



# Business Plan 2026/2027

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0.1

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# 1. Introduction

In 2023-24 Strata set out on an ambitious plan to lay the foundations to implement a scalable enterprise architecture for its partners. Having a designed enterprise architecture helps position Strata and its partners in the future ensuring that technology is there to transform any council and enable maximum efficiency.

These key pillars defined as the Blueprint set the Architecture that will support the councils transformation throughout 26/27:



## 1.1 Target operating Model (TOM)

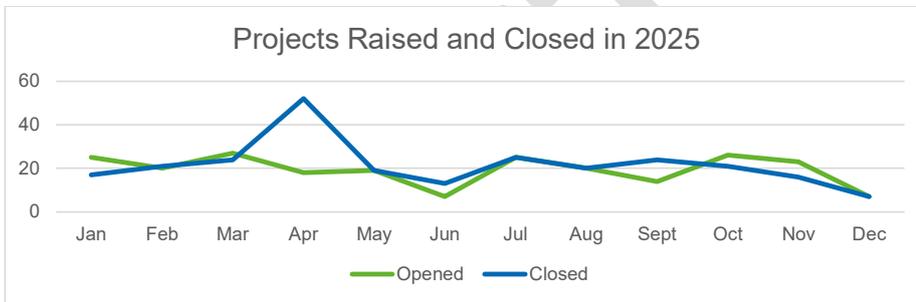
Strata and partners in 2024/25 realigned the operating model to be ITIL focused moving to a requirements, design and delivery led service. This joined with new

operational control boards has been instrumental in exceeding KPI's and demonstrating Strata's true delivery power. This can be seen clearly in the management information provided on a regular basis.

For calendar year 2025, up until 10<sup>th</sup> December when the data was captured, Strata have received 231 new Project requests and have closed 254 projects.

Commented [GR1]: How is a project defined?

Carry-over from previous years was 171 projects. This equates to an average of 20 new projects a month and an average of 23 project closures.



The number of open Projects reached a peak of 180 in January and a low of 131 in October. The spike in closed Projects in April relates to a full review with the authorities of all priorities, which resulted in a higher than usual rate of close.

As Strata gears up for significant change for our customers having a designed enterprise architecture will be critical to the future in transitioning services to new entities:

### 1.2 End User Computing (EUC)

Strata's approach to End User Computing (EUC) is a cornerstone of its scalable, future-ready blueprint for local government IT. By replacing legacy thin client technology with modern, Intune-managed laptops and packaging most applications into a centralised application catalogue, Strata has created an environment where digital resources can be rapidly deployed, reused, and scaled to meet evolving organisational needs and accelerating any future deployments.

### **1.2.1 Scalable Application Packaging**

A key strategic achievement is the packaging of most line-of-business applications into a reusable catalogue. These pre-packaged applications are ready for immediate deployment, supporting consistent user experiences and operational resilience, regardless of where staff are based or how the organisation evolves. This means that should the organisational footprint expand, such as during Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), new users, teams or even entire councils can be onboarded quickly and efficiently. Applications are not tied to specific hardware or locations; instead they are delivered on-demand to any authorised device, ensuring consistency, security and ease of management.

### **1.2.2 Building-Agnostic Digital Infrastructure**

The EUC model is fundamentally building-agnostic. Devices and applications are managed in the cloud enabling staff to work securely and productively from any location. This flexibility is critical during periods of organisational change, estate rationalisation or emergency response, ensuring that services remain available and staff remain connected regardless of physical premises.

### **1.2.3 Strategic Value in Local Government Reorganisation**

In the context of LGR whatever happens it is recognised Strata will need to be flexible in its approach as organisations merge and change. Strata's scalable EUC solution offers several key advantages whatever the footprint or model:

- **Rapid onboarding:** New councils or teams can be integrated or migrated to a digital environment with minimal disruption, leveraging the pre-packaged application catalogue.
- **Consistent user experience:** Standardised devices and applications ensure that all staff have access to the tools they need regardless of location or organisational structure.
- **Operational resilience:** Cloud-based management and delivery reduce dependency on legacy infrastructure, supporting business continuity and service excellence.
- **Cost efficiency:** Reusable application packages and centralised management lower support costs and streamline IT operations.

#### **1.2.4 Future-Ready Platform**

Strata's EUC strategy is designed to support ongoing transformation including the future implementation of Azure Virtual Desktop for specialised functions. This ensures that the digital environment remains adaptable, secure and aligned with the broader migration to cloud infrastructure.

#### **1.3 Cloud Telephony (Nice/CxOne)**

The transition to a cloud-based telephony platform marks a pivotal step in Strata's blueprint for a resilient, future-ready IT environment. With the retirement of Skype at the beginning of 2025, Strata undertook a rigorous selection process to identify and implement a scalable, enterprise-grade telephony solution. The chosen platform, NICE CXone, is designed to deliver private sector-grade management information, automated call routing, AI ready, and advanced artificial intelligence-driven call handling.

By leveraging cloud technology, the telephony platform is no longer tied to physical infrastructure or specific buildings. This building-agnostic approach ensures that communication services remain robust and accessible regardless of office relocations, estate rationalisation, or organisational restructuring. This means seamless continuity of service during periods of change enabling staff to remain connected and responsive wherever they are.

In the context of local government reorganisation, the cloud telephony solution provides the flexibility to adapt rapidly to new models or organisations. IT resources can be scaled up or down as needed, without the constraints of legacy hardware or on-premise systems. This agility is essential for maintaining high-quality service delivery and operational resilience during times of transition.

The NICE CXone platform introduces market leading automated routing and AI-powered call handling, streamlining workflows and enhancing customer experience. Management information tools provide real-time visibility into agent availability, queue performance and service demand, supporting data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement. Integration with single sign-on and presence information further simplifies day-to-day operations for council staff.

Migrating to a cloud telephony platform reduces dependency on ageing, on-premise equipment, lowers maintenance costs, and minimises the risk of service disruption. Councils benefit from predictable, consumption-based pricing and can redirect resources from infrastructure management to value-adding digital initiatives. The move also supports sustainability goals by optimising energy use and enabling smarter capacity management.

A unified cloud telephony solution will foster collaboration between councils, enabling joint projects, shared expertise, and consistent service delivery across organisational boundaries. The platform's interoperability and integration capabilities make it easier to connect systems, share data securely, and deliver a unified experience for staff and citizens.

