

STRATA JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 16 March 2017

Present:-

Councillor Dent (Chair)

Councillors Dewhirst, Jung, Lyons, Nicholas, Prowse, and Jung

Also Present

The Teignbridge Strata Director, Strata Director Responsible for Finance, Strata Lead for Human Resources, Strategic Lead Finance (EDDC) – Strata Director, Programme and Resource Manager, Manager Programme and Resources, Manager Compliance and Security, Business Development Manager, Infrastructure and Support Manager and Democratic Service Officer (Committees) (HB)

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APOLOGIES

These were received from Councillors Haines, Howe, Leadbetter and Musgrave.

Councillor Nicholas was substituting for Councillor Howe.

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2017 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

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QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER PROCEDURAL RULES

None

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QUESTION FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCILS UNDER PROCEDURE RULES

The following questions were put by Councillor Dewhirst in relation to IT issues at Teignbridge District Council:-

Why does the Wi-Fi not work in Teignbridge District Council Chamber?;

Why does the AV system also not work?;

Who was responsible for the design and installation?; and

Who is responsible for the on-going maintenance?.

A copy of the questions and replies from the Infrastructure and Support Manager are appended to the minutes.

It was noted that the problems had occurred during a Planning Committee meeting in the Council Chamber, this Committee traditionally being the most popular with the public.

The Infrastructure and Support Manager detailed the nature of the WiFi system at the Teignbridge offices. The Manager Programme and Resources and the Manager Business Systems explained the background to the difficulties experienced on that day which related to an user awareness. The problems had been discussed with the Council staff and care would be taken to ensure adequate preparation in future.

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 during consideration of the following items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part I, Schedule 12A of the Act.

MEMBER FEEDBACK REPORT ON PROGRESS

Chairman's statement

The Chair presented his report on findings resulting from Members' enquiries conducted with service users which had been submitted to the previous meeting of this Committee and which now included responses from Strata officers.

He stated that, now the conceptual and planning stage for Strata were over, the Committee needed to scrutinise Strata's performance against both the Business Plan and Operational Delivery to ensure effective functioning and value for money. He emphasized that the role of Scrutiny was to explore ways in which Members could collectively make a particular operation function better.

He acknowledged the very hard work put in by officers at all levels within Strata and thanked them for their expertise and contribution against complex and wide ranging challenges.

He referred to a template used by East Devon District Council for examining specific areas of performance which was readily comprehensible by non-technical individuals and stated that it was important for performance and financial reports to be submitted and presented in a simplistic way. On this basis, he felt that the table set out in the progress report (Min. No. 18 below refers) was also an acceptable template as a draft for further discussion.

A Member queried the delay in the rollout of the Strata global desktop following the identification of a latency issue in the data line between Knowle offices in Sidmouth and the Strata data centre in Exeter. The Infrastructure and Support Manager advised that the latency had only been an issue during the desktop migration period as, once all desktops were migrated, the East Devon servers could then also be migrated to the Strata data centre so that desktops and servers were all running locally. Microsoft RDS technology was being utilized for three systems at East Devon as an interim workaround during the desktop rollout - this would be retired when the East Devon servers were moved to the data centre.

Members reported problems encountered with Microsoft Outlook in the week commencing 13 March 2017 in that emails sent to Council Officers were returned with the message of "not known".

The Infrastructure and Support Manager and the Manager Compliance and Security advised that the problem had been resolved that morning. Responding to a Member, it was confirmed that service desks continued at all three councils to resolve Members' queries and that phone numbers of the service desks would be circulated to all Members for information.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

PROGRESS REPORT

A report was submitted by the Board and Strata Managers on the progress of key Strata projects and activities together with the change of plan for the roll out of the Global Desktop.

Infrastructure delivery

Since Christmas, the Global desktop roll out had progressed well with roll out completed at Teignbridge and positive feedback from Exeter, specifically around the ability to work flexibly. Training and refresher sessions had been completed at East Devon but with a revised roll out plan to be completed by the end of April.

Regarding Telephony - Single Supplier Consolidation, Virgin Media Broadband had revealed around 30 additional accounts belonging to Exeter City Council that were previously unknown. Early April was a likely date for the upgrade of Exeter's DASS (analogue) circuits to Q931 (digital) which would bring connectivity at Exeter in line with East Devon and Teignbridge. Virgin and Nexus were talking regularly to migrate lines from the old technology, but compensation from Virgin would not be forthcoming.

53 members of Strata now possessed Skype. Extension numbers for East Devon and Teignbridge had been implemented but, due to line issues, Exeter's was not expected to start until May/June. Rollout of Voicemail to Strata staff for testing and use would begin and Members were advised of the uses "Persistent Chat" could be put to including alerting Strata staff to faults and important information and facilitating group discussions and associated protocols. Decisions on the way Skype is used would rest with the individual Councils.

