

Agenda Item	7
Report No	AS/4/20

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Audit & Scrutiny Committee

Date: 24th September 2020

Report Title: Action Tracking Report

Report By: Corporate Audit Manager

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (the standards) requires the Chief Audit Executive to establish a follow-up process to monitor and ensure that management actions have been effectively implemented or that senior management has accepted the risk of not taking action. Details of this process called action tracking, is provided at section 4 of this report.
- 1.2 The outcome of this process is normally reported to the Audit & Scrutiny Committee on a six-monthly basis with reports provided to the June and November meetings. As the June Committee was cancelled the information is provided to this meeting and this report covers those audits which have been action tracked during the period 01/11/19 –11/09/20.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is invited to note and comment upon the action tracking information provided including the revised target dates for the completion of outstanding actions. It should be noted that there is a greater number of revisions than normal due to a lack of action during the response stage of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is a similar position reported by other Councils.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource – any resource implications arising from audit actions should be addressed by the relevant Services and where required, will be reported to Committee.
- 3.2 Risk – The implementation of the management agreed actions will assist in reducing the risk exposure to the Council.

3.3 There are no Legal, Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island), Climate Change / Carbon Clever or Gaelic implications

4. Action Tracking Process

4.1 The action tracking process operates as follows:

- (1) Audit reports contain an action plan which details the areas of concern; management agreed action; target date for implementation; and the title of the Officer responsible for implementation.
- (2) Once all of the target dates in the action plan have passed, these are action tracked. This involves contacting the appropriate Manager(s) to confirm that their actions have been implemented.
- (3) Where the agreed management action has not been undertaken, an explanation is requested. However, if this response is considered to be unsatisfactory, it is subject to further audit enquiry and/ or investigation. Where delays have occurred and the reason for these are considered reasonable then a revised implementation date is agreed and this is action tracked once this date has expired.

4.2 Where an audit is undertaken on an annual basis such as the Leader Programme and Compliance with the Carbon Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency Scheme, the management agreed actions are followed up as part of the following's year's audit work. Any outstanding recommendations are carried forward into the following year's report.

5. Action Tracking/ Follow-up results

5.1 Summary report

The report attached as **Appendix 1** provides a summary of all audit reports issued which have been subject to the action tracking/ follow up process outlined above. The information is split into 2 separate tables:

- Table 1 details the audits where the action tracking process is complete. All management agreed actions have been completed and/ or it has been agreed that these will be made redundant. In such circumstances, an explanation is provided.
- Table 2 details those audits where the action tracking process is still in progress and revised target dates have been provided. Further information on these particular audits is provided at section 5.2 below.

Overall, the reported position is that a total of **49** audit recommendations were made and the current position is that:

- **29 (59%)** actions have been satisfactorily implemented.
- **19 (39%)** actions have not yet been implemented and revised target dates have been agreed.
- **1 (2%)** action was made redundant and details were provided in the previous action tracking report to Committee.

5.2 Actions with revised target dates

A total of **6** audits listed in Table 2 have revised target dates as detailed below.

(i) HCD07/001 - Review of Burials and Cremations – Policy, Legislation and Processes

Action tracking on this audit was last reported to Committee on 28/11/19. The Service acknowledge that there have been significant delays in closing all the actions identified through the original audit. This was detailed in a report to Communities and Place Committee on 19/08/20 and discussed with members at a redesign

workshop on 01/09/20. A new management structure is in place within the Service and work on the review is being prioritised.

The Lean Review that commenced in September 2019 has made significant progress in the review of Burials and Cremation administration and invoicing procedures. Unfortunately, this work was delayed with the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 but the work has re-commenced and the table at **Appendix 2** been updated to reflect new target dates. A new Corporate Policy has been prepared and will be taken to the Communities and Place Committee in November 2020.

(ii) Review of the administration and payments in respect of Fostering, Adoption and Kinship Care

1 medium grade action is outstanding. When last reported, the original target date of 31/03/19 had been revised to 31/03/20. This action relates to reducing the payment frequency of adoption and resident allowances from fortnightly to monthly. Due to the Covid-19 outbreak and having to prioritise other areas of work, the service has been unable to implement these changes within the revised target date of 31/03/20. A further revision of the target date to 31/03/21 has been agreed.

(iii) Review of ICT projects

Both recommendations for this audit (1 high and 1 medium priority) remain outstanding and have been revised from 31/10/18 to 31/01/20 and now have an amended date of 28/02/21. These relate to the review of the Council's Project Management Policy by the Commercial & Efficiency Team, who intended to address the audit recommendations by establishing a Project Managers Office (PMO) to drive standardisation and efficiency of Project Management, with a revised policy being part of this process.