#### **1.4 Middleware**

As part of the reduction of technical debt strata created a middleware platform that sits between any data source and presentation to applications, citizen developers and the public via the online portal. The design ensures the platform being situated in the cloud is building and network agnostic allowing a "plug and play" mode of operation allowing partners and future partners to benefit from any application integrations within the catalogue. The platform is core to proactive communications monitoring data changes within back-office systems triggering notifications via a multitude of medias i.e. txt, email call back etc.

#### **1.5 Azure Cloud Technology**

Cloud technology and specifically the adoption of Microsoft Azure, is now central to Strata's vision for a future-proof, scalable enterprise architecture. In the context of local government reorganisation, the move to a building-agnostic cloud server platform is not just a technical upgrade it is a strategic enabler for transformation, operational resilience and service innovation.

Azure provides a highly scalable infrastructure that can dynamically adjust to the changing demands of partner councils. As local government structures evolve whether through re-organisation, shared services, or new partnership models the cloud ensures that IT resources can be rapidly scaled up or down without the

constraints of physical premises or legacy hardware. This flexibility is essential for supporting both day-to-day operations and major transformation programmes.

By decoupling IT infrastructure from specific buildings, Azure enables true mobility and continuity of service. Councils can consolidate, relocate or repurpose office space without being limited by server rooms or on-premise systems. This is particularly valuable during periods of organisational change, estate rationalisation or emergency response, ensuring that critical services remain available to staff and citizens regardless of location.

Harnessing Microsoft's ongoing investment in security Azure delivers robust protection for council data and systems. The platform benefits from advanced threat detection, automated patching and compliance with national and international standards. This is vital for local authorities who must safeguard sensitive information and demonstrate compliance with frameworks such as the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) and Public Services Network (PSN) requirements.

Migrating to Azure reduces dependency on ageing, on-premise hardware, provides comparable maintenance costs and minimising the risk of service disruption. Councils benefit from predictable, consumption-based pricing and can redirect resources from infrastructure management to value-adding digital initiatives. The cloud also supports sustainability goals by optimising energy use and enabling smarter capacity management

Azure underpins the delivery of modern digital services, from virtual desktops and remote working to advanced analytics and AI-driven solutions. It provides a standardised, future-ready platform for application modernisation, integration and the rapid deployment of new capabilities empowering councils to respond quickly to citizen needs and policy changes.

A unified cloud platform fosters collaboration between our partners councils, enabling shared services, joint projects, and the pooling of expertise. Azure's interoperability and integration capabilities make it easier to connect systems, share data securely and deliver consistent experiences across organisational boundaries.

Migrating to Azure takes a considerable amount of skill ensuring the business case is comparable and when configured in this tried and tested approach cost remains comparable to on premise but provides significantly more benefits.

### 1.6 SharePoint and Local Government Classification Scheme

**Commented [AL2]:** This has been updated to 'Local Government Functional Classification Scheme'

The deployment of SharePoint as Strata's document management system is a key to a modern, scalable, and resilient information environment. In today's local government context—where the volume, diversity, and importance of unstructured documents are ever-increasing—SharePoint provides a robust, cloud-enabled platform that ensures secure document retention, discoverability, and compliance.

SharePoint's cloud-based architecture and the way it has been implemented means that document management is no longer tied to physical servers or specific locations. This building-agnostic approach is critical for councils across Devon, especially during periods of organisational change, office relocations, or estate rationalisation. Staff can access, collaborate on, and manage documents securely from anywhere, supporting flexible working and business continuity.

At the heart of this SharePoint deployment is the adoption of the Local Government Functional Classification Scheme (LGFCS). Unlike traditional department-based filing structures, this standard organises documents by function reflecting the actual services and activities delivered by councils. This approach ensures that records are consistently categorised, regardless of organisational changes, mergers or restructures. It supports efficient information retrieval, robust retention policies and seamless compliance with statutory requirements.

SharePoint's integration with the Local Government Classification standard underpins strong governance and compliance. Automated retention schedules, audit trails and access controls ensure that sensitive information is protected and retained in line with legal and regulatory obligations. This is particularly vital for local authorities who must demonstrate transparency, accountability and adherence to frameworks such as the Public Services Network (PSN) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

By providing a unified platform for document management, SharePoint enables cross-council collaboration, knowledge sharing and the pooling of expertise plus interoperability with other cloud services such as Microsoft Teams and OneDrive.

### **1.7 Fabric, Purview, Data and AI**

Strata's blueprint emphasises the strategic adoption of Microsoft Fabric as the pillar of our data architecture. Fabric enables a unified data lake and warehouse approach, reducing time-to-insight and supporting advanced analytics and AI-driven services across partner councils. Complementing this, Microsoft Purview will provide robust governance, cataloguing and compliance capabilities, ensuring data integrity and security throughout its lifecycle. Together, these platforms will empower councils to leverage predictive analytics, machine learning and Copilot technologies, creating actionable insights that enhance service delivery and operational efficiency.

This data and AI strategy is not standalone it builds on the foundational work undertaken including the deployment of enterprise middleware, SharePoint migration, and cloud telephony solutions. Middleware continues to serve as the integration layer, enabling seamless API management and secure data exchange between line-of-business systems and the Fabric data platform. SharePoint remains critical for structured document management and compliance, while the shift to cloud telephony underpins omnichannel communication and collaboration. These enablers collectively form a resilient digital ecosystem, positioning Strata to deliver scalable, interoperable, and future-ready services for partners.

### **1.8 'One and Done' via CRM, Middleware and Data Integration.**

A significant part of the blueprint is providing a single, authoritative view of the customer to council staff. By centring the CRM on the entire customer record—not just isolated transactions it ensures that every interaction is consistent, informed, and resolved at the first point of contact. The CRM provides this consolidated record and supports straightforward, efficient customer journeys across channels.

Strata's Enterprise Middleware Architecture (EMA) sits between any data source (line-of-business systems, legacy databases, external partners) and the CRM and user-facing applications. Acting as the integration layer, EMA standardises

connectivity, governs APIs and surfaces back-office data to the CRM and the contact centre—so agents can view status, update records, and resolve cases without hand-offs or rekeying. This reduces technical debt, enables reuse, and presents clean, secure data services to citizen developers and portals.

