

**AUDIT REPORTS WITH MODERATE OR LOW LEVEL OF ASSURANCE  
ISSUED QUARTER 1 2017/18**

**Lone Worker Arrangements – 30 June 2017**

**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 A number of concerns had been raised by delegates at Lone Worker training sessions that had been run for the Council and, as a result, the Head of Health & Community Protection, on behalf of SMT, asked Internal Audit to undertake a review of lone working procedures. This topic had not been covered previously by Internal Audit.
- 2.2 The Council has used the Tunstall system for a number of years. However, other systems have also been piloted and informal systems are also used. This lack of consistency was one of the concerns raised.

**3 Scope and Objectives of the Audit**

- 3.1 The audit was undertaken to ascertain the systems (both formal and informal) that are being used across the Council to track staff that are undertaking lone working and to assess whether they are adequate and are being used effectively.
- 3.2 In terms of scope, the audit covered the following areas:
- Policies and procedures
  - Systems
  - Risk management.
- 3.3 The audit programme identified the expected controls. The control objectives examined were:
- The Council can demonstrate that it has considered the safety of staff that are undertaking lone working
  - Staff know how to use the systems in place
  - The safety of lone workers is protected via use of appropriate systems

- Staff are able to use the lone worker systems correctly
- Managers know the whereabouts of relevant staff that are lone working
- Management are able to demonstrate that they have considered the risks to their staff undertaking lone working
- Staff are able to obtain details of any potential risks posed by individuals before visiting a property.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Recommendations from Previous Report

4.1.1 This is the first audit of this topic, so this section is not applicable.

### 4.2 Policies & Procedures

4.2.1 A lone working policy is in place. This was last reviewed in September 2016 and the document includes the next review date as appropriate.

4.2.2 The policy is available to all staff via the intranet through the AssessNet portal. Based on the answers to general questions posed during the course of the audit, it is evident that most staff are not aware of the existence of or the location of the policy, so the existence of the policy and its location need to be publicised.

#### **Risk**

**Staff may be placing themselves in harm's way by not following the policy.**

#### **Recommendation**

**The Lone Worker policy should be publicised to all staff.**

4.2.3 There are some general procedure notes in place for the use of the Tunstall system and the Benefits team have their own version which has been expanded to include contact details relevant to the team. Contract Services have also produced procedure notes for their 'system' which uses two-way radios as opposed to Tunstall.

4.2.4 The Housing Support & Lifeline Manager (HSLM) suggested that there were user guides supplied with the Oysta system that was being piloted and users were briefly shown how to use them, but nothing formal has been drawn up as the system was only being trialled.

### 4.3 Systems

4.3.1 A survey was undertaken of staff members on the Senior Officers email group to ascertain the arrangements that are in place within each team at the Council. As expected, this highlighted a large range of informal systems, as well as Tunstall and the pilot of the Oysta system.

4.3.2 As indicated above, the prompt for the audit to be undertaken came from feedback received following lone worker training. Meetings were held with some of those who had provided the feedback to get further details as to

their concerns. The main concerns expressed regarding Tunstall were the consistency of use and the ability to use the system if confronted with an 'immediate issue'.

