

Appendix 2A: Audit Assurances and Themes

Assurance



Better Queensway Project Assurance

Objective

To assess the robustness of the Council's project management arrangements to deliver the required outcomes and benefits for the citizens of Southend.

Summary

Better Queensway is a complex, key strategic Council project, which is subject to regular member scrutiny. The project's top-level governance structures are well defined, documented and include progress reporting. The efficiency and effectiveness of these boards, could be improved by ensuring the lower-level Operational Group governance arrangements operate effectively.

As such, management have agreed:

- actions to formalise the role of the Operational Group and to introduce an additional layer of review and challenge of information presented to this group by the Project Manager. Formalising the Operational Group's role will provide clarity about roles and responsibilities, which will ensure that Workstream Leads are clear on what is required of them to fulfil their roles successfully
- to fully embed risk and issue management processes, including escalation arrangements, across the governance hierarchy.

Work has begun on the development of an Operations Manual which provides the opportunity to bring project processes, such as risk and issue management and Council roles and responsibilities together into a single document. This will minimise the risk caused by the departure of any one project team member by ensuring others are already aware of the processes to be followed.

Council-side project plans need to be fully developed for the current phase of the project, ensuring these capture all the required information, outline the critical path of activity, key dependencies, as well as the resources required to deliver Council tasks.

As such, management have agreed actions to develop Council-side plans (which are driven by The Porters Place Southend Limited Liability Partnership) which will ensure the project is aware of the key tasks to be completed and the amount of resource required. This will provide the Operational Group and Partnership Board with the information required to fully challenge the completion of tasks and be fully confident the project remains on track to deliver as planned.

Potential benefits identified and developed in earlier phases of the project were incorporated into the obligations within the LLP Partnership Agreement. Subject to planning permission being agreed, managing the delivery of expected project benefits and the Council's ability to demonstrate their realisation, would be improved by the development of detailed benefit profiles and plans.

Management have agreed robust implementation dates with Internal Audit and we intend to follow up progress of the implementation of actions in March 2021, with a view to reporting progress to the April 2021 Audit Committee.

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IT Disaster Recovery

Objective

To assess whether there are robust arrangements in place to ensure the design of the Council's IT Disaster Recovery (DR) planning documentation and processes are appropriate, complete and robust, and to explore whether there is sufficient assurance that the arrangements will operate in practice.

Summary

IT Disaster Recovery (DR) planning provides a framework for protecting, restoring and accessing an organisation's data in the event of future scenarios that may threaten part or all of an organisation's technical resources. It is a key component involving many aspects of business operations that require significant information to function. The objective of a DR plan is to ensure that when required, the organisation's vital data can be recovered, and mission-critical applications will be brought back online in the shortest possible time.

Management are currently exploring the IT DR landscape to gain a greater understanding of what is and is not in place. This includes identifying the:

- Key applications, servers and operating systems
- Recovery time objectives and recovery point objectives
- Responsible business owners and
- Key third party suppliers.

Understanding the core components above will help inform the Council's IT DR policy, plans and capabilities.

The IT Disaster Recovery environment is lacking key controls normally associated with this area to cover the IT environment that the Council is currently operating. Management are keen on developing the IT DR Plan, including a periodic testing schedule that reflects the requirements of the IT environment now and in the future.

A significant part of their future planning is the migration to a Cloud infrastructure which should reduce the costs and transfer some of the DR control operation to the Cloud vendor. Whilst this migration was not part of the scope of this review, it will be important that Management ensure, when planning such changes, the IT DR policy is updated to reflect the new arrangements.

This review provides a priority of key actions that management are already considering as the journey to develop the Council's IT Disaster Recovery capabilities continues.