With CRM, Middleware and data platform working as a unified fabric, customer interactions it provides a streamlined customer approach, and will provide much needed continuity of service during times of structural change.

## 2 Overview of 2025/26

During the past year, Strata has delivered a number of priority digital projects in support of the partner councils objectives. These have focused on modernising core platforms, improving service resilience and reducing reliance on ageing technologies while maintaining alignment with agreed strategic and financial plans.

### 2.1 Copper Switch Off

Progress across the councils has been consistently strong, with delivery ahead of plan in several areas. Teignbridge District Council was completed by October 2025 achieving delivery approximately two months earlier than scheduled. Exeter City Council is now almost complete and remains on track for full completion by the end of the calendar year. East Devon District Council is also nearing completion, with fewer than ten remaining lines, excluding the Home Safeguard service which is not held by Strata.

The programme has successfully removed legacy PBX infrastructure and replaced it with Microsoft Teams telephony, modernising the telephony estate and reducing dependency on ageing on-premise equipment. Where sites have transitioned from FTTC to FTTP connectivity, there has been a clear improvement in internet access performance, contributing to greater reliability and an improved user experience.

Delivery has met the original BTS deadline of December 2025, rather than the later revised target of January 2027, demonstrating effective planning and

execution. In addition to these operational improvements, the programme has delivered tangible financial benefits, reducing the annual BT bill of approximately £18,000 to around £500 per year.

## **2.2 Enterprise Middleware Architecture (EMA)**

The EMA platform has been successfully implemented in the production environment and is supporting several live, business-critical services, including missed bin reporting and licensing. Knowledge transfer activities have been undertaken to support ongoing operation and future extension of the platform by the councils.

EMA is providing integration aligned with Council objectives relating to platform standardisation, efficiency, and digital enablement. The adoption of standardised API management, monitoring, and security controls has enabled future system changes to be delivered with reduced integration risk and improved consistency across services.

## **2.3 Power Platform and Centre of Excellence**

The core Centre of Excellence (CoE) capability has been implemented, including governance and monitoring, supported by defined security roles and data loss prevention controls.

Structured training and guidance have been delivered to support staff use of Power Apps and Power Automate, and governance standards have been established for environment management, naming conventions, and connector usage. An initial pipeline of use cases has been developed, with early solutions focused on internal process automation and service efficiency. While adoption levels vary across councils, this has informed a planned focus on targeted engagement, internal champions, and shared learning to increase uptake. Overall, the programme supports the councils' digital strategies by enabling proportionate innovation, improving time-to-value, and maintaining strong governance.

## **2.4 Contact Centre Transformation**

Following the July go-live, the CXone platform has consolidated contact handling across the partner councils onto a single, cloud-based solution. Since

implementation, the platform has processed customer interactions, providing a consistent foundation for multi-channel service delivery aligned with Business Plan objectives relating to customer access, service efficiency, and operational resilience.

Operational feedback from front-line teams indicates improved visibility of agent availability, queue performance, and service demand. Integration with single sign-on and presence information has simplified day-to-day workflows and reduced dependency on manual processes.

A structured training approach, delivered through the NICE Dojo platform, has supported capability development across agent, supervisor, and administrator roles. While early implementation phases identified interoperability and device-related issues, these were addressed through targeted workstation changes and client configuration updates. Further work is underway to enhance reporting maturity and deepen user training as part of an agreed programme of continuous improvement.

Overall, the CXone programme has delivered measurable operational value, improved service oversight and reduced fragmentation across council contact handling arrangements.

## **2.5 End User Compute (EUC)**

The End User Computing (EUC) project was initiated to address the limitations and increasing risk associated with legacy thin-client and Global Desktop technologies, while supporting 24/25 Business Plan objectives relating to workforce productivity, flexible working, and security. The project delivered the transition to modern, Microsoft Intune-managed Windows 11 devices, alongside standardised application delivery and cloud-based data access through Microsoft 365 services, including OneDrive for Business.

From a strategic perspective, the project has reduced dependency on ageing end-user infrastructure, simplified device lifecycle management, and improved alignment with Microsoft security baselines. The approach provides a more consistent and supportable end-user platform across all partner councils and better supports location-independent working. The approach taken to modernise

application delivery has been designed to support the future implementation of Azure Virtual Desktop and to remain consistent with the overall Azure migration strategy.

Post-implementation staff survey results indicate that the EUC project has met its intended objectives. Feedback highlights improvements in device performance, reliability, and access to core productivity applications when compared with the previous Global Desktop model. The ability for staff to work effectively across different locations was identified as a key benefit, aligning with organisational expectations around flexible working and service continuity.

**Commented [AL3]:** Outstanding issues with some applications e.g. Uniform following the migration to W11 need addressing as a priority

In addition to internal feedback, Microsoft has provided informal assurance that the programme represented one of the fastest and most successful Windows 11 and Intune rollouts they have observed within the Southwest. This external perspective provides further confidence in the effectiveness of the delivery approach and the capability of the delivery team.

## 2.6 Azure Migration

Strata have migrated a range of workloads from the on-premise infrastructure to Microsoft Azure and is continuing to do so in the new year as this project progresses. This will improve platform resilience and security, is reducing dependency on end-of-life hardware and will enable more flexible capacity management. The move supports sustainability objectives and establishes a standardised cloud platform to support further services, including virtual desktops (Azure Virtual Desktop) and application modernisation.

## 2.7 Cyber Assessment Framework

Strata, working with the three partner councils, has completed the initial phase of the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) assessment, covering Objective A (Managing Security Risk) and Objective D (Minimising the Impact of Cyber Security Incidents). The assessment was conducted independently and provides formal assurance against nationally defined cyber security outcomes. The review confirmed that all councils demonstrate a strong and consistent approach to cyber risk management. Strong compliance was indicated for Objective A, with evidence of mature governance structures, defined risk management processes, and effective oversight arrangements in place across the partnership.

## **2.8 Progression to the Next CAF Phase**

Based on the outcomes of the initial assessment, Strata and partner councils have been invited by MHCLG to participate as early adopters in the next phase of CAF delivery as an exemplar service. This phase will assess Objective B (Protecting Against Cyber Attacks) and Objective C (Detecting Cyber Security Events) and is expected to commence in 2026. In response to the CAF findings and to prepare for future objectives, Strata has initiated a number of structured programmes within its security improvement roadmap.