- 4.3.3 The use of Tunstall appears to be ad-hoc with some teams reporting that it is used for all visits but other teams that have access appearing not to use it. The Project Manager (Sustaining Tenancies) (PMST) provided a report from Tunstall that listed all staff that had been set up on the system along with details of when they had last used it.
- 4.3.4 There were 147 users set up to use the system when the report was produced. However, according to the data within the spreadsheet, only ten had used it during the reporting period (April 2017) and only 48 appeared to have used the system at all (as per the last log on date within the report) of which only 28 had used the system from 2016 onwards.
- 4.3.5 A sample of those who had seemingly not used the system was chosen from the report (excluding those who no longer work for the Council) and those chosen were asked:
- a) Is the report accurate?
  - b) If you haven't used the system, why not?
  - c) If you have used the system, when was it last used / how often is it used?
- 4.3.6 Half of the sample claimed to have used the system at some point although only two suggested that they would still use it, although it subsequently transpired that their team is now using Oysta. Of the others, some highlighted that they had changed roles and no longer felt the need to use the system.
- 4.3.7 Of those who had not used the system, they highlighted that they had no use of the system, either because they didn't undertake lone working or they used another system. One user was not even aware that he had been set up.
- 4.3.8 The HSLM subsequently contacted Internal Audit as he had been doing some work to cleanse the system of those who no longer worked for the authority. This reduced the number of users to 101. He also advised that he was to contact all users to ascertain if they still required access to the system and was to build an annual review of users into the work schedule and agreed to follow up on the inaccuracy of the reports with Tunstall.
- 4.3.9 With regards to the concern raised in relation to the lack of responsiveness of Tunstall for dealing with immediate issues, a trial had been run on the Oysta system, as this contains a 'man down' function and a panic button. However, upon discussion with a team that has used the system (Appeals & Enforcement within Development Services) and with the PMST, it was established that (amongst other things) there were issues with the GPS positioning and signal reception within rural areas. As a result, it is not thought that the system meets the needs of the organisation.

- 4.3.10 Some staff within Neighbourhood Services (including Rangers and Area Contract Officers) use the two-way radio system. Car Park staff that transferred to the Ranger service had previously used this system and the Senior Contract Officer advised that the decision to expand this to the Area Contract Officers was partly taken as a result of the 'usability' of the Tunstall system.
- 4.3.11 One specific area of concern noted related to the logging and tracking of out-of-hours visits. Most alarm calls are now dealt with by contractors in the first instance who will wait on site with any staff that are subsequently called out. However, staff dealing with other issues (e.g. members of the events team called to an event or surveyors dealing with lift problems), may attend directly and these do not appear to be being logged so that their return from the job can be reported.
- 4.3.12 What is clear from the discussions held and the survey responses received is that neither the Tunstall or Oysta systems fully meet the needs of the Council for dealing with lone workers and there is a need to continue to look at other possible solutions.
- Risk**  
**Staff undertaking lone working may not be able to get help when required.**
- Recommendation**  
**A review should be undertaken to identify other lone working system to ascertain whether they are better suited to the needs of the Council with trials being performed as necessary.**
- 4.3.13 However, whatever solution is arrived at, there is a need for a formal set of instructions to be drawn up to identify when these formal systems should be used with all relevant staff being given access to the system.
- Risk**  
**Staff undertaking lone working may not be able to get help when required.**
- Recommendation**  
**Formal instructions should be drawn up to advise staff when the lone worker system should be used. These should then be publicised to relevant staff.**
- 4.3.14 Another issue that was raised by a number of staff was what constitutes lone working. Whilst the formal systems are geared around meetings with 'service users' in their own properties, the informal systems, can be used for all instances when staff leave their normal work place.
- 4.3.15 The majority of the informal systems employ a whiteboard, with staff recording details of their visits with some also including an expected time of return, but not all follow this process. Others will use their Outlook calendars to record their visits or just sign in and out on the team's fire records.

- 4.3.16 One thing that these informal systems rely on is the need for someone checking whether the staff member has returned as expected. In a number of instances, it was highlighted that staff will try to call them if they have not returned, but this arrangement is often informal with no one being officially allocated to this task.
- Risk**  
**Accidents or incidents involving lone working staff may not be identified in a timely manner.**
- Recommendation**  
**Staff within each section should be nominated to contact staff that have not returned to the office as expected.**
- 4.3.17 In response to the survey, the Learning & Development Officer (LDO) highlighted that managers (from other sections) have asked for HR to try to contact a member of staff if they have not arrived when expected. This relies on individuals keeping their details (phone numbers) up-to-date via self-serve. Managers will also be advised that they should have staff contact information.
- Risk**  
**Staff may not be contactable.**
- Recommendation**  
**Staff should be advised of the need to keep their details up-to-date on self-serve.**
- 4.3.18 Whilst we would not expect a 'one size fits all' approach to tracking lone workers, due to the differing risk levels across the visits being provided, there is a further lack of consistency over how the informal systems are used.
- 4.3.19 Upon walking around Riverside House, it is clear that the use of whiteboards varies across teams, with some just showing ticks or crosses to indicate whether someone is expected in the office and others giving details of locations and expected time of return to the office.
- Risk**  
**Staff may not use the system properly.**
- Recommendation**  
**A consistent format should be agreed for the use of any 'informal' systems.**
- 4.3.20 One issue with whiteboards that is worth bearing in mind is that they rely, to an extent, on people being in the proximity of the board. Going forward, the new ways of working suggest that hot-desking may be undertaken and teams may not be sitting together, so a whiteboard sited in a single location may not be effective. To that end it is worth considering the formalisation of the use of electronic systems, such as Outlook, in the planning for the move to the new HQ.

