

Audit Panel

Tuesday, 14th September, 2010

MEETING OF AUDIT PANEL

Members present: Councillor J. Rodgers (Chairman); and
Councillors Mullaghan, Rodway and Dr. Smith.

In attendance: Mrs. J. Thompson, Director of Finance and Resources;
Mr. A. Wilson, Head of Audit, Governance and
Risk Services;
Mrs. G. Ireland, Corporate Risk and Governance Manager;
Mr. A. Harrison, Acting Corporate Assurance Manager; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Ekin and Lavery.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 7th June were taken as read and signed as correct.

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 – Policy for Elected Members

(Mr. C. Quigley, Town Solicitor, attended in connection with this item.)

The Panel considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to present to the Audit Panel the Council’s Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000 policy. This policy was drafted because of the amendments to the legislation which came into effect on 6th April, 2010. This policy was approved by the Chief Officers’ Management Team on 26th May.

Background

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) and subordinate legislation provide the legislative framework within which covert surveillance operations must be conducted in order to ensure that investigatory powers are used in accordance with human rights legislation.

The right to respect for one's private and family life is enshrined in Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 2000 (HRA) which makes it unlawful for a public authority to act in a way which is incompatible with any of the Convention rights. The right to privacy is not an absolute right and is subject to certain exemptions. Adherence to RIPA ensures that any intrusion into the individual's private life is proportionate and lawful.

RIPA requires the Council to have in place procedures to ensure that, when required, covert surveillance is necessary, proportionate and properly authorised. RIPA sets out a statutory mechanism for authorising the three main areas relevant to local authorities, namely, the acquisition of communications data, covert surveillance and the use of covert human intelligence sources.

The Council is committed to implementing the provisions of RIPA to ensure that any covert surveillance carried out during the course of investigations is undertaken properly and that the surveillance is necessary and proportionate to the investigation of alleged offence(s). The Office of the Surveillance Commissioners (OSC) provides oversight of the conduct of covert surveillance and covert human intelligence sources by public authorities. A regular criticism in their inspection reports was that public authorities in Great Britain were not giving enough thought to proportionality and, consequently authorisations were being granted in circumstances where the impact on the privacy of the individual was disproportionate to the seriousness of the alleged offence. For example, monitoring dog owners to ensure they are complying with anti-fouling laws and conducting covert surveillance for minor littering offences are two of the recent examples involving the disproportionate use of surveillance powers identified by OSC.

In the case of the Council, 11 requests have been made since 1st July, 2006 to carry out directed surveillance under RIPA. These were for the deployment of covert cameras at hot spots for the illegal deposit of waste, which the Council would regard as a serious offence.

RIPA legislation has been updated to ensure that covert surveillance techniques can continue to be used by public authorities, but only where they are necessary and proportionate.

Key Issues

As a result of the changes in the legislation, Members are given an enhanced role in overseeing the way the Council uses covert investigatory techniques. In order to assist Members with that scrutiny role, a policy has been developed to give an overview of what RIPA is in practice and how it should be to be used by the

Council. The purpose of the policy is that Members should have an understanding about the application of RIPA to its regulatory functions of the Council. Accordingly, an annual report will be made to the Strategic Policy and Resource Committee for the purpose of enabling Members to have the opportunity to review the Council's use of RIPA, and to set the Council's general surveillance policy. It is proposed that a report will be submitted twice a year to the Audit Panel to ensure that the Council's policy being applied on a consistent basis and remains fit for purpose (but the regular reporting period will be reviewed by the Town Solicitor). Members will not be involved in making decisions on specific authorisations.

The Council seeks to ensure that this Policy remains consistent with the Council's objectives, which are:

- proper procedures are in place in order to carry out covert surveillance;**
- an individual's right to privacy is not breached without justification;**
- the potential invasion of privacy caused by using techniques regulated by RIPA, are properly justified with a clear and concise paper/electronic audit trail;**
- proper authorisation is obtained for covert surveillance;**
- covert surveillance is considered as a last resort, having exhausted all other avenues;**
- the seriousness of the offence is considered, in addition to the requirement to weigh up the benefits to the investigation, when considering whether to authorise covert techniques under RIPA;**
- an officer is designated as the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for ensuring that all authorising officers meet the standards required by the OSC; and**
- Members have a strategic oversight role in relation to the Council's RIPA process.**

Without clear and robust policies and procedures in place, there would be a risk that officers would fail to comply with the relevant legislation and associated Codes of Practice. Consequently, complaints may be made against the Council by aggrieved persons, which may proceed to investigation by the independent tribunals set up by the OSC. The Tribunals have the power to cancel authorisations, order the destruction of any records obtained in exercise of the powers conferred by RIPA and award compensation as they see fit.

