

Appendix B: Service Assurance Statement

Service Area:	Housing & Public Protection	Date:	May 2017
Head of Service / Corporate Manager:	Andy Godman		

The following Service Assurance Statement has been completed for the period 2016-17. Retrospective for the past financial year, it represents an assessment of the level of assurance provided by controls within Housing & Public Protection. These controls have been in place / were implemented during the financial year and remain in place at the date of preparation of this statement.

Overall Assessment

For Housing & Public Protection, I am satisfied that with the exception of those matters detailed in the Action column below, adequate systems of internal control were in place / implemented during the financial year and are on-going. I consider the *overall* level of assurance for Housing & Public Protection based on the areas covered by this assessment to be: **Effective**

Action Areas

Governance Area	Action	Priority	Due date	Responsible officer
Internal control	To complete the Medium recommendations arising from the internal audit on homelessness services	Medium	September 2017	Strategic Housing Manager
Internal control	Review and update written delegations for officers of the Service	High	September 2017	Head of Service
Internal control	Improve financial control systems as regards Careline	High	September 2017	Head of Service/Financial Services
Internal control	Consider options for improving resilience associated with key contractor failure	Low	March 2018	Head of Service/Service Managers

I have prioritised the actions identified above as follows:

High:	Action requiring implementation as soon as possible
Medium:	Action requiring implementation within 6 months
Low:	Action requiring implementation within 6 to 12 months

I take responsibility for ensuring that the above outlined actions are implemented and will, if requested, provide progress monitoring information to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

Signed:		Date:	May 2017
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Governance Area		Governance Assessment Question	Overall Assessment of the effectiveness of current arrangements	Brief details of evidence / sources / link	Remedial Action Required (link to Action Areas page 1)
Legislation and Regulations	1	How effective are arrangements to ensure that services are provided in order to adequately discharge statutory duties placed on the Council, or the exercise of powers as supported by Council policy?	Partially effective	<p>I have suitably qualified and experienced officers, regulated by professional institutes where relevant, who are able to interpret and implement changes to services as a result of changed or emergent legislation.</p> <p>Several long term absences have occurred during the year, which have required careful management to ensure the statutory duties continued to be discharged.</p> <p>However, the Council's delegation arrangements are inconsistent as regards executive and non-executive powers. This requires clarification – see item 11.</p>	Yes
Staffing	2	<p>How effective is learning needs analysis, to ensure that any gaps in required skills and knowledge are identified?</p> <p>Are all staff provided with the opportunity to develop the skills and</p>	Effective	All officers within H&PPS receive an annual appraisal which, inter alia, identify learning and development needs. The Service in 2016/17 had a reasonable training budget that met all key	No

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		<p>knowledge they need to perform their role effectively and to meet agreed targets?</p> <p>Are methods of evaluation of training considered prior to and following any learning and development activities?</p>		<p>requests for training requested.</p> <p>Environmental Health Practitioners hold regular internal CPD sessions where development activity is shared.</p>	
Risk Management	3	<p>How effective are the risk management arrangements you have in place (identification, control, monitoring, review and update) for mitigating against all significant risks including those relating to partnership arrangements?</p>	Effective	<p>My managers are responsible for ensuring that service risks are identified and managed. They are recorded on Covalent and I am satisfied that my risk entries remain up to date.</p> <p>My service currently has two Top Risks; Homelessness & the use of bed & breakfast accommodation and the development of Careline.</p>	No
Partnerships	4	<p>How effective are the corporate governance arrangements which support significant service delivery partnerships?</p> <p>How effective is the monitoring activity of each significant partnership in terms of ensuring that both the Council's priorities and the partnership's overall objectives are met?</p>	Effective	<p>I have two of the Council's significant partnerships within my service area – the North Herts Community Safety Partnership (NHCSPP), and the North Herts Housing Partnership (NHHP).</p> <p>The terms of reference that underpin the NHCSPP are reviewed</p>	No

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				<p>at least annually and the use of funds monitored via the Responsible Authority Group (RAG). The overall effectiveness of the CSP was subject to an external assessment in March 2012.</p> <p>The performance of the NHHP is regularly reviewed both at an operational and strategic level.</p>	
Internal Control	5	How effective are processes in place for ensuring that appropriate action is taken to implement recommendations made by internal / external audit or other review bodies and hence ensure that existence of an effective system of internal control?	Effective	The Service was subject to a number of audits in 2016/17 however only one reported within that year – Homelessness. The two Medium recommendations with be implemented in 2017/18.	Yes
Procurement	6	How effective are arrangements within the service area for identifying contracts and projects and ensuring that contracts are procured in line with Contract Procurement Rules?	Effective	My service managers are responsible for contracts within their teams and ensuring the requirements of corporate procurement rules are followed. The procurement of Careline equipment was completed in 2016/17 and so were those	Yes

