

Appendix 5: Other Audits and Grant Claims

Highways Capitalised Maintenance Programme

Objective

To assess the robustness of the Council's end-to-end arrangements for managing the Highways Capitalised Maintenance programme of works, which supports the delivery of improvements to the Council's pavements and highways for the benefit of the citizens of Southend.

Summary of work

This was an advisory piece of work where Internal Audit reviewed key documentation and provided management with feedback and interim recommendations to either strengthen the programme control environment or highlight where further clarity is required for the process to operate effectively, whilst also enabling the Capital Board to fulfil its role in monitoring the programme's delivery, to realise the expected outcomes and benefits of strategic relevance from the capital investments made by the Council.

Feedback was provided in the following key areas:

- the development of a business case and clear scopes of work
- developing robust plans that ensure the programme can be delivered on time and within budget
- clarification of the programme's governance processes and associated roles and responsibilities
- the introduction of a change control process that will ensure proposed changes are impact assessed against the agreed programme aims and the available resources
- the introduction of processes to ensure programme risks and issues are managed and monitored to avoid negatively impacting upon the programme aims.

Management have agreed robust implementation dates with Internal Audit and we intend to follow up progress of the implementation of actions during Q2 2022/23, with a view to reporting progress to the September 2022 Audit Committee.

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Supporting Families Programme, Payments by Results Scheme Grant 2021/22 - claim September to December 2021

Objective

To assess compliance with the terms and conditions of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Programme Guidance for making Payment by Result (PBR) claims for the year April 2021 to March 2022 under the 2021-22 Phase of the Supporting Families Programme.

Background

The new phase of the programme aims to build resilience by providing whole family support at the earliest possible point and help prevent escalation into statutory services. The Council has agreed to achieve measurable outcomes with a minimum of 258 families assisted by March 2022 under this Programme.

In line with the previous Troubled Families Programme, the new phase requires that Internal Audit verifies a 10% representative sample of PBR claims before they are made to ensure there is supporting evidence to confirm families:

- met the required criteria to be considered for entry to the Supporting Families Programme
- have achieved either continuous employment or significant and sustained progress against all problems identified at the point of engagement and during intervention as defined by the Council's agreed Outcomes Plan.

The new Programme Guidance has been updated to allow for a second PBR claim to be made for a family receiving support where a certain set of circumstances have been met. This is particularly pertinent as families recover from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conclusion – claim period September to December 2021

Between October and December 2021, 91 PBR claims were presented to audit, prior to submission to the DLUHC. Twelve were presented as second claims in relation to families for which a PBR claim had previously been made.

Audit work resulted in the following findings and adjustment to the final PBR claim made to the DLUHC in respect of the original twelve reclaims:

- one was removed from the PBR claim finally made as it did not meet the criteria for a second claim in that the required two years gap between the first and second claims had not elapsed. Going forward these claims will be reviewed to identify whether they meet criteria for a subsequent claim to the DLUHC.
- three were not confirmed as reclaims so were declared as standard PBR claims.

The remaining eight were confirmed as reclaims and declared as such on the claim to DLUHC.

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Of the 90 claims submitted to the DLUHC for a PBR payment the Early Help and Family Support Team Manager had:

- independently reviewed nine of the 48 claims where families were supported by the Early Help and Family Support team, to confirm appropriate evidence had been provided for a PBR to be claimed. This exceeded the usual 10% check of claims made
- reviewed evidence for a further 42 cases relating to Child in Need (CIN) and Youth Offending Service (YOS) claims where families had been supported by other Social Care teams.

Internal Audit randomly selected nine claims for review which included four worked on by the Early Help and Family Support team (including one reclaim case), four CIN claims and one YOS claim which had all been reviewed independently by the Early Help and Family Support Team Manager. For all nine claims, suitable evidence was available to support:

- entry into the programme
- a claim for significant and sustained progress against all problems identified at the point of engagement and during intervention.

Children's Quality Assurance Framework (QAF)

Objective

To provide support and challenge to the Children's Services Steering Group responsible for monitoring the pilot and roll out of the more targeted and focused approach to case file audits. The aim being to improve overall social work practice by using learning to build on the good practice and support those areas where improvements would deliver better outcomes to young people and families.

Summary of work

Feedback was provided in October 2021 and February 2022 to the Chair of the Steering Group and colleagues in the Practice Unit after first and second round of case file audits completed.

Feedback and discussion was provided regarding:

- the Audit tool to be used in the pilot
- the content of the July to September Quarterly Assurance report prepared for Children Services Departmental Management Team
- the risks associated with the transition of the pilot to business as usual
- clarifying arrangements in procedural documents to make expectations and processes clear
- the difference in the clarity and / or quality of action plans emanating from case file audits when assessing the actions plans against Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound goals (SMART objectives). Internal audit have been asked to provide some further support to the service to develop this area.

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Feedback on the impact of the Steering Group provided to all members from the Executive Director for Children and Public Health

'I wanted to write to thank you for all your work and your individual and collective contribution to the successful delivery of the ambitious pilot programme launched in July 2021 and completed at the end of March 2022.

Without your commitment, drive and oversight as a steering group, the intended outcomes from the pilot programme would not have been delivered'.

I know from feedback over the course of the pilot project how influential and critical your role has been. I wanted to thank you separately and specifically given your invaluable input and commitment. You should be very proud at what you collectively delivered and helped the service as a whole to achieve.'

Feedback on the impact provided to all members from the Chair of the Steering Group

'It has been one of the most dynamic and effective steering groups I have worked with and has certainly been a key part of the success of the pilot.'