee the following year. Whilst it is acknowledged by officers that the pre-application advice fee paying service alone will not generate enough of a discount to cover the entire cost of the subscription next year, this will be supplemented as stated above using the remaining £8,500 from the MHCLG grant.
- 2.6 The result of opting in to the service charge would mean there would be an additional £40+VAT (£48) added to the existing fee for any fee charging service. This service charge is a fixed charge applicable to any fee that the Council has set at £100 or more. The service charge does not adjust relative to the overall fee for the applicable Council service.
- 2.7 Whilst this will be an increase in cost for customers, it will make a significant contribution to improved self-service for all planning customers but particularly when used in conjunction with guidance services such as, 'find out if you need planning permission'. Guidance services such as this enables a more comprehensive check of individual sites in one place on the Council's website

compared to the service the Council currently provides. Through the PlanX platform, relevant checks for the type of development proposed are made of constraints such as whether the site sits within a conservation area, is a listed building, if there is a TPO and if an Article 4 Direction is in place. Currently, customers would need to know to check these constraints and would have to make those checks in multiple places.

- 2.8 Should they wish to progress and continue the journey following use of a guidance service such as the 'find out if you need planning permission', the customer is easily directed to relevant onward services, some of which will be fee paying services, such as 'apply for pre-application advice' where the service charge would apply. Linking services in this way makes it easier for the customer to navigate through what can often be confusing and/or complex planning rules in one place within the Council's website. The linking of services provides a more convenient and easier way of making requests and may also increase uptake of fee paying services such as seeking pre-application advice.
- 2.9 It is anticipated that in addition to requests for pre-application advice, all other fee paying planning services be delivered through PlanX where possible. These services would also be subject to the service charge as described above. It is recommended the Council's website be updated to clearly state the service charge will be applied as an addition to the stated fee. This would need to be clearly stated in relation to each fee paying service as and when they are delivered through PlanX.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 That members agree that the service charge for PlanX is applied in accordance with paragraph 2.9 of this report.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 To opt in and apply the service charge but adjust the existing pre-application advice fees and other non-statutory services with fees, such as the submission of amendments and further information, down by £48 for the current set fees. This was rejected by Policy and Resources Committee for the reasons set out in the officer report.
- 4.2 To opt in and apply the service charge but adjust the existing pre-application advice fees and other non-statutory services with fees such as the submission of amendments and further information, down by £48 for the current set fees for pre-app advice requests related to householder development only and for the submission of amendments and further information related to applications where the fee is currently under £299 only. The £48 that would be lost on these fees could

be absorbed elsewhere by adjusting other fees. This was rejected by Policy and Resources Committee for the reasons set out in the officer report.

- 4.3 To opt out of the service charge. This was rejected by Policy and Resources Committee for the reasons set out in the officer report.
- 4.4 To apply the service charge proportionately and relative to the different levels of fee within each fee paying services. This is not possible under the PlanX payment structure.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 The proposal to opt in to the service charge has been discussed informally with senior officers.
- 5.2 Policy and Resources Committee reviewed the recommendation on 17th June 2026 and supported its progression to Full Council.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The proposals would align with the Corporate Plan as it would enable the Planning Service to better operate within its resources whilst delivering the service in a transparent and efficient way.
Financial, Resource and Property	The proposal to opt in to the service charge means a lower subscription charge within the first year that is well below the £23,500 grant funding. Applying the service charge results in a discount to the following year's subscription which combined with the remaining £8,500 of grant funding means the subscription for year two will be either substantially or fully covered. It is anticipated that further fee paying planning services are introduced at the earliest opportunity during the first two years to ensure the use of PlanX becomes self funded. The improvements for customers in terms of access to more accurate information and for them to self serve leads to efficiencies in the use of officer time.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The provision of a planning function and processing applications made to the Planning Service is a statutory requirement. However, other services such as the provision of pre-application and post-decision advice, are discretionary elements of the planning function that already occurs within Swale. In accordance with Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 and Section 3 of the

	Localism Act 2011, the suggested approach to opt in to the service charge to recover costs associated with this work is lawful and has no other legal implications. The contract will be procured via the GCloud framework which is compliant with Contract Standing Orders. The contract will be drawn up using terms and conditions which have been approved by Mid Kent Legal Services and Finance. The benefit of applying the service charge for use of PlanX will result in the annual subscription ultimately being paid for in future years, therefore not drawing on the Council's budget. The service charge is considered reasonable and proportionate. The use of PlanX and its use of open-source data contributes to the provision of digital services and improving accessibility. The PlanX product has been innovatively developed between the product developer and Local Planning Authorities to achieve faster, more efficient services. Improved and more accessible data provided in a format consistent across many Local Planning Authorities results in greater opportunities for customers to access a more cost-effective, inclusive and transparent Planning Service. The use of digital workflows supports NPPS objectives around public sector innovation and modernisation and resilience in digital infrastructure.
Crime and Disorder	There are no implications for crime and disorder.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	Opting in to the service charge for PlanX would not result in any direct implications in respect of the environment and the climate/ecological emergency.
Health and Wellbeing	There are no implications for health and wellbeing.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	There are no implications for the safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	There is a risk to the image of the Council arising from the introduction of a service fee that is adding more cost for applicants. However, the introduction of a fee for this service is comparable to the Planning Portal in terms of there being a service fee, difference being, the fee for the PlanX platform is that it is cheaper. It is

	considered that the benefits of opting into the service fee will outweigh the limited additional costs. The benefits of improved access to data and services may have positive reputational benefits. No Health and Safety issues are anticipated.
Equality and Diversity	None at this stage.
Privacy and Data Protection	None at this stage.
Local Government Reorganisation	The recommendation has little impact on Local Government Reorganisation other than the use of PlanX itself will better align us with neighbouring authorities who are already using the platform and those that are also engaged in the onboarding process.

7 Appendices

7.1 None

8 Background Documents

8.1 Item 8 Policy and Resources Committee 17 June 2026 – PlanX Software – Approach to Service Charge.

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Policy and Resources Committee, 17/06/2026 19:00](#)