



## Dumfries and Galloway Council maximises scarce planning resources with Uniform Cloud

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**Max McCall**  
Building Standards Team Leader  
Dumfries and Galloway Council

### Overview:

Located in the western part of the Southern Uplands, Dumfries & Galloway includes Scotland's most southerly point, the Mull of Galloway. One of the most rural communities in southern Scotland, the population of 145,000 people is spread across a wide area, reaching from the administrative centre of Dumfries to Stranraer, 76 miles away on the West coast.

The rural nature of the Council creates one notable challenge: the recruitment of skilled staff in key areas, including Planning and IT. While the lack of skilled resources in these specialist areas is **well documented**, the Council's distance from large conurbations exacerbates the problem. For Dumfries and Galloway Council, digital transformation and the shift to a cloud-first strategy, including the migration to Uniform Cloud, is playing an essential role in maximising the time and expertise of existing staff whilst also supporting a more efficient and seamless customer experience.

### Challenges:

Dumfries and Galloway Council has worked with Idox since 1994, first using Acolaid before migrating to Uniform in August 2016. The initial drive for the migration was to embrace the enhanced functionality provided by Uniform, which was already used by the majority of Planning departments in Scotland. In addition, the Council required support to migrate to the online Building Standards portal in September 2016 to accelerate the adoption of electronic submissions.

Max McCall, Building Standards Team Leader, Dumfries and Galloway Council, says, “Uniform provided the connectors we required to link to the online portal. Within a month, we started getting online applications and were able to bring in all the required documents from the portal into the system.”

At that time, the decision was taken to adopt a ‘thick client’ approach, with the Idox solution hosted on Dumfries and Galloway Council's own server infrastructure. Initially, this model worked well, although, over time, aspects of the internal on-premise infrastructure began to create performance issues. When the ever-escalating internal security requirements began to affect system performance and, as a result, productivity and staff morale, the decision was taken to re-evaluate the deployment model.

### Solution:

Over the past few years, the Council has embarked upon a digital transformation journey, including a cloud-first deployment model and, in January 2024, the Council migrated to Uniform Cloud to achieve a fully hosted and managed solution. The decision to remain with Idox was clear, based on the long track record, market experience and the company's strong relationships with both Dumfries and Galloway Council and the wider Scottish Government.



As Max McCall says, "Uniform is an essential part of our business, we cannot function without it. Our internal IT support diminished for a number of reasons, so the adoption of a hosted and managed approach with Idox was the ideal solution to improve the speed of access and system resilience to boost confidence and productivity."

Jessica Taylor, Planning Systems and Performance Team Leader, Dumfries and Galloway Council, adds, "Idox is so well established in this market. They understand the complexity of planning and building standards processes. Plus, with Idox user group meetings we have support from the wider planning community, not just in terms of the system but also processes and how to use Uniform to the best advantage to deliver our services."

The Council also took the opportunity to use the Idox scanning services to digitise 30,000 planning documents when the storage location used for Planning and Building Standards records was repurposed. Following this seamless process, these historic documents are now connected to Uniform by case reference, enabling enforcement officers and building surveyors to access vital legacy information at the touch of a button.

Jessica Taylor explains, "The shift to remote working that occurred during the pandemic highlighted the vital importance of fast access to historic documents. Digitising our paper records makes it so easy and ensures information is always available wherever staff are located."

#### Benefits:

The migration to Uniform Cloud was straightforward – 'stress-free' according to Jessica Taylor: "Idox already had all the Council's data, and we had spent a lot of time during the initial Uniform migration improving data quality, which is enormously valuable."

Another quantifiable benefit of the hosted and managed model is the upgrade experience. In the past, the Council found the upgrade process both stressful and demanding. Each upgrade required significant commitment from the internal IT resource which meant several months' notice to ensure the on-premise infrastructure was prepared. Furthermore, the reduction in IT staff meant a dearth of Uniform-specific expertise, putting the onus on Jessica Taylor to oversee the upgrade.

With Uniform Cloud the process is seamless, requiring far less resource and inducing negligible stress. "Idox simply tells us when the upgrade will happen. Downtime is minimal and we have the huge benefit of being on the newest version of Uniform," she says.

Planning and Building Standards staff immediately embraced the speed and reliability of the cloud-based deployment, enjoying the benefits of rapid access to a stable system. With approximately 2,100 planning applications to validate each year, including 400 household applications, and 1,450 building standards applications, the faster system access is delivering significant productivity gains throughout Planning and Building Standards.

This additional productivity is particularly key given the Council's ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining planning expertise. While difficulties in securing planning skills is already widely accepted, the rural nature of this region significantly exacerbates the recruitment problem, with the department heavily reliant on agency staff and development management assistants.

"The speed and reliability of Uniform Cloud to improve productivity is absolutely vital given the pressure on staffing. Furthermore, the consistency of information recording and ease of access ensures work can be quickly handled by anyone with the right skills," says Max McCall.

#### Looking ahead:

Looking ahead, the Council plans to explore further the functionality of Idox systems, including Uniform Cloud, to improve the customer journey. Offering different ways to interact with Planning and Building Services, such as self-service via the website, will reduce the pressure on staff whilst also speeding up the experience for customers.

A key focus will be to automate the management of non-standard and complex tasks. Today, while 95% of applications come through the national portal, non-standard processes, such as pre-applications, discharge conditions or non-material variations, cannot use the portal and require time-consuming manual intervention to upload documents.

"The goal is to determine how to best use technology to improve the quality of service with less resource," Jessica Taylor confirms. "Streamlining process, for example by automating the integration of documents directly into our systems or providing automatic updates on the progress of applications, will make the entire process more efficient and user friendly for our customers. It will also allow the Council to reallocate experienced staff to deliver added value services throughout Planning and Building Services."

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