Staff from what was the Commercial & Efficiency Team now form part of the Transformation Service which was formed in May 2020 and has taken action (and will continue to do so) to set in place and actively promote the effective management of business change and improvement (including projects), with proportionate controls and governance, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for Project Sponsors and Leads.

As part of Service Redesign, the Transformation Service is investigating how best to facilitate training for all levels of project/ programme staff which will inculcate best practice and good governance and standardisation across the Council's business change activities. The PMO function has been established to provide a single support structure, designed to provide assistance to change and delivery initiatives, good governance and project management guidance for a consistent and proportionate approach through the lifecycle of initiatives and interventions - the current focus for this is via the Council's Recovery Action Plan which is regularly reported to Council meetings.

(iv) Winter Maintenance

All High and Medium priority actions have been completed. The outstanding action is a low priority action to clearly detail the target times and weather conditions under which the targets are applicable on the Council's website and review gritting maps for consistency of detail. A revised target date of 31/10/20 has been agreed for this action. which ties in with the beginning of the winter maintenance season.

(v) Review of Information Management Arrangements

Table 2 shows 3 recommendations with revised target dates, but this does not reflect the full picture whereby the 2 high grade recommendations had 7 associated actions, 4 of which have been completed. The outstanding actions are as follows:

- 1 recommendation had 4 actions, 2 of which have been completed. 1 outstanding action relates to the provision of mandatory staff training on Information Management. Confirmation has been provided that the staff induction has been reviewed and this process includes a requirement for the managers to sign off that the employee understands the information management and security responsibilities of their role. However, the review of all mandatory training (Information Management aside which can be completed online) has been overtaken by Covid-19 and the impact that it has had on face to face training. A revised target date of 31/12/20 has been agreed.

The other action concerns the corporate approach to information management with a plan to change staff behaviour and ensure best practice is followed. This was to align with the restructuring of Services and a revised target date of 31/12/20 has been agreed as this is the date given for organisational restructure in the Recovery Board Programme. The 2 outstanding actions detailed below are linked and so have the same target date.

- 1 recommendation had 3 actions, and 2 have been completed. The remaining action relates to an appropriate structure and member composition of the Information Management Governance Board.
- 1 medium grade action is linked with the plan above and will consider information management practice and what resources are required to deliver this.

(vi) Provision of Early Learning and Childcare services

The high priority action due to be completed at the end of February was completed on time. The remaining actions were due to be completed by the end of March or April, however progress on these was delayed by the Covid-19 outbreak as team members were involved in setting up childcare hubs for key worker provision. Most of the work to address the actions had been done pre-Covid which has enabled the second high priority action and 2 of the medium priority actions to be completed. The target dates for the 2 outstanding actions have been revised to the end of September 2020. These relate to guidance on best practice for staff using the database used for recording use of childcare hours, and the introduction of a process to identify any parents/carers who may exceed their funded hours when using more than one provider.

Designation: Corporate Audit Manager

Date: 14th September 2020

Author: Donna Sutherland

Action Tracking Report

Table 1 - audits where action tracking is complete

Report Ref and Title	Date Issued	Recommendations			Explanation/ Comments
		Total	Completed	No Action	
HDA05/001.bf - Review of VAT arrangements	14/03/19	3	3		
HDB10/001 Financial Assessments	02/04/19	3	3		
HAC02/005 Investigation into missing housing income	17/10/19	4	4		
Totals		10	10	0	

Table 2 - audits where action tracking has not been completed

Report Ref and Title	Date Issued	Recommendations				Date Revised
		Total	Completed	No Action	Still Outstanding	
HED04/004 - Repairs and Maintenance - Care & Learning Properties	15/09/17	5	2			3
HCD07/001 - Review of Burials and Cremations – Policy, Legislation and Processes	05/09/17	9	2			7
HAA03/001 - Review of the administration and payments in respect of Fostering, Adoption and Kinship Care	17/07/18	6	4	1		1
HAB01/007.bf Review of ICT Projects	31/07/18	2	0			2
HCC07/001.bf Winter Maintenance	18/03/19	6	5			1
HDD04/001 Review of Information Management Arrangements	06/09/19	6	3			3
HAA01/001 Provision of Early Learning and Childcare services	19/11/19	5	3			2
Totals		39	19	1		19

