



Home Working

City of York Council

Internal Audit Report 2020/21

Business Unit: Corporate Services
Responsible Officer: Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development
Service Manager: Human Resources Manager (Performance and Change)
Date Issued: 27th May 2021
Status: Final
Reference: 10220/002

| | P1 | P2 | P3 |
|-----------------------|----------------------|----|----|
| Actions | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Overall Audit Opinion | Reasonable Assurance | | |



Summary and Overall Conclusions

Introduction

The move to the West Offices in 2013 instigated new ways of working with many staff working from home on individual days. An audit was done on homeworking in the winter of 2019/20 and although a draft report was issued, the audit report was not finalised.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, in March 2020, staff were told to work from home if they could to reduce the spread of coronavirus. This resulted in around 75% of office based staff working from home. This was a big increase in the numbers of staff working from home and the amount of time that they were working at home. At the time of writing, in March 2021, this remains the instruction to staff.

Objectives and Scope of the Audit

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

- There is effective corporate guidance for homeworking during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- A record is kept of council assets that have been issued to staff to use at home with the assets being returned when staff leave.
- Line managers have considered the impact of large numbers of staff working at home in their team and take appropriate actions where necessary.
- The implications for the future working arrangements for the council are being considered if more staff are working from home.

This audit updated the testing from the previous audit on homeworking, and reviewed the arrangements in light of the changed context where a lot more staff have been working from home during the pandemic.

The audit also included a review of homeworking arrangements within a number of service teams, in order to establish whether there is a consistent approach across the council.

Key Findings

The guidance notes on the intranet for homeworking have been updated in June 2020 to reflect that most staff are now working from home during the pandemic. The updated guidance sets down the important considerations, such as office and IT equipment needs and health and safety issues that staff and their line managers need to consider when staff are working from home. Other out-of-date guidance documents relating to homeworking have now been removed from the intranet.

At the time of the audit, we identified an issue with the records that were maintained at the delivery desk at the West Offices when office furniture was being issued or returned by staff. Although a list was maintained by the Facilities Manager of office furniture that has been issued to staff, no record was being taken when office furniture was being returned at the delivery desk at West Offices. Therefore at the time of the audit it was not possible to confirm whether all office furniture was being returned when staff leave. However, in the time period since the audit was completed the list has been updated with an additional column now giving details of when items of furniture are returned to the West Offices.

Generally homeworking has been well managed during the pandemic with reasonable steps being taken across the Council to manage large numbers of staff who are working from home. Even though there was no consistent way that staff were being managed whilst working at home, most managers have a reasonable understanding of their employees' work stations and have been holding regular 1-2-1 meetings and team meetings on either a weekly or fortnightly basis.

A working group to determine the future workplace strategy across council office locations which focuses initially on West Offices and Hazel Court, has been set up. This group has now started with meetings being held in February which were chaired by the Chief Operating Officer with a draft action plan being produced.

Overall Conclusions

There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited. Our overall opinion of the controls within the system at the time of the audit was that they provided Reasonable Assurance.

1. Returning office furniture

Issue/Control Weakness

Records of office furniture that has been issued to staff so that they can work from home were out of date.

Risk

Items of office furniture are not returned to the Council when staff leave.

Findings

The Facilities Management team are aware when staff are leaving the Council because they receive leavers' reports. There are informal mechanisms to ensure staff return furniture when they leave because staff may contact the Facilities Management team to return office furniture or empty their locker which they have not used during the pandemic. Staff in the security team who manage the delivery desk have also been requested to inform the Facilities Management team if items of office furniture have been returned without prior notice.

A spreadsheet of office furniture is maintained by the Facilities Management Team that lists chairs and other items of office furniture that had been issued to members of staff so that they can work from home. At the time of the audit the spreadsheet gave details of the items of office furniture that had been issued to staff but there was no record on the spreadsheet when the items were returned to the Council. This meant that, it was not possible to confirm whether the spreadsheet was accurate because records were not kept when items were issued or returned to the Council at the delivery desk at West Offices.

However, since the audit was undertaken in the autumn of 2020, the spreadsheet has been updated and now includes an additional column when items are returned to the delivery desk at West Offices.

Agreed Action 1.1

The spreadsheet has now been updated with an additional column that gives details when the office furniture was returned. When a chair is returned or collected the Security and Facilities Management teams are contacted by email with a member of the Facilities Management team then updating the list.

Priority

2

Responsible Officer

Facilities Manager

Timescale

Implemented

2. Supporting staff who make difficult phone calls

Issue/Control Weakness

Staff who work in the Planning and Social Care teams may need additional support when making difficult phone calls relating to their work whilst working at home.

Risk

Staff become distressed during difficult phone calls with their line manager not being able to support them.

Findings

The previous audit raised an action relating to staff who worked in the Planning and Social Care teams who may make difficult phone calls relating to their work whilst working at home. This issue was not resolved before the pandemic started in March 2020. The Workforce Development Advisors should discuss this issue with the two services to determine how staff in these two services could be supported when taking difficult phone calls relating to their work when they are not in the West Offices where colleagues can support them.

Agreed Action 2.1

The Human Resources or Workforce Development Unit team will make contact with the managers in these two teams and identify any training needed to support handling difficult calls.

Priority

3

Responsible Officer

HR Manager
(Performance and Change)

Timescale

30th June 2021

Audit Opinions and Priorities for Actions

Audit Opinions

Our work is based on using a variety of audit techniques to test the operation of systems. This may include sampling and data analysis of wider populations. It cannot guarantee the elimination of fraud or error. Our opinion relates only to the objectives set out in the audit scope and is based on risks related to those objectives that we identify at the time of the audit.

Our overall audit opinion is based on 4 grades of opinion, as set out below.

Opinion Assessment of internal control

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|-----------------------|--|
| Substantial Assurance | A sound system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited. |
| Reasonable Assurance | There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited. |
| Limited Assurance | Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited. |
| No Assurance | Immediate action is required to address fundamental gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance identified. The system of governance, risk management and control is inadequate to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited. |

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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