

**Teignbridge District Council  
Strata Joint Scrutiny Committee  
September 6<sup>th</sup> 2022  
Part 1**

**Strata Performance Report**

**Purpose of Report**

To inform the committee of the performance, delivery and state of Strata Solutions Ltd over the period from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2022.

**Recommendation(s)**

The Committee is asked to note and accept the report on the current state of Strata and its performance.

**Report Author**

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## **Appendix A**

### **1. Introduction**

This is the latest performance report from Strata Solutions which provides Business and IT services to the three Councils. There are some key things to note as Strata matures as an organisation such as the level of resource utilisation and the need for Strata to change its operating model and adopt improved processes, governance and move to an Agile delivery model. These things need to happen if Strata is to stay on top of the ever-increasing demand for delivering projects which meet the financial needs and objectives of its clients.

Strata also now has a different leader as the existing IT Director left in April. Mark Davies has taken over as Director of IT and Digital Transformation and has already started to make significant changes to the operation of the company.

### **2. Overall Performance**

Strata has performed well over the last 12 months and has a great staff culture and level of retention. There have been a few more staff moving on but still much less than one would expect for a similar sized team.

There have been several reviews, audits and reports into Strata such as a report produced by the external consultants Agilisys and the annual report by Devon Audit Partnership.

The Agilisys report had a mixed reaction with the clients as it highlighted things which Strata was not initially keen to hear but were things the clients had said previously. However, in time Strata has found ways to address these issues and is making progress on them. These were issues around use of virtual desktop environment, moving systems to cloud and project delivery process, to name a few of the key things.

The clients have been kept up to date with changes within Strata and the future plans which they have welcomed and are willing to embrace new ways of working and improvements to delivery.

The Devon Audit Partnership audit of the ICT with a focus on security gave a fair and comforting assessment of Strata ICT services and gave a 'Reasonable Assurance' rating overall. Of course, improvements can always be made and especially with security as it is an ever evolving landscape and this will be an ongoing plan for improvement.

### **3. Technology**

The pace of technology never slows and therefore it is incumbent on an organisation to stay on top of a constant improvement program of technology change.

Strata had been tasked over the previous years to make savings one of, if not the, key objective. As such some of the technology has languished in the past and whilst service has always been maintained it has left the technology behind the level it should be at. This is not just in the physical technology that needs or needed to be updated such as servers and storage systems. It is also about plans to migrate to cloud, where appropriate, and how better to deliver services already being delivered. This has meant that Strata has some outdated technology, some contracts for systems which are perhaps overdue for a refresh, upgrade or even re-procurement in some cases. The consequence of which means there have been some technology risk, the business (the client councils) cannot move in the direction they want or at the speed they would like.

Strata has now upgraded some key technology in the last few months, such as a new resilient storage system and new servers, however, there is still much to do. As such we are looking at engaging the services of a technology architect to review, plan and set a clear strategy for the technology solutions and the systems life-cycles. This will enable the teams in Strata to plan more efficiently and ensure we do not waste the precious staff resource time we have keeping old systems operating.

We need to do the same with the business applications too and not just the systems they operate on. Without modern integrated systems it makes the digital

move more complex and if, as many are, the clients wish to channel shift (get customers to self serve and use more cost effective means of communication) then we need to make the move to modernise applications and importantly consolidate across all clients where practically possible.

If each client operates only 50% the same then Strata has 200% to do (50% the same + 3 x 50% different), if each client operated 95% the same, Strata has only 115% to deliver. While over simplistic the sentiment holds true, the more we do together, the greater savings we all make the more Strata can deliver on future plans.

#### **4. People**

Over the past twelve months around five staff have departed Strata, some for their advancement and some due to internal pressures within Strata and the demands asked of it. This is to be expected however and we have already made in roads to changing the culture to ensure the staff retention remains high and employee enjoyment is excellent.

Strata had struggled to replace the Head of Infrastructure and this role had been filled on an interim basis by the Head of Security and Compliance who is holding both roles. This situation is about to change as we have recruited a permanent and exceptionally experienced individual to take the lead as Head of Infrastructure once their notice period at another public body has been worked.

Other vacancies in the Service Desk area have now also been filled. Strata recently attended the Exeter Jobs Fair to establish its presence in the available jobs market and to encourage applicants to apply for open positions and to build a list of potential applicants.

The jobs market is very challenging at present for employers as there are many more jobs in the market than people wanting to fill them. This has not impacted Strata to any significant degree as yet but may as incumbent staff are more able

to move for higher salaries and Strata would be less able to recruit due to lower public sector pay grading than that of similar in the private sector.

This should be identified as a risk to the Strata operation as it may become an issue in which case market supplements may be necessary on more roles than one might typically expect.

## **5. Projects**

Many projects have been delivered and are in the state of delivery over the period. Some of the key projects are listed here for the benefit of the committee and to ensure they are briefed on the more important aspects of Strata delivery.

1. Financial Management System replacement. This project is across all three clients and is intended to deliver a new system to manage finances and the income management systems that takes payments. The approach is to stage the deliver so that TDC go first in April 2023 and EDDC and ECC follow in subsequent years. The supplier of the systems and technology has been through the procurement exercise and the project is developing well. There have been some challenges at times to engage all clients to the same degree given they are going at different times.
2. M365 – Microsoft 365. This has developed over the last few months and TDC have migrated to use the majority of function within the M365 product. They have undergone training and are now working to get staff to fully embrace the new services available to them. EDDC and ECC are next with EDDC getting Teams and a full migration subsequently. ECC are going through their governance process to agree timescales. The key to success in rolling out M365 is that the staff adopt and utilise the technology to drive efficiencies. This is perhaps more challenging than having Strata roll out the technology.
3. SAN Upgrade – (SAN = Storage Area Network, which are intelligent high speed disk storage on the network and not attached to any one server.)

