

Report of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee: Future Finance Project Standing Overview Group Meeting of 26 September 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:

- 1) accept this report as an accurate record of the meeting ensuring transparency in Scrutiny activities.
- 2) hold a further standing session of the Standing Overview Group in December 2024.

2. Introduction

Standing Overview Group meetings of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee are held with the purpose of bringing rigour and understanding to complex issues across different services. To promote transparency, a Report is brought to the Scrutiny Committee to highlight pertinent issues and take forward any actions or recommendations that have arisen.

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

This Report outlines the topics covered at the 26 September 2024 meeting of Future Finance Standing Overview Group, and highlights the key points raised during the discussion and details any agreed actions and/or recommendations.

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, in 2023, to hold a Standing Overview Group to review the Future Finance Project following a spotlight review entitled [Modernisation of the Corporate Finance System](#).

The first meeting of the Future Finance Standing Overview Group was held on 23 November 2023; a Report of the meeting was shared with the Scrutiny Committee at the meeting of 25 January 2024 ([Future Finance Update on progress of project](#)). The second meeting of the Future Finance Standing Overview Group was held on 9 May 2024 and a

Report of the meeting was considered by the Scrutiny Committee at the meeting of 27 June 2024 ([Future Finance Update on progress of project](#)).

The scope of the spotlight review was “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

At the September 2024 meeting of the Future Finance Standing Overview Group the Head of Finance Transformation provided an update.

Members 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 and the integrated system testing is nearing completion with the project moving into the user acceptance testing (UAT) phase. The first data migration has been completed and a large amount of transactions have been successfully mapped to the new coding structure. The data migration process and testing continues to provide learning where it has been identified that further investigation of some account rules needed for the system require further consideration. This has been the focus during May - July 2024. There is more confidence that the mapping of ‘Finest’ (current system) codes to ‘Unit 4’ (new system) codes is sufficiently accurate to proceed to a full UAT.

The project is slightly delayed and is now expected to ‘go live’ late November 2024.

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:

- *Working together* - the team continue to work closely together and are co-located within County Hall.
- *The cost of the implementation* – the project continues to be within the original budget (including contingency fund) agreed by Cabinet in June 2022. The agreed contingency fund is being utilised. Members expressed the need to continue to keep a focus on costs 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’ date is now scheduled for late November 2024.
- *Data Security and Migration* – Access to the system is provided to staff when they have completed the relevant training modules, with approvals appropriate to roles and in line with the Council’s financial approvals. A data protection impact assessment has been completed and testing on the new system will continue. Storage of existing data will form the second part of the project. The Finest contract

has been extended to December 2025 to allow for contingencies; including disaster recovery.

- *Training* – training is progressing well and is on track. Approximately 900 users will require training on how to use the Unit 4 before it is launched ('go live'). E-learning courses have been developed. Training is currently underway for 'Champions' within the Finance Team, who will help deliver training internally to colleagues following Embridge initial sessions. Budget Holders have also been invited to attend introductory training sessions. Test users (mainly requisitioners) have also been testing the system and have received it well. Testers have also included budget holders. Embridge will provide an enhanced level of support throughout the implementation phase alongside the Councils internal helpdesk support.

Members expressed their gratitude that the project was running to budget. The Committee welcomed a further meeting of the Standing Overview Group in December 2024 and requested to see the Unit 4 system in action.

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 contributes to the Council achieving its strategic plan.

Improving Member knowledge on key issues contributes to the Council's commitment to being a trusted, 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 topics covered at the meeting of 26 September 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: F Letch (Chair), A Dewhurst, C Slade, M Squires and J Trail,

Head of Finance Transformation: Jenny Ryding

Head of Scrutiny: Louise Rayment

Scrutiny Administrator: Yvette Welsh

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 11.00am.