

# **Audit Committee**

**17<sup>th</sup> January 2014**

**REPORT BY: Head of Housing and Commissioning**

**SUBJECT: Housing Repairs and Maintenance**

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**REPORT FOR: Discussion**

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## **Context:**

1.1 The following brief was received by the then Cabinet Member for Care and the Head of Housing and Commissioning from the Chair of the Audit Committee following the meeting of committee on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2013 and which summarises concerns that the Committee still harbours about the integrity and governance of housing repairs:

“Throughout this year, the Internal Audit Working Group of the Audit Committee has been reviewing the Action Plan drawn up in response to an Internal Audit Report released in August 2012. The Group remain concerned in relation to this area of work and would like to invite you both to attend the Audit Committee on 17 January 2014 at 10 am to discuss the issues:

- Are the systems in place to drive service improvements?
- Is the level of management appropriate, do the officers have ownership of the service?
- Is there adequate support given to the service by ICT?
- Would adequate KPIs assist management?
- Will the new Housing Management System capture useful information and help manage costs?
- Would comparison between the internal workforce and external contractors costs aid cost control?”

1.2 The response to these specific points can be summarised as follows, which the Head of Service would be pleased to elaborate on and to answer members’ questions at the meeting.

- **Are the systems in place to drive service improvements?**

There is a regular cycle of whole team and area team meetings at which performance is reviewed against a suite of measures, areas for improvement are identified and actions agreed in order to drive forward these improvements. Frequent meetings as well daily contact takes place between the Responsive Repairs Team Leader and Housing Maintenance Manager at which the suite of measures and issues of concern are routinely considered. The effectiveness of these arrangements will be reviewed as part of the whole-service redesign (see below) for Housing

- **Is the level of management appropriate, do the officers have ownership of the service?**

This will be reviewed and challenged as part of redesign of housing services in light of the pressures on budgets and the need to find not only efficiencies and savings but improve customer outcomes. This review will also examine the skills and competencies we require for managers as distinct from those who may be more usefully employed in more of a professional role. Having the right vertical management structure and systems to ensure that we are clear on accountability and responsibility will be an important facet of the service redesign as will be ensuring strong and productive links with other area of service.

- **Is there adequate support given to the service by IT?**

The two main issues for the service are around the implementation of the new housing computer software, QL and the repairs scheduling system Zipporah.

The QL system has been sourced as a highly configurable and integrated housing solution in strict accordance with council policy and with the full involvement of procurement and IT. It is being implemented in accordance with Prince 2 methodology, has a project manager who is part of the Change and Governance service and the implementation process involves a team of service users and the supplier. The procurement aspect of this work reported to and was signed off by Care and Well-Being Programme Board with the knowledge and involvement of senior IT personnel. The implementation phase is being overseen by ICT/Change and Governance Programme Board since when an element of retro-fitting appears to have been introduced as regards the need to demonstrate a business case and web-based functionality which we are confident of being able to respond to.

However configurable and comprehensive an IT system may be, a single system is unlikely to be able to meet the needs for all aspects of service. In evolving a new housing repairs service we have not been helped by the Zipporah appointment scheduling and reporting system. This was promoted as a “corporate solution” but has proved to be a major disappointment and this has been fed back to the corporate centre by service managers at frequent stages throughout the process. A significant amount of officer time and effort

has gone into making the system work as best it can. However its functionality and particularly its report writing, is, at best, limited and in some cases inadequate to the task. We would not recommend investing any further time and resources in this product and will be looking to exit from it and to source a more suitable and effective replacement from one of the market leaders.

- **Would adequate KPI's assist management?**

We reviewed and remodelled the services along the principles of Systems Thinking (one of three corporate pilots) and there was a conscious effort to move away from individual KPIs and towards a suite of measures that would provide a more rounded picture of performance and customer feedback. The problem with KPIs is that they often become the main focus and a service becomes subliminally geared towards satisfying these. We would need to be convinced of the value of reintroducing KPIs both in terms of the service and the customer's experience. In the meantime we have a suite of measures that are produced monthly and used as the basis for team meetings and performance review. However because of the limitations of Zipporah they do not provide as good a management tool as we would like due to the paucity of back-up data available for many of the reports which would enable in-depth investigation to identify and rectify problems. The reintroduction of customer satisfaction call backs will give us more meaningful information.