## **2.9 Disaster Recovery as a Service (DRaaS)**

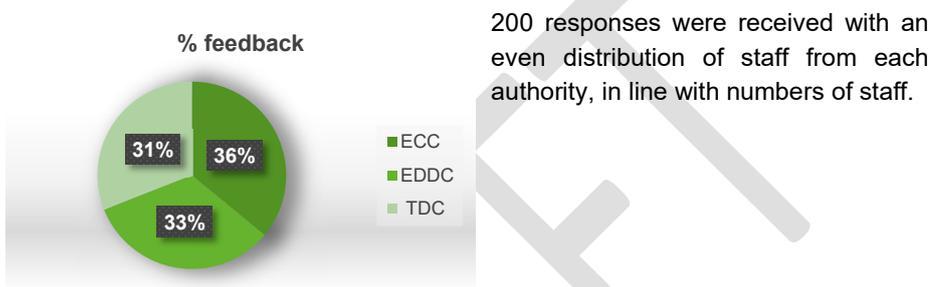
The DRaaS programme establishes a consistent framework for recovery planning and incident response across the partnership. This includes regular recovery rehearsals, annual tabletop and simulation exercises aligned to the hybrid Azure architecture and the development of CAF-aligned incident playbooks covering scenarios such as phishing, malware incidents and account compromise.

## **2.10 Security as a Service (SaaS)**

The Security as a Service programme provides continuous vulnerability management and remediation across infrastructure and platform services. It includes regular patching cycles, automated compliance, risk reporting and targeted consultancy and assurance activity to maintain alignment with CAF and PSN CoCo requirements.

### 3. Staff Survey

The Strata survey was conducted during November 2025 and received **200 responses** (approx. 10% of the Strata service users). Respondents were asked the same questions as in the 2023 survey to allow for an accurate comparison of responses, plus some additional questions.



Overall satisfaction with Strata increased by 2% between 2023 and 2025 to **71% overall satisfaction** with the 50% of respondents scoring **80% or higher**.

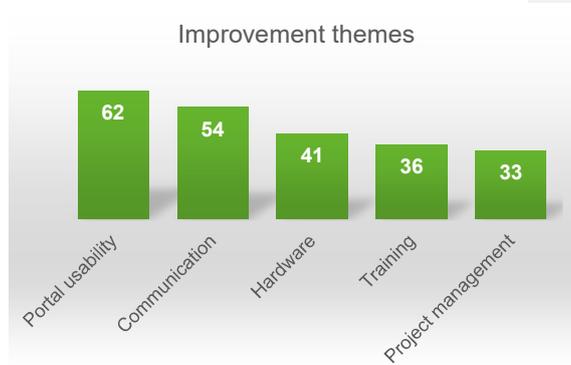


The number of respondents that gave low satisfaction scores between 2023 to 2025 also fell by 4%



There were **pockets of dissatisfaction** and the survey highlighted areas for improvement. These are highlighted in the graph.

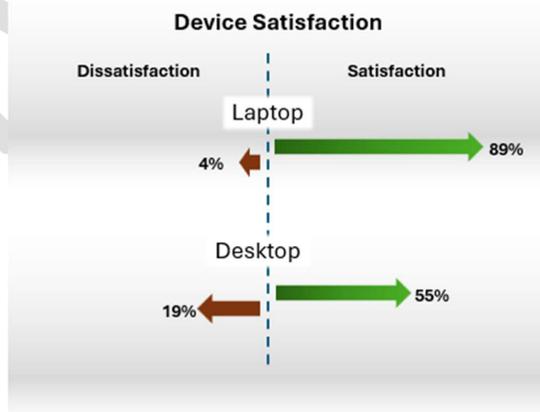
By far most common area of concern was the usability of the **portal**, including ease of finding the correct request type, ease of tracking request status and getting feedback once a request has been closed. These concerns will be addressed and improvements made during 2026/27.



**Commented [AL4]:** The 'new' portal has always been inferior to the previous in regards to usability, we were told that this was being worked on prior to 26/27, why have there been no improvements since, this was raised by EDDC/ECC/TDC immediately after launch

Another element highlighted was **training**. Comments are related to Strata not providing training on third party software such as Uniform, Academy etc, rather than the quality of other training delivered by our internal trainer (who received very positive feedback)

In terms of **Hardware**, negative feedback generally related to the desktop PCs and older mobile devices. The Survey asked questions relating to user satisfaction of the desktop pcs and laptop devices. There were significant differences between the 2 types of devices, with users being much mor satisfied with the new EUC laptops compared to the older desktop PCs.



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## 4. Themes of Projects for 2026/27

### 4.1 Service Maximisation

Prioritising the reuse and extension of established applications and services promotes rationalisation and standardisation across all three councils. Extending systems into councils where they are not yet adopted is typically lower risk, faster to implement and more cost-effective than procuring new platforms, particularly where contracts, integrations, skills and governance arrangements are already in place. This reduces architectural complexity and avoids unnecessary duplication.

2026/27 Targets:

- Telephony Phase 2
- EDDC Street Scene replacement
- Comino D360 upgrade
- Review use of Uniform
- Health and Safety system
- Implementation of the Solution for Rostering, Time and Attendance
- Review and Implement improvements to iTrent
- Enhancements to Leisure digital offer via Legend
- Assets improvement work to SAM

### 4.2 Corporate Efficiency

During 2026/27 Strata will embed automation practices into the architecture, enabling capabilities such as automated Azure resource scheduling to reduce infrastructure running costs, scripted and repeatable disaster recovery procedures to improve recoverability and reduce operational risk, and the application of AI-enabled services to streamline information governance. Automating document redaction using AI and enforcing information lifecycle compliance through platforms such as Microsoft Purview (integrated with SharePoint) will be continued. Collectively, these measures should reduce manual effort, improve consistency and compliance, and support the incremental evolution of the Strata Architecture Blueprint.

