

Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Quarter 2 Progress Report 2019/20

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1. Summary of Completed Audits

Housing Repairs Programme – Position Statement, No Specific Audit Opinion

- 1.1 The October 2018 Policy, Resources & Growth Committee approved the recommendation to bring the responsive repairs and empty property refurbishments service in house. The annual value of the work is thought to be approximately £8m. In addition, the following services are to be procured externally:
- Planned maintenance and improvement programmes services;
 - Major capital projects;
 - Specialist works.
- 1.2 The objective of the audit was to provide assurance that the progress of the programme is sufficient to ensure the delivery of the repairs service on time and at the expected cost.
- 1.3 The audit has concluded, as at November 2019, that there is significant risk that the Council will not be able to successfully deliver a cost effective and efficient in-house repairs service by 1 April 2020.
- 1.4 The audit found that, whilst appropriate governance arrangements are in place and staff are working hard to develop a future programme for housing repairs and to deliver a new in-house service by the 1 April 2020, there are significant challenges to overcome in order to deliver the service by the deadline. Key risks include uncertainties about future costs, insufficient project staff, and challenges in the timetable for delivery of appropriate IT systems and in procuring and managing supply chains.
- 1.5 It was agreed with management that to bring this project back on track and achieve the delivery deadlines, further work was required to ensure:
- That the estimated costs of the in-house service have been forecast as accurately as possible;
 - The project is sufficiently resourced i.e. the recruitment of additional and replacement resources (including an Interim Executive Director as well as replacement Programme Manager);
 - The Planned Maintenance Programme is delivered on time;
 - The materials supply chain is properly understood and that the related IT requirements can be delivered within the available timescale;

- There is a clear understanding of how the Works Management System will be used (this will initially be sourced from the existing supplier);
 - The arrangements for the leasing and operation of the vehicle fleet are put in place within the timescales available;
 - That that a process for the appointment of sub-contractors to carry out specialist works is put in place;
 - A telephony system is in place that meets the requirements for a new customer call centre;
 - Performance management and quality control frameworks are put in place that will allow the effective management of the service;
 - The development of more detailed project plans and improvements to the existing risk management process.
- 1.6 Housing management, the project team and support services are working to implement these actions, and this will be subject to further assurance work by Internal Audit as the programme progresses.

E-Recruitment System– Position Statement, No Specific Audit Opinion

- 1.7 With effect from April 2019, the three Orbis partner authorities implemented a joint Applicant Tracking System (ATS) called TribePad, designed to converge recruitment processes administered for all three bodies by Business Operations and replace the various versions of the Talentlink system.
- 1.8 At the time of our review some of the implementation was still in progress. As a result, our input was focused upon providing advice on key controls being developed including:
- The implementation of effective governance structures, including ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood;
 - Restriction of system access to appropriately authorised individuals;
 - System permissions being aligned correctly to job functions; and
 - Ensuring that the recruitment process was fair, open and transparent in line with the Council's sovereign policies.

- 1.9 The ongoing nature of development meant that we did not give an opinion in respect of overall assurance, and this audit was issued as a no-opinion position statement as a result. We were, however, able to conclude that the expected key controls within the overall recruitment area were robust and under continual review.
- 1.10 Our audit identified a number of areas for additional improvement around transparency of change management approval, and in preventing the publication of job advertisements by managers without the knowledge of recruitment teams. Most significant of our findings was the identification of an area that could be non-compliant with GDPR requirements (where hiring managers could see details of 'new' applications that were never actually formally submitted): as a result of the finding, a task was commissioned with suppliers TribePad to resolve this issue immediately.

