

STRATA JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 17 March 2016

Present:-

Councillor Prowse (Chair)
Councillors Raybould, Dewhirst, Haines and Jung

Also Present

Chief Operating Officer, Manager Programmes and Resources, Director with responsibility for Finance, Strategic Lead for Human Resources, Teignbridge Strata Director, Democratic Services Officer (Committees) 9HB)

David Curnow - Devon Audit Partnership

1 **APOLOGIES**

These were received from Councillors Bialyk, Chapman and Dent.

2 **DAVID CURNOW**

The Chair welcomed David Curnow of the Devon Audit Partnership attending as an observer.

3 **PEER REVIEW OF TEIGNBRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

At the Chairman's request, the Teignbridge Strata Director reported that Teignbridge District Council had recently undergone an LGA peer challenge. This had covered scrutiny mechanisms including arrangements with external partners such as the other Strata authorities. The pre-scrutiny process, now in place for Strata, had been welcomed and the peer group report was awaited.

4 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2015 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

5 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made

6 **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER PROCEDURAL RULES**

None.

7 **QUESTION FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCILS UNDER PROCEDURE RULES**

The following question had been put by Councillor Dewhirst:-

"Members at Teignbridge District Council have commented that they have been informed by Strata Engineers that they should not be helping Members with their computers."

I understand that the rules regarding members IT at Teignbridge are that Strata is tasked with ensuring that Members have access to their electronic communication from the Council and constituents on their own personal computer equipment and that they be able to utilise other functions on their computer arising from this communication such as viewing portable document files, MS Word files and MS Excel files. Please can the Chief Executive confirm that this is the case?

Can the Chief Operating Officer confirm if Exeter City Council and East Devon District Council have the same regulations regarding Member's IT?

If a Member receives a virus, trojan or other malicious software in a communication from a constituent that then bars the Member from accessing their emails will Strata help the Member to regain control of their computer? Can the Chief Operating Officer also explain where this duty ends and general maintenance of Member's IT equipment begins?"

The Chief Operating Officer advised that the operational backing from Strata replicated that of the East Devon model and that support on offer was as comprehensive as possible, other than for when equipment was irrevocably damaged.

He undertook to answer the questions in writing.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the position.

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STRATA BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER 3 2015/16

The report of the Director with responsibility for Finance was submitted advising Members on the financial progress of Strata during the first nine months of 2015/16, including a project outturn assessment against the savings set out in the Business Plan.

At the six month stage, the Board was projecting a saving of £201,488 against the target of £262,098. The reduction was partly attributable to replacement infrastructure for Teignbridge but would also be partly offset by a reduction in employee costs. Each Council's contribution towards the capital budget was £150,000 per annum. Responding to a Member, he advised that, where the three Councils sought to obtain additional equipment such as tablets, Iphones, software systems and even software upgrade, the purchasing and up-front payment was undertaken by Strata and the Councils invoiced. Exeter Members were provided with I pads whereas East Devon Members owned their own equipment.

Members were advised that the Government had required a commitment to spend the Transformation Challenge Award grant of £975,000 and that this had been substantially committed. A total of £745,840 had been carried forward into this financial year, of which £408,268 had been spent. It was anticipated that the remainder would be used in this financial year and be sufficient to meet the anticipated expenditure.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

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STRATA BUDGET 2016/17

The report of the Strata Board was submitted seeking approval for the 2016/17 financial year budget.

The budget required the three owner Councils to approve each of its own budgets based on the initial three year approved methodology - the 2013/14 budget as adjusted for inflation and agreed conditions/disposals. It also reflected the decisions made at the JEC on 24 November 2015 to offer Strata contracts to those staff who wished to transfer which had substantially removed the projected surplus in the original Business Plan for 2016/17. The reduction would be made up in future years to ensure the savings approved were made by the end of the project. Any in year surplus achieved would be returned in the form of a refund to each Council in line with the agreed percentage split. The anticipated surplus for the year was approximately £27,000.

The capital programme was based on the annual contribution, convergence projects and any approved Council schemes, which would be delivered by Strata. The budget for 2016/17 was £941,090.

The three Councils had agreed a total revenue budget transfer for 2016/17 of £5,900,990 including the £15,000 for support services and all existing staffing, supplies and services.

Members also noted that:-

- the green travel item related to a subsidy offered to staff in relation to public transport; and
- the budgeted item for Exeter City Council parking was in respect of additional parking spaces for Strata Managers and contractors who were frequent visitors to the other partner authorities.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

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STRATA IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS MARCH 2016

The Chief Operating Officer presented the report on the progress of the Implementation Plan. The Strata Plan had been created in 2014 and much work had been done in implementing the vision of a single IT organisation delivering IT services from a single data centre using the latest virtual desktop infrastructure.

