

STRATA JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 15 June 2017

Present:-

Councillors Dewhirst, Lyons, Nicholas, Prowse and Jung

Also Present

Strata IT Director, Programme and Resource Manager, Security and Compliance Manager, Business Systems Manager, Document Processing Manager, Chief Finance Officer, Infrastructure and Support Manager, Strata Lead for Human Resources, Strata Board Director and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB)

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ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councillor Lyons of Exeter City Council was elected as Chair for the next 12 months.

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APOLOGIES

These were received from Councillors Dent, Haines and Leadbetter and the Teignbridge Strata Director.

Councillor Nicholas was substituting for Councillor Dent.

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MINUTES

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

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of pecuniary interest were made.

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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

None.

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PAST CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chair presented the report of the past Chair and it was noted that it had been agreed with the Strata IT Director that updates would be provided on progress in a format that is readily comprehensible for laypeople.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

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STRATA IT DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Strata IT Director presented his comprehensive report providing an update on the function of the Strata organisation, the aim being to provide background to the core areas of specialisation within Strata and identifying key activities, successes

and areas for improvement. He detailed a SWOT analysis developed in conjunction with the Strata Board and Strata staff and highlighted the following key areas:-

Improved communication

A number of activities had been undertaken both internally within Strata and externally with the three authorities including their respective management teams, major suppliers and Exeter College and he tabled the first edition of the Strata Newsletter.

The HR Lead for Strata emphasised the value of the new approach to communication and welcomed the newsletter. Members asked that the newsletter be distributed wider including all Councillors of the three authorities.

Supplier Management

Suppliers were being categorised as either key, strategic or business and there was focus on VMWare (Global Desktop), VMB, Virgin Media Business (performance), Nexus (Global Communications), Midlands HR (HR and Payroll) and Redcentric (credits).

Project and Business Change Request -Workload

A review and analysis of workload had shown a lack of progress in some areas including Business Change Requests and problem management and work was continuing in this area. Work over the last two years had been mapped against available staff time identifying issues relating to the management of workload and associated work related stress.

Members noted that the introduction of the Global Desktop project had been a significant contributory factor. Although introduced as a one year project, it had become apparent that a two year implementation period would have been more realistic. A software problem had also proved a major stumbling block. Referring to this and the new data centre as the two major initial projects, the Teignbridge Members were particularly concerned regarding the slowness of the global desktop widely reported at their Council and reference was made to Excel spreadsheets - Excel and other issues were common across the three councils with outlook crashes being a recent phenomena. Members noted that the newly implemented Global Desktop Improvement Programme would seek to progress the project and all migrated users had been surveyed, issues had been categorised and a programme of work underway to address the problems.

Security – Cyber threats

Following significant global cyber-attacks in May that had affected, amongst others, the NHS (and with reports of attacks to BA and University College London on this day), Strata had put in place precautions which had protected the three authorities and extra vigilance was being applied. An East Devon Councillor asked how, given the global communications project involved the incorporation of the telephony service into the Global Desktop, could breakdowns be reported by telephone. It was explained that, although telephony was part of the same system, there was inherent resilience in the overall system which prevented total breakdown as a result of a cyber-attack.

Individual managers presented their respective areas as set out below:-

Compliance and Security – Robin Barlow

The Compliance and Security Manager enlarged on the recent cyber-attacks explaining that hackers were constantly probing systems for weaknesses with up to a million probes a day common and with 20,000 attacks since March. A table detailed the source of attacks by nation. Extra vigilance was therefore vital.

The Compliance and Security team were analysing the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations which would need to be complied with by May 2018. Strata had agreed a new Public Services Network contract and delivered a saving of £20,000 over a two year term.

The Public Services Network Code of Connection remediation works continued with a number of servers fixed.