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				associated with specialist contractors. The contract for Maintenance & Installation Services will be carried out later this year as will a decision on the Fall-Back Response Service (although there is possibly only one supplier for this).	
Financial Management	7	How effective are arrangements for ensuring that all financial activity relating to income, expenditure and asset management is undertaken in compliance with Financial Regulations and ensures effective budget management and reporting?	Partially effective	<p>My service managers have operational control of their working budgets and work closely with the Service Accountant to control expenditure throughout the year.</p> <p>I maintain oversight of the overall budgetary position.</p> <p>Careline is a trading unit within the Council and operates in a number of changing and competitive markets. This necessitates the production of timely and reliable management accounting information on which to base sound decision-making. Current arrangements are inadequate in</p>	Yes

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				this context and improved control and reporting systems are needed. Work in this area will also be guided by the outcome of the Careline Operational audit that should report in the 1 st qtr of 2017/18.	
Business Continuity	8	How effective and appropriate are the business continuity arrangements in place for key service elements including those provided under contract?	Effective	<p>Business continuity arrangements for the Service were reviewed during 2015/16.</p> <p>The Disaster Recovery (DR) for Careline is crucial due to the support provided to the vulnerable by this service. A new DR site was commissioned in 2016/17 and Careline now has access to the Council's 4x4 vehicles to further support resilience as regards staffing of the Operations Centre.</p> <p>A preliminary analysis of risk/harm of contractor failure has revealed that the Service is vulnerable as regards the failure of key software suppliers. Further work on how</p>	Yes

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				these risks can be mitigated will be undertaken in 2017/18.	
Project Management	9	How effective are arrangements for ensuring that all new developments are supported by a robust business case and if agreed, are implemented following corporate project management procedures?	Effective	All of the significant projects within the Housing and Public Protection Service are managed having regard to appropriate project management processes. Requests for improvements to information technology are supported with robust business cases.	Yes
Governance	10	How effective are arrangements for ensuring that there are no breaches of corporate policy in the service areas e.g. Officer Code of Conduct including Conflicts of Interest and Gifts and Hospitality, HR policies, Health and Safety, Equalities, Anti-fraud and corruption?	Effective	<p>All managers within the Service have annual appraisals and subsequent 6 monthly reviews – these feature a discussion on the implementation of corporate policy.</p> <p>On a practical level, an annual assessment is undertaken for the Service as regards compliance with key corporate policies, health & safety risk assessments; updates and reminders are given to staff from time to time e.g. at staff meetings; remedial actions</p>	No

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				<p>are inserted in to the Service Plan. Checks are undertaken to ensure that staff undertake required refresher training. Where a member of staff breaches corporate policy an investigation is undertaken and appropriate disciplinary action taken.</p>	
Decision Making	11	Is there an effective scheme of delegation relating to the service areas which has been formally agreed, communicated to all relevant staff and Members and monitored for compliance?	Partially effective	The Council's delegation arrangements are inconsistent as regards executive and non-executive powers. This requires clarification – see item 1.	Yes
Community engagement	12	How effective are complaints and comments monitoring procedures, including those relating to MPs correspondence and Local Government, in ensuring that an appropriate response is provided and where appropriate, corrective action is taken to strengthen the system of internal control?	Effective	<p>There are Service procedure notes for the management of 3Cs cases, investigations by the Local Government Ombudsman and responding to MP correspondence. My PA is tasked with ensuring that responses are despatched within agreed timescales and escalated to me if they are not. Any service failure is identified</p>	No

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				and remedial action instituted Two referrals were made to the LGO during 2016/17. None were upheld.	
Performance	13	How effective are current systems for monitoring and regularly reporting the performance of the service against its planned outcomes? How effective are systems established to rectify poor service performance?	Effective	Performance against the Service Plan and other targets are formally monitored by me through appropriate performance indicators. Where performance targets have not been met appropriate corrective action was taken. All key performance targets for 2016/17 were met or exceeded.	No
Data quality	14	Are effective arrangements in place to ensure that data to support decision making is accurate and produced in a timely manner?	Effective	Procedure notes for the collection of data to support the majority of my performance indicators are in place and published on the intranet.	No
DPA and FOI	15	Are effective arrangements in place to ensure that staff are aware of the requirements of and adhere to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Data Protection Act • the Freedom of Information Act 	Effective	There are a number of Service-specific guidance notes on the intranet explaining how officers should approach their responsibilities as regards DPA,	No

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Council's Document Retention Schedule; and Data sharing protocols As they relate to their roles. 		<p>FOI, etc.</p> <p>A local data retention schedule specifically for my service area is in place and is in the process of being reviewed.</p> <p>I still have some issues with the use of the Council's Data Sharing Protocol and email encryption system being accepted by partners. I am working with IT to see how this can be resolved. The semi-automation of the deletion of files that contain personal information has continued in 2016/17 in line with DPA principles.</p>	
Conduct	16	How effective are arrangements for communicating to both Members and officers within the service area the requirements of the Officer / Member Protocol and for ensuring that both parties have a constructive working relationship?	Effective	There is a constructive working relationship with Members and in particular with my Executive Members, Cllr Lovewell and Cllr Hunter.	No
Conflicts	17	Have there been any conflicts/potential	Effective	There was one Member conflict	No

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		conflicts in Council roles and duties identified if so, how have these been managed?		encountered in 2016/17 involving a NHDC Cllr who is also a Chairman of the Housing Association. This case has been brought to the attention of the Monitoring Officer – no action was taken.	