Contract Collusion – Reasonable Assurance

- 1.11 This audit was a planned audit from the 2018/19 audit plan which was carried forward and completed in 2019/20.
- 1.12 Collusion in procurement is a risk in terms of security, VFM, effectively delivery of services and the reputation of the Council. It can occur when suppliers/bidders agree among themselves to eliminate competition in the procurement process or it can occur between the supplier and Council officers.
- 1.13 The audit concluded Reasonable Assurance as the Council has a good awareness of the risks of contract collusion and has measures in place to protect the Council from collusion. However, the Council has continued to identify issues with individual procurements through Whistleblowing and other tip offs. For procurements over £75,000, there is a good level of engagement with the Procurement Service, however, this is not the case with procurements under this threshold.
- 1.14 The following areas were identified where the Council can strengthen the control environment to both prevent and detect collusion in procurement processes:-
- Always clearly documenting the rationale for the percentage split between cost and quality as these can be manipulated to favour specific contractors;
 - Taking additional action to ensure that a sufficient number of bids are received for all procurements to meet the requirement of Contract Standing Orders;
 - Introducing a requirement for all bidders to sign a declaration of non-collusion;
 - Evidencing anti-fraud checks that are undertaken as part of procurement processes;

- Creating reports and using data analytics to detect suspicious patterns in our procurement data.

Cottesmore St Mary's School – Partial Assurance

1.15 An audit of Cottesmore St Mary's School was undertaken in accordance with our standard audit programme. This covers governance arrangements, financial planning, budget monitoring, purchasing, income, payroll and some limited testing on school funds and assets.

1.16 The review concluded partial assurance and identified a number of weaknesses in the system of control. Actions for improvement were agreed with management at the school in the following areas:

- Updating statutory information on the School's website;
- Reviewing and updating the School's scheme of delegation;
- Ensuring that reports are issued to the Governing Body on a more timely basis;
- Working with the Council's Finance team to resolve a problem with the payroll reconciliation and better evidencing checks carried out on new appointments to the school;
- Reconciling overtime payments and introducing a checklist for staff leavers;
- Ensuring that evidence is retained when the insurances of contractors are checked;
- Improving the process for raising purchase orders and security over purchasing cards in use;
- Improving the process for reimbursing expenses;
- Introducing more regular review of the school fund account;
- Better record keeping over the school's keys and assets.

Working Time Directive – Partial Assurance

1.17 The Working Time Regulations (1998) implement the European Working Time Directive (EWTD) into UK law. The Council has a statutory obligation to comply with these requirements.

1.18 The regulations set down employee rights to maximum working hours, rest periods, rest breaks whilst at work, annual leave and working arrangements for night workers.

- 1.19 This was an unplanned audit review following the investigation into the fatal accident at Blatchington Mill School, in which it was found that the member of staff concerned had two contracts with the Council for an aggregate of 50 hours per week, which is in excess of the 48 hours allowed under the Working Time Directive.
- 1.20 The following areas for improvement were identified by our review:
- Human Resources to carry out monitoring of hours worked outside of the WTD rules;
 - Opt-out agreements to be completed by all staff to record their agreement to such arrangements and that evidence of these opt-outs to be retained;
 - A standardised risk assessment form to be introduced where opt-outs are agreed;
 - Better communication of WTD requirements to all staff via the Wave and other routes, including specific manager responsibilities;
 - Improved record keeping in relation to external employment by members of staff, which are also counted for the purpose of the WTD.
- 1.21 All of the actions were agreed with management as part of a formal action plan and will be subject to a follow up by Internal Audit as part of the 2020/21 audit plan.

Temporary Accommodation – Partial Assurance

- 1.22 Temporary Accommodation is funded by the general fund and has a gross budget of £18m in 2019/20. It overspent its budget by £0.59m in 2018/19 and is again expected to overspend in 2019/20.
- 1.23 This audit was carried forward from the 2018/19 financial year and its main focus was on budget management and the collection and recovery of rents.
- 1.24 Our report gave a Partial Assurance opinion and we identified a number of key areas where improvements need to be made. These were to:
- Take steps to reduce the budget overspend by increasing homeless prevention work and moving current tenants into private sector rented accommodation;
 - Improve the budget monitoring process;
 - To take action to improve the monitoring and collection of current tenants arrears (at the time of audit totally £1m);

- To take action to improve the monitoring and collection of former tenants arrears (at the time of audit totally £2.2m plus);
- To improve the process for the write-off or irrecoverable debt;
- To review the bad debt provision for temporary accommodation debts.

1.25 In all cases these actions have been agreed with management and will be followed up by Internal Audit as part of the 2020/21 audit plan.

