Principal Decision Report

Decision between £100k-£250k or the Executive Director/Director considers it to be of such significance that a record of the decision would ensure transparency and accountability.

Subject:	Procurement of Specialist Robotic Process Automation (RPA) Consultancy Support – maximum contract value up to £250,000 (excluding VAT)
Decision maker:	Chief Executive
Decision date:	
Report author:	David Cooper (Assistant Director Digital Transformation & Innovation)
Ward (s):	Not Applicable

Reason for decision

To seek approval to procure specialist Robotic Process Automation (RPA) consultancy support, up to a £194.000 (excluding VAT), to establish, accelerate and embed an internal RPA capability within the Council.

The consultancy will deliver production-ready automations while putting in place the governance, standards, reusable components, documentation and internal skills the Council needs to sustain and grow the capability itself, without long-term reliance on external specialists.

The £194k (excluding VAT) figure is the maximum procurement envelope. It is not a commitment to spend that amount. Actual expenditure will be determined by the outcome of the procurement, the agreed delivery model and phasing, and the services called off against agreed milestones. The value released by individual automations is separate again and will be baselined and tracked automation by automation.

This decision relates to consultancy support only.

Recommendation(s)

1. Approve the procurement of specialist RPA consultancy support up to a maximum contract value of £195.000 (excluding VAT), for an initial period of up to 12 months (TBC), through a compliant route to be confirmed by Procurement in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Procurement Act 2023.
2. Note that £195.000 (excluding VAT) is a maximum envelope and not a forecast of spend. The contract should be structured in phases, with a formal review point at the end of the initial Foundation and Discovery phase (months 1–3) and continuation subject to evidence of delivery progress, knowledge transfer and benefits.

3. Note that the requirement includes business analysis, process discovery, governance, quality assurance, benefits tracking, training and knowledge transfer, and is intended to create a sustainable internal capability rather than purchase isolated automations.
4. Note that the funding source for the consultancy is to be confirmed by Finance (TBC), and that contract award will be made in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules following the procurement.

Background

Oldham Council continues to operate under significant pressure:

- Budget constraints and the need for ongoing savings
- Rising demand in statutory services
- Workforce shortages and recruitment challenges
- Legacy systems with limited integration options
- Resident expectations for faster, digital-first services

Many internal processes remain manual, repetitive and time-consuming. These include data entry, reconciliations, case updates, document handling and cross-system checks. These tasks consume staff time, contribute to backlogs and increase the risk of error.

RPA provides a practical, relatively low-disruption way of addressing this. Software "robots" work with the Council's existing systems through the same screens staff use, so processes can be automated without replacing underlying line-of-business systems or commissioning costly integrations. RPA is best suited to high-volume, stable, rules-based processes. It is not suitable for every process, and selecting the right processes is central to the approach set out below.

Why specialist consultancy support is required

The Council does not currently have sufficient in-house specialist RPA capacity to establish the capability at the pace required while also building the standards and controls needed to run automations safely in production. RPA is most successful when it is implemented as an operational capability rather than a technology experiment. Without experienced support there is a risk of slow progress, fragile automations that are difficult to support, and benefits that are not evidenced.

The requirement is therefore broader than development resource. The consultancy is expected to provide:

- RPA technical expertise and UiPath development expertise
- Business analysis and process discovery with services
- Development and deployment of production-ready automations
- Prioritisation of the automation pipeline
- Automation governance, including intake, design review and go-live controls
- Quality assurance, including code review, testing and UAT
- Benefits identification, baselining and tracking

- Documentation for every automation (process and solution design, risk assessment, runbook and handover)
- Training and knowledge transfer to Council staff
- Development of internal capability, standards and reusable component libraries
- Support for deploying and operating automations, including a BAU support model
- A planned reduction in long-term reliance on external specialists

The Council would not be buying isolated bots. It would be buying a structured route to stand up an internal RPA capability: live automations, reusable components, documentation, governance, reporting and a route to sustainability. This provides stronger long-term value than relying on a supplier to deliver disconnected automations that need external support for every change.

Proposed approach

The operating model will be lightweight but disciplined. It will make it easy for services to suggest opportunities while ensuring only suitable processes are selected. This prevents RPA from becoming a queue of random requests and helps directors see what value is being delivered. Delivery is proposed in four phases over an initial 12 months:

Phase 1: Months 1–3 – Foundation, Discovery and Initial Delivery. Stand up the RPA function, agree the delivery model, set up infrastructure, create structured documentation, begin component libraries and deploy the first set of automations.