**Risk**

**Current informal systems may not be suited to the new ways of working employed at the new HQ.**

**Recommendation**

**Staff on the Transforming Our Workplace team should consider what (informal) systems should be employed to track lone workers once staff move to the new HQ.**

- 4.3.21 As suggested above, Lone Worker training events have been run. As per the On Course directory these courses are 'awareness workshops' that 'look at (general) processes and practices to improve the personal safety of staff working alone' and do not, therefore, include training on any of the specific systems used by the Council.
- 4.3.22 The courses were last run in March and there are no further courses shown on the directory for the current year. Having said that, the LDO advised that attempts are being made to schedule more in.
- 4.3.23 The courses have been attended by 40 members of staff, split between Health & Community Protection (13), Housing & Property Services (25) and Cultural Services (two). It is therefore clear that some services where regular lone working is undertaken have not attended the training on offer.

**Risk**

**Staff may not know how to deal with situations they are faced with.**

**Recommendation**

**The lone worker training should be promoted to those that undertake lone working.**

**4.4 Risk Management**

- 4.4.1 A search was performed on AssessNet to identify all risk assessments that included the Lone Working hazard. This search returned 50 individual assessments.
- 4.4.2 However, these varied with some being 'all-encompassing' for a whole team (one assessment covering Development Control) and others being for one-off events. They also varied between assessments of staff visiting customers and individuals being the only person working within a Council building at specific times or within an isolated area.
- 4.4.3 Some departments had undertaken numerous assessments (there are sixteen Cultural Services assessments, although some of these relate to leisure centres that have now ceased to be the responsibility of the Council), whereas others had just one assessment (Finance and Development Services).
- 4.4.4 It was also noted that there were no assessments undertaken in relation to some teams where a degree of lone working with 'customers' is expected (e.g.

the Assets Team in Housing & Property Services, Regulatory Services etc.).

**Risk**

**Managers may be unaware of the risks that their staff are facing.**

**Recommendation**

**Managers should review AssessNet to ascertain whether there are relevant assessments for their team and undertake assessments as necessary.**

- 4.4.5 The Corporate Health & Safety Co-ordinator and Building Manager gave details of the processes followed for maintaining the staff alert list. These were considered to be satisfactory, with regular meetings being held to review the individuals contained thereon.
- 4.4.6 During meetings some had expressed concern that the list may not be accurate if people moved or changed their name, but the system is only ever going to be as good as the information provided to the team that maintain the list.
- 4.4.7 All staff have access to the list through two different 'search functions' (via the intranet and mapping systems) as opposed to having access to the whole list and this is considered appropriate.

**5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 Following our review, in overall terms we are able to give a MODERATE degree of assurance that the Lone Worker Arrangements in place at the Council are appropriate and are being used 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 A number of issues were identified:

- The lack of general awareness concerning the existence of the Lone Worker Policy.
- The formal lone working systems in use do not fully meet the needs of the Council.
- There is a lack of consistency in the use of the different systems available.
- The process for contacting lone working staff needs to be formalised

- and staff need to ensure their contact details remain up-to-date.
- Lone Worker training has been attended by only a small number of teams.
- Risk assessments on AssessNet are also, similarly, confined to a number of services.
- Processes need to be reviewed in light of the new ways of working envisaged as part of the move to the Council's new HQ.

## 6 **Management Action**

- 6.1 The recommendations arising above are reproduced in the Action Plan for management attention.