The main elements of the new IT infrastructure - data centre, WAN and main computers - had been completed in 2015, overcoming several challenges. They had provided the foundation for the delivery of the virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) to roll out the Global Desktop to all staff members, with 419 having been globalised to date.

A major problem with software from VMWare had delayed the Desktop globalisation process - completion in Exeter would now be early April, with an expected late May start in East Devon and a September start in Teignbridge.

The transfer of various suppliers over to Virgin Media Business contract was underway again following a delay in the process in December which Virgin had subsequently solved and, consequently, Virgin had now allocated three defined staff members to the Strata contract. Moving on to a single contract was the first step in migrating to a modern digital telecoms platform called SIP which was planned for August 2016.

Migration towards single versions of business software and migration of applications and projects had begun.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the progress of the Implementation Plan.

STRATA BOARD WORK PLAN

The report of the Strata Board on the work plan was submitted.

The Democratic Services Manager/Monitoring Officer Governance and Communications presented the newly adopted work plan that would be monitored by the Board over the next twelve months. He reported that considerable focus had been given to delivering the first part of the implementation plan and the new virtual desk top and supporting technologies across the three Councils. The work plan would be kept under monthly review by the Board which would be reviewing wider progress against the Company's business and organisational objectives.

The work plan was meant to provide the delivery of relevant and timely information to this Scrutiny Committee and the Executive. It was also intended to provide a framework for the management of the company's business and service delivery objectives against the approved business plan.

Members welcomed progress on the Plan, highlighting the reference to additional shareholders and suggesting that the availability of Board minutes would be helpful.

The former matter had been discussed at a Board meeting as it was possible that, as the Company established itself, it might wish to expand as part of an extended partnership with other Councils. This was a matter for the future.

In respect of making the minutes of Board meetings available to Members, the Scrutiny Committee felt that a full understanding of the operation of the Company was vital if they were to fulfil their representative roles on behalf of the public. They acknowledged that some of the Board's deliberations covered confidential commercial and staffing issues but that, without knowledge of Board business, they were not presently in a position to know what was or was not sensitive information and, critically, were unable to fully scrutinise the operation of the Company.

A further issue was that general understanding amongst all Members across the three Authorities of the operation and raison d'être of the Company was not thought to be high, especially amongst new Councillors. Although briefings were held at the beginning of the Municipal Year, the most recent had been poorly attended.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee:-

- (1) noted the report; and
- (2) requested the Teignbridge Strata Director to report to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting on mechanisms for increasing the transparency of Board business.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT OF THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

The Strategic Lead for Human Resources presented the report of the Strata Board on arrangements adopted for the performance management approach for the Chief Operating Officer.

Joint Strata Scrutiny Committee noted the report and that a "two tier" approach would be used:-

- performance assessment – carried out by the Board collectively – three Directors; and
- performance management – carried out by one Board member.

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FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES

The Strategic Lead for Human Resources presented the report of the Strata Board on proposed family friendly policies adopted by the Board in principle. These covered maternity, paternity and adoption leave. They had been discussed and agreed by Unison regional from the outset as representing the statutory provisions, given the other additional enhanced benefits such as holiday entitlement, flexi times etc.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee supported the action of the Board in agreeing the policies, in principle, so that they could be discussed and agreed with Unison at the next Staff Joint Forum.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 - EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part I, Schedule 12A of the Act.

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STAFF ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

The Strategic Lead for Human Resources presented the report of the Strata Board updating Members on the recent staff engagement exercise. It was the first staff engagement survey undertaken by Human Resources on behalf of Strata suggested for completion on Strata's first year anniversary.

Because of the split sites, a focus on communication and better connectivity would be important. Members remarked on the level of staff response at 52% which it was anticipated would increase in future years. A target in excess of 90% was the goal and, ultimately, it was intended to seek Investors In People accreditation. It was proposed that the Chief Operating Officer and management team, together with Human Resources, produce an Action Plan, the results to be published on the intranet. It was also the intention for Human Resources surgeries to be held at all sites.

Joint Strata Scrutiny Committee noted the actions approved by the Board.

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SECURITY STATUS OVERVIEW

The report of the Strata Board updating Members on changing cyber threats and Strata's response, in the light of recent security incidents, was submitted.

The Chief Operating Officer reported that all three sites were protected by daily backup with the new Strata systems which now included the City Council systems backed up at Oakwood. East Devon was backed up at Honiton and initial tests for Teignbridge to be backed up at Oakwood had been successful.

Details were provided of recent attacks and on-going work to combat loss of data systems through a cyber-attack. It was noted that these threats were increasing, such activity now practically organised on a commercial basis.

Joint Strata Scrutiny Committee noted the actions approved by the Board.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.50 pm)

Chair