Transport Capital Grants – Claim Certified (No audit opinion is applicable)

1.26 This work involved the certification of two 2018/19 grant claims received from the Department for Transport. These were:

- Local Transport Capital Block Funding Grant;
- Bus Subsidy Grant.

1.27 No significant issues were identified in the grant certification.

HASC Temporary Accommodation – Reasonable Assurance

1.28 Following a Councillor enquiry about payments made by Health and Adult Social Care (HASC) for temporary accommodation to a specific provider, it was identified that an appropriate contract was not in place. As a consequence, it was agreed to undertake a further review to obtain assurance that this was a one-off and contractual arrangements are in place with other HASC temporary accommodation providers. The review was an addition to the agreed Internal Audit Plan for 2019/20.

1.29 The main method of providing temporary accommodation to HASC is via the Housing Temporary Accommodation service. Although contracts were found to be in place with almost all providers, the audit found there is a lack of a joined up approach across the two directorates with regard to providing temporary accommodation. Specific areas for review and improvement were:

- The joint working arrangements between Housing Temporary Accommodation and HASC in relation to Emergency and Temporary Accommodation;
- The arrangements with two accommodation providers who are still procured via a spot – purchasing arrangement;

- Those temporary accommodation cases where it is unclear as to whether there is still a duty to house them under the Care Act.

Treasury Management – Reasonable Assurance

- 1.30 The purpose of the audit was to provide assurance that controls are in place over all investment and borrowing decisions and that effective cash flow and performance monitoring arrangements are in place.
- 1.31 The audit found that an appropriate Treasury Management Policy and Treasury Management Practice Statements were in place and the performance of investments exceeded the targets set. Testing confirmed that controls were in place over borrowing and investment transactions, and record keeping was effective.
- 1.32 Three actions for improvement were agreed but two of these were low priority. The medium priority action was that there was a need to improve the evidencing of a management check during the processing of investment and borrowing transactions.

Purchasing Cards System – Reasonable Assurance

- 1.33 The purpose of the audit was to provide assurance that controls over purchasing cards ensure that they are only used for Council business and by those with appropriate authorisation. Also, that the accounting and VAT arrangements are fit for purpose.
- 1.34 The audit report concluded Reasonable Assurance and that the main controls were in place over the authorisation of purchases and the use of the cards. Actions were agreed to further improve the control environment as follows:
- Identified delays in the authorisation of transactions are addressed by the additional monitoring of compliance reports and the reintroduction of exception reports to detect potential rogue transactions;
 - Appropriate receipts are retained to support the VAT reclaimed on all relevant transactions;
 - Appropriate narrative is always included on the system to explain the purchase;
 - To review card holder spending limits to detect any increases which have only been agreed on a temporary basis.

Care Leavers (Follow-up) – Reasonable Assurance

- 1.35 The Care Leaver Services Team provide information, help and support to those leaving care, aged 18-24, in order to help them make the transition to adult life successfully. This includes the statutory responsibility for providing financial assistance towards accommodation, education and training costs.
- 1.36 This was a follow-up on a previous audit report, from August 2018, which provided a Partial Assurance opinion. The objective of this audit was to provide assurance that the actions from the last audit had been implemented and that key financial controls were in place and operating effectively for administering grants and other payments to those leaving care.
- 1.37 This audit concluded Reasonable Assurance and that the majority of actions from the 2018 report had been implemented. The remaining areas for improvement that were identified were as follows:
- That continued action is taken to ensure that all six monthly Pathway Plan reviews are completed on time (the target is 90% of Care Leavers);
 - That purchasing financial limits are always complied with;
 - The security arrangements for purchasing cards are complied with.

Public Health – Reasonable Assurance

- 1.38 As a result of consultation with service management it was agreed that the focus of this audit of Public Health would be on the 'Active for Life' programme. Specifically that the programme is subject to robust monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes and that budgetary control, procurement and other financial processes complied with corporate requirements. Also, that there was compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations whenever personal data was being collected and used.
- 1.39 The audit concluded Reasonable Assurance and that each element of the programme is subject to robust monitoring, evaluation and reporting.
- 1.40 The following areas were identified where additional improvement to controls can be made:
- The introduction of Projection Initiation Documents (PIDs) to support the introduction of new projects/ activities;
 - Improved sharing of budgetary control information with project managers and more accurate coding of income and expenditure;

- Better income reconciliation processes;
- Improvements to data recording and handling.