2026/27 Targets:

- DevOps:
  - Azure server power automation (cost saving)
  - Azure Disaster Recovery automation (compliance)

- Waste LatCo
- Purview (compliance)
- Artificial Intelligence:
  - Housing
  - Automated document redaction
- Permissions Self Service website
- CRM system exploration
- Digital solution to compare plans and documents
- Digital solution for neighbourhood requests
- Waste management stage 2

#### **4.3 Data Driven Authorities**

Through delivery of Microsoft Fabric and the medallion architecture, Strata will work with the Councils to integrate performance, risk and finance data into automated, validated dashboards, with the aim of creating a clear “golden thread” between data and decision-making. Developing semantic models, curated workspaces and repeatable deployment pipelines to enable consistent data flows, reliable reporting and greater visibility, empowering officers and Members with actionable insights is the aim within 2026 and beyond.

2026/27 Targets:

- Assist in the Development and implementation of Council organisational data strategy
- Develop and support the use of Power BI within each Council

#### **4.4 Embedding Transformation**

Continuing the delivery of long-tail enabler projects and extending existing enablers to strengthen and support council operations.

2026/27 Targets:

- SharePoint
- Support Exeter Transformation programme.
- Enabler 7: Notifications
- Digital process improvement work from M25
- Implement automation (Power apps)

#### 4.5 Infrastructure

2026 will see the continued evolution of the shared ICT infrastructure with the migration from dark fibre to leased lines, along with the implementation of Azure virtual desktop and finalisation of the Azure migration, all of which will further strengthen the Councils' digital infrastructure. The replacement of the external firewalls will bolster operational performance and security, SDWAN will enhance connectivity, while transition to IKEN will streamline data management.

2026/27 Targets:

- Dark Fibre and Leased lines migration
- Azure virtual desktop
- Azure migration
- Civic Centre Closure
- Operations and Maintenance - External Firewall Replacement
- IKEN Cloud Migration
- SDWAN

#### 4.6 Security, Operations and Maintenance

Disaster Recovery as a Service (DRaaS) supports the alignment with NCSC guidance and the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) by providing demonstrable and tested recovery capability in the event of cyber or service disruption. Continued adoption of Azure services enables the automated management of backups, patching and security updates, supporting the NCSC principles of resilience, recovery and secure system operation.

2026/27 Targets:

- Disaster Recovery as a Service (DRaaS)
- Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF)
- Azure Updates
- Azure Backup

## 5. Corporate Training Schedule

Our aim for 2026/27 is to build on our Performance Development Review (PDRs) framework that was introduced in June 2024 ensuring that specific training needs were met. This

process has given us the opportunity to continually assess the skills of our team to ensure that they are aligned with the ongoing requirements as set out within our business plan.

In December 2025 we installed a Performance Management system which will allow us to adopt a more strategic approach to the development needs of our team. This system includes a specific Personal Development Plan portal which will enable managers and team members to continually review training ensuring that any skills gaps are addressed.

### 5.1 Training 2025/26

Throughout 2025 our focus has been to fulfil the training objectives that were set within the 2024/25 Performance Development Plans (PDRs) this was the first opportunity for Strata to create a framework that highlights a clear organisational commitment to strategic alignment, professional growth and operational excellence across all teams. The objectives were directly linked to the Strata Business Plan, focusing on business transformation, technology adoption and service improvement.

### 5.2 Technical Training Completed 2025

Department	Technical Needs	Training Completed (core areas)
Business Systems	Support for strategic initiatives, technology rollouts, and service improvements; alignment with the business plan.	Microsoft certifications (Power BI, Azure, MS365), data analysis, business systems knowledge.
Infrastructure, Security and Product Delivery	Advanced certifications, project management, and cybersecurity expertise.	Microsoft Intune, Azure, security certifications, self-funded project management courses.
Support Desk	ITIL processes and business plan alignment.	Dell/Apple/MS technical certifications, Azure, Intune.

Document Management	Service delivery, process improvement, and upskilling in technical and operational areas.	Printer knowledge, HTML for designers.
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Alongside technical training, Strata developed and launched an in-house 'Introduction to Management' programme designed for junior managers who identified a need for further support with people management and soft skills, this was partly due to the restructure that took place in 2024 as several members of the team took on Line Management responsibilities and highlighted the need for such training within their PDR's. The programme included the following modules: management and leadership; team building; people management; planning and organising; self-reflection and awareness and presenting to the Senior Management Team (SMT). Six team members participated in these highly successful sessions.

The completion of 2025/26 PDRs highlights Strata's continued commitment to further developing its training framework and to supporting ongoing transformation and improvement. Using the data from the PDRs we have developed a Training Needs Analysis for 2026, which will enable us to further enhance our technical capabilities and supports any skills gaps that have been identified within this process, in addition all team members must complete relevant Microsoft base-level certificates (core certificates) as a minimum requirement.

### 5.3 Technical Training Identified for 2026

Department	Technical Needs	Planned Training (core areas)
Business Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core Certifications</li> <li>• Data Engineering</li> <li>• Ongoing Technical Skills</li> <li>• Process Standardisation</li> </ul>	Microsoft 365 Fundamentals (all) Training towards Data Engineer Associate certification Upskilling in Power BI, PowerShell automation and data warehousing

Infrastructure, Security and Product Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core Certifications</li> <li>• Cloud skills</li> <li>• Security and Patching</li> <li>• Compliance and Audit</li> </ul>	<p>Azure, MS 365, Intune, AZ - 140/AZ-900/AZ-500</p> <p>Azure Migration and Azure virtual desktop</p> <p>Windows Training and 3<sup>rd</sup> party patching processes, Fortinet firewall management</p> <p>Phishing simulation, regulatory frameworks and audit readiness</p>
Support Desk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core Certifications</li> <li>• Asset Management</li> <li>• Customer Service</li> </ul>	<p>MS 365 Fundamentals (all)</p> <p>CMDB and Asset Lifecycle process</p> <p>Ongoing development of ITIL processes, customer centric training</p>
Document Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core Certificates</li> <li>• Cloud skills</li> </ul>	<p>Printer knowledge/GDPR</p> <p>MS Teams and One Drive</p>

As we continue through 2026 and into 2027, we will maintain our focus on monitoring requirements through, monthly one to ones, ongoing interim and annual reviews and an annual skills audit.

By adopting this approach, our training initiatives will stay aligned with both the team's and clients' needs, meet the objectives that are set out within this business plan, promote continuous professional development and enhance operational effectiveness.

