

Appendix 2d: 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.

ICT Strategy

Original Objective

To assess the robustness of the governance arrangements which ensure the technology elements of the Southend on Sea City Council's (the Council's) various service strategies properly inform the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) strategy; that the ICT Strategy is delivered and that it supports and enables the achievement of the Council's strategic goals.

Summary findings

Fully implemented	Substantially implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Closed
2	-	-	-	1

The ICT department underwent a full restructure in 2019, resulting in a significant change in personnel. The ICT department inherited legacy infrastructure and service contracts, that had historically resulted in the Council not having a fit for purpose technology environment.

In the 2022/23 audit year, IA performed a review of the ICT strategy in which three management actions were identified and agreed as being required:

- Management Action 1 - Use the Digital governance forum to holistically review Corporate, Service areas and ICT plans to understand ICT requirements and how they align to Corporate and ICT strategies, in order to prioritise projects for ICT support.
- Management Action 2 - Include a specific point into the Service Plan / Performance Management Framework (PMF) to state the ICT requirements and that teams should engage early with ICT. This point can also include a reference link to the Entrance Hall process
- Management Action 3 - Create a detailed ICT roadmap providing milestones for the next three to five years.

To assess progress with the delivery of these actions IA has conducted a follow up review to highlight areas where improvements have been made and gaps still exist.

- The actions required to address management action 1 and 3 have been fully implemented and evidence supporting this has been provided and reviewed.
- The actions required to address management action 2 has been closed as ICT have shown that they are engaged proactively in the service planning process. While it was noted that some service plans still require more ICT involvement, it is understood that this is due to the level of engagement from the services and there being limitations to the extent that ICT can go to in ensuring their engagement.

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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 (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 findings

Fully implemented	Substantially implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Closed
2	-	1	2	-

The ICT department underwent a full restructure in 2019, resulting in a significant change in personnel. The ICT department inherited legacy infrastructure and service contracts that had historically resulted in the Council not having a fit for purpose technology environment.

Significant work has been undertaken to update the infrastructure and the majority of IT systems and applications have been migrated into the Council's Cloud Servers as a result. These Cloud servers and all applications running on them are maintained by Microsoft and sit as part of Microsoft's DR arrangements.

The reduction in the number of systems and applications on the Council's own servers means that although the Council is still in the process of developing its DR capability the Council believes that the risk associated with the lack of this capability have been significantly reduced. Internal audit are reviewing the Cloud Governance arrangements in place as part of the 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan, to understand the Council's arrangements for cloud governance including DR capabilities of their Cloud providers.

The 2022 review identified five management actions outstanding from the 2020 ITDR report. This current follow up review has assessed where action has been taken to address the remaining management actions from the 2022 follow up review and has highlighted areas where improvements have been made and where gaps still exist:

- Management action 1 – Provide periodic training and awareness raising of the IT DR plan to the relevant business stakeholders and the IT department to ensure that the correct procedures are followed and carried out in the event of a disaster - The actions required to implement this have been completed. The evidence supporting this has been reviewed to validate this completion
- Management action 2 – Scope the overall IT DR environment so that it is clearly defined and documented - The actions required to implement this have been partially implemented, with evidence showing that ICT are in the process of implementing this action. The evidence provided shows that ICT are in a transition period whereby they are standardising Recovery Point Objectives (RPO) and Recovery Time Objectives (RTO) for systems still held on the Council's server.

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A Critical Disaster Recovery Candidate Listing, setting out the systems that require recovery in the event of an incident and their key details, including RPO and RTO is in development and discussed regularly at the ICT Steering Group meetings. A High-Level Design and Disaster Recovery options paper was created as a result of the previous audit but has yet to be implemented. We understand this is due to resource constraints in the IT function and the reduced risk as a result of the Cloud transition. Hence, the Council has not yet implemented an ITDR solution for its own server and so further progress remains needed.

- Management action 3 – Obtain assurance from third parties, who provide core elements of the IT environment and systems, about their business continuity arrangements and disaster recovery plans and the results of their testing - The management action has not been fully implemented. The Council has found it challenging to obtain the required information for third party contract's Disaster Recovery processes. This is due to the relevant level of detail often not being provided by organisations when requested, despite significant effort by the Council to get additional information and understand their DR capabilities. ICT have now updated their risk registers to identify and accept the risk of a lack of knowledge of ITDR capabilities of suppliers. This needs to include a risk rating of contractors to understand those where poor ITDR arrangements presents the biggest risk.

We have also noted that, due to the move of significant applications to a software as service (SaaS) model, responsibility for ensuring that IT DR commitments made by these suppliers now sits with contract managers for these providers. There is need to formalise this change in responsibility to ensure it is understood by contract managers.

- Management action 4 - Develop an IT DR Plan and test this on a periodic basis to provide assurance that the Council's IT systems can be recovered in the event of a crisis or disaster - The Council has delayed implementation of conducting an IT DR test, as the IT DR arrangements to test have not yet been put in place.
- Management action 5 - Develop an Application Register that includes all the Council's applications, business/data owners, servers, operating systems with defined RTO and RPO - Management have developed a detailed listing for Disaster Recovery candidates and have begun to collate and agree RPO and RTO for systems on the servers, but there remains a need to complete the assessment of the RTO and RPO for critical systems running on the Council Server.

Management attention and action is required to mitigate the risks remaining for those actions identified as ongoing or not yet fully implemented.

Appendix 2d: Audits Revisited

Direct Payments

Original Objective

To assess the robustness of arrangements at Southend City Council for ensuring payments made to clients with an assessed need for support are valid and delivering the required outcomes for vulnerable citizens and their families.

Summary findings

Fully implemented	Substantially implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Closed
1	1	-	-	-

Since the original audit in June 2023, there has been substantial work to implement the recommendations.

Policies and Procedures

The Adult's Social Care Direct Payment Policy has been reviewed and updated to reflect changes in legislation and procedures. This policy has been signed off by the Adults and Community Services Departmental Team.

The Children's Resource Allocation Panel (RAP) Terms of Reference, although not a policy, covers the key elements of the procedures for how Children's Direct Payments are administered and has been updated and reviewed by the Team Manager.

Annual reviews

Annual reviews have taken place effectively for thirteen of the nineteen cases sampled. Of the remaining six cases:

- Two cases have not yet been in effect long enough for a review (reviews are to be undertaken after the first six weeks initially and then annually, as per the policy)
- Two of the overdue cases have been allocated for a review
- Two of the overdue cases have not been allocated for review.

The adults service has a target of completing 75% of annual reviews within the 12-month time frame. Currently, the percentage of annual reviews completed within 12 months is 74.9%.

All cases that have been reviewed show that consideration had been given to whether they meet the criteria for receiving a direct payment and the direct payment is meeting the individuals need or have been updated to meet the change in need.

Some of the cases had a slight variation in amounts comparing the current list of direct payments to the care plans. This was due to inflation adjustments and is not a concern.