INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

FROM:	Audit and Risk Manager	**SUBJECT:**	Housing-Related Support Services
TO:	Head of Housing Services	**DATE:**	19 March 2018
C.C.	Chief Executive		
	Deputy Chief Executive (BH)		
	Head of Finance		
	Sustaining Tenancies Manager		
	Housing Support & Lifeline Manager		
	Project Manager – Sustaining Tenancies		
	Portfolio Holder (Cllr. Phillips)		

1 Introduction

1.1 In accordance with the Audit Plan for 2017/18, an examination of the above subject area has been undertaken and this report presents the findings and conclusions drawn from the audit for information and action where appropriate.

1.2 Wherever possible, findings have been discussed with the staff involved in the procedures examined and their views are incorporated, where appropriate, into the report. My thanks are extended to all concerned for the help and cooperation received during the audit.

2 Background

2.1 In October 2015, Warwickshire County Council (WCC) agreed to the restructure of Housing Related Support as part of its One Organisation Plan Savings to achieve a cumulative savings target of £3.725 million by 2018. To implement this decision, WCC decided to decommission many of the existing services that its Housing Related Support funding supported and to use revised eligibility criteria to recommission other services.

2.2 A report was presented to and approved by Executive in February 2017, for new service charges, review staffing, and discuss plans for income generation to address cuts to Supported People funding.

2.3 The charges looked to generate an additional £127,000 from Supporting People charges for 2016/17 along with a further £200,000 income per year through the marketing of the Lifeline and Support Services. There were also plans to make savings of £131,000 a year from a staffing redesign, with further associated budget savings of £127,000 per annum.

3   **Scope and Objectives of the Audit**

3.1   The objective of the audit was to review the controls in place to ensure that housing related support services are provided economically to the right people at the right time in line with regulatory requirements and the Council's policies and procedures.

3.2   The audit covered the following control objectives:
- Strategies and policies.
- Roles and responsibilities.
- Processes and procedures.
- Finance and budget monitoring.
- Improvement and development.
- Information assurance.

4   **Findings**

4.1   **Recommendations from Previous Report**

4.1.1   The current position in respect of the recommendations from the audit reported in December 2012 is as follows:

Recommendation	Management Response	Current Status
1 The risks pertaining to the practice of temporary homeless placements in guest rooms at very sheltered schemes should be considered as part of the next review of the Operational Risk Register, along with possible mitigation measures.	In post-audit discussion with the Business Manager, it was advised that this issue has been taken on board as a causal element in the recent major review of the Operational Risk Register for Housing and Property Services.	Completed. Addressed in Housing Services Risk Register and also in the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-2020.
2 Subject to clarification on requirements from the Commissioning Body and/or Warwickshire County Council as appropriate, arrangements should be put in place for staff training on understanding and dealing with dementia.	Dementia Training is being arranged with the Care Bureau for all staff during March and April, 2013.	This was addressed at the time.
3 The Support Manual should be reviewed and revised as necessary.	Support manual already under review.	This was completed at the time and currently procedures are available to staff, see 4.4 below.

4.2   **Strategies & Policies**

4.2.1   As highlighted above, in October 2015, Warwickshire County Council (WCC) agreed to the restructure of Housing Related Support (HRS) as part of its One Organisation Plan Savings to achieve a cumulative savings target of £3.725 million by 2018. To implement this decision, WCC decided to decommission many of the existing services that its HRS funding supported and to use revised eligibility criteria to recommission other services.

4.2.2   There is no formal policy or guidance for Housing Related Support Services (HRSS) as the service was redeveloped by merging two teams, Housing Support and Lifeline. The team now simply provides a service as previous funding from WCC is no longer available.

4.2.3   The redevelopment was approved by Executive meeting in February 2017, when a paper was presented confirming extensive consultation had been undertaken with residents of sheltered schemes and tenants of designated properties for older residents.

4.2.4   Recommendations were made relating to changes to the structure of service charges and suggested that these would no longer be obligatory for the designated stock as part of the tenancy agreement. Charges would only be levied where it was agreed with the tenant that they require these services. However, the sheltered schemes such as Chandos Court, Tannery Court etc. would still be required to pay the charges.

4.2.5   Proposals for new management arrangements for housing support services were made to the Employment Committee, which is responsible for setting policies relating to staffing matters as well as approving the staffing structure of the Council, in June 2017.

4.2.6   At the same time a full redesign of the teams delivering these services were also presented for consideration, with cost implications, including potential redundancy costs, also reported to Executive.