Extra Care Housing Follow-up – Partial Assurance

- 1.41 Extra Care Housing schemes are designed for older people (over 55) who are still able to live independently but require care for low to moderate needs. The units are purpose built self-contained flats, designed to encourage independent living for as long as possible.
- 1.42 This audit was a follow-up to a 2018/19 audit that gave a Partial Assurance opinion. The purpose of the audit was to provide assurance that the objectives and rationale of the service model are clear and Extra Care Housing performance measures are aligned. Also that:
- Contracts are in place with third parties that detail service level expectations and performance is monitored;
 - Budget monitoring processes are robust and arrangements are in place to evaluate the cost effectiveness of the service model.
- 1.43 The audit again concluded Partial Assurance and that further action is still required to improve the control environment over this service. Specifically:
- Action is taken to avoid extra care units being left empty or individuals being accepted with lower care or social housing needs than would be expected;
 - There is additional review to ensure that this type of accommodation provides value for money, including that all relevant costs are take into consideration;
 - To identify why the care provider's linked to Extra Care Schemes are not always being used by residents;
 - To introduce an operational protocol between the Council and one of the Extra Care providers;
 - That key performance information is captured by service providers and reviewed by the Council.
- 1.44 The deadline for implementing these actions is April 2020 and this will be subject to a further follow up by Internal Audit to confirm that sufficient improvement is made.

Cyber Security – Reasonable Assurance

- 1.45 Cyber-attacks on the Council's IT systems and devices are a threat to the security of the council's data, and could have a large adverse impact on service delivery. Cyber security refers to the measures in place to combat these threats, and is defined as the protection of information systems (hardware, software and associated infrastructure), the data on them, and the services they provide, from unauthorised access, harm or misuse. This includes harm caused intentionally by the operator of the system, or accidentally, as a result of failing to follow security procedures.
- 1.46 The audit concluded Reasonable Assurance and found that comprehensive information and guidance is available to users providing information on cyber security issues. This included mandatory and additional training, plus policies, advice, and regular news items posted on the intranet where new and emerging issues are identified.
- 1.47 Technical defences are in place and are regularly tested by external penetration testers. Further proactive measures are taken by relevant staff to keep informed of emerging cyber security threats and trends.
- 1.48 A number of areas where further improvements to control can be made were identified and actions agreed. These were in relation to:
- The development of a Cyber response plan and improved co-ordination with our Orbis partners to share best practice;
 - Enhanced monitoring of IT activity and procurement of additional vulnerability scanning tools.

EU Grant – SHINE (Claim 7)

- 1.49 This is an EU Interreg project that requires grant certification at least once a year. The full title of the project is Sustainable Housing Initiatives in Excluded Neighbourhoods. The total value of the project between 2016 and 2020 is approximately £367,000 (Grant expected £220,000).
- 1.50 No significant issues were identified in the grant certification.

Valley Gardens (Phase 3) - No Specific Audit Opinion

- 1.51 This audit was requested by the Audit and Standards Committee in July 2019 and is included as a separate agenda item at this meeting.

2. Proactive Counter Fraud Work

- 2.1 Internal Audit deliver both reactive and proactive counter fraud services across the Orbis partnership. Work to date has focussed on the following areas.

National Fraud Initiative Exercise

2.2 The results from this exercise were received on 31 January 2019 and have been prioritised for review over the coming months. Periodic updates on any outcomes from this work will be provided as part of future internal audit progress reports.

Counter Fraud Policies

2.3 Each Orbis partner has in place a Counter Fraud Strategy that sets out their commitment to preventing, detecting and deterring fraud. Internal Audit are in the process of reviewing the sovereign strategies to align with best practice and to ensure a robust and consistent approach to tackling fraud.

Fraud Risk Assessments

2.4 Fraud risk assessments have been consolidated and are regularly reviewed to ensure that the current fraud threat for the Council has been considered and appropriate mitigating actions identified.

