



Title of report: Renewal of Access Group contract for Mosaic, Synergy and associated systems

Decision maker: Cabinet member adults, health and wellbeing

Decision date: 25 September 2026

Report by: Corporate Director - Community Wellbeing

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to result in the council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the council's budget for the service or function concerned. A threshold of £500,000 is regarded as significant.

Wards affected

All Wards

Purpose

To seek approval to enter into a new contractual arrangement with The Access Group for the provision of Mosaic (adults and children's social care case management system), Synergy (education management system), Abacus (adult social care finance system) and Core+(youth service system including transition to a cloud-hosted Software as a Service (SaaS) , following expiry of the current contract's available extensions in September 2026.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) the Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing approves the procurement of a new five-year contract with The Access Group for the provision of Mosaic, Synergy, Abacus and Core+, via direct award under the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation (YPO) 1095 framework (Lot 12),(Health and Social Care Software Systems for UK public sector organisations) at total cost of £3.4m, for the period 1 October 2026 to 30 September 2031;

- b) authority be delegated to the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing to finalise and execute the contract, including hosting arrangements and delivery protection provisions; and**
- c) authority is delegated to the Corporate Director Community and Wellbeing to make all operational decisions relating to the implementation of the above recommendations.**

Alternative options

1. Allow the current contract to lapse without a successor arrangement. Rejected: these are business-critical statutory systems and lapse is not a viable option for service continuity.
2. Conduct a full open market re-procurement exercise. Rejected: the timescale before contract expiry does not allow for a full competitive procurement due to the short-term nature of the original contract extension, and a compliant direct-award route already exists via the YPO 1095 framework (Lot 12), which has been used to derive the current pricing. Market testing undertaken confirms that the council is securing value for money through this supplier.
3. Enter a three-year term instead of five years. Rejected: the three-year option carries a higher combined annualised cost (£686k/year) than the five-year option (£673k/year). The Access Group has also confirmed that a 3+2 structure (a three-year term with an option to extend by a further two years) is not available. In addition, Hoople's technical team have assessed that, given the complexity and interconnected nature of the systems involved, completing a further full procurement and migration exercise within three years is likely to incur significant additional spend on external resources — and even then would be unlikely to succeed. The five-year term is assessed as offering better long-term value and materially lower delivery risk.
4. Seek a further short-term bridging extension of the current contract. Rejected: legal advice obtained in April 2026 confirmed that all extensions available under the current contract are exhausted.

Key considerations

5. The Access Group suite of applications provides an integrated platform for managing cases, commissioning, provider management and financial administration across adult and children's services. Mosaic supports frontline practice and statutory social care case management for children's and adult social care; Synergy is the education case management system, including SEND and school admissions; Abacus manages social care charging and financial assessments; and Core+ is the youth services case management system. Together they provide an integrated digital backbone that underpins safe, effective, person-centred services for the residents of Herefordshire.
6. The council's contract with The Access Group for Mosaic, Synergy, Abacus and Core+ expires in September 2026. The on-premise hosting by Hoople of the systems currently used by the council is no longer available and will not be supported by the Access Group beyond January 2028 and therefore the Council needs to procure a new system that will be remotely hosted and supported by the Access Group.
7. Maintaining an effective case management system, with associated supporting systems, is vital for both adults and children's services. The Access Group is one of the two main providers of case management systems in the market. A market testing exercise has been undertaken which demonstrated that whilst quality scores were equal, the Access Group was £400k cheaper than the other system. Aside from the costs, an assessment of the cost of change has been undertaken using benchmarks from other authorities. This demonstrates that for one service alone, the cost of change is likely to be around £2m; with both children's and adult

services involved in the existing systems, any cost of change is likely to be in the region of £4m to £5m. This is largely due to the fact that the systems store and record data on the council's most vulnerable children and adults and therefore, the risk of moving the data between systems and securing continuity of service delivery is significant. It should also be noted that adult social care is focused on improvement following the Care Quality Commission assessment and this would be significantly compromised by any change of system by diverting away staff and management focus and attention.

8. Given the assessment of the market, a direct award offers the most value for money and compliant way forward. The council and Hoople will continue to work closely with the Access Group to ensure visibility of future developments from the supplier.
9. The increased cost of the new contract reflects new functionality within the systems, including the move of the Mosaic, [Synergy and Abacus systems] to a cloud-hosted service with a consequent reduction in the use of Hoople IT maintained servers. There will be improved options around portal access – enabling more timely payments to providers – and integration of financial processes which will speed up the fee uplift process and the management of client contributions to their care costs. Herefordshire Council is one of only six councils out of the 92 using the Access Group products who remain hosted in-house. There is significant experience, therefore, of migrating to the cloud hosted service. This is in addition to the experience that Hoople IT have of similar large scale system migrations. The migration plan will be received by mid November 2026, with the full migration completed by January 2028. The cost of migration and associated training is included in the contract price, and the industry standard cyber security requirements apply to the systems. Whilst AI products are available at an additional cost when they become available, these are not being purchased as part of the contract renewal.
10. Prior to the end of the five-year contract, a further market testing exercise will be undertaken as there are likely to have been further developments in the market during the lifetime of this contract.