The Town Solicitor will be appointed as the Senior Responsible Officer who will ensure compliance with the Act and Codes of Practice. A solicitor within Legal Services will be nominated as the point of reference who will report to the Town Solicitor.

A centralised record of all authorisations and associated documentation will be held by the Town Solicitor/Assistant Chief Executive. This will be updated whenever an authorisation is granted, renewed or cancelled. Legal Services will be responsible for maintaining the centralised record.

Resource Implications

Financial and Human Resources

There are no immediate financial obligations for the Council. Any training will be met from within existing training budgets.

Asset and Other Implications

None

Recommendations

The Audit Panel is asked to:

- endorse the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 Policy;
- agree that high level training be developed and provided to Members;
- note that procedural guidance is currently being drafted for Council officers; and
- agree that a training programme is implemented for Council officers.”

After discussion, the Panel adopted the recommendations and noted that a copy of the Policy was available on the Modern.gov site.

Audit, Governance and Risk Services Progress Report

The Panel considered a report outlining the work which Audit, Governance and Risk Services had undertaken between June and August, 2010.

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services reported that, during the period, audit reports had been finalised in respect of the Belfast Waterfront Hall's Urban Trans Project, Bereavement Services, Procurement, Information Management/Information Security, Utilities and Fixed Assets. Audits of Payroll, Civic Amenity Sites and arc21 work were in progress and reports relating to Markets and Tourism were being drafted which, once finalised, would be submitted to the Panel.

In addition, audits of the Community Services Section, Corporate Complaints, IT Governance, Parks and Leisure and the Council's Compliance with Payment Card Industry Standards were being planned.

He provided also information regarding ongoing fraud investigation work being undertaken by the Service and confirmed that reports would, in future, be submitted to the relevant Committee, once investigations had been concluded and fraud had been confirmed. He advised that one of the key measures in preventing fraud was to ensure that up-to-date, robust procedures covering financial controls were in place and that the Service had been working closely with Business and Finance Managers in this regard. He added that fraud awareness training had been delivered to staff within the Development Department and was in the process of being rolled out to those within the Health and Environmental Services Department.

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services highlighted also the work being undertaken in relation to business continuity management and pandemic planning and advised the Panel that a separate report, detailing the Service's work in relation to risk management would be considered later in the meeting.

After discussion, the Panel noted the information which had been provided and commended Audit, Governance and Risk Services on the comprehensive nature of the report.

Belfast City Council – Audit Recommendations Monitor

The Panel considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Audit Panel's terms of reference include provision for it to 'consider reports from Audit, Governance and Risk Services on agreed recommendations not implemented within a reasonable timescale.' As the Audit Panel will be aware, Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) has had an established process in place over the last number of years of undertaking 'follow-up audits' to report on the level of implementation of agreed audit recommendations. The purpose of this process has been to provide assurances to management and Members that, where necessary, improvements have been made and to identify outstanding actions.

In the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Service's annual assurance statement for 2009/2010, he reported that, during that year, the follow-up audit process had established that 47% of internal audit recommendations had been fully implemented, 37% partially implemented (giving a combined full and partial of 84%), 13% not implemented and that 3% of recommendations were no longer applicable at the time of audit follow-up reviews. The detailed results of these follow-up reviews were set out in audit reports and summarised in progress reports to the Audit Panel.

Whilst this process gave some assurance that the majority of internal audit recommendations were being addressed (either in full or in part), AGRS was becoming increasingly concerned that the outstanding actions were not being adequately tracked and that this could result in identified weaknesses in the control environment not being addressed even though they had been highlighted in audit reports.

The new Director of Finance and Resources discussed this issue with AGRS shortly after taking up office and it was agreed that a formal audit recommendation monitoring system should be established in the Council and that, in addition to tracking internal audit recommendations, the opportunity would be taken to use this process to also track external audit recommendations. It was agreed also that the process would take place every six months and would be reported to the Audit Panel.

On 25th June, AGRS wrote to all Directors and Departmental Business Managers explaining the new process and forwarded to them a spreadsheet of all outstanding audit recommendations relating to their Department. An additional spreadsheet was also issued to the Director of Finance and Resources covering corporate-wide recommendations. Departments were asked to review the action taken to address the recommendations and, following receipt of these updates, auditors from AGRS have met with managers/staff and, where appropriate, have independently validated the status of each audit recommendation. As a result of this process, AGRS has prepared its first audit recommendations monitoring report, a copy of which has been forwarded to the Panel.