Fraud Response Plans

2.5 The Fraud Response Plans take into consideration the results of the fraud risk assessments and emerging trends across the public sector in order to provide a proactive counter fraud programme. These include an increased emphasis on data analytics. The Fraud Response Plans set out the proactive work plan for Internal Audit in 2019/20. Areas identified include analysis in the following areas:

- Conflict of Interest
- Gifts and Hospitality
- Purchasing and Fuel Cards

Fraud Awareness

2.6 The team has been refreshing eLearning content to provide engaging and current material available to the whole organisation. This will be run in conjunction with fraud awareness workshops to help specific, targeted services identify the risk of fraud and vulnerabilities in their processes and procedures. An awareness campaign was undertaken to coincide with Internal Fraud Awareness Week in November.

Reactive Counter Fraud Work - Summary of Completed Investigations

Cash Loss

- 2.7 Following reports of cash loss at a care home, Internal Audit provide advice on security and improving controls over cash handling.

Housing Tenancy & Local Taxation

- 2.8 In addition to the above, a key focus area remains housing tenancy fraud and Local Taxation, and the team has made good progress with work to date delivering:

- 7 properties returned so far this year;
- 4 people removed from the Housing Waiting List following investigation;
- £14,803 in Housing Benefit overpayment has been identified as a result of investigation;
- £812 in Council Tax Reduction overpayment identified;
- SPD to the value of £2,982 has been removed from council tax account following investigation;
- An individual has been charged £28,393 in Business Rates following an investigation that found the individual had been renting a property out as holiday lets when the property had been listed as residential.

3. Action Tracking

- 3.1 All high priority actions agreed with management as part of individual audit reviews are subject to action tracking. As at the end of quarter2, 86% of high priority actions due had been implemented.
- 3.2 As at December 2019 there are 4 high priority actions which are overdue. Details of these are provided below, together with details of progress and commentary.

Details of Audit, Risk and Action	Dir.	Due date	Revised date	Progress and Comments
<p>Residential and Nursing Care</p> <p><u>Contract Rates and Fees.</u> A shortage of residential nursing care vacancies in the city meant prices were significantly higher than the set rates the Council pays. To secure appropriate care for individual nursing care clients, rates were agreed above the BHCC set fee, following the approval of a waiver. There were insufficient resources in the Care Matching Team to effectively manage this issue.</p> <p>An action was agreed that the function and process of the Care Matching Team will be reviewed to include negotiation (brokerage) and waivers.</p>	HASC	31/7/19	To be reviewed during the 2020/21 audit.	<p>Over the past year to 18 months HASC has identified that to continue meeting its statutory responsibilities and ensuring vulnerable adults are supported with high quality services required significant changes to the way they worked. This has impacted on the implementation of this action (and the two other ASC actions below).</p> <p>A new Operating Model for the directorate has been adopted and Residential and Nursing Care is incorporated into this programme of work.</p> <p>If this issue is not addressed there is an ongoing budget risk.</p> <p>Residential and Nursing Care will be included in the Internal Audit Plan for 2020/21.</p>
<p>Residential and Nursing Care</p> <p><u>Resident Care Needs Assessments.</u> It is a requirement for care plans to be regularly reviewed. The audit found that this is not always happening. There is a risk client's care needs are not being met and/or that the Council may be paying for nursing care that is no longer required by the client.</p> <p>The service agreed an action to improve performance with a revised</p>	HASC	31/7/19	To be reviewed during the 2020/21 audit.	<p>The service has stated that historically performance regarding Reviews has not always been to the standard that would be wanted (in terms of numbers completed) but there is still a desire to improve this performance in line with the requirement of the Care Act and the quality/ impact of these reviews.</p>