## 6. KPI Review and Value Setting

The Strata Board reviewed the Proposed KPI's, and a baseline value was set at 85% to allow the incoming ICT Director to implement changes and transformation at scale. Industry standard response times were adopted and implemented as below:

### SLAs by Priority:

P1 - Resolution Target: 4 Working Hours  
P2 - Resolution Target: 7 working hours  
P3 - Resolution Target: 2 working days  
P4 - Resolution Target: 5 working days

An average for last rolling year is 93% with the change curve visibly being shown within the data trends.

<<< DS Graph >>>

Now a baseline has been established and considerable change undertaken a new target value proposed for 26/27 of 90% whilst the level of transformation activity remains so high aligning more to actual performance levels and demonstrating continual improvement in line with ITIL practice.

## 6.1 Proposed new KPIs for 26/27

### Requests

#### 6.1.1 Data

Theme	Indicator	Trigger	Effort – Working Days
Add data to Data Warehouse	Acknowledgement of Request	Date Request received	4
Add data to Data Warehouse	Issue of Pre Load Documentation for completion by Authority	Date Request Received	2
Add data to Data Warehouse	Load data into Bronze area of the data Lakehouse/ warehouse	Date Completed documentation received	5
Add data to Data Warehouse	Curate Data to Silver Gold Level – effort assessment	Date request received	5
Permissions	Grant user permissions to data schema in Warehouse	Date approval received from data owner	2

#### 6.1.2 Power Platform

Theme	Indicator	Trigger	Effort – Working Days
Licensing	Purchase and assign new Power Platform Premium License	Date Request Received	10*
Permissions	Grant user access to Power Platform Environments	Date Request Received	1
New Flow or App Development	Assessment of effort required to develop new Flow or App	Date Request Received	5
Advice	Advice or 'How do I do x' with Power Platform	Date Request Received	5

#### 6.1.3 GovService (Firmstep)

Theme	Indicator	Trigger	Effort – Working Days
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New Process	Assessment of effort required to develop new GovService Process/ Form	Date Request Received	5
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#### 6.1.4 Project

The Project KPIs are a work in progress as we redefine our project processes and review the data available from existing Project systems (KanbanFlow, ASM and Microsoft Planner).

Theme	Indicator	Subject to	Trigger	Effort – Working Days
New Project Submission	Assessment of Effort required	Submission meets requirements of providing enough information to perform an assessment	Date Request Received	10
Feasibility	Produce agreed Business Requirements Document (BRD) or Options Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business understands their problem and can articulate the To Be status</li> <li>Business availability</li> <li>Where involving multiple businesses, that there is an agreement of what the requirements should be</li> </ul>	Authority prioritises the new submission in Portfolio Board, request is moved into Feasibility column	5
Design	High Level Design document, submitted to TDA (Technical Design Authority)	BRD articulates requirements and appropriate information is available from authority and supplier	Business Requirements are signed off	20
Project Closure	Project closure document completed, if required. Task moved to Done		Customer approval to move request to Project Closure Phase.	3



## 7. Overview of Workload

The resourcing analysis for the forthcoming year indicates that, while overall staffing capacity remains broadly stable, there are shortfalls in several specialist delivery roles. Pressures are evident within data, project management, development, and business analysis functions, where forecast demand exceeds available capacity based on the current programme of work. Conversely, capacity in some platform and operational areas is forecast to be sufficient, highlighting an imbalance in capability rather than an overall headcount issue.

These shortfalls have been identified and are being actively addressed. Where specialist capability is required to deliver defined programmes, capital funding will be used to supplement core capacity through funded roles or time-limited specialist resources (fixed term or contractors). This approach allows delivery of priority transformation activity while maintaining flexibility and avoiding permanent increases to the core headcount where demand is project driven.

### 7.1 Alignment of Resourcing

It should be noted that the resourcing calculations are based on known and sized projects at the time the analysis was completed in November 25. However, analysis of project submission activity over the past year indicates a sustained and variable flow of new demand. During the year, monthly project submissions ranged from 7 to 27 requests, with several periods where the number of new requests met or exceeded delivery capacity, contributing to backlog and reprioritisation activity. While some months show strong closure rates, this has been achieved through active management rather than a reduction in underlying demand. In addition, several new project requests have been submitted since these figures were compiled and have not yet been sized or scheduled. Taken together, this demonstrates that demand is not static and is likely to continue to increase. This reinforces the need for councils to manage project submissions at a strategic level, with clear prioritisation, sequencing, and entry controls, to ensure that delivery remains achievable within available capacity and that resources are focused on agreed corporate priorities.

## 8. Finance

### 8.1. Current financial status of the company

One of the key objectives originally set for Strata by the owners was to deliver cost savings as set out in the original business case and subsequently amended each year since 2017/18. The original ten-year Business Case has met its objectives and saving profile and the 2024/25 Business Plan moved away from delivering a savings profile and shifted to a transformational focus.

The forecast outturn for the 2025/26 Budget is a net underspend of £297k.

	Revenue budget 2025/26	Projected 2025/26 outturn	Outturn variance to budget
Income - revenue	£8,762,795	£8,711,245	-£51,550
Investment interest	£20,000	£69,590	£49,590
Employees	-£3,965,500	-£3,840,356	£125,144
Supplies & services	-£4,745,396	-£4,559,811	£185,585
Transport	-£7,499	-£10,279	-£2,780
Support services	-£60,000	-£60,000	£0
Tax on interest	-£4,400	-£13,191	-£8,791
<b>Net Income/(Expense)</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£297,198</b>	<b>£297,198</b>
<b>2023/24 hand back spend</b>	<b>-£166,394</b>	<b>-£26,953</b>	<b>£139,441</b>
<b>2024/25 hand back spend</b>	<b>-£516,606</b>	<b>-£274,016</b>	<b>£242,590</b>
<b>Total net savings incl hand back</b>			<b>£679,229</b>

The projected underspend of £297k against the core Budget is due to the following:

- **Employee costs** £125k Favourable variance due to EDDC Graphics team budget removal and later onboarding of staff for new posts created by the reorganisation than Budgeted, partially offset by redundancy costs from the reorganisation.
- **Supplies & Services** £185k Favourable variance
- **Income** £52k Adverse to Budget due to removal of EDDC Graphics team budget, partially offset by additional postage recharges from local elections not factored into Budget
- **Investment interest** £41k Favourable (net of Corporation Tax) due to continued high level of Base Rate, compared with more conservative Budget assumption

In the financial year 2025/26 £166k of savings distributed to the councils at the end of 2023/24 and £517k of savings distributed at the end of 2024/25 was handed back to Strata to continue to fund the programme of transformational change and transition to a cloud-based server system. £301k of these funds are forecast to be spent in 2025/26 leaving £382k which will continue into the financial year 2026/27. It is proposed that these funds along with any unspent funds distributed to the councils at the end of the 2025/26 financial year will be handed back to Strata to fund the additional expenditure expected to be incurred in 2026/27 whilst the onsite servers continue to be used and maintained during the transition to the Cloud (Azure) in 2026/27 as outlined in this business plan. The 2026/27 Budget set out in this Business Plan does not reflect the costs associated with the transition from onsite servers to the Cloud (Azure).

