Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

10am, Thursday, 5 November 2020

Homelessness Services Internal Audit – Actions Update

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

Committee is asked to:

1.1 Note the progress against recommendations within the Internal Audit of Homelessness Services Report.

1.2 Recognise the complexities and issues which have impacted progress and compliance with timescales.

1.3 Recognise the need for an extension to agreed due dates, of a limited number of audit actions, due to the current pandemic and the adaption of service delivery.

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Homelessness Housing and Fair Work

Homelessness Internal Audit update

2.   Executive Summary

2.1   The report provides an update on the progress of actions identified in the Internal Audit of Homelessness Services in July 2019. The audit identified two high and one medium finding, relating to homelessness performance and quality assurance, data quality and performance reporting and provision of homelessness advice and information. For each area a number of management actions with timescales for completion, were proposed and agreed. Following the public health crisis Internal Audit extended all outstanding audit action dates by four months, several of these now require further consideration in line with adapt and recovery measures.

3.   Background

3.1   Colleagues from Internal Audit presented findings and recommendations to the Governance Risk and Best Value Committee (GRBV) on 13 August 2019.

3.2   The report was referred to Homelessness, Housing and Fair Work Committee on 29 August 2019. It was agreed that a further report would be submitted to detail completion of actions and issues and complexities which may have delayed progression of any recommendations.

4.   Main report

4.1   The Internal Audit Report included twenty-five actions with varying timescales for completion. Seventeen actions are now fully implemented, agreed and closed by Internal Audit. A further three are now implemented and awaiting closure, with five being progressed.

4.2   One audit action which had been implemented and closed, was subject to a validation audit in March 2020. The finding related to invoice quality assurance procedures.

4.3   The 2019 audit included two management actions, one was implemented and sustained, whilst the other was implemented but not sustained. The findings were reopened, and further work carried out to ensure measures were put in place to

ensure compliance. Retrospective quality assurance is underway with an agreed implementation date of December 2020.

4.4 Each audit action presents challenges for completing within timescales, which can't always be recognised prior to the commencement of work. These challenges have been further impacted by the pandemic and demands on service delivery.

4.5 This was recognised by Internal Audit and an extension of four months given to all open audit actions across the Council.

4.6 Following the onset of the pandemic and the variation of some areas of service delivery in line with health and safety measures, several open audit actions now require further work to recognise ways to adapt how we engage with customers and how they can access our services.

4.7 By providing alternative access routes the Council will reduce some initial face to face and telephone contact by enabling those customers who can and prefer to use digital platforms the ability to do so.

4.8 This will require extensive work to update our Council webpages and develop an online self-service housing options advice tool which can be accessed via the Council website and a smart phone.

4.9 Further detail of all pending actions are included at Appendix 1, alongside proposed revised dates for completion where necessary.

5.   Next Steps

5.1 Officers will continue to progress open audit actions to completion and will endeavour to conclude these within agreed timescales.

6.   Financial impact

6.1 Funding options will be considered for costs associated with developing our online capabilities and introducing digital platforms. Costs incurred in development and introduction, will be offset in part through more efficient service delivery in future.

7.   Stakeholder/Community Impact

7.1 N/A

8.   Background reading/external references

8.1 Internal Audit Opinions Report

8.2 Homelessness Internal Audit Report

9.   Appendices

9.1   Appendix 1 – Internal Audit of Homelessness Services Outstanding Actions

Appendix 1
Internal Audit – Homelessness Services – Update on outstanding actions

Recommendation and Agreed Management Action	Update – September 2020	Due Date
CW1808 Recommendation 2.2.3 - Performance Reporting – Proposals for performance reporting to Committee should consider (but not be restricted to) monitoring areas highlighted in finding 1; performance against agreed service standards (if implemented), compliance with applicable regulations, policies, and procedures; and data quality protocols. **Agreed Management Action:** *We will report performance information through a dashboard to Committee, officers are currently working with elected members to finalise the key performance indicators required.* **Evidence required for closure:** - Documentation supporting the need for the key indicators required - Copy of dashboard reporting	Due to COVID and changes to Committee schedule, we were unable to complete this action in its entirety as no dashboard reporting through Committee until BAU arrangements are reinstated.	01/09/2020
CW1808 Recommendation 2.2.2 - Performance Information – The Council should report performance information in relation to Service Standards and key homelessness outcomes regularly on the Council's website and other forums such as social media. **Agreed Management Action:** *We will report performance information in relation to Service Standards and key homelessness outcomes regularly on the Council's website and other forums such as social media* **Evidence required for closure:** - Screenshots of regular postings on the Council's website etc. regarding performance information in relation to service standards.	Following the onset of the pandemic, the web pages were updated to include information for service users on how to access services during lockdown. As part of the Adapt and Renew work, a complete redesign of the Homelessness web pages is required to allow service users to input data and access services. The Head of Service and Executive Director are aware and have approved the request to revise the date to March 2021 to enable this work to be carried out.	07/09/2020
CW1801 Recommendation 3.1.2: Updating homelessness information on website - The Council's website should be updated to include the following: Information on the range of advice and support available from the Council and what customers can expect including: emergency homelessness assistance; temporary accommodation; housing options advice – including other housing providers;	**As above.** A working group has been formed to undertake a complete redesign of the homelessness web pages, which will include links to Committee reports, policies, service standards etc. The aim is to allow customers to be able to access information on what services are provided, pre-	07/09/2020

