



Review of Housemark City of York Council 2017-18 Memorandum

For: Director of Adult Social Care
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1 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

- 1.1 The council are currently subscribed to Housemark, a system where housing-related data can be inputted and performance can not only be monitored but also benchmarked against the performance statistics of other councils and organisations. The subscription to Housemark, at the time of the review was approximately £10,000 per annum on a three year contract and therefore it is important to review its use and benefit to the council.
- 1.2 The purpose of this review was to provide assurance to management that procedures and controls within the system will ensure that the use of Housemark is purposeful and beneficial to the council's housing performance.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1.3 The review found the following issues:
- Absence of separation of duties between inputting and checking the data that is submitted to Housemark;
 - Reports can only be extracted from Housemark on an annual basis;
 - There are clear differences in the comparative data used to inform the KPI machine and the peer group data reviewed in the reports sent by Housemark;
 - Performance is not compared against a consistent number of organisations in the reports sent by Housemark;
 - There was limited evidence available to support the use of Housemark in informing decisions made at the council.

2 FINDINGS

Housemark contract

- 2.1 Housemark is a core benchmarking service that the council is currently paying a subscription to. The cost of subscription is largely determined by housing stock numbers and at the time of the review, the council had been charged approximately £10,000 per annum, for the last three years. The contract with Housemark, at the time of the review was based over a three year term and was due for renewal in July 2018. Housemark now only offer annual contracts.

Data input into the system

- 2.2 As part of the review, we confirmed the arrangements for entering data into the system by officers. It was found that there were no separation of duties between the input of the data into the system and any quality checking of the data submitted.
- 2.3 As part of Housemark's data validation, they have a process whereby any deviant data is followed up by them to a nominated council officer and figures outside of normal parameters have to be re-accepted by the council. During the review, it was confirmed that one officer is responsible for the full process. Whilst data is sourced and validated by the service department, the officer that inputs the data into the Housemark system is also the main contact for the system and is the individual responsible for authorising any deviant data. It was also noted that Housemark do not require evidence to support any deviant data and will accept deviances with a simple narrative confirmation. We could therefore not confirm any separation of duties in data entry and validation queries for the Housemark system.

Guidance for submitting data

- 2.4 Data is currently being inputted into the Housemark system on a quarterly basis. Although assurance cannot be given to support the idea that every organisation is submitting data in the same way, the review confirmed that there is sufficient guidance in place as part of the subscription. As part of this guidance, there is information regarding data collection available and this includes what each indicator should be comprised of. Again, although the use of this guidance throughout all organisations cannot be confirmed, this framework should allow for more accurate benchmarking.

Housemark – pulling reports direct from the system

- 2.5 Despite quarterly inputs of data, the Business Intelligence (BI) team is currently only able to extract an annual report from the Housemark system. The report produced by BI is currently comparing the council's data with all other organisations subscribed to Housemark (approximately 300 organisations).

- 2.6 From this internally produced report, the details of eight metrics are uploaded to the KPI machine. It was confirmed that this information, pulled from the report and uploaded to the KPI machine, is identical to the raw data initially submitted to Housemark. However, Housemark provides the additional information to state which quartile the council is in for each metric when compared with all other users and this quartile information is then also uploaded to the KPI machine.
- 2.7 The annual report by BI can be produced immediately following the annual deadline for the submission of information to Housemark. This is subsequently sent to the housing team. The council also receive reports and data analysis from Housemark itself.

Housemark Annual Report – Analytical Review

- 2.8 A review of the annual Housemark report revealed an inconsistency in the number of authorities the council is benchmarked against. Further analytical review showed disparate comparisons in each of the Housemark reports. A total of 65 organisations are included in the council's peer group. However, we found only one metric where the council was scored against all organisations in the peer group. The council's performance is categorised within a quartile when compared with peer performance. As each metric is measured against a different number of organisations, this suggests the quartiles are not equally determined.

Comparisons with other Organisations

- 2.9 On review, it was evident that the reports sent by Housemark focus primarily on the comparison of peer group data, whereby the council is only compared with organisations with a similar housing stock. This suggests that there is some discrepancy between the information being uploaded to the KPI machine, where the council is compared with all Housemark users, and the reports sent by Housemark focusing on only similar sized organisations.
- 2.10 It was evident, in the 2018 Tenant Satisfaction Survey (TSS) Results report, that the Housemark data is used to support the results of the survey. However within this report, there was just a single section relating to Housemark's core questions. Additionally, this report did not discuss the results of the council against other organisations, but simply compared the council's own 2016-17 results with those of 2017-18.

Use of benchmarking data

- 2.11 A review of these reports evidenced that the information could help the housing team to inform decision making and action plans. However, there was no evidence available to support this.
- 2.12 Housemark facilitates a number of clubs, whereby subscribers are able to use their benchmarking data at workshops that aim to focus on areas that may be of concern. The council is currently subscribed to the Welfare Reform Impact

Club and this is attended by a member of the housing team. The club has a membership fee separate to the annual cost of Housemark and the cost of this has ranged between approximately £600 and £800 per annum over the last three years.

3 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 It would be beneficial to the service to review whether Housemark is a system that is currently providing value for money. It would be useful to understand how the system is being used to monitor and manage performance within the service area; taking into account that just a single report is produced each year.
- 3.2 To ensure that the council fully understand how data is being benchmarked, a review of how data is being compared on both the internally produced report and those sent by Housemark, would be of value. It is important that, within each report, the council is clear on the number of organisations they are being benchmarked against; as this will encourage more consistent performance data.
- 3.3 The service may also add value to the use of the Housemark system by ensuring that data is checked independently of the inputting process. Secondary checks will help to promote both the accuracy and the integrity of the data.
- 3.4 It would also be beneficial to determine how the information is being used and to what extent the benchmarking results are assisting decision making.

4 Management Response

- 4.1 The business case for continuing with Housemark was reviewed with the former Director and they agreed to continue with Housemark. However, the Head of Housing has indicated that they will undertake some soft market testing to review what else is available during 2019/20. Housemark is currently the leading product on the market for benchmarking cost and performance. Housemark provides flexibility and improvements to the front end configuration has led to better online functionality (the product has been revised since the review was carried out). Currently only one year contacts are available with Housemark.
- 4.2 We will be looking into the information that can be extracted from the Housemark on an ongoing basis and establish an audit family from those organisations with open data available on Housemark (noting that annual reports sent by Housemark currently only compare City of York Council with organisations of similar housing stock). The Housing Services Change Manager has recently attended training on Housemark Housing Analytics and Introduction to Predictive Analytics.

- 4.3 The service (both Housing Repairs and Housing Management) is now in a stronger position to use Housemark information more effectively – there is increased capacity with two change management roles and the restructures are bedding in well. This will give the space to use the information that the product gives us to improve service delivery more effectively. Indicators that are not reported on at present will be in future particularly when we introduce the new Housing IT system within 18 months to 2 years.
- 4.4 We will seek to provide data quarterly where resources allow within the housing service and finance to spread data input and validation over a longer period rather than doing this all at year end. This has happened for the first quarter this financial year. The important thing is that data is available across organisations over time to compare and review performance.