

# **STRATA - JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, 12 JULY 2021**

Present:

Councillors Twiss, Atkinson, Clarence and Nuttall

Members Attendance:

Councillors

Apologies:

Councillors King, Hookway, Denning, Sparkes and J Petherick

Officers in Attendance:

Laurence Whitlock, Strata IT Director

Paul Nicholls, Company Director for STRATA

Simon Davey, Strata Board Director

Robin Barlow, Head of Security & Compliance

Peter Johns, Head of IT Solutions Delivery

Martin Millmow, Head of Document Centres

Adrian Smith, Head of Infrastructure & Support

Trish Corns, Democratic Services Officer

Christopher Morgan, Trainee Democratic Services Officer

## **9. ELECTION OF CHAIR 2021/2022**

In accordance with the existing annual rotation for the position of Chair, Councillor Nuttall proposed that Councillor Clarence representing Teignbridge District Council be elected Chair for the 2021/22 Municipal Year. This was seconded by Councillor Twiss and

RESOLVED

Councillor Clarence be elected Chair for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

## **10. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 January were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, with the amendment of *Chair* being added to the sign off at the end of the minutes.

## **11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

## **12. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER PROCEDURAL RULES**

None.

**13. QUESTION FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCILS UNDER PROCEDURE RULES**

None.

**14. STRATA PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Strata IT Director referred to the report circulated with the agenda which updated Members on the performance of Strata since January 2021.

Whilst dealing with the increased demand in the service due to Covid and agile working and the recent return to the Council Chambers for meetings, success had included: the migration to Windows 10 and work commencing on optimising Global Desktop. Improvements would include a reduction in screen pixilation for Zoom and Teams, password synchronization, which will enable Councillors to manage their own passwords; commencement of the rollout of O365; greater levels of collaboration and document management; near completion of the replacement of Windows 2008 servers enabling Strata to gain PSN accreditation for a further 12 month period; the continued support for officers working from either the office or remotely as the lifting of Covid restrictions could see more staff working increased days at the offices; responding to new cyber challenges; the roll out of cyber awareness training to all staff; prioritising work demand for the three authorities to get back on track following prioritisation of Covid priorities; IT training services for both staff and Councillors which have been successful and widely used; support for hybrid Councillor meetings for all authorities; the Business Plan had been signed off by all three authorities; and the company had made savings of £1.051,425 for 2020/21 which was repaid to the Councils at the start of the financial year.

It was noted that there was minimal Strata staff sickness (at an average of 1.3 days per FTE) over a 12 month period which was possibly as a result of staff working remotely and not in close contact with colleagues. 500 hours of flexitime had been lost by Strata staff over the last six months which equates to free time to the three authorities.

It was noted that remote working had resulted in a significant decrease in printing across the three authorities, and a resulting decrease in costs which has a positive impact on the Climate Change agenda. However the increasing use of IT and remote working could have a negative impact on the Carbon footprint of the authorities. . Strata are currently working with Exeter University to finalise a Carbon Impact report covering the last three years.

RECOMMENDED - The report be noted.

**15. STRATA FINANCE REPORT, BUDGET MONITORING AT MAY 2021**

The East Devon District Council Strata Director presented the agenda report which detailed the financial position of the 2021/22 budget as at May 2021.

The Company had been given a total of £6.6 million to run the IT Services in 2021/22 along with funding for various capital projects. The Company also maintained an account for additional purchases throughout the year, which is invoiced to each Council based on actual purchases made.

Although savings of £310,000 were delivered, Strata asked for £210,000 to be used for specific service improvements. This was agreed by the three Councils and Strata reduced the payments for all Councils by £500,000 at the start of the year. In response to the challenges the Councils faced as a result of the restrictions imposed in response to Covid-19 Strata identified an additional £340,000 of one off savings on top of the £696,167. The outturn position was broadly in line with that projection.

RECOMMENDED - The report be noted.

**16. STRATA FINANCE REPORT BUDGET MONITORING OUTTURN 2020/21**

Consideration was given to the agenda report which advised on the financial position of Strata at the end of 2020-21 including the Statement of Accounts at Appendix B. These Statutory Accounts evidenced the true financial position of the Company and were affected by items not included in the management accounts such as the pension fund deficit and depreciation. The Accounts were approved by the Board on 28 May 2021.

The company made savings of £1,051,425 through efficiencies and cost saving initiatives, this did not however impact on the overall quality of the Strata service provision.

RECOMMENDED - The report be noted.

**17. EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL AND EXETER CITY COUNCIL IT SURVEY FEEDBACK**

Consideration was given to the agenda report which detailed the results of a Councillor survey undertaken during late March and early April 2021. Strata and the Democratic Services Teams from East Devon District Council and Exeter City Council undertook the survey of Councillors in relation to the current and future IT requirements. The outcomes of the survey would act to inform and guide a potential redesign of the IT solution that it delivered to Councillors to enable them to perform their important role in supporting the citizens of Devon.

The report present the findings of the survey which would enable a discussion to be entered into between Strata, the authorities and representative Councillors. It was hoped that 60% of Councillors would complete the survey and this was achieved.

The conclusions of the survey were:

1) There is no single solution that will address all of the identified needs of the Councillors who responded.

- 2) That having a single device/screen for Virtual Council meetings is very challenging.
- 3) That devices need to be refreshed (replaced after a period of time) to ensure they do not go end of life, and budgets need to be set by the Councils to support this.
- 4) EDDC and ECC are not maximising or realising the benefits of ModernGov and a refresher exercise is required for Councillors.
- 5) Security restrictions need reviewing to improve usability, especially around calendar appointments, email attachments and application installs.

#### RECOMMENDED

The report be noted and the finding be discussed with the Client Leads and Democratic Service Leads of the two authorities being East Devon District and Exeter City Councils, to identify potential solutions to the requirements.

The conclusions of the discussions be presented to the Councillor representatives for consideration.

#### **18. COUNCILLOR IT USER GROUP DISCUSSION DOCUMENT**

The Committee considered the agenda report which proposed the setting up of a Councillor IT User Group be setup to enable focussed discussions to be held into ongoing Councillor IT provision. The aim is to identify areas where improvements could be made, to identify Councillor IT training needs and to reflect on trends in the IT industry which may be relevant to the work of Local Government.

The proposed Terms of Reference and the attendee compilation was set out at report pages 4 and 6 respectively.

#### RECOMMENDED

The proposed Terms of Reference and the attendee compilation as set out in the agenda report be approved with the addition of the following:

1. The Group meet every 3 months in the first year.
2. A representative from all three Councils be present at all meetings, and the representatives be authorised to appoint a substitute if unable to attend.

CLLR C CLARANCE  
Chairman