4.2.7   The paper was approved by the Employment Committee at its meeting in June 2017, and subsequently by Executive.

4.3   **Roles & Responsibilities**

4.3.1   The Head of Housing Services has overall responsibility for HRSS. In terms of day-to-day management, these responsibilities are devolved to the Sustaining Tenancies Manager, the Housing Support & Lifeline Manager (HSLM), and the Project Manager – Sustaining Tenancies (PMST).

4.3.2   Following the abovementioned redesign, the operational responsibility for undertaking the services rests with the Housing Support and Lifeline Team Leaders, the Housing Support and Lifeline Officers, and the Lifeline Officers (Nights), with all of these posts having been added to the establishment following the approval by the Employment Committee and Executive.

4.3.3   Staff involved in the process have copies of an office manual / procedures for reference and these are retained electronically on a secure drive at Acorn Court and are only accessible by relevant staff.

4.4   **Processes & Procedures**

4.4.1   The services now provided include:
- Housing Support to Council tenants in sheltered schemes, designated stock and William Wallsgrove House.
- Lifeline Service to private customers across the UK
- Out of hours (OOH) calls for Council repairs
- Homeless OOH
- WCC Emergency Duty Team and Foster Care OOH calls
- Scheme Cleaners

4.4.2   The full list is detailed in the Executive Paper from February 2017.
- Setting up and maintaining a home or tenancy
- Developing domestic and life skills
- Developing social skills
- Advice, advocacy and liaison with outside organisations
- Help in managing finances and benefit claims
- Supervision or monitoring medication
- Peer support and befriending
- Help in finding move-on accommodation
- Help in maintaining the safety and security of the dwelling
- Advice and support on repair work and/or home improvements
- Management of handyman services

4.4.3   Procedures for the services exist in the form of a breakdown of individual tasks for each of the schemes. These list all services and the time taken to complete each task, with each task having an associated hourly rate.

4.4.4   The documents are retained securely on the Acorn Court network drive and are also available in a hard copy manual.

4.4.5   There are also procedures and guidance notes detailing the services, provided, that are available to all employees involved in providing the services. As above, guidance notes are saved on the Acorn Court network drive.

4.4.6   Managers are responsible for developing and maintaining the procedures and Team Leaders ensure they are implemented and also ensure compliance.

4.4.7   A system called Dolphin was previously used and provided training and procedure software. This was replaced by PNC 7 software, installed in 2016 and the processes used previously were reviewed due to the new system.

4.4.8   As a result of the restructuring in 2017, the processes were reviewed again to align with the new structure and also the system requirements.

4.4.9   Managers ensure compliance with the procedures through call monitoring, feedback from staff and other departments and also from encouraging officers from relevant areas to attend team meetings.

4.5   **Finance & Budget Monitoring**

4.5.1   As highlighted above, the Supporting People Grants (which had been received since April 2003) were reviewed by WCC, the administering authority, and terminated from 31 July 2016. It was subsequently agreed that the HRA would fund the provision of this service until a review of the service had been completed in 2017.

4.5.2   For 2017/18 the agreed budget for Housing Support was £435,700 with the Lifeline budget being set at £543,300, although both have been subject to in-year adjustments.

4.5.3   Budget monitoring, involving meetings between the managers and accountants, is undertaken on a monthly basis with reports being received by the HSLM for Housing Support and the PMST for Lifeline, detailing the budget movement and any variance.

4.5.4   The charges for the services provided were reviewed and agreed as part of the budget setting process. In addition, further charges for the Discretionary Services (new tenants only) and Lifeline Services Equipment and Products are detailed in the Fees and Charges available from the Council's website. These were also approved by Executive.

4.5.5   Income for the services is received, processed and accounted for via the usual income routes for the Council. The accounting records were reviewed to establish the volume of income received. For Lifeline, the main source of income is from the Central Alarm Charge.

4.5.6   It was noted that the initial budgeted income for Lifeline Central Alarm Charge was £209,100 and to the end of December 2017, the actual income was over £276,000. The budget had since been adjusted to an income of £350,800. Other Income was adjusted to £50,000 from an initial income of £30,000 and the actual income for the same period was approximately £91,000.

4.5.7   For Housing Support, there was no initial annual budget for other income and this was subsequently adjusted to £200. The actual income at the end of December 2017 was over £11,700.

Risk

Future years' budgets may not reflect actual income.

Recommendation

Budget forecasts should take into account the increase in income, which should also be reflected in the annual budget setting process.

4.5.8   The service is currently reviewing the income reporting process and content. See 4.6 below.

4.6   **Improvement & Development**

4.6.1   Provision and use of the services is monitored and reviewed via call monitoring (from the Call Centre). All calls are logged and monitored e.g. answer within 30 seconds. However, this process is currently subject to review with a view to improvements being made going forward as the service is developing.

