

STRATA JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 23 July 2015

Present:-

Councillors Bialyk, Raybould, Dewhirst, Prowse and Dent

Also Present

The Chief Operating Officer, Assistant Director Finance and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB), Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance East Devon District Council.

16

APOLOGIES

These were received from Councillors Chapman and Haines.

17

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 May 2015 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

18

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

19

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

The Chair referred to a request from a Member at a recent joint Scrutiny Training session for all Members to be encouraged to submit questions on the operation of Strata to this Joint Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed that this would be of benefit, given that many could be unfamiliar with the operation of Strata.

An Exeter City Councillor remarked that this was common practice at Exeter City Council Scrutiny Committees and emphasised that, wherever possible, advance notice should be provided so that officers were sufficiently prepared to respond on the night. As the next meeting was not until October, Members should also feel free to approach officers in the interim.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee supported the proposal that an item be placed on future agenda for all Members to ask questions.

20

PROGRESS REPORT ON STRATA IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Chief Operating Officer presented the report providing an update on the progress with the Implementation Plan.

- Overall Plan close to original timetable meeting quality targets and on budget. A six week delay in installation of new Wide Area Network (WAN) and internet had been reduced from four and to two weeks and would be operational by September. Savings of £2.2 million achieved in staff costs (third of total costs to be saved). Single telephony supplier selected. Internet upgrade for Exeter from 10 MB to 400 MB due in the next few weeks;
- Organisational progress – interviews are being conducted for three apprentices, one to be located at each main site; and Ex Head of South Hams ICT appointed as Strata Manager Security and Compliance in February;
- Contract novation was a priority, with suppliers given the opportunity to supply three rather than two or one authority(ies) and Strata would be looking for a subsequent reduction in overall costs;
- Engagement working well with all authorities. A report on a proposal to reduce the number of Executive and Scrutiny meetings from four to three a year, both meetings to be held close to one another, would be submitted to the next Joint meeting;
- Risks identified and being managed included the level of change that users would experience when the new Strata infrastructure is fully deployed, especially for Skype and MS Office update;
- Some recent examples of success in securing savings from some suppliers were presented;
- Teignbridge experiencing greater number of incidents with their IT infrastructure – this is being managed keeping in mind that the majority of the main infrastructure will be replaced in a year's time;
- A number of opportunities from the project were presented. These included consolidating website design, introduction of iphones, in-cab technology being used by Exeter City Council to be rolled out at Teignbridge;
- Channel Shift Infrastructure under development – Netcall - new voice recognition system implemented at Exeter. Channel shift allowed shifting the requests of service to the council to the cheapest option for dealing with the query – in most cases by taking the request online;
- Opportunities for combining systems such as planning, building control, environmental health etc. of all authorities were under consideration;
- Faster internet connection being introduced with Exeter users to see impact from August.

He responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- East Devon would meet the IT costs relating to its relocation of offices – this includes the requirement for new data lines into the two offices at Honiton and Exmouth;
- The Lync system was explained to the Committee as a similar system to Skype, both provided by Microsoft, and to be re-branded Skype for Business;
- With regard to contract novation, the three authorities will continue to receive and pay invoices until all relevant contracts are novated to Strata. These costs are then charged across to Strata;
- The potential for extending mapping facilities within each Council to attempt to secure overlap with each other would be examined. This would be of value where searches were instigated in respect of an area where neighbouring authorities' boundaries overlapped.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the progress of the implementation plan.

STRATA DRAFT ACCOUNTS 2014/15

The Assistant Director Finance presented the draft end of year 2014/15 financial accounts, noting that it was likely that the final accounts only and not the draft would be reported to the Joint Strata Executive Committee at its September meeting. Referring to both the profit and loss and balance sheet statements, he highlighted the £857,620 loss and net assets respectively. The former figure was in respect of the pension liability transferred from the three authorities.

He confirmed that all authorities were underwriting the pension liability and it was noted, in response to a Member, that there had been a smooth transfer of staff pension arrangements.

It was noted that Neil Aggett had replaced Steve Hodder as a Director representing Teignbridge District Council and that Companies House had been informed of the status of Karen Jenkins of East Devon as a Director.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the draft 2014/15 accounts.

STRATA PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - JUNE

The Chief Operating Officer presented the updated suite of performance indicators that Strata was using to manage its business and to show stakeholders how Strata is performing. It was the June report showing the figures to the end of May. He reported that the format was a work in progress and would be further refined in the coming months to ensure the statistics were as meaningful as possible. He explained that incidents, especially with system downtime, were all examined with a view to future prevention. It was noted that Teignbridge were troubled by more system downtime than the other two sites.

The Chief Operating Officer stated that a complete review of the transfer of the IT functions of the three authorities to Strata would be appropriate at a future date.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee:-

- (1) approved the report; and
- (2) agreed to the submission of a comprehensive review of the operation of Strata to a future meeting of this Joint Committee.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.40 pm)

Chair