- **Will the new Housing Management System capture useful information and help manage costs?**

The project team has asked each service manager for a list of reports required and the system will be set up to enable this reporting. QL comes with two main reporting tools and together these enable us to combine any data fields to report on. Thus, we can use QL to report on all aspects of any service as long as we have set the system up to hold that data. We are currently working on the specification for the interface between Zipporah and QL and only once we have agreed that will we be able to answer this specific question because we may have to rely on Zipporah for some reports at the scheduling end (such as how many visits to complete the job). However QL will be able to recall jobs ordered broken down by for example, jobs completed the same day, end to end times, cancellations and reasons, work done, and capture costs of external contractors. At present it takes the Team Leader around 3 days a month to extract this data from Zipporah (10% of her time). We believe we can ensure that the "phone back" information in respect of customer satisfaction can be reported through QL and this will then give us the full 360 suite of measures.

- **Would comparison between the internal workforce and external contractors costs aid cost control?**

This is something we will need to look at as part of a corporate review of third party spending and the drive for efficiencies, which would include looking at what services the Council could look to outsource. There is no doubt that the

Council is an expensive employer and carries considerable overheads. However under TUPE legislation (and particularly if Welsh Government adopts the “TUPE plus” approach) then the cost of outsourcing would need to be factored into any arrangement. In undertaking any cost comparison with the private sector or indeed other social landlords we will need to ensure that we are comparing like with like. It is not a straightforward exercise and we would need to be clear that a time-consuming and resource intensive exercise would in itself be a cost-effective and constitute sensible use of staff time.

## **2. Additional comment**

### **2.1 Revised action plan**

A review of the action plan with the Internal Audit Manager would indicate that all but two of the actions have been completed. An update on these two issues are appended to this report (Appendix 1)

### **2.2 Further work**

The original audit of repairs and maintenance reported in August 2012 and was based on the old system for housing repairs and maintenance, which had in the meantime been superseded. The majority of action points from that report have now been addressed. However further ad hoc issues have been raised by committee over successive meetings to the extent that is unclear as to what the current remit is or expectations of the service in terms of the original audit work.

It is suggested that a fresh audit of housing repairs and maintenance is carried out based on the current system and in accordance with clear and agreed parameters and that this be carried out in the Autumn of 2014 to allow time for restructuring of the Housing Service.

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Appendix 1

**Housing Repairs And Maintenance - Revised Action Plan January 2014.**

<b>REF</b>	<b>Control Weakness</b>	<b>Last Agreed Action November 2013</b>	<b>January 2014 Update.</b>
8.4	The Tenant's Handbook has not been updated since 2004	<p>It has been identified that tenants handbook contained far too much information.</p> <p>We have been working with IT to develop housings web pages.</p> <p>Having to much information has made us a hostage to fortune due to the fact that the information is prone to go out of date.</p> <p>The new tenant's handbook to be produced will be as brief and to the point as possible therefore hopefully more manageable and relevant to the intended audience.</p>	<p><b>Works to be completed May 2014</b></p> <p><b>Action - Housing Operations Manager.</b></p> <p>Tenants information to be revised and updated in conjunction with planned Housing Restructures but to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updating information given to tenants in "Sign Up Packs" on the start of new tenancies.</li> <li>• Publicising revised Service Standards for Housing Repairs and Maintenance.</li> </ul> <p>Officers to seek input of and approval from Tenant's Liaison Forum and Tenants Service Monitors prior to final publication.</p> <p>All information is being uploaded onto the website.</p>
8.6	Staff attitude towards members of the public has resulted in verbal complaints	<p>There is a need for cultural change in certain areas of the service. We have strengthened our management arrangements as a result of the restructure and this will help target areas of weakness in relation to performance and customer care.</p> <p>All Housing Maintenance / Contracts</p>	<p>Formal complaints over an officer's conduct are investigated and dealt with in line with Corporate Complaints Procedure.</p> <p>Verbal complaints are similarly investigated but information can often come third hand or long after the alleged incident / occurrence.</p> <p>Any complaint made against an officer will be dealt with appropriately and proportionately through supervision, and</p>

		Related Staff attended Chartered Institute of Housing – Customer Care Training in January 2013.	development or under the Councils Disciplinary Policy.
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