

Delegated Decision Report

Decision below £250k



Subject:	Renewal of Silktide accessibility tool
Decision maker: Senior Officer	Fiona Greenway, Executive Director of Resources
Decision maker: Cabinet Member	Cllr Jabbar, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate Services and Sustainability
Decision date:	18 September 2025
Report author:	Fran Lautman, Assistant Director of Customer Experience Gordon Lee, Senior Digital Officer
Ward (s):	All

Reason for decision

This report seeks approval for a total of £25,032 net (£30,038 inclusive of VAT) across 3 financial years for the renewal of the Silktide accessibility tool currently used to assess and identify accessibility issues on Council websites.

Recommendation(s)

The renewal and continued use of Silktide so we can meet the legal requirement that our websites, mobile apps and any documents, plans and policies published online will meet the international WCAG 2.1 AA (soon to be WCAG 2.2 AA) accessibility standard.

1. Background

1.1 Accessibility is important for the following reasons:

1.2 Morally - An accessible website is one that people with permanent and temporary disabilities, such as sight loss, speech and motor difficulties, hearing loss, cognitive impairments or even a broken arm, can use without encountering barriers that disrupt the task they're trying to complete. In a nutshell, web accessibility means designing a website so that disabled people can access the same information and do the same things that a non-disabled person can.

1.3 Reputationally - Accessible websites tend to provide a better user experience and rank higher in search engine results too. Not being compliant runs the risk of being highlighted by the Central Digital and Data Office and leaves us open to legal challenge.

1.4 Legally - Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations came into force in September 2020. These regulations state that local government organisation website and web applications must comply with the WCAG 2.1 AA standard as a minimum.

2. Current Solution

2.1 At the moment we use Silktide as our tool to test the council's websites for accessibility, it also does other things to monitor and improve the website's usability:

- Identifying broken links, typos, and grammatical errors
- Testing against WCAG 2.1 A, AA, and AAA standards
- Finding design, technical, and speed issues
- Monitoring GDPR compliance

2.2 Using Silktide over the last two years has allowed us to improve the accessibility of oldham.gov.uk (currently oldham.gov.uk is 87% compliant with the WCAG guidelines) and other council sites. Also manage things like broken links (we now have on average about 30 broken links a month compared to over 400 a month before we started using Silktide) coding errors, page loading issues and general user experience.

3. Why use Silktide

3.1 Silktide was chosen as the council's accessibility solution for several reasons:

- Cost: Silktide is considerably better value for money than other systems that fulfil a similar function.

- Ease of use: Silktide uses AI to identify issues and provide solutions. An intuitive interface allows issues tracked and resolved quickly and efficiently.
- Flexibility: Unlike other systems we can change the websites Silktide scans at any point, this means we can scan all our sites with one tool.

3.2 Our current website templates are 8 years old and struggle to meet the current guidelines. New WCAG guidelines coming into force in October 2024 will mean that we will need to update our web templates in the near future. Silktide will allow us to identify existing problems and try to mitigate them until we update our website and web templates.

4. Alternative option(s) to be considered

4.1 Not renewing Silktide - not renewing Silktide would hamper the councils efforts to meet the statutory accessibility requirements. Testing would have to be done manually on a page by page basis and solutions to each problem would need to be worked through by individual web team members. This would result in more, less productive Web Team time working on accessibility issues and create reputational risk.

5. Consultation

5.1 The Cabinet member has been consulted.

6. Risks

6.1 Non compliance - The Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) is responsible for monitoring public sector website compliance. It can publicly highlight any public sector body that fails to publish an accurate accessibility statement or meet the WCAG 2.1 AA standard.

6.2 Several discrimination cases against non-compliant websites have been brought forward by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and settled out of court.

6.3 To avoid the risk of a legal challenge and the reputational fallout of being named as a discriminatory organisation, we need to proactively work towards web accessibility.

7. Implications

Financial	<p>This report seeks approval to renew the Silktide accessibility tool for a further three-year period.</p> <p>The total cost of the contract is £25,032 (excluding VAT), which equates to £8,344 per annum.</p> <p>The contract will be funded from the budget allocated to this software package within the existing Customer Services revenue budget.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Matthew Kearns, Finance Manager</p>
Legal	<p>This is a standard under the threshold contract that is a direct award on agreeable terms. As long as the procurement process has been followed Legal have no further comment.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mike Grocott, Solicitor</p>
Equality impact including implications for Children and Young People	<p>Renewing this software will help ensure that council websites remain accessible to all users, including people with disabilities, in line with our equality and inclusion commitments. The renewal supports our duty to identify and remove barriers to digital access, ensuring residents with different needs can engage with council services online, as such, the impact of this proposal is positive.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">James Mulvaney, Policy Manager</p>
Procurement	<p>Recommendation for Direct Award under the Procurement Act 2023: The Commercial Procurement Unit (CPU) supports the recommendation to enter into a three-year contract with the Silktide for the procurement of software licenses required with a total cost for a 3-year Contract of £30,038 including VAT.</p> <p>Under the Procurement Act 2023, a direct award is permissible in accordance with Schedule 5, where the following conditions are met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (a) Only a particular supplier can provide the required goods, services, or works due to exclusive rights, such as intellectual property <p>Silktide holds the intellectual property rights to the required software, therefore, approval is sought to proceed with this direct award.</p> <p>In compliance with PA23, the following mandatory notices will be issued:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transparency Notice (Section 44) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. To be published prior to contract award.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. This notice will inform the market of the Council's intention to make a direct award and the justification for doing so. c. Upon approval, please notify CPU so the notice can be issued. <p>2. Contract Award Notice (Section 50)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To be published before contract signature. b. This formally notifies the market of the Council's intention to award the contract. c. A standstill period of 8 working days must be observed before the contract is signed. <p>3. Contract Details Notice (Section 53)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To be published within 30 days of contract signature. b. This provides transparency regarding the final contract terms. <p>Please ensure CPU is notified upon approval of the Delegated Decision Report (DDR) so that all required notices are published in accordance with PA23 prior to any contract signature.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Senga Henstock, ICT Senior Buyer</p>
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Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution?	Yes
Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget?	Yes
Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council?	No

Report author sign-off	Gordon Lee
Role	Senior Digital Officer
Date of sign-off	4 September 2025

Report author sign-off	 Fran Lautman
Role	Assistant Director of Customer Experience
Date of sign-off	11 September 2025

Approval	
Officer approval sign-off	 Fiona Greenway
Role	Executive Director of Resources
Date of sign-off	12 September 2025

Approval	
Member(s) approval sign-off	 Cllr Abdul Jabbar
Role	Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate Services and Sustainability
Date of sign-off	18 September 2025