



MS PROJECT ONLINE

Making the Replacement Decision

Enterprise alternatives to Microsoft Project Online — What Public Sector buyers should look for





For more than a decade, Microsoft Project Online has been a foundational platform for portfolio, programme and project management across the UK public sector. Councils, NHS bodies, local and central government departments have relied on it to manage schedules, resources, governance and reporting at scale.

Microsoft has now confirmed that Project Online is being retired.

While this decision aligns with Microsoft's broader shift toward modern, cloud-native services, it presents a very real challenge for public sector organisations that depend on Project Online's enterprise capabilities.

Microsoft's retirement announcement for Project Online gives customers a list of options



Planner (basic and premium)



Project Server Subscription Edition



Dynamics 365 Project Operations



Project desktop

While this list is helpful, it doesn't answer the question your organization actually has to resolve: do you modernize within Microsoft's Planner/Power Platform stack, do you keep continuity with onprem Project Server, or do you move to a dedicated enterprise PPM platform?



What is the right choice?



The right choice depends less on tool preference and more on what your PMO uses Project Online for today. If Project Online is mainly a lightweight register and teams do execution elsewhere, Planner premium plus Power Platform extensions may be sufficient, especially given the Dataverse foundation and Microsoft ecosystem alignment. If Project Online is a core system of record for governance, resource oversight, timesheets, and portfolio reporting, a rebuild can quietly turn into a multimonth software project with real delivery risk.

In this guide we compare the 3 routes through a requirements-first lens, scheduling rigor, portfolio governance, reporting/BI, security/compliance, and migration support, so you can build a defensible shortlist. We also show where a platform like Verto can reduce migration risk by preserving portfolio and governance capabilities while still fitting into a Microsoft 365 operating model.

Book a Migration Scope call at vertocloud.co.uk/contact or by calling [0204 526 5925](tel:02045265925)

Capability Comparison

Microsoft Planner (Basic + Premium)



What is it?

Planner is Microsoft's task/work management app. Microsoft has consolidated the "Project for the web" experience into Planner as premium functionality (often referred to as Planner Premium).

Best fit for

Teams needing modern task management and lighter-weight project planning; departmental delivery teams; organisations willing to rebuild enterprise PPM capability using Power Platform and reporting layers.

Main Implications

Teams integration and broad adoption potential, but enterprise PPM requires additional design work (governance, portfolio roll-ups, reporting, data model). Public sector PMOs should validate if resource capacity planning, portfolio governance, baselines/earned value, and assurance reporting requirements can be met. Expect greater dependence on Power BI/Power Platform for reporting and workflow automation.

Cost\Licencing

UK pricing is published for Planner/Project plans (e.g., Planner and Project Plan 5 shows £42.30 user/month paid yearly in the UK). Plan inclusions vary (portfolio management and enterprise resource management are positioned under Plan 5). Additional costs may arise for Power BI licensing and Power Platform usage depending on your design.

Migration notes / risks:

Migration effort depends heavily on how you currently use Project Online (custom fields, workflows, resource pools, reporting).

Risk of fragmented data across Planner, SharePoint lists, Excel and custom-made Power Platform apps unless a clear portfolio data model is established.

Validate data export/import approach early (projects, tasks, dependencies, history/baselines).

Project Server Subscription Edition (on-premises)



What is it?

Project Server Subscription Edition is Microsoft's on-premises Project Server aligned to SharePoint Server Subscription Edition (SE). It runs as a service application under SharePoint Server SE.

Best fit for

Organisations that need an on-prem PPM platform similar in spirit to Project Online and have the skills/operating model to run SharePoint Server SE + Project Server SE securely

Main Implications

You take on on-prem infrastructure responsibility: patching, security, backups, HA/DR, capacity, and platform governance. May support specific security/data residency requirements but increases operational overhead and dependency on specialist skills. Often the 'closest Microsoft-like' option for organisations invested in classic Project Server/Project Online patterns.

Cost\Licencing

Microsoft states Project Server SE can only be enabled on the Enterprise version of SharePoint Server Subscription Edition. Total cost typically includes SharePoint Server SE, CALs, SQL Server, Windows Server, and infrastructure/hosting plus operational support. Exact licensing costs vary by agreement; most organisations model this with Microsoft/partners.

Migration notes / risks:

Migration may be simpler for classic Project Server patterns but still requires a data migration plan and validation.

On-prem adoption can extend timelines due to environment build, security approvals, and operational readiness (monitoring, DR testing).

Confirm integration points (identity, reporting, timesheets, workflows, custom fields) and how they map on-prem.