The migration of servers from the Teignbridge and East Devon datacentres had begun and, once complete, the rental of hardware at Teignbridge would cease and hardware from East Devon would be re-allocated to the secondary datacentre at Oakwood.

Strata had also completed its office move within Exeter.

Business as Usual

The Manager Programmes and Resources reported 102 scheduled projects including 26 planned convergence projects, 389 open Business Change Requests, 243 open Service Requests and 935 software products supported.

He advised that routine meetings were held with service users such as Planning, Building Control, Environmental Health etc. to see how Strata was performing for their services and detailed the process for assessing the viability of projects. The convergence process would rationalise these requests, all with business cases prepared by the service lead and evaluated by the respective senior Council teams - IT Requirements Board at Teignbridge, IT Requirements Board at Exeter and the Senior Management Team at East Devon, with subsequent monitoring and sign off by these groups when complete.

Security was another key issue and the three Councils annual re-certification to use the Government's secure network was approaching - PSN CoCo compliance. It needed to be re-attained by the beginning of July 2017, with the process starting on the 20 March 2017 where an external specialist would review and test the shared Strata environment.

The Manager Compliance and Security reported that the Government's intention was to provide an alternative secure email service to replace the PSN by the end of March 2017. To this end, Strata had implemented new secure email standards in preparation. However, Crown Commercial Services, the Government operator, had advised that no alternative would be provided in that timescale and it was likely that PSN would continue being provided by a commercial operator. Cost increases were anticipated.

Convergence

Convergence would deliver on Strata's three key objectives of cost savings, risk reduction and increasing capability to change. Some projects would offer opportunities for Council's to increase efficiency although there was a possibility that Strata could incur costs above those in the approved business plan but could, nonetheless, result in bigger savings/transformation opportunities in the Councils.

A table was provided setting out some systems that had already being converged with business cases approved by the three Councils and progress had started on iTrent HR/Payroll system, Door Access and Time and attendance, Uniform suite – Planning, Building Control, Environmental Health, Estates and Licensing and Council websites. The table set out the target and progress for each project.

The Chair welcomed the format set out in the table, suggesting that this could be further developed and that, rather than progressing through a Review Group he acknowledged that agreement on the appropriate way forward could best be achieved in discussion with Laurence Whitlock, the incoming Chief Operating Officer when in post. He understood that Laurence was very familiar with such a style of report. He would be meeting him on 18 April 2017.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted:-

- (1) the report; and
- (2) that the Chair would meet with Laurence Whitlock on 18 April 2017 with the Strata Lead for Human Resources, discussions to cover performance management.

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UPDATE ON DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SOFTWARE SUPPLIER

Strata officers updated the meeting on progress with a compensation package with a software supplier following the identification of a number of faults with the product. The supplier had acknowledged the faults as genuine bugs and had been working with Strata to deliver fixes for these.

The impact of this was that contractors had needed to be retained and legacy systems kept in operation for longer than originally planned incurring extra cost.

Members would be kept updated on progress.

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BUSINESS CASE - NEW TELEPHONE SYSTEM

The Infrastructure and Support Manager reported on progress with the installation of a customer contact centre system for each Council, including the preparation of a business case. Funding was available in the Strata Budget and the final decision would rest with the Board.

The three councils used three different call centre technologies, all of which were in need of upgrade or replacement. A detailed plan has been created with a major Microsoft partner, Nexus, to implement a single call centre tightly integrated with Skype to be used and administered independently by each of the three councils in place by the end of 2017. The aim was to replace all three aging PABX's and their main analogue lines with resilient digital connections at the Strata data centres. The many contracts for "call time" had also been replaced and were being provided by one supplier, VMB, with only specialised alarm lines staying with BT.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

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HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE REPORT

The Strata Lead for Human Resources presented an update on key Human Resources information in relation to Strata Services Solutions Ltd.

She detailed staff recruitment since April 2016 and the measures being taken to compete with the private sector. Since inception, Strata had employed three apprentices with two offered roles within Strata's Service Desk. Details of a staff engagement survey had been circulated. Key policies would be sent to all Strata staff electronically on an annual basis to ensure that Strata staff understand their obligations as employees and are kept informed of key HR and Health and Safety policies. She also stated that HR would attend regular management team meetings to discuss HR matters commencing with the arrival of the new Chief Operating Officer.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the report and requested the Strata Joint Executive Committee to agree the actions outlined.

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STRATA BUDGET MONITORING 2016/17

The Director responsible for Finance reported that a written report had not been provided for this Committee meeting as the report setting out the financial progress of Strata during the first nine months of 2016/17 had been submitted to the January meeting.

At that meeting, the Committee had been advised that the Board was projecting a revenue saving for the Councils of about £70,000 for 2016/17 against the target of £254,052 in the original business case. He advised that he would be reporting to the Strata Board on 17 March that the underspend was now likely to be £100,000.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the position.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.55 pm)

Chair

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