Review of Burials and Cremations – Policy, Legislation and Processes

Priority/ Ref	Recommendation	Management Agreed Action	Implementation		Latest Service Update
			Responsible Officer	Target Date	
High H1	<p>The Burials Grounds Policy should be reviewed, revised and re-issued to all staff, along with relevant procedures to ensure a consistent service delivery across the area.</p>	<p>A new post of Bereavement Services Manager was created at the end of 2016. This post was filled in Spring 2017, and the priorities for the new post holder include reviewing and standardising policies and procedures relating to Burials and Cremations.</p>	Bereavement Services Manager	<p>31/03/18</p> <p>Revised to 31/03/19, 31/03/20, now 31/03/21</p>	<p>New draft policy created incorporating Burials and Cremation policy. Impact assessment to be completed and revised policy to be put to Communities and Place Committee on 25/11/20 for approval.</p> <p>Lean review progressing procedures review. All 'as is' procedures mapped. New process maps and procedures being drafted. When complete will be issued to staff for consultation and then, where necessary, to funeral directors.</p>
	<p>As Service staff are located in various areas a process for policy update notifications along with a contact for support and advice should be agreed. A benefit for staff would be an internal user group to be set-up which could include taking forward the staff suggestions.</p>				<p>Staff meetings have occurred as part of Lean review. Further meetings to be arranged to consult on new procedures.</p> <p>Internal user group to be developed for any future developments.</p>

Priority/ Ref	Recommendation	Management Agreed Action	Implementation		Latest Service Update
			Responsible Officer	Target Date	
High H2	Review the existing storage facilities and identify where fire safes are needed.	Fire safes will be provided where required.	Bereavement Services Manager	31/01/18, Was shown as complete then revised to 31/01/20, now 31/10/20	Fire cabinets installed in all locations apart from one. New cabinet has been ordered for this location.
	A process for the storage and retention of the historic paper records needs to be created.	The Council's retention schedules for cemetery and cremation records are being reviewed. A large quantity of historical information has been either archived or disposed of in accordance with these schedules. This will continue at all locations where cemetery information is held.	Bereavement Services Manager	30/04/18 Revised to 31/03/19, 31/03/20, now 30/06/21 (for BACAS system)	As reported previously, it is proposed all historical burial records are recorded digitally. Work is progressing to extend the current use of the BACAS digital system to all offices. When completed in early 2021 this will allow the digital recording of all future burials and cremations. With responsibility for 268 burial grounds, the transfer of current records to the digital system is a major undertaking. The options to undertake the transfer are being investigated with the intention to commence this work in 2021.
				31/03/21	Original registers/ records will be held by the Archivists in conditions that will preserve registers; this process has been ongoing in Burial Grounds covered by the Inverness administration office.

Priority/ Ref	Recommendation	Management Agreed Action	Implementation		Latest Service Update
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H2 cont.	Investigate possibility of installing/creating datum points in all burial grounds to standardise the identification and measuring of lair locations.	Datum points for all of the cemeteries still in use will be provided.	Bereavement Services Manager	31/10/18 Completed 31/12/20	Recorded as completed in last update. The introduction of software will record current and future information on Lairs, Lair holders and numbers interred in each lair. It is envisaged that new hardware now available will allow the GPS of each lairs to be pinpointed in relation to its actual position within the burial ground, in relation to the Datum point.
		The Service is investigating the employment of a graduate intern to undertake the marking out and planning of these cemeteries.		29/11/19 Completed	New graduate appointed and work progressing.
	Arrange to properly document the information which is not held on our registers. Thereafter, any future changes should be promptly documented.	Arrangements will be made to record all lair information in ledgers or electronic systems.	Bereavement Services Manager	31/07/18 Revised to 31/03/19, 28/02/20, now 30/06/21 (for BACAS system)	Work is progressing to extend the current use of the BACAS digital system to all offices. Training to be provided.

Priority/ Ref	Recommendation	Management Agreed Action	Implementation		Latest Service Update
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High H3	Review the existing practices for advance lair purchases and amend policy to ensure all offices are following one consistent procedure.	Consultation with stakeholders will be required before implementing any new policy.	Bereavement Services Manager	28/02/18 Revised to 31/03/19, 31/03/20, now 31/12/20	The new Management Rules for Cemeteries make clear that for individual cemeteries where there are known capacity constraints any request to future purchase a lair will be denied. All advance purchases were suspended during initial months of Covid19 pandemic.
	Bereavement Services Manager		Completed	Recorded as completed in last update.	
High H4	A review of the schedule for booking slots should be undertaken, to match opening hours with working patterns to reduce the need for overtime costs. Consideration should also be given to how this schedule is deployed across all offices and need for possible local variations.	Consultation with stakeholders will be required before implementing any new policy.	Bereavement Services Manager	28/02/18 Was shown as complete now revised to 31/12/20	Work ongoing through lean review on possible booking arrangements.
		Working patterns at Kilvean Crematorium to be reviewed.		28/02/18 Revised to 31/03/19, 31/03/20 Now completed	Working patterns at Kilvean Crematorium were reviewed through Covid19 response. Times were altered to allow more direct cremations and for a 6 week period slots on Saturdays. Work ongoing through lean review on possible booking arrangements.