Infrastructure Projects - Adrian Smith

The Infrastructure and Support Manager provided further detail on the Global Desktop implementation, the 15 staff remaining to be incorporated being on long term sick. A significant cause of the delay in the deployment of the Global Desktop project was down to software bugs within the VMWare product

Strata were currently undertaking a review of the Global Desktop environment (Global Desktop Improvement Programme) and looking at a number of issues that had been reported. The most pressing current problem with the Global Desktop was outlook crashing, other issues including wrong printer settings, blank screens, slow login and specific applications slowness including Excel. He assured Members that the problems encountered were being addressed.

The service desk was performing well in supporting both business as usual activities and the Global Desktop roll out. There was a high end user satisfaction.

As a result of the introduction of an external organisation at Teignbridge refurbishment including IT systems was progressing rapidly and it was anticipated that Global Communication installation at Exmouth, as part of the overall relocation of the Council offices, would commence in Exmouth in late August, Virgin Business Media having completed the survey for the fibre links with confirmed delivery dates awaited. A review would be undertaken of Oakwood House in Marsh Barton, Exeter, the location of the backup data centre, with options including:-

- upgrade of current site;
- re-location to another site; or
- move to a cloud system

Document Centres - Martin Millmow

The Document Centre Manager reported that new printing devices would be rolled out, Ricoh having been the successful of seven tenderers and with the existing 80 printers to be reduced to 53 new devices equipped to cope with recent system upgrades. The Strata web design team had worked on a wide range of communication materials to support the second phase of the new East Devon District Council Waste and Re-cycling scheme.

Programme and Resources – Steve Gammon

The Programme and Resources Manager detailed the 16 systems convergence projects being undertaken as requested by Council service managers and as agreed

by the partner Councils and in the annual Strata Business Plan.

He referred to the increase in the cost of the Car Park system which, nevertheless, had been put back by the delay in the system's implementation and to the increase in cost (£13,000) of a new HR and Payroll system at Teignbridge to bring it in line with legislative changes.

He provided a detailed explanation of the new street naming and numbering system which Strata was implementing for the three councils and explained how this would co-ordinate with common systems within the authorities. For the future there was scope to link major property systems such as planning, housing, council tax, environmental health and licensing to the national Unique Property Reference Number.

Business Systems – Dave Sercombe

The Business Systems Manager reported that Strata were continuing to deliver the 70 plus system implementation and business case projects currently in progress, such a high demand placing pressure on business change requests. Some of the main projects were HR and Payroll and Garden Waste Renewals for Teignbridge, Firmstep digital transformation and UNIFORM Planning and Building Control implementation for Exeter, Document Management and Waste and Recycling rollouts for East Devon and Car Parks for East Devon and Teignbridge but not Exeter who were working with Devon County Council. The Strata IT Director would be examining governance including relationships with the respective Council senior management teams.

He provided an update on staff changes.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the report, the Chair thanking the IT Director for a comprehensive update.

STRATA BUDGET MONITORING OUT-TURN REPORT 2016/17

The Director responsible for Finance reported that Strata had been set a savings target of £254,052 in the original business case. Following approval to move staff to new Strata terms and conditions, a revenue saving of only £26,964 had been projected at the start of the financial year 2016/17. However, the strata budget had delivered £310,950 of revenue savings for 2016/17 including employee savings of £51,695 resulting from lower than planned redundancies and vacancies and £318,356 from income, notably Central Government funds, especially for Revenue and Benefits systems.

The Company had repaid £100,000 to the Councils and the Board had identified the following options for the Strata Joint Executive Committee:-

- return the additional £200,000 to the Councils; or
- following the IT Director's review, two areas of the business had been identified which would benefit from additional resource in order to strengthen the service provided to Councils and to generate further savings. The Board had recommended the appointment of two Project Managers and one Supplier Engagement Manager on fixed term contracts for two years. The cost was estimated at £132,000 a year, with the balance of funding coming from anticipated additional savings generated by the Supplier Engagement Manager.