Dynamics 365 Project Operations



What is it?

Dynamics 365 Project Operations is a Dynamics application intended to connect sales, resourcing, project management and finance in a single system—often used by project-based organisations (PSA/ERP-adjacent).

Best fit for

Organisations that need tight linkage between delivery and finance (timesheets, utilisation, billing) and are invested in Dynamics 365 or want an ERP/PSA-aligned approach.

Main Implications

Different category from classic PPM: designed to run delivery alongside financial/operational processes, not to replicate Project Online's portfolio governance patterns out of the box. Implementation effort can be significant (data model, security roles, finance integrations, process design). Often becomes part of a broader Dynamics programme, not a quick replacement.

Cost\Licencing

Microsoft publishes per-user pricing in Ireland: €126.40 user/month, paid yearly (VAT excluded). Dynamics licencing is subscription-based and can be complex depending on user roles and add-ons—model your licence mix early.

Migration notes / risks:

Expect a discovery phase to decide what data moves and what processes change; migrating 'as-is' from Project Online is rarely realistic.

Validate reporting needs (Power BI), portfolio oversight requirements, and whether additional PPM tooling is needed for portfolio governance.

Project desktop (Project Professional)



What is it?

The Project desktop app (Project Professional) is Microsoft's desktop scheduling tool (MPP). Microsoft states Project desktop is not impacted by the Project Online retirement.

Best fit for

Project managers who need advanced scheduling on the desktop; organisations that use desktop primarily and publish/report elsewhere.

Main Implications

Not an enterprise PPM platform by itself: you still need a system of record for portfolio oversight, governance workflows, resource capacity, reporting and audit trails. Moving to desktop-only increases reliance on spreadsheets/manual consolidation unless paired with an enterprise portfolio layer. Works best when paired with a portfolio platform and an agreed operating model.

Cost\Licencing

Microsoft's UK pricing page for Planner/Project plans shows Plan 5 at £42.30 user/month paid yearly and notes it includes Project desktop and Project Online (note: Project Online retirement still applies). Microsoft's Plan 3 page states each subscription allows up to five concurrent installations of the Project Online desktop client. Public sector procurement routes may show list pricing via the Digital Marketplace.

Migration notes / risks:

Desktop-first migrations risk losing centralised governance and reporting unless a portfolio platform is introduced.

Validate how timesheets, resource pools, approvals and reporting will work post-migration.



Where PPM fits (as a primary alternative)

⚠ Implications for buyers (what to validate)

- Can PPM preserve your non-negotiables: portfolio visibility, assurance workflows, reporting outputs, resource/capacity planning, audit trails.
- Migration mapping: how Project Online entities map (projects, tasks, dependencies, resources, custom fields, timesheets, risks/issues, approvals).
- Microsoft integration: Teams + Microsoft 365 usage patterns; Power BI reporting; identity/SAML/Entra ID alignment; data export for audit.
- Implementation and support model: discovery, configuration, data migration, training and change management.

Cost considerations (how to frame the conversation)

- Model total cost of ownership (TCO), not just licence price: implementation services, internal PMO/IT time, reporting rebuild, integrations, and ongoing admin burden.
- Compare 'build' costs (Planner + Power Platform + reporting + governance build) versus 'buy' costs (enterprise PPM platform with these capabilities native).
- Public sector procurement: assess whether buying via frameworks reduces procurement friction and implementation risk (best-practice inference).

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MIGRATION CHECKLIST

How to avoid losing critical portfolio capability

[Checklist](#)

What's next?



Our Migration Checklist will help to give you a sense of what we recommend you do next. You can download it here.

[Checklist](#)

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CAPABILITY	MS PROJECT ONLINE (EXISTING OFFERING)	MS PLANNER PREMIUM (SUGGESTED MS OFFERING)	VERTO
Scheduling & dependencies (Gantt, task links)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Resource management / capacity planning	Yes	Partial	Yes
Portfolio prioritization & scenario planning	Yes	Partial	Yes
Enterprise reporting / BI integration	Yes	Yes	Yes
Timesheets & approvals	Yes	Yes	Yes
Custom fields / configurable data model	Yes	Yes	Yes
Workflows / stage-gate governance	Yes	Yes	Yes
Multi-project views / cross-project dependency management	Yes	Some question about ability	Yes
Baselines / earned value (EVM)	Yes	Partial	Yes
Integrations: Teams/SharePoint/Power BI / SSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
API / data export & migration support	Yes	Yes	Yes
Security & compliance credentials (ISO/SOC etc.)	Microsoft STP	Microsoft STP	ISO 27001 & Cyber Essentials