Internal Audit – Homelessness Services – Update on outstanding actions

homeless assessments; signposting to other support and advice agencies including financial/debt/legal advice; foodbanks; health services; and drug/substance addiction services; and inclusion of a frequently asked questions (FAQs) section - Legal duties of landlords and creditors such as mortgage providers in relation to issuing a Homelessness Section 11 Notice. - Webpages should be subject to regular review to ensure the information remains up to date and in line with policies and legislation **Agreed Management Action:** *Following the engagement events with key stakeholders, the Council's website will be updated to include the information set out within the recommendation, and any other information relevant to key stakeholders.* *Webpages will be subject to regular review to ensure the information remains up to date and in line with policies and legislation.* **Evidence required:** - Website updated to include information as set out in recommendation and outcome of engagement. - Agreed arrangements for regular review - for example in line with policy review schedule	populate forms, upload copies of related documents, check criteria and eligibility and arrange an appointment/call from a housing officer. The Head of Service and Executive Director are aware and have approved the request to revise the date to March 2021 to enable this work to be carried out.	
CW1801 Recommendation 3.1.3: Homelessness information leaflet - The Council should also develop a leaflet for applicants based on the information set out above. The leaflet should be made available in all Council offices, locality offices, libraries, health centres, Citizen Advice Bureaus, charities and other local support and advice agencies. **Agreed Management Action:** *Following the engagement events with key stakeholders, we will develop a leaflet for applicants based on the information set out above, and any other relevant information.* **Evidence required:** - The finalised leaflet. - A distribution protocol for ensuring the leaflets are restocked to the locations as needed	The leaflet was in development and about to be finalised for printing, however due to the pandemic this was put on hold. A redesign will need to be undertaken to update information and when appropriate, the leaflet will be printed and distributed as agreed. An extension to the due date will be required, at this time it is not known when it will be appropriate to distribute hard copies of leaflets whilst adhering to precautions in place to limit the spread of COVID.	01/09/2020

Validation Review 2019/20 - Where quality assurance checks for the period March to July 2019 are performed, these should be based on a representative sample of invoices processed. Where any errors are identified, the supplier should be contacted and appropriate action to taken to address the error (for example, offsetting the balance owed against future payments, or arranging payment refunds), and feedback / training provided to the team members who processed the invoices. **Agreed Management Action**: *Where retrospective quality assurance checks are performed, appropriate action will be taken to address any significant errors identified with feedback/training provided to the team members who processed the invoices.* **Evidence Required:** - Details of the number of retrospective checks completed and a summary of findings and remedial action taken to address these. Details of employee feedback/training - either on individual or group basis. - Internal Audit will review a sample of checks to ensure satisfactory evidence of the quality assurance has been undertaken, actions addressed, and employee feedback training given where relevant.	Working alongside Business Support colleagues, work is underway to complete the required actions and evidence will be submitted prior to the due date at the end of December.	31/12/2020
CW1808 Recommendation 2.1.5 - HIS alignment to Council's records retention policy and schedule. - Records held within HIS should be managed within the Council's Records Retention Policy and Schedule. This should a detailed plan for destruction of records over five years old. **Agreed Management Action:** Records held within HIS will be managed within the Council's Records Retention Policy and Schedule. The ongoing management and deletion of historical records will form part of the data cleansing project as HIS migrates to Northgate. **Evidence Required:**	The project is progressing towards completion, but the actual go-live date is to be agreed by the Councils PM and Board as the owner and lead for this project. Indicated this may be October 2020 but not yet confirmed. Training will be required following 'go live' date therefore extension to completion date requested (01/03/2021).	31/10/2020

- The plans on how HIS will be managed and aligned to the council's records retention policy and schedule - including arrangements for archiving and deleting records in line with schedule - The data cleansing plans for migration from HIS to Northgate.		

CW1801 Recommendation 3.1.4: Developing online self-service solutions - The Council should consider development of an online self-service housing options advice tool which can be accessed via the Council website and smart phone. The tool would allow applicants to enter details about their circumstances and receive advice on pre-defined outcomes. The tool would not replace the right for applicants to request information and advice in person, however, would allow applicants to receive person centred advice at a time convenient to them.
 	
Agreed Management Action:
It is our aim to develop an online self-service housing options advice tool which can be accessed via the Council website and smart phone.
 	
Evidence Required:
- Please provide updates regarding any status changes in producing a self-service solution.
- Please provide basic evidence supporting each stage of development;
    o Market Research (i.e. What do customers want in a self-service tool?)
    o Concept Development (i.e. How can we present what customers want in a self-service tool?)
    o Prototype (i.e. Pulling together what the customers want and presenting it in a solution)
    o Design & Development (i.e. Tweaking and improving the prototype)
    o Deployment (i.e Making the solution publicly available)
	This may be a longer-term option for the service, we are dependent on CGI/Digital Services to progress this option following a costing exercise. The current delay in implementing Northgate for the service as well as developing an online Edindex housing application form has impacted progressing this further.	01/06/2023