



Solutions for
government

Strata Report

Support of Councillor IT

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Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this discussion document is to present a number of options to the Strata Board, the Joint Scrutiny Committee and the Joint Executive Committee to enable the development of a support function for Councillor IT with Strata.

Background to the Discussion Document

There is currently no formal agreement for the support of Councillor IT equipment at either East Devon District Council or Teignbridge District Council. Councillors provide their own IT out of their allocated budget and the authorities provide access to Office 365 to enable emails to be sent and received.

Hence, Strata only have responsibility for supporting the O365 environment at these two councils and not for the support of the individual IT equipment (desktops, laptops, printers) used by each Councillor.

No IT equipment is provided by either East Devon District Council or Teignbridge District Council to Councillors to enable them to perform their function.

Hence, there is a very mixed and privately owned IT environment used by the Councillors, and currently there is now support offered by Strata on this equipment.

At Exeter City Council, the position is very different as the authority provide Councillors with devices to enable them to access both email and various IT systems. As these devices are authority owned, they are supported by Strata, and Councillors regularly contact Strata to ask for support. The devices are built and provisioned by Strata and Microsoft Outlook is provided as the email platform.

Historically at Teignbridge District Council, there was a resource within Democratic Services who supported the Councillor IT environment, however, when Strata was formed it was decided that the service was no longer required and the member of staff left the organisation. Hence, over the last three years, no direct support for IT equipment at Teignbridge has been offered, however, Councillors have visited the Strata Service Desk to ask for advice and guidance on IT issues or to have equipment looked at. This is believed to be outside the scope of the Strata service, but has been performed by Service Desk staff on a reasonable efforts basis.

At East Devon District Council, Councillors have made their own support arrangements, and no formal service appears to have ever been offered, however, at times, Councillors have dropped into the Strata Service Desk to seek assistance with privately owned IT hardware related issues. When possible, the Strata Service Desk staff have been able to offer assistance.

Currently, Strata have received requests from both Councillors at East Devon and Teignbridge for support of their personal hardware and hence it is believed that there is now a requirement for a basic level service to be made available to allow for Councillors to contact the Strata Service Desk to request assistance.

The challenges that any service could face would include:

- A complete mix of equipment that Councillors have purchased and used – this will include multiple device types and ageing equipment
- Little knowledge as to how the equipment has been configured and is being used
- Equipment may not be transportable and tied to a Councillor's location
- Data may not have been being backed up and any failure may result in Strata not being able to restore data if it hasn't been being backed up and any backup tested on a regular basis.
- Strata is not resourced up to deal with Councillors IT, and any request for support could impact on Strata's ability to support the authorities IT environment
- Potentially an initial avalanche of pent up demand of minor issues, which could overload and waste resources
- The IT equipment may contain sensitive data, which Strata would have to ensure there were appropriate safeguards in place to protect both the Councillor and Strata.

There is no asset register of the equipment that Councillors use, so Strata could not be expected to provide anything other than a very basic level of support.

In addition, Councillors have made their own arrangements for network connectivity and hence own the relationship and contract with the Broadband service provider.

In summary, there is certainly an identified need for a basic level of Councillor IT support service to be provided by Strata, but this would be limited in scope and only provided on a reasonable efforts basis. In order for any service to be successful and in order that it would not impact on the business as usual operation the service would need to be scoped and caveated in order that Strata are not left exposed or having to commit time and effort in supporting a Councillors privately owned IT equipment.

Support Options

Strata are proposing three options for the support of the Councillors privately owned IT equipment.

Option 1 – Basic Service provided by Strata at each Head Office location – this would be paid for by each authority and included in their annual Strata service charge. This would be charged at a rate of £250 per Councillor per annum. Hence for a Council of 50 councillors, the charge would be **£12,500** per annum.

Option 2 – Basic Service provided by Strata at each Head Office location – this would be paid for by each Councillor on an annual basis (they can opt in or opt out on an annual basis) and will be charged at a rate of **£250** per councillor per annum. The monies will be deducted from the Councillor's expenses payments.

Option 3 – A voucher scheme. This scheme would enable an authority to buy a number of vouchers which could then be traded for Strata Service Desk support time. The initial minimum number of vouchers per authority would be 20, and each voucher would be worth an hour of Strata level 1 or level 2 time. A pack of 20 vouchers would be charged at a rate of £1000, which is equivalent to **£50 per hour**. The voucher scheme would be administered by Democratic Services department of each authority.

The scope of the service (for all options) would be as follows:

- All calls for support need to be logged via the Strata Service Desk one number. Each request for support will be given a priority and an incident reference number.
- This is primarily a service to get a Councillor able to access the Office 365 system rather than a regular maintenance service.
- The call for support would then be passed to a Strata Service Desk Analyst for initial diagnosis, and fault finding. This will be limited to a one hour period of diagnostic work.
- The Service Desk Analyst will then provide an update to the Councillor as to whether the problem has been fixed, is fixable but will require additional diagnostic time or cannot be fixed by Strata.

Caveats

- Strata will only deal with calls which have been logged, impromptu visits will not be accepted

- Strata staff will only deal with issues where the equipment can be brought into a Strata office, Strata will not make home visits.
- Strata will not reload a Councillors backup, or be responsible in any way for the data or applications on a councillors privately owned IT
- Unless causing the primary issue, Strata will not undertake the routine update of the equipment with recent patches but may comment on these
- Where the fault is deemed to be a hardware component failure, then Strata will identify the issue but will be unable to arrange the provision of a replacement;
- The resolution of faults caused by the underlying operating system not being licenced will not be undertaken;
- Strata will not be responsible for the provision or installation of any consumables in printers
- Strata will not offer any guarantee of a fix, all calls will be handled on a reasonable efforts basis
- At times of high demand for Strata Service Desk services, the demands of the three authorities will take priority over the service offered to the Councillors.

If the Voucher scheme is the selected option, a Voucher can be exchanged for one hour of individual Councillor training. Unused Vouchers will expire after 12 months and cannot be carried forward into the next financial year.

Option 4 – Council provided hardware (tablet device)

As an alternative to the above options, each authority could look to provide the IT hardware to enable a councillor to perform their role. The hardware would comprise of an iPad Pro (A4 size tablet) or iPad Air (normal size tablet), this is a similar device provided to the councillors by Exeter City Council. The devices would be loaded with the relevant Strata supported councillor required applications, i.e. email. Support on the devices would be provided by the Strata service desk at an additional cost.

The estimated cost of providing the iPad device + support in the first year would be circa £800 per councillor (depending on the device selected). In subsequent years there would be an annual support cost of £150 per device.

This service does not cover the cost of printing hardware or a home Broadband Service.

Caveats:

- Strata will only deal with calls which have been logged, impromptu visits will not be accepted
- Strata staff will only deal with issues where the equipment can be brought into a Strata office, Strata will not make home visits.
- Strata will not reload a Councillors backup, or be responsible in any way for the data or applications on a councillors privately owned IT

Conclusions

In submitting these options, Strata hope to deliver a support service to Councillors which, whilst offering no guarantee of a fix, will allow Councillors to request assistance for their privately owned IT equipment.

It is important that Councillors understand and acknowledge the limitations of the proposed service, but we hope that it will provide a level of support commensurate with the requirements of each Councillors.

Should EDDC or TDC wish to explore the provision of hardware to each councillor, Strata suggest a more detailed discussion is entered into to identify the type of tablet device required and to firm up on the pricing.
