Homelessness - Housing Options 2016-17

City of York Council

Internal Audit Report

Business Unit: Health, Housing and Adult Social Care Directorate
Responsible Officer: AD Housing and Community Safety
Service Manager: Service Manager Housing Options and Homelessness
Date Issued: 11/08/2017
Status: Final
Reference: 11700/002

	P1	P2	P3
Actions	0	0	0
Overall Audit Opinion	High Assurance		

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Summary and Overall Conclusions

Introduction

The Housing Options service area is a key part of the Homelessness system in City of York council. It acts as a single access point for homeless enquiries. The service is responsible for assessing individuals' circumstances and determining what level of assistance the council has a duty to provide, and what action should be taken.

In 2015/16, Housing Options saw approximately 3400 people, of which 1327 were in depth interviews/cases. Of these, 163 presented as homeless under the Housing Act 1996 and 91 were accepted as homeless. The prevention of homelessness is also a key focus for the service. In 2015/16 there were 630 homeless prevention cases recorded by Housing Options and partner agencies.

Objectives and Scope of the Audit

A degree of assurance is currently present with the achievement of the Gold Standard accreditation from DCLG. The service area requested that the audit process focus on the Housing Options functions, to provide an independent review of the controls in place. Therefore, this audit did not cover homeless establishments.

The purpose of this audit was to provide assurance to management that procedures and controls within the system ensure that:

- decisions regarding the status of applicants are made in a timely manner and are correct, based on the information available
- supporting documentation and evidence is retained for all decisions
- consistent and high quality advice is issued to all customers
- affordability assessments are consistent and accurate.

Key Findings

There is a high level of assurance that the controls within the Housing Options system mitigate risk effectively. The reviewed decisions on the status of homeless presentations stood up to scrutiny, and any delays in this area tend to be caused by factors unrelated to the service area. Case notes supporting decisions are of a high quality, and show that the level of investigation done is appropriate in each case. The case notes are supported by key documents and evidence for decisions, which are held on the council's document management system. There was evidence to support that advice given to customers is of a good quality, with detailed options outlined and adequate signposting to external agencies. Affordability assessments are detailed, accurate, and provide useful information for both the service area and the customer.

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Overall Conclusions

It was found that the arrangements for managing risk were very good. An effective control environment appears to be in operation. Our overall opinion of the controls within the system at the time of the audit was that they provided High Assurance.

Audit Opinions and Priorities for Actions

Audit Opinions
Audit work is based on sampling transactions to test the operation of systems. It cannot guarantee the elimination of fraud or error. Our opinion is based on the risks we identify at the time of the audit. Our overall audit opinion is based on 5 grades of opinion, as set out below.

Opinion	Assessment of internal control
High Assurance	Overall, very good management of risk. An effective control environment appears to be in operation.
Substantial Assurance	Overall, good management of risk with few weaknesses identified. An effective control environment is in operation but there is scope for further improvement in the areas identified.
Reasonable Assurance	Overall, satisfactory management of risk with a number of weaknesses identified. An acceptable control environment is in operation but there are a number of improvements that could be made.
Limited Assurance	Overall, poor management of risk with significant control weaknesses in key areas and major improvements required before an effective control environment will be in operation.
No Assurance	Overall, there is a fundamental failure in control and risks are not being effectively managed. A number of key areas require substantial improvement to protect the system from error and abuse.

Priorities for Actions
Priority 1	A fundamental system weakness, which presents unacceptable risk to the system objectives and requires urgent attention by management.
Priority 2	A significant system weakness, whose impact or frequency presents risks to the system objectives, which needs to be addressed by management.
Priority 3	The system objectives are not exposed to significant risk, but the issue merits attention by management.

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