Community impact

11. Mosaic and Synergy directly support statutory case management functions for children's and adult social care and for education (including SEN and admissions), serving vulnerable residents across the county. The Mosaic system is directly relevant to the council's corporate parenting responsibilities, as it underpins case management for looked after children and care leavers.
12. Failure to secure continuity of this system would present a direct risk to the council's ability to meet these responsibilities. No change to service eligibility or service delivery model is proposed; the changes are to the hosting arrangements for the system.

Environmental impact

13. This is a decision on back-office/ICT systems and is assessed as having minimal direct environmental impact. Migration to a cloud-hosted (SaaS) model may reduce on-premise server energy consumption over time. Consideration has been given to minimising waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy.

Equality duty

14. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
15. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for this project/decision/activity and it has been found to have no impact for equality.

Resource implications

16. The confirmed combined annual package cost is £673k per year for the five-year term from 1 October 2026 to 31 September 2031. This represents an annual increase of £327k from 2027-2028 and £164k in 2026-2027 as part year effect. Of the annual increase, £47k reflects the cost of the Access Community Gateway (ACG) gateway, which is not yet live.
17. The increase is due to the improved functionality within the system, including the provision of enhanced financial modules, portal access and migration to a cloud-hosted service.
18. The current annual base budget within ICT for the systems is £346k, so the new contract cost reflects an annual pressure as referenced above. This will be addressed during the budget setting for 2027-2028.
19. However, there may be cost mitigations associated with the migration to a cloud-hosted service, with a consequent reduction in the use of Hoople IT maintained servers and the migration may reduce on-premise server energy consumption over time.

Revenue or Capital cost of project (indicate R or C)	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<i>Annual combined cost (R)</i>	337	673	673	1,683	3,365
TOTAL	337	673	673	1,683	3,365

Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Base budget (C02182)	173	346	346	1,865	1,730
TOTAL	173	346	346	1,865	1,730

Revenue budget implications	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Increase on existing revenue budget	164	327	327	818	1,635
TOTAL					

Legal implications

20. Procurements for goods and services need to be carried out in accordance with the Public Contract Regulation 2015 or the Procurement Act 2023.
21. The YPO 1095 framework is a compliant framework let under the Public Contract Regulation 2015. The framework allows for direct award of contracts.
22. The relevant legal provisions for this decision can be found in the council's constitution, www.herefordshire.gov.uk/constitution.

Risk management

23. The risks and opportunities associated with this renewal are set out below.

Risk/opportunity	Mitigation
Risk: (of not re-signing) Failure to deliver statutory requirements for reporting to Department for Education for the schools and education function Inability to return SEN2 Data	Little, or none, until an alternative solution can be implemented.
Risk: Severely restricted ability to deliver adult social care in the county.	Little, or none, would require activating BCP until an alternative could be brought online.
Opportunity: Once signed and migrated to the cloud solution, access to the 'Evo' products/platform will give additional functionality across Mosaic, Synergy, and Core+.	
Opportunity: Improved resilience for cloud hosted services over and above locally hosted 'On Premises' version.	

Consultees

24. Consultation has taken place with the relevant Corporate Directors and the interim Chief Digital and Information Officer.
25. A political group consultation took place on 9 September 2026 and the following views were noted:
 - The Liberal Democrat Group requested details of the comparative assessment with other systems to be included in the decision report. There were also concerns about the risks associated with moving three critical systems to cloud-hosted infrastructure and the expertise required to do that. A broader concern about the local government market being overly dependent on a small number of suppliers was raised.
 - The Green Group sought clarity on whether migration and user training was included in the contract, whether moving to cloud-hosted systems would improve security or reduce cyber-security risk and whether the systems would support AI-enabled capabilities and analysis.
 - Other comments related to assurance that the council could exit the contract at the end of the term and that it would have visibility and oversight of future developments and commitments from the supplier.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None identified

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

- Mosaic — case management system for children's and adults' social care
- Synergy — education case management system (including SEN, admissions)

- Abacus — social care finance system
- Core+ — youth service management system
- Evo — The Access Group's next-generation cloud platform
- YPO — Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation (framework provider)
- SaaS — Software as a Service
- DC2 — The Access Group's data centre hosting environment