

LDS/24/26

Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee
Thursday 27th June 2024

Report of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee: Future Finance Project Standing Overview Group Meeting of 9th May 2024

Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

1. Recommendation

That the Committee be asked to:

- a. accept this report as an accurate record of the meeting ensuring transparency in scrutiny activities.
- b. hold a further standing session of the Standing Overview Group in September 2024.

2. Introduction

The Standing Overview Group of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee meets regularly as an informal information sharing and member development session where issues are presented to the Councillors to raise awareness and increase knowledge. The Standing Overview Group considers key updates and pertinent issues from across different services, with the aim of developing Members' knowledge, and bringing to the forefront any areas which may benefit from further scrutiny.

Any action points arising from the sessions are reported back to the next formal Committee meeting.

This report outlines the topic(s) covered at the meeting of 9 May 2024 - the Future Finance Project – and highlights the key points raised during discussion and details any agreed actions.

3. Background

The Future Finance Project is the Council's transformation programme to move to a new corporate finance system. The Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Committee, resolved to hold a Standing Overview Group to review the Future Finance Project following a spotlight review in 2023: ([Modernisation of the Corporate Finance System Final Report.pdf \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)).

The first meeting of the Standing Overview Group of the Future Finance Project was held on 23 November 2023 and a report of the meeting was reported to the Committee on the 25 January 2024 ([Future Finance Update on progress of implementation](#)).

The scope of the review was to “to evaluate the Future Finance Project’s aims, plans and risks to determine if the approach aligns to our corporate priorities and best value. In particular, focusing on quality, governance, and budget.”

4. Implementation of the Future Finance Project

The Standing Overview Group received an update from the Head of Finance Transformation. Councillors were reminded that following the successful and compliant procurement process, in July 2023 a consortium led by Softcat were awarded a contract and the Unit 4 Solution is now being implemented by Embridge Consulting.

The design phase of the project commenced in September 2023, the build stage phase concluded in February 2024, the integrated system testing is nearing completion and the project is moving towards the user acceptance testing phase. Data migration is underway; this is a significant part of the project and additional capacity has been identified to support this exercise.

The complexity of integrations of the finance system with other systems in the Council are being fully tested before moving into user acceptance testing. Teams to test the new system are being identified with the support of the Senior Leadership Team. The project is still on track for phase 1 of the project to ‘go live’ in August 2024, with further project phases planned thereafter.

Summary of Member Discussion

Members of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Committee were invited, via this Standing Overview Group, to ask questions about and offer comments on the project. The key questions and discussion was as follows:

- *The cost of the implementation* – the project continues to be within the original budget agreed by Cabinet in June 2022. The financial envelope for the project included contingency funding. Some contingency spend was forecast, including for staff training, other aspects of contingency spend include some build changes, additional support for integrations testing and some amendments to the Financial Planning and Analysis module, ensuring its integration with iTrent. Further use of the budget contingency is forecast over the coming months, but remains well within the overall budget envelope. Members expressed the need to continue to keep a focus on the budget to ensure the project continues to remain within the budget envelope through the coming phases.
- *Timeline* – The Head of Finance Transformation talked about the project timeline, explaining that the ‘go live is scheduled for August 2024. Members noted this is 3 months ahead of an original go live of November 2024, and expressed their thanks for the progress made.
- *Coding structure* - While the coding structure in Unit 4 will not be the same as in Finest a significant piece of reconciliation work for core reports and data migration is taking place and will be thoroughly tested during user acceptance testing.

- *Data Security and Migration* – Reassurance was offered regarding users of the system with access given to staff according to their role. A data protection impact assessment has been completed and testing on the new system will take place. Storage of existing data will form the second part of the project.
- *Training* – The contingency budget was forecast, which is a key element of the project to ensure the system can be used to best effect.

Members expressed their gratitude that the project was running to budget, to time. Members suggested sharing learning from the Future Finance Project with other system change projects. The Committee welcomed a further meeting of the Standing Overview Group in September 2024.

5. Options / Alternatives

The report is the summary of a Scrutiny Standing Overview Group meeting. Scrutiny does not make decisions and this report does not propose any alternatives.

6. Consultations / Representations / Technical Data

As above, there are no specific considerations in regard to consultations, representations and technical data in this report.

7. Strategic Plan

The alignment of all Scrutiny activity with the strategic plan is detailed on the Scrutiny work programme. The issues raised in the report and the benefit of developing member knowledge and the 'critical friend' challenge of Scrutiny contribute to the Council achieving its strategic plan.

Improving Member knowledge on key issues contributes to the Council's commitment to being a trust, inclusive and innovative Council. It ensures good decision making and that the Council listens and learns.

8. Financial Considerations

There are no specific financial considerations in this report.

9. Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations in this report.

10. Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)

There are no specific environmental impact considerations in this report.

11. Equality Considerations

There are no specific equality considerations in this report.

12. Risk Management Considerations

The activity of Scrutiny Standing Overview Groups contributes to the mitigations for:

Ineffective Member Scrutiny

defined as: 'Due to ineffective scrutiny, the level and quality of service management may drop, leading to financial mismanagement or harm to staff and/or citizens and reputational damage e.g. Grenfell.'

Member Effectiveness

defined as: 'Inadequate member effectiveness due to a lack of training, support and knowledge leads to a lack of challenge to corporate officers and/or poor decision making, resulting in a negative effect on the County's citizens (poor value for money, poor service delivery, harm, etc).'

13. Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations

The report outlines the topic(s) covered at the meeting of 9th May 2024, highlights the key points raised during discussion and details any agreed actions.

The report is formally reported to the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Committee in the interests of openness, transparency and good decision making.

Attendance

Councillors: A Dewhurst (Chair), C Slade, J Hodgson, M Squires and J Trail,

Scrutiny Officer: Charlie Fisher

Scrutiny Administrator: Yvette Welsh

Head of Finance Transformation: Jenny Ryding

Assistant Head of Finance: Esther Thorpe

Electoral Divisions: All

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Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Background Paper – NIL

The meeting began at 10.30am and finished at 11.11am.