

# **STRATA - JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, 11 JANUARY 2021**

Present:

Councillors Atkinson (Chair), King, Twiss, Hookway, Sparkes, Oliver, Clarence and Nuttall

Members Attendance:

Councillors Wrigley, Dewhurst and Pearson

Apologies:

Councillor Orme

Officers in Attendance:

Laurence Whitlock, Strata IT Director

Paul Nicholls, Strata Board Director

Simon Davey, Strata Board Director

David Hodgson, Strata Finance Director

Trish Corns, Democratic Services Officer

Christopher Morgan, Trainee Democratic Services Officer

Robin Barlow, Head of Security & Compliance

Martin Millmow, Head of Document Centres

David Sercombe, Head of Business Systems & Business Intelligence

Adrian Smith, Head of Infrastructure & Support

## **1. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2020 were approved as a correct record and authorised to be signed at the earliest convenience.

In regard to the last sentence of Minute 16, it was noted the matter was included in the *Strata Business Plan 2020/21 and Beyond*, agendas item 9.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

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

None.

## **4. IT DIRECTOR'S AND MANAGER'S REPORT AUGUST TO DECEMBER 2020**

The Strata IT Director referred to the report circulated with the agenda. Resources had continued to focus on ensuring a stable IT environment during the current

Covid situation for the delivery of the service, and support to officers and Members in an exemplary manner. Demand on the service had increased significantly since Covid and resources had focused on support for agile working.

Successes included: assisting the Council produce online forms through the Firmstep platform for the Business Support Grants, enabling expedient process and payment to those in need, training sessions for staff and Members; the continued reduction of printing volumes; Strata service savings in excess of £1m to be refunded to all three authorities, and Strata staffs' annual conference being held remotely with the contribution of staffs' own money to the Alzheimer's society, Honiton Food Bank, and Children's Hospice South West charities.

In addition project work, of which there were currently 49, included the *Strata Business Plan 20/21 and Beyond* progression; Windows 10 migration, agile working, stability of Global Desktop and Global Comms platforms, renewal of both the Microsoft and VMWare licence agreements, and partnership work with Exeter University on climate change. This would assess Strata's environment so that Strata could support the three authorities in meeting their Climate Change aspirations.

Challenges included the increased demand on the service as a result of Covid, and consequently not progressing planned projects as well as expected.

RESOLVED

The report be received and noted.

## **5. FINANCE DIRECTOR'S REPORT NOVEMBER 2020**

The committee referred to the Strata Budget Monitoring report which detailed the financial position as at 30 November 2020.

The Company has been given a total of £6.60 million to run the IT Services in 2020/21 along with funding for various capital projects. The Company also maintained an account for additional purchases throughout the year, which was invoiced to each Council based on actual purchases made.

Key variations from the revenue and capital budgets were detailed which resulted in savings of £500,000 and a further £320,000 and £282,000 identified to assist in the current Covid situation and the significant strain for all three authorities

This had been achieved with the addition of two service desk posts to address the increased demand on the service.

RESOLVED

The report be received and noted

## **6. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 - EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RECOMMENDED** 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 item on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

## **7. QUESTION FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCILS UNDER PROCEDURE RULES**

Councillor Clarence asked a question which was circulated to the Committee with the answer. The question and answer which is appended was noted.

The Chair concluded that the question submitted by Councillor Clarence had provided a worthwhile scrutiny exercise into Strata's value for money efficiency and effectiveness.

*At this juncture councillors Oliver and Twiss left the meeting.*

## **8. STRATA BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21 AND BEYOND**

The IT Director referred to the draft Business Plan as circulated with the agenda, and the Committee considered the recommendations at page 3 of the Plan.

The draft Plan recognised the challenging time since Covid, both for Strata and the three authorities in adapting to the change. The authorities needed Strata to support them in an 'agile' way, the community needed to be able to access council services on line, businesses unable to operate needed access to funds, democracy needed to be carried out in a virtual world and managers needed to ensure that authority services could continue to operate using widely dispersed resources.

Strata reacted confidently to the challenge proving that it could react and deal successfully to change, and has fared better than a large number of private and public organisations. Strata had and was continuing to prove the service was stronger, more adaptable, and more flexible. Along with this the resulting realisation that the authorities were probably more dependent on IT and the value it brings than previously.

The draft Plan set out the 'vision and plan' for the next 12 months, from 1 April 2021, in order to better support the needs of the three authorities. It was developed to deliver a more 'customer focussed' approach to Strata's work, yet still delivering against the original objectives of reduced risk, reduced cost and the creation of an environment to support change.

### **RECOMMENDED**

The recommendations set out at page 3 of the *Strata Business Plan 2020/21 and Beyond* be referred to Joint Strata Executive for approval, with the exception of the two recommendations relating to governance structure. It is recommended that these need further debate by the Joint Strata Executive and the Joint Scrutiny Committee and any changes should be delayed until a more detailed review is undertaken.

Strata - Joint Scrutiny Committee (11.1.2021)

The meeting started at 1600hrs and finished at 1845hrs

CLLR Y ATKINSON  
Chairman