## **8.2 The company's accounts**

The Strata Board has employed PKF Francis Clark to deliver an independent external audit of the company's accounts. The external audit provides confidence to the Board and the councils that the financial performance reported, gives a true and fair view of the financial position of the company. Acting as a company under the terms and conditions of a local authority does however bring challenges.

The company's balance sheet is vulnerable to movements in interest rates due to the Local Government Pension Scheme, and there is no simple solution, whilst the pension scheme remains open to new entrants. The weakness is a risk insofar as it affects the credit rating of the company.

However, the guarantee provided by the three owners of the council enables the directors to assess the company as being able to continue trading despite the Balance Sheet position. The balance sheet value as of 31 March 2025 is £774k (net assets) a small reduction on the prior year. The pension scheme liability was £195k as of 31 March 2025 due to high interest rates however the scheme liabilities will increase as and when interest rates reduce in the future. The balance sheet value in the prior financial year had an overall net asset value of £807k as of 31 March 2024.

## **8.3 Internal audit**

In addition to the external audit, Strata uses Devon Audit Partnership (DAP) to provide an internal audit service. The latest assurance report from November 2025 confirmed an audit opinion of 'Reasonable Assurance' and stated:



There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

Each of the specific sections reviewed were assessed to have a Reasonable Assurance level of Assurance. In 2026/27, with recognition of the progression of Local Government Reorganisation, Internal Audit will be reviewing value for money, legacy projects and the Cloud Financials finance system project.

#### 8.4 Summary of revenue budget

The basis of the Business Plan Budget for 2026/27 is a build-up of the expected income and costs of the business with an income from the three councils to cover the costs of the business net of any sundry income. The supplies and services cost forecast has been worked up in detail to aid budget monitoring. There is no contingency built into the cost base and therefore should any unexpected additional funding be required it will be requested on an exceptional basis.

The table below shows the cost and income projections for the next three years.

		Budget 2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Income	Contract payment	£9,090,805	£9,304,115	£9,436,718
	Document Centre recharges	£19,000	£19,722	£20,215
	Mobile telephony recharges	£29,894	£31,030	£31,807
	Interest income	£20,000	£20,760	£21,279
	<b>Total</b>	<b>£9,159,699</b>	<b>£9,375,628</b>	<b>£9,510,019</b>
Staff costs		<b>-£4,017,488</b>	<b>-£4,038,013</b>	<b>-£4,038,963</b>
Transport		<b>-£8,672</b>	<b>-£9,002</b>	<b>-£9,228</b>
Supplies and services	Core	£160,035	£166,116	£170,269
	Infrastructure	£1,438,578	£1,493,244	£1,530,575
	Document Centre	£340,920	£353,875	£362,722
	Compliance and security	£127,344	£132,183	£135,487
	Business systems	£2,692,607	£2,794,926	£2,864,799
	WAN	£315,418	£327,404	£335,589
	Telephony	£31,780	£32,988	£33,812
	Product delivery	£10,000	£10,380	£10,640
	Service desk	£16,857	£17,497	£17,935
	<b>Total</b>	<b>-£5,13 ,539</b>	<b>-£5,328,613</b>	<b>-£5,461,828</b>

	Budget 2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Net income/(expense)	£0	£0	£0

## 8.5 Income

Strata's income comprises of a contract payment from the councils and sundry income from interest income, mobile phone and Document Centre recharges.

The Contract Payment to be paid to Strata by the Councils in 2026/27 is £9,090,805. The Contract Payment has been calculated to cover the projected costs of the business net of any sundry income/recharges. A comparison of the forecast contract payment by council in each financial year is set out in the table below:

Contract Payment	Budget	Share by council	2027/28	2028/29
	2026/27	2026/27		
EDDC	£3,512,806	38.6%	£3,602,480	£3,653,823
ECC	£3,042,197	33.5%	£3,125,579	£3,170,125
TDC	£2,535,802	27.9%	£2,576,056	£2,612,770
<b>Total</b>	<b>£9,090,805</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>£9,304,115</b>	<b>£9,436,718</b>

The 2026/27 contract payment reflects a net increase on the 2025/26 payment due to:

- Inflationary increases in the existing contract estate net of any contract terminations and other operating expenditure;
- Staff cost inflation and inflationary increases on sundry staff and insurance costs, net of a reduction in pension contributions;
- New additions to the contract estate proposed in this Business Plan; and
- New contracts acquired by the councils since the last Business Plan to date.

Since the original baseline Council Budgets were passed over to Strata on implementation in 2014/15, each Councils' Contract Payment has increased accordingly for the above factors, resulting in a Contract Payment share in 2026/27 as set out in the table below:

Contract Payment	Cost share by Council 2014/15*		Net cost movement by Council 2014/15 – 2026/27	Contract Payment 2026/27	
	37.3%	£1,933,864		38.6%	£3,512,80
EDDC*			£1,578,941		

<b>ECC</b>	34.6%	£1,792,920	£1,249,277	33.5%	£3,042,197
<b>TDC</b>	28.1%	£1,454,430	£1,081,372	27.9%	£2,535,802
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>£5,181,214</b>	<b>£3,909,591</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>£9,090,805</b>

\* Note: Due to significant differences in the Print, Post, Design and Scanning services at each Council at the outset that, although still included within Strata for cost savings reasons, the original shareholding for each Council was calculated with the budget for this service excluded.

