Appendix 8: Audits Revisited

Purpose of these audits

To assess whether the actions agreed in the original audit have been implemented and are now effectively embedded into the day-to-day operation of the service.

IT Disaster Recovery

Original Objective

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

Action Implementation Level

Opinion: **Partial Assurance**

Results

Fully implemented	Substantially implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Closed
3	0	5	0	0

Summary

Since issuing of the original internal audit report, partial progress has been made in implementing the agreed management actions. Progress has been slowed down mainly due to management focus to shift the Council's IT applications to a new platform before disaster recovery procedures can be fully implemented.

At the time of reporting the results of our revisit, the following progress has been made:

- The IT team has developed an ITDR plan that defines the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders and services within the Council, which has also been agreed and communicated to stakeholders within the Council. This policy has also been shared on the Council's intranet for wider communication.

- Network and architecture diagrams have been developed providing a visual layout of the Council's IT environment. It includes the layout of the organisation's local area networks (LANs), wide area networks (WANs) and wireless networks. Additionally, it also covers network applications and services, servers, computers and other devices.

- There are a number of areas where further work is still required in order to improve the Council's ITDR response. In summary:

  - A formalised training plan needs to be developed to identify key staff who should go on the required training, as well as identifying any key-person dependencies. The Council is currently performing a skills audit which will provide the basis for this plan to be developed.

- Management needs to scope the Council's disaster recovery environment, including identification of all key and critical applications, criticality of systems and dependency mapping of all systems.

- The Council has implemented an IT Service Management tool to capture key details of supplier contracts, however this is only in relation to new suppliers. To provide confidence that the third parties are able to continue to provide services in the event of any disaster they experience, a review of all existing third parties' business continuity plans and ITDR plans is required.

- Management needs to formalise and define an ITDR testing plan and include this within the Council-wide overarching ITDR plan arrangements. Additionally, it will need to test the IT DR plan in accordance with the defined frequency and document results of testing and build on the lessons learnt.

Adult Social Care (ASC) Financial Assessments

Original Objective

To assess the robustness of the process that determines eligibility for financial support towards care needs to ensure it is accurate, transparent and accessible.

Action Implementation Level

Opinion: **Partial Assurance**

Results

Fully implemented	Substantially implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Closed
1	0	5	0	0

Summary

Since issuing of the original internal audit report in July 2020, limited progress has been made in implementing the agreed management actions. Progress has been hindered by the following factors:

- the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has impacted the Financial Assessments team's ability to perform home visits and attend appointments resulting in the backlog of financial assessments not yet being fully reduced

- the ongoing development of a new reporting dashboard, C-Bench, which has not yet been fully developed. The current tool / methods for performance monitoring are not sufficient

- an internal restructure within the Financial Assessments team which took longer than anticipated but was completed on 6th June 2022. Recruiting and onboarding the appropriate individuals to align with the new team structure is now underway.

Appendix 8: Audits Revisited

At the time of reporting the results of our revisit, the following progress has been made:

- Staff guidance documents on the Financial Assessment processes have been updated but do require extending to include further detail in order to ensure consistent and adequate actions are taken

- The backlog of 313 financial re-assessments has been reduced to 12 (as at 9th June 2022). However, at the time of the audit fieldwork in March 2022, the number of outstanding financial re-assessments was 78

- A tracking mechanism has been introduced to identify and monitor financial assessments where expected delays are known. There is a need to formalise the monitoring arrangements around these to minimise the risk of drift.

There are a number of areas where further work is still required to improve the Adult Social Care Financial Assessments processes and controls. In summary:

- Continue to develop arrangements to monitor team performance on:
  - the number of cases completed
  - the number of days taken to complete each case
- Enhance monthly performance reports by:
  - Monitoring the timeliness of performance of financial assessments
  - Including the percentage of financial assessments that were checked by the Senior Finance Officer and the outcomes of these
  - Including information relating to waivers.
- Each waiver should be revisited on a periodic basis to check the validity, eligibility and appropriateness of each assessment.
- Revisiting all nil charge financial assessments on an annual frequency to ensure that the nil charge assessment remains appropriate in each case and that the Council isn't losing out on income.

Throughout the audit, management showed awareness of the challenges they face and showed willingness to receive feedback on their current progress towards implementation. The ongoing development and implementation of the reporting dashboard, C-Bench, will, in particular, be hugely beneficial and will increase the level of insight that can be used to analyse performance of the Financial Assessments Team.