4.6.2   In addition, the service is currently looking to change the information reported to management in the new financial year to:

- Percentage of calls to Lifeline answered within one minute
- Income earned by Lifeline.

Risk

Performance monitoring and reporting may not meet the needs of the service or be properly communicated.

Recommendation

The performance monitoring and reporting process should be fully developed to include:
- **Relevant and useful Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**
- **A regular reporting requirement.**
- **Relevant and useful information reported accurately and promptly to the correct officers.**
- **Action plans to improve performance.**

4.6.3   Customer satisfaction forms are currently used to establish the views of service users. Once Lifeline installation is completed, a questionnaire is left for service user. Results are all logged and to date there have been no areas of concern.

4.6.4   In terms of more formal review, the Council service was a member of Telecare Services Authority (TSA). TSA offer technology enabled care (TEC) service providers and suppliers a way of demonstrating quality and it also offers commissioners assurance that providers offer quality services. This is by way of an annual Quality Standards Framework (QSF) audit, providing certification against defined quality standards.

4.6.5   However, due to the redesign of the service and pressures on all management and staff, the Council decided in the short term to not take the annual audits and are for the moment just basic members. This will be revisited going forward.

4.6.6   It was established that there is a requirement to improve and develop the services provided and the redesign has already led to improvements such as:

- Mileage reduction due to use of Pool Cars
- Website development and improvement

- Social media
- Mail order of equipment across the UK
- New products
- New key safes including fitting by staff.

4.6.7   Good practice and new developments are shared between authorities and partners, via the TSA website, which also allows members to submit ideas and contribute useful articles.

4.7   Information Assurance

4.7.1   Checks are undertaken to ensure all reported information is accurate and valid. The PNC system provides the data and reports.

4.7.2   The HSLM and the Team Leaders review the reports and check back to the system to ensure that the data is accurate, as a second check.

4.7.3   As mentioned above, electronic data is held securely on the PNC system at Acorn Court and access is restricted to authorised personnel only. The current PNC user list was reviewed and it was found that there are 39 current users, including a Tunstall Engineer access. Tunstall is the system provider and require access for maintenance.

4.7.4   In addition there is a username, 'Wallboard'. This is a login for the wallboard chart which shows call stats and calls waiting.

4.7.5   Hard copy procedures and documentation are retained at 42 Acorn Court secure building, Riverside and also at sheltered scheme offices. Access to all buildings is restricted and documents are held securely.

5   Conclusions

5.1   Following our review, in overall terms we are able to give a SUBSTANTIAL degree of assurance that the systems and controls in place in respect of Housing Related Support Services are appropriate and are working effectively.

5.2   The assurance bands are shown below:

Level of Assurance	Definition
Substantial Assurance	There is a sound system of control in place and compliance with the key controls.
Moderate Assurance	Whilst the system of control is broadly satisfactory, some controls are weak or non-existent and there is non-compliance with several controls.
Limited Assurance	The system of control is generally weak and there is non-compliance with controls that do exist.

5.3   Issues were identified relating to:

- Budgets do not reflect increasing income.
- Performance monitoring and reporting may not meet the needs of the service or be properly communicated.

6   **Management Action**

6.1   The recommendations arising above are reproduced in the attached Action
         Plan (Appendix A) for management attention.

Richard Barr
Audit and Risk Manager

Action Plan

Internal Audit of Housing-Related Support Services – March 2018

Report Ref.	Recommendation	Risk	Risk Rating*	Responsible Officer(s)	Management Response	Target Date
4.5.7	Budget forecasts should take into account the increase in income, which should also be reflected in the annual budget setting process.	Future years' budgets may not reflect actual income.	Medium	Housing Support & Lifeline Manager	This will be discussed with the Assistant Accountant as it is believed this was due to two cost centres being merged (7430 and 7440) and the budget may not, therefore, have been set correctly after the merger.	30/03/2018
4.6.2	The performance monitoring and reporting process should be fully developed to include: • Relevant and useful Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). • A regular reporting requirement. • Relevant and useful information reported accurately and promptly to the correct officers. • Action plans to improve performance.	Performance monitoring and reporting may not meet the needs of the service or be properly communicated.	Medium	Housing Support & Lifeline Manager	Performance is monitored on a day to day basis by the service mangers with relevant KPIs reviewed by the Housing Services management team on a quarterly basis.	Complete

* Risk Ratings are defined as follows:

High Risk: Issue of significant importance requiring urgent attention.
Medium Risk: Issue of moderate importance requiring prompt attention.
Low Risk: Issue of minor importance requiring attention.