Priority/ Ref	Recommendation	Management Agreed Action	Implementation		Latest Service Update
			Responsible Officer	Target Date	
High H5	<p>The Service should review current practices for debtor accounts to re-align with Financial Regulations and the corporate guidance.</p> <p>The Financial Regulations state services should be paid for in advance.</p>	Bereavement Services to work with the Council's Debtors Section to ensure that the Council's Financial Regulations are either followed or altered to take into account the sensitive nature of the services being provided.	Bereavement Services Manager	Ongoing 28/02/18, Revised to 28/02/19, now 31/03/21	<p>The Debtors Section is actively pursuing all outstanding invoices over the Council's standard terms; this has reduced the debt substantially.</p> <p>The Lean review has identified that any additional associated costs, for example, Pre-purchase, Transfer of Lair, Headstone/Memorials, could be paid at time of request, which would further reduce outstanding debt, and the need for invoicing. This could be done as part of an online payment process. This approach is supported through the Income Review Project which requires Services to consider pre-payments to reduce not only the cost of invoicing but also reduce the risk of bad debt.</p>
	The Service should investigate introducing pre-payment at the time of booking for the burial and cremation services. The benefits of this would include removing the need for invoicing and debt control giving a saving on the associated costs.	Prepayment plans are an avenue of income. Funeral poverty allows individuals to spread the cost of lair purchased and internment.	Bereavement Services Manager	28/02/18 Revised to 31/03/20, now 31/03/21	An initial review of a repayment plan was completed and this indicated that was not feasible at that time. This will be further considered as the lean review progresses.
		Consultation with stakeholders will be required before implementing any new policy.	Bereavement Services Manager	28/02/18 Revised to 31/03/19, now 31/03/21	Meetings with funeral directors have been occurring throughout the Covid19 pandemic. Day to day interaction with FD is ongoing. Formal consultation will occur when proposals are finalised.

Priority/ Ref	Recommendation	Management Agreed Action	Implementation		Latest Service Update
			Responsible Officer	Target Date	
H5 cont		Financial monitoring to be standardised.	Bereavement Services Manager	28/02/18 Revised to 31/03/20, now 31/03/21	As above, meetings are taking place out ensure all invoicing is carried out consistently across all areas.
High H6	The Service should create and implement an internal Council Crematorium policy with the necessary procedures and guidance, and ensuring there is suitable staff cover to authorise the necessary checks within the processes	ICCM or FBCA training in Crematorium Operations to be provided for all staff.	Burial and Cremations Officer	28/02/18 Complete	Training for Crematorium Operators ongoing.
		We are about to recruit for a new Burial and Cremations officer, and this will provide an opportunity to build resilience into authorisations within the Crematorium processes.	Bereavement Services Manager	28/02/18 Complete	Officer in post.
Medium M1	The Management Rules for Cemeteries should be reviewed and amended to cover all relevant information on the purchase of burial plot, burial arrangements and on-going maintenance of lairs.	The existing Management Rules will be reviewed in partnership with Legal Services and presented to the first Resources Committee of 2018. There is a statutory consultation process that will be built in to this review.	Bereavement Services Manager/ Burial and Cremations Officer	31/03/18 Revised to 28/02/19, 30/04/20, now 31/12/20	Review of Management Rules for Cemeteries agreed at EDI Committee in January 2019. Statutory consultation requires to be completed. Management Rules for the Crematorium are being reviewed.

Priority/ Ref	Recommendation	Management Agreed Action	Implementation		Latest Service Update
			Responsible Officer	Target Date	
M1 cont	This should also be done for the information issued to lair purchasers to include easily understood guidance on understanding the Management Rules for Cemeteries	The process for issuing information to lair holders is inconsistent across the Highlands and will be reviewed	Bereavement Services Manager/ Burial and Cremations Officer	28/02/18 Revised to 28/02/19, 31/03/20, now 31/12/20	New leaflets and signage being drafted for consultation with staff, Funeral Directors and memorial masons.
Medium M2	The existing policy for Crematorium users should be reviewed and amended to ensure this is flexible and easily accessible for crematorium users, funeral directors, the public, Members and staff.	Consultation with stakeholders will be required before implementing any new policy.	Bereavement Services Manager/ Burial and Cremations Officer	28/02/18 Revised to 21/12/18, 31/12/19, now 31/03/21	Active discussions held with Funeral Directors throughout Covid19 pandemic and continuing. Management Rules for the Crematorium are being reviewed.
Low L1	When timescales are available from the Scottish Government the Service needs to amend current policies and procedures to take account of the new Act.	Staff are involved in the Scottish Government (SG) consultation working group. The final consultation stage has been agreed and is currently scheduled to be reviewed by the Minister by the end of the year.	Bereavement Services Manager/ Burial and Cremations Officer	31/03/19 Completed 31/10/19	Recorded as completed in last update.