This project was a significant project undertaken by the infrastructure team as the existing storage was about to go end of life and out of support. That does not mean it would stop working but would pose security and reliability risks which are not acceptable to carry.

The SAN was installed by the supplier, DELL, and the data was migrated by Strata staff from the old system to the new. The old systems are still in operation and will be for a little while longer. This is to ensure all data is migrated and gives us options during the period of overlap.

4. PSTN – Public Switched Telephone Network. (Copper Phone Lines). In Exeter the phone lines are primarily provide to the council by Virgin Media who have as early adopters, decided to cease a large number of their copper telephony circuits in October 2022. This will be happening countrywide in the next few years but Virgin Media have gone early. As a consequence, Strata has had to work with many areas of ECC to identify and locate telephony circuits and determine if they are needed and if so for what purpose. Given previous low levels of documentation and understanding of what is in place this has placed a significant demand on some Strata resources. Circa 130 phones lines have been identified of which we are now planning to decommission the majority as they were not in use. The circa 20 lines that we do need to replace have now been ordered and will be commissioned before the switch off in October. There are some savings on the decommissioning of the lines of around £3000. This is a saving but is outweighed by the cost to make the savings, although this is now an ongoing saving so will recoup over time. The point here is that this is a long a laborious process and will be required for the subsequent councils over the next few years.
5. Street Cleaning App. This was built by Strata as an app for Apple iPhones to be used by Street Cleaning staff. It went live in May and has been a welcomed improvement for staff. Future developments of this are anticipated to continue the improvements.

6. St Sidwells Point. This was a project Strata were proud to part of as it is an important project for not only ECC but for the residents of Exeter. Strata designed, provided and installed the networking and technology to allow the booking, website, back office, and point of sale systems to operate in the new state of the art leisure complex.
  
7. Trade Waste. Another project for ECC was the development of the Trade Waste system which allowed commercial entities in Exeter to engage ECC to manage the removal of their trade waste. While not the most complex of projects its an example of how digital initiatives can drive revenue opportunities.

Over the next few weeks, the project engagement and delivery process will change. Significant Strata resources are used in validating the value of projects before they are accepted into being a project in progress. This is not the best use of time especially as not all ideas become projects and often there is little co-ordination between clients as to the value of any one project to all clients rather than just the one. Strata believes this can change so the validation of an idea, before it's a project, can be streamlined and the collaboration opportunities can be explored such that every project is potentially a multi-client project and again can add value to all and save money for all. This is obviously the ideal and should at least be the primary consideration before any project is established.

Strata will be adopting a more Agile method to project delivery, where that approach is suitable, and this will give gains in the time to deliver. The quality in delivery will be increased by changes to the project governance which will more prescriptive as to what projects need to do to move through each stage of project delivery.

## **6. Incidents and Performance Data**

This report is presenting the data since January 1<sup>st</sup> 2022. The following shows key data indicators which show the work Strata has done or is doing in the Service Desk, Business Systems and Projects.

Type of Work	Number	Category
<b>Incidents</b>	<b>4301</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
	17	Priority 1
	113	Priority 2
	877	Priority 3
	2546	Priority 4
	748	Priority 5
<b>Service Requests</b>	<b>3888</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
	1428	ECC
	1058	EDDC
	847	TDC
	555	Strata

Work is being undertaken to ensure all work done by Strata is captured in one place as any packet of work be that service desk call, incident, project, service request, BCR or project takes resource time, and it makes more sense to record all these things as 'work' plus the category of work. This will allow Strata to get a clearer understanding of resource utilisation and identify where efficiencies can be made.

## 7. Improvements

One of the initial actions for the new IT Director to complete was an assessment of the 'state of the nation' with regards Strata, its operation, the technology, the culture and its relationship with its clients. This report had some similar and overlapping findings as the Agilisys report but also went further as to how things can be resolved over the short and medium term.

One the key issues is that Strata is under resourced. That's not to say that there are simply not enough staff as it is more complex than that. Additional staff can only help if they are slotted into a well operating machine which has good governance and clearly defined processes, alas that is not Strata. So that any



new staff member would take time to get up to speed and would have no clear processes to follow, they would therefore take more time from existing staff to shadow and learn from.

What needs to happen is Strata needs to go through an improvement plan which will help develop things not existing, improve things that are and make sure all staff operate within that governance. This is a developing plan and more details can be shared once it is fully formed.

Another action we have already implemented is to adopt agile methods. Agile is never a solution by itself as adopting agile can simply mean that one delivers low quality faster! Therefore, Strata is reviewing where time is being wasted and how quality can almost immediately be improved such by adopting agile methods projects are delivered through the pipeline faster and to higher quality. In the shorter term however, this could mean a reduction in output which will be followed by a ramping up to a higher level than today.

## **8. Conclusion**

It is hoped that from this report the committee can see that whilst Strata has had some issues which have manifest over the previous few years due to financial constraints and focus on delivery, the future is bright. More is being done to deliver more, faster and to a higher quality and while in doing so trying to bring the clients together, where appropriate, to enable benefits for all. With scale come economies and Strata believe this is no less true in its delivery to its clients.