The two Project Manager posts would support the Business Analyst teams in delivering IT projects. This would enable the Business Analysts to focus on delivery and allow for better engagement with the client services. It would also alleviate many of the problems identified in the IT Director's report in respect of the strain and excessive workload that the team was currently facing.

The Supplier Engagement Manager post would work more closely with suppliers to drive greater efficiency in contract negotiation, again removing another element of work from the team. By having dedicated experts in project management and supplier engagement, the Company would be better placed to use the skills of its team to match the requirements of the customers.

Members, in debating the proposed option, noted that the importance of training and upskilling was acknowledged and that there were growing links with Exeter College.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the report and supported the second of the above options.

32

STRATA TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2017/18

The HR Lead for Strata presented the report setting out the Training and Development Plan 2017-2018 which was broken down into the following elements:-

- mandatory training for everyone
- mandatory training for managers
- other training
- health and safety training

Training included e-learning, face to face and a health and safety hub as well as NVQ's.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted and supported the report.

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STRATA PERFORMANCE EXCELLENCE REVIEW FORM

The HR Lead for Strata presented the report setting out the performance excellence reviews framework.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted and supported the report.

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STRATA - EMPLOYEE REFERRAL SCHEME POLICY

The HR Lead for Strata presented the report setting out the referral policy. It had been introduced to incentivise staff to use their personal and professional networks to recommend Strata as a place to work. Where a person was referred to Strata and, had gone through the recruitment process, offered employment by Strata which they accept, the staff member introducing them would receive a £500 net payment.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted and supported the report.

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.

UPDATE ON DISCUSSIONS WITH 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.

Whilst stating verbally that the system had contained a number of genuine bugs and working with Strata to deliver fixes and then benefitting from upgrades to the system, the company had not legally acknowledged guilt. Unusually for a software supplier of the size of VMWare, they had made a written gesture of goodwill and had offered to extend the five year contract by 12 months and to offer professional support to assist with the upgrade.

The financial details of this offer were detailed, Members noting that this was less than half of the estimated cost to the three Councils. The company had been made aware by the Board that both this Committee and the Strata Joint Executive committee would need to consider their offer.

Members discussed the offer and the way forward proposed by the Strata Board.

Members would be kept updated on progress.

TEIGNBRIDGE DIGITAL PLATFORM

The Strata IT Director presented the report updating the Committee on changes to the timescales of the Digital Platform project.

Although it had been the intention to implement a Digital Platform for either East Devon or Teignbridge in March 2018, the former had commenced the refurbishment of Forde House to accommodate an external organisation and wished to commence digital convergence by September, the aim being to streamline service delivery to customers by taking a “digital first” approach and making the customer the heart of the process. There were no resource or cost implications for Strata.

Members supported bringing forward this project noting that a detailed business case, whilst nearing completion, was not yet ready

The existing Lagan system at East Devon would continue.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the report and supported the order of implementation and proposed change to timescales for the Digital Platform project.

VIRGIN MEDIA BUSINESS

The Strata IT Director reported that significant problems had been encountered with the performance of the above supplier, the implementation of a major system taking over 250 working days rather than the originally proposed lead time of 25 working days. It had been necessary to tightly manage the project with ongoing discussions at a senior level with the company.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the position.

STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING POLICY

The Strata Manager Programmes and Resources presented the report proposing a common Street Name and Numbering policy for adoption by Exeter City Council, Teignbridge District Council and East Devon District Council enabling a consistent and resilient administration of the function by Strata and reducing the risk of challenge and complaint.

It was proposed that East Devon District Council and Teignbridge District Council retain, and Exeter City Council adopt, the Town Improvement Clauses Act 1847 as a single and consistent basis for providing the Street Naming and Numbering function administered on behalf of the Councils by Strata.

Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the report and supported the adoption of a common Street Name and Numbering policy and a revised discretionary charge of £147 with effect from 1 April 2017.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.20 pm)

Chair

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