

6. Update on Homelessness Service Audit Action Plan

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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on the Homelessness Service Audit Action Plan.

Recommendation

To note the actions and progress made.

Background

Initial Audit

The South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) reported their findings of the review of the Homelessness Service in March 2007. At that time the Auditors opinion was as follows:

“I cannot provide assurance for the Homelessness Service as the areas reviewed were found to be inadequately controlled. Risks are not well managed and systems require the introduction or improvement of internal controls to ensure the achievement of objectives.”

A report was brought to Audit Committee in December 2007 updating members on the progress made to date on the action plan.

Review – April 08

A follow up to the original audit was undertaken by Ian Baker (Group Auditor) in April 2008. The findings of this are shown below.

“Based on the evidence and commitment I have seen, I feel able to improve the level of assurance we can offer to Partial Assurance in that some of the key areas reviewed are still not adequately controlled. However, if the current momentum is continued, I feel that the prospects for improvement are positive.”

Internal Audit 2009

The South West Audit Partnership undertook an audit of the Homelessness Service during the final quarter of 2008/09 and have recently published their findings. The overall outcome of this audit is that Reasonable Assurance can be given as most of the areas reviewed were found to be adequately controlled and generally risks are well managed. The full Conclusion and Audit Opinion are attached in Appendix A, page 16. A copy of the new action plan arising from this audit is attached in Appendix B, pages 17-19.

Action Plan

There are five actions arising from this latest audit including one remaining action from the previous action plan.

Members will see that actions 1.1, 2.1 and 5.1 are now being quality checked to ensure compliance in all cases with the procedure as it is laid down. Where the procedure has not been followed a referral will be made to the responsible officer through the Quality Monitoring Framework process. I have also reminded staff of the importance of ensuring procedures are followed and records are complete.

The data to underpin the report to District Executive (DX), item 7.1, is currently being compiled and analysed. Due to the process and associated deadlines required of reports to DX the report will be submitted to Legal and Democratic Services in September and presented to DX members on 1st October 2009.

For the final action 8.1, we will undertake a review of the process followed using lean thinking principles to see if we can streamline it. This is important as the success rate for collection of a debt decreases the older the debt becomes.

Summary

There has been significant progress made by the team since the original review in March 2007 when no assurance could be given, with the latest audit reporting that reasonable assurance can now be given. We will work to complete the actions identified in order to further enhance assurance levels.

This is a significant turnaround achieved at a time of considerable disruption generated by the introduction of Choice Based Lettings (CBL), and higher demand on the service as a result of the recession. However the introduction of the Abris IT system in the autumn of 2008 as part of the CBL system has been a major influence alongside a commitment and dedication from the team in this key area of the Council's services to the public.

Financial Implications

None.

Background Papers: *Internal Audit Report of Homelessness Service June 2009*
Audit Committee Agenda and Minutes December 2007
Internal Audit Report of Homelessness Service March 2007
