



devon **audit** partnership

Internal Audit Report

Strata ICT Audit Summary
2019/20

Strata Services Solutions - ICT
Partnership organisation of
Exeter, East Devon and
Teignbridge

July 2020

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Auditing for achievement

1 Introduction

Strata Service Solutions has three founding partners; East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council (The Partners). The creation of Strata in 2014 was an innovative approach that has positioned the Partners well as many Council’s around the country increasingly look to enter into similar partnership arrangements.

The approach has been proven to exceed expectations, including the financial benefit delivered to the Partners. With the common infrastructure platform and desktop in place, the new Strata Business Plan confirms the desire to continually improve and fulfil the critical role of enabling technology driven transformational change.

The SOCITM 2019 Policy Briefing on Technology related trends for the public sector in 2019, SOCITM identify ‘Partnering and Sharing Locally’ as a key trend for Councils who ‘need to adopt and share in order to remain solvent’. Nationally, the concept of the Unitary Authority is likely to become more prevalent as local government finances continue to be stretched.

“Complex business priorities for the public sector will determine IT priorities in 2019 – and we have mostly gone beyond a narrow view of IT as a cost centre, to become a strategic enabler. That is what digital transformation’ is all about...”

SOCITM Policy Briefing 2019

2 Audit Opinions

This section summarises our assurance opinions for the overall delivery of IT service by Strata as well as the two individual audit review areas covered during 2019/20. Opinions regarding assurance for the individual control areas for Cyber Security are included as part of the Cyber Security report.

Overall Conclusions (including Strategy & IT Operations)	
Effective service delivery occurs when an IT organization performs an IT service (business process, application, IT skills, hardware, software, or infrastructure service) that the customer values and desires and that the customer cannot or does not want to perform itself.	Good Standard 
Project Management & Solution Delivery Processes	
Service Design (Project Fulfilment) - Processes to transform the strategic requirements of Strata (and its clients) into effective business solutions are effective.	Good Standard 
Cyber Security	
Cyber (Security) can be considered to be a body of technologies, processes and practices designed to protect networks, computers, programs and data from attack, damage or unauthorised access.	Good Standard 

3 Executive Summary

Previous reports have highlighted the strengths of both the Strata's strategic concept and direction and, in the day to day delivery of the full range of IT services to the Partners. Work undertaken this year further confirmed that the direction of travel remains upwards and that the appetite to continually improve remains as strong as ever.

The importance for organisations to have effective and reliable IT services has never been more apparent as during the current Coronavirus crisis and the early days in particular. This not only serves as testament to the quality of service, but also the quality and dedication of Strata's staff.

The crisis has also highlighted the benefits of harnessing and embracing new technologies to enhance operations and potentially replace altogether some methods of working. The new Project Management process has now been adopted by Strata and the Partners will help with the effective delivery of any transformational changes identified by the Partners.

The potential for cautious steps towards a moderate degree of commercialisation is now formally recognised and the independent report commissioned by Strata provides a valuable appraisal. Although the ongoing and short term impacts of Coronavirus will delay any pilot exercise, opportunities remain.

Strata's new Business Plan has all but formally adopted by the Partners and this provides excellent and measurable detail as to how it will continually improve the services it offers the Partners and act as an effective enabler for transformational change. DAP consider the Business Plan to be of a high standard and this, along with the high standard operational reporting and metrics, provides the measures from which continual service improvement can be delivered.

Strata continue to perform strongly during 2019/20 and again exceeded the financial benefit targets set by the Partners. The implementation of the new IT Service Management ITSM solution (Alemba vFire) will provide further opportunities to improve value for money. Work will be performed within 2020/21 to assess both the effectiveness and opportunities of the new solution, including the all-important capture of customer feedback.

Like Project Management, Cyber Security is discussed in detail within the individual report document. However, the analysis of cyber controls provides some further assurance that certain key IT operations are being performed to a satisfactory standard and in accord with best practice. Work continues to improve the overall security environment as cyber threats continue to increase and evolve. DAP will continue to review cyber controls using the Government advocated Cyber Essentials scheme using the original technical approach that prescribes controls in detail.

"The demands on Strata have been immense". Your support for the significant ICT and telephony challenges you have faced, and overcome, has enabled the majority of our workforce to work from home."

*Karime Hassan
Chief Executive & Growth
Director, Exeter City
Council*

4 Issues for the Annual Governance Statement

The evidence obtained in internal audit reviews can identify issues in respect of risk management, systems and controls that may be relevant to the Annual Governance Statement.

There are no issues arising that require reporting within the AGS or UoR

5 Inherent Limitations

The opinions and recommendations contained within this report are based on our examination of restricted samples of transactions / records and our discussions with officers responsible for the processes reviewed.

6 Acknowledgements

We would like to express our thanks and appreciation to all those who provided support and assistance during the course of this audit.

Robert Hutchins
Head of Partnership

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