Phase 2: Months 4–6 – Scale Delivery and Standardisation. Move from early proof points into repeatable delivery by expanding automations, building system-specific components and introducing stronger reporting and support controls.

Phase 3: Months 7–9 – Embed Across Services and Build Internal Capability. Expand RPA across the Council, formalise the pipeline, increase internal contribution and introduce stronger quality controls across the live estate.

Phase 4: Months 10–12 – Optimisation, Handover and Sustainability. Optimise the live estate, complete knowledge transfer, formalise BAU ownership and produce a year-two roadmap.

The draft RPA Capability Roadmap (Appendix 1) sets an indicative target of 8–16 live automations in year one. This is a planning assumption, not a commitment, and will be tested through the procurement and confirmed through discovery.

Scale and type of opportunity

The RPA Project List (Appendix 2) records automations delivered at another local authority using the same platform and approach. It is used here to show the scale and type of opportunity, not as a list of Oldham projects. No individual project is approved for delivery by this decision, and the Council's own pipeline will be built and prioritised through discovery. Illustrative examples across different services and automation types include:

- **Adult Social Care:** web referrals of 100+ data fields per form automatically created or matched in the case management system, cutting processing from c.20 to c.3 minutes per referral and helping vulnerable adults to be triaged more quickly.

- **Revenues and Benefits:** weekly processing of 100+ refunds and credit transfers on closed accounts, with eligibility checks, system notes and an audit report, reducing manual effort by c.90%.
- **Environmental Health and Planning:** food business registrations, licensing closures and planning consultation records entered automatically, removing manual keying of 15–20 minutes per record and reducing backlogs.
- **Finance:** scheduled extraction of debt management reports from Agresso, with customer record creation, improving consistency and reducing manual handling.
- **Document processing and data extraction:** conversion of 800+ files a month ahead of redaction, and bulk data extraction to support the decommissioning of legacy systems.

Equivalent processes are expected to exist within Oldham's services, and this will be validated through discovery.

Indicative benefits

Benefits are separated into four types so that they are not overstated or double counted:

- **Cashable savings** – an actual reduction in expenditure, such as licence removal or reduced supplier, agency or overtime spend.
- **Capacity release** – staff hours released by automation that can be redirected to higher-value work, backlogs or demand growth. Capacity release is not treated as a cashable budget saving unless posts or spend are actually reduced.
- **Cost avoidance** – additional staffing, system or supplier expenditure that would otherwise be needed.
- **Service / risk benefit** – faster processing, reduced backlogs, improved accuracy and data quality, auditability and reduced operational risk.

The table below summarises the evidence available from the RPA Project List. The figures relate to another authority and are not Oldham baselines. They should not be added together or extrapolated across the Council.

Automation / Area	Current Manual Effort	Indicative Time Saving	Indicative Financial Benefit	Benefit Type	Evidence / Assumption
Adult Social Care – web referrals entered into Mosaic	15–35 referrals per day at c.20 minutes each (c.5–12 hours per day)	Reduced to c.3 minutes per referral; just under 1 FTE released	Not valued. Capacity release only – cashable only if posts, agency or overtime spend are actually reduced	Capacity release; Service / risk (faster triage of vulnerable adults)	Delivered at another authority (RPA Project List). Hours calculated from the stated volumes and times. Oldham volumes TBC through discovery.
Revenues – closed accounts in credit (NEC Revenues & Benefits)	100+ refund / credit transfer transactions per week	c.90% reduction in manual effort	Insufficient information to value – handling time per transaction not recorded	Capacity release; Service / risk (accuracy, audit trail)	RPA Project List. Baseline handling time TBC.

Automation / Area	Current Manual Effort	Indicative Time Saving	Indicative Financial Benefit	Benefit Type	Evidence / Assumption
Legacy system decommissioning – data extraction (Nalytics, Apex, Egress)	100,000+ records, thousands of documents and 30GB+ of files to extract	1,700+ hours of manual effort avoided (one-off)	Contributed to annual licence savings in excess of £140,000 at that authority	Cashable (licence removal); Cost avoidance (one-off effort)	RPA Project List. Licence saving is not solely attributable to RPA and is specific to that authority's systems. Any Oldham opportunity would be assessed case by case.
Planning – consultation data entry (Civica APP)	15–20 minutes per record; backlogs reported	Manual keying removed except for exceptions	Insufficient information to value – volumes not recorded	Capacity release; Service / risk (backlog reduction)	RPA Project List. Volumes TBC.
Environmental Health – food business registrations (Civica APP)	Emailed forms uploaded manually to records	c.15 minutes per transaction	Insufficient information to value – volumes not recorded	Capacity release; Service / risk	RPA Project List. Volumes TBC.
Document processing – conversion of files to PDF prior to redaction	800+ files per month	Manual conversion removed	Insufficient information to value	Capacity release; Service / risk (compliance, consistency)	RPA Project List. Handling time TBC.