Details of Audit, Risk and Action	Dir.	Due date	Revised date	Progress and Comments
target set of 60% per annum but which prioritises clients in nursing care settings.				In 2019/20 efforts 'targeting' review activity were focussed on the most vulnerable and those presenting as benefiting most from a review. The 'Better Lives, Stronger Communities' (BLSC) programme, we will focus on continued improvement.
<p>Direct Payments</p> <p><u>Annual client reviews.</u> The audit found that only a quarter of client accounts had been reviewed in the previous 12 months. This created a risk that clients are not receiving the required level of care or that funds could be used more effectively.</p> <p>An action was agreed to allow the service to attain their target of reviewing 60% of clients annually.</p>	HASC	31/7/19	To be reviewed during the 2019/20 audit.	<p>Please see the comments above regarding client reviews.</p> <p>The BLSC programme will focus on the reviewing activity aligned to this cohort. The service also wants to increase the numbers of people receiving a direct payment if they can.</p> <p>A follow-up audit is currently in progress.</p>
<p>Housing Local Delivery Vehicle (Follow-up)</p> <p><u>Funding Gap.</u> The terms of the original funding agreement with Seaside Homes included a guaranteed rent payment which is no longer affordable over the last five years the Local Housing Allowance rate (which is the maximum rent the council can charge its tenants to match the housing benefit) has remained static.</p> <p>This has meant a growing and significant financial gap between</p>	NCH	30/9/19	Not yet agreed.	<p>This is a complex issue which has not yet been resolved. The Executive Director (F&R) and the former and Acting Director (NCH) have held meetings during 2019 and options are being considered to manage the financial gap.</p> <p>If this issue is not addressed, it will result in a substantial cumulative deficit which cannot be funded from future rents.</p>

Details of Audit, Risk and Action	Dir.	Due date	Revised date	Progress and Comments
<p>what the council receives in rent and what it pays to Seaside Homes.</p> <p>The Executive Director agreed to work with Seaside Homes to discuss and agree a constructive way forward.</p>				A follow-up audit will be scheduled for 2020/21.

4. Amendments to the Audit Plan

4.1 In accordance with proper professional practice, the internal audit plan for the year remains under regular review to ensure that the service continues to focus its resources in the highest priority areas based on an assessment of risk. The following additions to the audit plan have been made since the last meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee:

- E-Recruitment Project Assurance;
- Home Care (Follow-up).

4.2 Through the same process, audits could either be removed or deferred from the audit plan and, where appropriate, considered for inclusion in the 2020/21 plan as part of the overall risk assessment completed during the annual audit planning process. One audit has been deleted since the last meeting as follows:

- IT and Digital Projects.

5 Internal Audit Performance

5.1 In addition to the annual assessment of internal audit effectiveness against Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), the performance of the service is monitored on an ongoing basis against a set up agreed key performance indicators as set out in the following table:

Aspect of Service	Orbis IA Performance Indicator	Target	RAG Score	Actual Performance
Quality	Annual Audit Plan agreed by Audit Committee	By end April	G	Approved by Audit Committee on 12 March 2019

Aspect of Service	Orbis IA Performance Indicator	Target	RAG Score	Actual Performance
	Annual Audit Report and Opinion	By end July	G	2019/20 Annual Report and Opinion approved by Audit Committee on 23 July 2019
	Customer Satisfaction Levels	90% satisfied	G	100% as at the end of quarter 1
Productivity and Process Efficiency	Audit Plan – completion to draft report stage	90%	G	On target. 64% of the plan complete as at the end of quarter 1.
Compliance with Professional Standards	Public Sector Internal Audit Standards	Conforms	G	January 2018 – External assessment by the South West Audit Partnership gave an opinion of ‘Generally Conforms’ – the highest of three possible rankings
	Relevant legislation such as the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, Criminal Procedures and Investigations Act	Conforms	G	No evidence of non-compliance identified
Outcome and degree of influence	Implementation of management actions agreed in response to audit findings	95% for high priority agreed actions	A	86% at end of quarter 2.
Our staff	Professionally Qualified/Accredited	80%	G	85%

Audit Opinions and Definitions

Opinion	Definition
Substantial Assurance	Controls are in place and are operating as expected to manage key risks to the achievement of system or service objectives.
Reasonable Assurance	Most controls are in place and are operating as expected to manage key risks to the achievement of system or service objectives.
Partial Assurance	There are weaknesses in the system of control and/or the level of non-compliance is such as to put the achievement of the system or service objectives at risk.
Minimal Assurance	Controls are generally weak or non-existent, leaving the system open to the risk of significant error or fraud. There is a high risk to the ability of the system/service to meet its objectives.