The total income budgeted to be received by Strata from the Councils in 2026/27 of £9,139,699, as set out in the table below, in respect of the Contract Payment and recharges has increased by 4.3% overall on the 2025/26 Budget of £8,762,795.

Council Payments	Budget 2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Contract Payment	£9,090,805	£9,304,11	£9,436,718
Document Centre Recharge	£19,000	£19,722	£20,215
Mobile Tariff Access Recharge	£29,894	£31,030	£31,807
<b>Total</b>	<b>£9,139,699</b>	<b>£9,354,86</b>	<b>£9,488,740</b>

Document Centre recharges are projected based on expected costs in 2026/27 and are higher than 2025/26 due to expected Election activity. Both Document Centre and Mobile Tariff Access recharges reflect inflation at 3.0% in 2027/28 and 2.5% in 2028/29.

As in the 2025/26 Business Plan Strata is proposing that Contract Payments in 2026/27 are paid as follows:

- Quarter 1 – 30%
- Quarter 2 – 30%
- Quarter 3 – 20%
- Quarter 4 – 20%

The forecast for interest on bank deposits is estimated to be lower than the outturn forecast for 2025/26 due to uncertainty over interest rate reductions. A conservative estimate for interest income of £20k has been factored into the 2026/27 budget, net of Corporation Tax at 19%.

### 8.6 Staff costs

Staff costs are projected to increase by c.£147k in 2026/27 compared with 2025/26, before capitalising any staff costs.

The budgeted staff salaries reflect inflation of 3.0% (2.5% inflation + 0.5% for increment increases) for 2026/27 and on-costs (for example, NI employers and pension contributions) are applied and account for an additional c31.2% of staff salary costs. The pension contribution assumption has reduced from 18.75% in 2025/26 to 17.9% in 2024-25, a reduction of c£28k.

The Business Plan assumes that £300k of costs relating to staff working on development projects will be capitalised (£216k capitalised 2025/26).

As in previous years the staff costs figures do not include the Business Systems team resources which are paid for and dedicated to an authority capital project. These resources are capitalised and recharged to the relevant authority.

An inflation assumption of 3.0% has been applied to staff costs in 2027/28 and 2.5% in 2028/29.

### **8.7 Transport**

An inflation assumption of 3.5% has been applied to the forecast 2026/27 costs to calculate the budgeted 2026/27 cost. An inflation assumption of 3.0% has been applied to transport costs in 2027/28 and 2.5% in 2028/29.

### **8.8 Supplies and services**

Contract costs have been estimated for 2026/27 using an RPIX contract renewal inflation assumption of 3.8% that has been applied on renewal for existing contracts in 2026/27, except where a higher than inflation increase is expected, for example where an existing multi-year contract is to be renewed or a product upgrade is to be delivered, or the price is currently fixed by an existing multi-year contract. Other non-contract based operating expenditure has 3.8% inflation applied to the expected annual cost.

The Supplies & Services cost reflects contracts that have been removed from the contract estate and new contracts that have been entered into since the previous Business Plan. A significant addition to the Supplies & Services contract estate for 2026/27 is the incumbent eFinancials finance system (EDDC and ECC only) which was due to be replaced by the Cloud Financials finance system in 2025-26 however the project is currently on hold. The contract payment includes provision for Cloud Financials contract costs in 2026/27 as a contingency for the project which will be returned to the councils if not required.

An inflation assumption of 3.0% has been applied to the forecast 2026/27 cost in 2027/28 and 2.5% in 2028/29.

### **8.9 Summary of capital budget**

The capital requirements of the business in 2026/27, as outlined in this business plan, are summarised on the next page.

The capital requirements are in addition to the annual £150k capital Tri-Payment for infrastructure requirements. At the end of 2025/26 there is forecast to be a £210k Tri-Payment reserve that will be carried forward into 2026/27. All Tri-Payment capital spend will be appropriated by the Architecture Board for infrastructure replacement and rectification needs.

As in previous years, any remaining 2025/26 approved capital budget not spent in the approved year is proposed to be carried forward into 2026/27. Earmarks will only be drawn down should projects be approved via Architecture Board and are to enable the councils' internal budgetary purposes.

	Total	Funded by EDDC	Funded by ECC	Funded by TDC
Percentage split as per the original business plan		36.7%	35.9%	27.4%
<b>Project</b>				
Housing AI	£10,000	£10,000	£0	£0
Telephony phase 2	£100,000	£36,692	£35,936	£27,372
Purview	£10,000	£3,669	£3,594	£2,737
Leisure digital Enhancements	£20,000	£0	£0	£20,000
Plans and documents solution	£50,000	£0	£0	£50,000
Neighbourhood requests	£50,000	£0	£0	£50,000
Document redaction solution	£30,000	£0	£0	£30,000
Corporate asset management system	£150,000	£0	£150,000	£0
Azure virtual desktop	£70,000	£25,684	£25,155	£19,161
Miscellaneous System Upgrades	£100,000	£36,692	£35,936	£27,372
EDDC Street Scene replacement	£200,000	£200,000	£0	£0
Civic Centre Closure	£400,000	£0	£400,000	£0
Comino D360 upgrade - Cloud Migration	£140,000	£80,184	£0	£59,816
XLPrint - Cloud Migration	£35,000	£12,842	£12,578	£9,580
IKEN Cloud Migration	£80,000	£29,354	£28,749	£21,897
SDWAN (Discovery)	£75,000	£27,519	£26,952	£20,529
Review use of Uniform	£20,000	£0	£0	£20,000
ITrent improvements	£20,000	£0	£0	£20,000
AI implementation plan	£50,000	£18,346	£17,968	£13,686
Digitalisation of paper records	£53,000	£0	£53,000	£0
Exeter tickets website	£12,500	£0	£12,500	£0
One Housing migration	£100,000	£0	£100,000	£0
Parks and Green Spaces	£20,000	£0	£20,000	£0
Exeter RIT	£120,000	£0	£120,000	£0
Waste Management	£30,000	£0	£30,000	£0
Telephony routing	£10,000	£3,669	£3,594	£2,737
Staff cost capitalisation	£300,000	£110,076	£107,808	£82,116
<b>Total capital Funding</b>	<b>£2,255,500</b>	<b>£594,727</b>	<b>£1,183,770</b>	<b>£477,003</b>

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