Where the source material does not record volumes or handling times, no financial value has been attributed. Financial benefits will be baselined and tracked for each automation as part of the RPA benefits management process.

Financial envelope and value for money

The costs of the RPA capability are separate and are shown separately:

- **Consultancy (this decision):** up to £194,000 excluding VAT, as a maximum contract value.
- **UiPath platform (separate Administrative Decision):** approximately £18,000 per annum. Depending on the success of the team we would need to purchase additional robots.

Three different figures should not be confused: the maximum contract value (£194,000 excluding VAT); the actual expenditure, which will depend on the tendered price, the phasing agreed and the services called off; and the value released by individual automations, which will be measured separately for each automation. Indicative early market information suggests that a 12-month programme of this type can be delivered within the envelope. The final contract value will be determined through procurement.

The value-for-money case rests on creating reusable organisational capability rather than buying individual automations. Component libraries for common actions and key Council systems reduce the build time of later automations. Mandatory documentation, governance and benefits tracking reduce support risk and give directors evidence for future investment decisions. Knowledge transfer reduces the need for external support for every change after year one.

The evidence available supports the type and scale of benefit RPA can deliver, including capacity release of up to around one FTE from a single high-volume automation, cost avoidance from removing manual processing hours, and cashable licence savings where RPA enables legacy systems to be decommissioned. The evidence is not sufficient to support a defensible return on investment or payback calculation for Oldham at this stage, and none is claimed. Financial benefits will be baselined and tracked for each automation as part of the RPA benefits management process and reported to inform the review point at the end of Phase 1 and any future investment decision.

Alternative option(s) to be considered *(please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s)*

Option 1: Do nothing

Manual processes would continue unchanged. This would not address capacity pressures or backlogs, would maintain the current risk of keying errors, and would provide no opportunity to release staff capacity or realise efficiency savings. The UiPath platform, if licensed, would be under-used. **Rejected.**

Option 2: Continue with manual processes and add administrative capacity

Additional staff or agency capacity could relieve backlogs in specific services quickly and is a reasonable short-term response to peaks in demand. However, there are recruitment challenges across many services and it would increase ongoing salary, training and management costs. It would not address the underlying inefficiencies or system limitations. **Rejected as a general solution**, although services may still need temporary capacity in some cases.

Option 3: Develop the capability solely using existing internal resource

This would minimise external expenditure and build ownership from the outset. However, the Council does not currently have sufficient specialist RPA capacity, and staff would need to be released from existing duties and trained before delivery could start. Progress would be slower, the risk of poorly controlled or fragile automations would be higher, and benefits would take longer to realise. **Rejected for the initial phase.** Internal resource remains central to the recommended option and is expected to take on more of the work over time.

Option 4: Commission automations as an outsourced or managed service

A supplier could build and run automations on the Council's behalf, providing fast initial delivery. However, the Council would remain dependent on the supplier for support and change, would not develop internal skills or reusable assets, and would face continuing external costs. **Rejected.**

Option 5: Procure time-bound specialist RPA consultancy with knowledge transfer (Recommended)

This option provides the expertise needed to establish the capability quickly and safely, delivers production-ready automations from the first quarter, and builds the governance, standards, documentation and internal skills needed for the Council to sustain RPA after year one. Phasing with a review point limits financial exposure while benefits are evidenced.

The choice of RPA platform is addressed in the separate UiPath Administrative Decision and is not repeated here.

Risks

There are risks in adopting any new way of working. These are considered manageable given the track record of the approach at other authorities, provided the mitigations below are put in place:

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Poor process selection	Effort spent on unstable, low-volume or poorly defined processes; weak return	Single intake route and scoring of each opportunity by volume, stability, rules-based content, data quality, risk and benefit before build. Broken processes are fixed before they are automated.
Failure to realise benefits	Investment not matched by released capacity or savings	Baseline manual effort before build; agree success measures with the service owner; track transactions, exceptions and hours saved after go-live; phased contract with a review point at month 3.
Dependency on specialist resource	Capability stalls when the consultancy ends	Knowledge transfer built into every phase; internal staff shadow, then pair-build, then lead smaller builds; handover deliverables written into the contract and tied to milestones.
Supplier dependency	Council unable to support or change automations without the supplier	Council owns all code, component libraries and documentation; mandatory PDD, SDD, runbook and handover pack for every automation; Council-controlled Orchestrator and source control.
Knowledge transfer not achieved	Live estate cannot be sustained internally	Named internal staff assigned from the outset; structured training pathway; knowledge transfer measured as a contract deliverable, not left to the final quarter.
Information governance and data security	Data breach or non-compliant processing of personal data	DPIA and risk assessment per automation where personal data is processed; least-privilege robot accounts; credentials held in a secure vault; full audit logging; IG and Cyber Security engaged before go-live.
Automated processing errors	Incorrect updates replicated at volume	Rules-based validation, business and system exception handling, UAT sign-off by the service, controlled go-live, status reports to the service and manual referral of exceptions.
Business continuity	Service disruption if an automation or system fails	Documented fallback to the manual process; monitoring and alerting; support runbooks; agreed incident and rerun procedures.
Scalability and licensing cost	Costs rise as the estate grows	Licensing scaled only where benefits are evidenced; utilisation reviewed regularly; growth subject to separate decisions.
Service engagement	Services do not release staff time to support discovery, UAT and adoption	Director-level sponsorship; early workshops with priority services; visible pipeline and benefits reporting; use of live examples to explain what RPA can and cannot do.
Internal capacity to sustain the capability	Insufficient internal roles to run the live estate after year one	BAU support model agreed before handover; year-two roadmap to set out internal roles and resourcing for decision (TBC).

Implications

Financial	Capital Implications The proposed scheme represents capital expenditure and will be a charge against the Information Technology (IT) capital programme. The estimated total cost of the capital scheme is up to £194,000 (excluding VAT) and will be defrayed in 2026/27 and 2027/28. Provision exists within the capital programme against which this scheme will be a charge. (Jit Kara Senior Accountant)
Procurement	In accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, Commercial Procurement Unit conducted a compliant open competition via The Chest e-tendering portal under reference DN825199 - Intelligent Automation (RPA) Capability Development and Automation Delivery Partner. A total of 22 tender submissions were received. Following a robust evaluation process, TDS colleagues independently assessed and scored all bids against the published award criteria. A moderation meeting was subsequently undertaken to review and agree the final scores. As a result of this process, Nova Process Automation achieved the highest overall score and has been identified as the preferred supplier. Approval is therefore sought to award and enter into a 12-month contract with Nova Process Automation for the provision of Intelligent Automation (RPA) capability development and automation delivery services. TDS colleagues will be responsible for the ongoing management of the contract, including supplier performance monitoring, delivery oversight, and contract review activities throughout the contract term. Subject to approval, Commercial Procurement Unit will complete all required procurement governance activities, including the publication of the relevant notices in accordance with the Procurement Act 2023 and associated regulations, and will

	ensure that the contract award is implemented in line with both legislative requirements and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. Senga Henstock ICT Senior Buyer 16 October 2026
Legal	The proposal is lawful and complies with the Contract Procedure Rules and the Council's constitution. This is a covered procurement with respect to the Procurement Act 2023 and complies with it. Bryan Boese - solicitor
Equality impact including implications for Children and Young People	No adverse equality impact is anticipated from this decision. Faster processing of referrals and applications is expected to benefit residents, including vulnerable adults. Each automation affecting residents will be screened for equality impact before go-live, and an Equality Impact Assessment completed where required.
Other	Information governance: a DPIA and risk assessment will be completed for each automation that processes personal data, with IG approval before go-live. IT and cyber security: robot accounts, credentials and access will follow Council security standards and will be reviewed by IT / Cyber Security.

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

Appendices (including any relevant Background Papers)

1. Appendix 1 – RPA Capability Roadmap: Oldham Council 12-Month Implementation Plan

2. Appendix 2 – RPA Project List (examples of automations delivered at another local authority)
3. Appendix 3 – Background paper – Administrative Decision: Procurement of UiPath Unattended Robot and Associated RPA Platform Licensing

Report author sign-off	David Cooper
Role	Assistant Director of Digital Transformation and Innovation
Date of sign-off	09/10/26

Approved by the Chief Executive following consultation with the political group leaders who were in attendance as follows:- Councillors: Decision made under the authorisation contained in Section 9C (5) Delegations of Specific Officers of Part 3 (Responsibility for Functions) and Section 3.6 of Part 4 (Executive Procedure Rules) of the Council Constitution for the Chief Executive to take emergency decisions in respect of the Council's executive functions.
Signed: Shelley Kipling, Chief Executive Dated:
Date of Leaders' Consultative meeting:
Summary of feedback from the political group leaders