Key Issues

The report shows that, while significant progress has been made to implement outstanding audit recommendations, there are still a number of recommendations which need to be addressed, most notably by the Finance and Resources Department, mainly in relation to income/accounts receivable and treasury management and in relation to a corporate issue, overtime. It should be noted that, due to the nature of its work, Finance and Resources receives a higher number of audit reports/recommendations than other Departments and that many of the recommendations relate to issues arising from the implementation of the new SAP accounting system and related processes. These issues / recommendations have been discussed with both the Director of Finance and Resources and the new Head of Finance and Performance and AGRS can confirm that action plans are being put in place ensure that the outstanding actions are addressed. More detail is provided in the monitoring report.

It should also be noted that, from now on, once audit reports are finalised, AGRS will input new recommendations (including those raised by the LGA) into the appropriate Departmental spreadsheets to ensure that recommendations can be tracked.

As well as improving the tracking of audit recommendations, this new process has a number of other benefits:

- AGRS will be able to reduce the time allocated to follow-up audits in next and future years' audit plan. AGRS will, however, continue to conduct full follow-up audits whenever 'red' assurance level reports are issued or a specific request is received from the Assurance Board or Audit Panel; and
- Each Director and Departmental Business Manager will have a clear record of the status of all outstanding audit recommendations relating to their department which should improve their ability to manage the implementation of these.

Resource Implications

There are no significant resource implications arising from this report.

Recommendations

The Audit Panel is requested to:

- note the audit recommendations monitoring report and that management is taking action to ensure that all outstanding recommendations are addressed; and
- agree that this monitoring process will take place every six months with reports to the Audit Panel following each exercise (next report March, 2010)."

The Panel adopted the recommendations and noted that a copy of the monitoring report could be accessed on the Modern.gov site.

Annual Report of the Chief Local Government Auditor

The Acting Corporate Assurance Manager informed the Panel that the Chief Local Government Auditor was required, under the provisions of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005, to produce an annual report which summarised, from an external audit perspective, the key issues arising in all Councils across Northern Ireland. He stated that this year's report, which had been published on 23rd June, had covered a wide variety of issues ranging from basic financial control to governance,

value-for-money and contracts. The key issues arising from the report which were specific to the Council related to contracts/tendering/procurement, Declaration of Members' Interests, the risk associated with incurring fines for exceeding landfill allowances, financial control and IT-related issues. He pointed out that Audit, Governance and Risk Services had, in consultation with the relevant Departmental Managers, undertaken a review of the report in order to determine whether there were lessons to be learned in relation to these and issues arising at other Councils. The review had concluded that, in the vast majority of instances, measures were in place within the Council to mitigate against the risks raised in the Chief Local Government Auditor's report.

After discussion, the Panel noted the contents of the report, a copy of which was available on the Modern.gov site.

Corporate Risk Management

The Panel was reminded that, at its meeting on 15th February, it had agreed that reports should, on a quarterly basis, be submitted to the Chief Officers' Management Team and the Audit Panel setting out the management arrangements which had been put in place to address key risks identified across the Council. The Corporate Risk and Governance Manager reviewed the current status of the eleven risks which had been included in the Corporate Risk Register, together with four contained within Departmental Risk Registers. She explained that the aim of risk management was to reduce the likelihood of risks materialising and the impact should they materialise. A quarterly review process had been agreed with Chief Officers, which would enable her to provide an independent overview on the management of both corporate and departmental risks. The process would highlight also any delays in the implementation of proposed actions and areas which warranted further action.

She informed the Panel that it was, ultimately, the responsibility of Managers to ensure that risks were properly identified and addressed and that each Chief Officer was required to complete a quarterly assurance statement setting out the work undertaken in relation to the management of risk. In the previous quarter, she had received assurances from all Chief Officers that the Corporate, Departmental and Operational Risk Registers and associated action plans had been reviewed. These had confirmed that, overall, the Council's risk management processes were being complied with. However, some improvements could be made around the timely updating of risk registers and associated action plans. She reported that, in future, the quarterly report would highlight the impact on the management of key risks of any delays in the implementation of proposed actions or where there had been failures within the existing controls.

The Panel noted the information which had been provided and that a copy of the quarterly risk report could be accessed on the Modern.gov site.

Sickness Absence Management

(Mrs. J. Minne, Head of Human Resources, attended in connection with this item.)

The Panel was advised that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 18th June, had agreed a new two-year target aimed at reducing absence to 11 days per full time equivalent by March, 2011 and to 10.75 days by March, 2012. The Head of Human Resources submitted for the Panel's consideration a report which set out the Departmental and Sectional absence figures at the end of June and which provided a comparison with the target figure and performance for the corresponding quarter in the previous year. She explained that the figures indicated that, overall, the Council was on course to meet its target for 2010/2011. However, five Sections across the Council were in danger of not meeting the target, should their current level of absence continue. She stated that the Human Resources Service would continue to monitor sickness figures within these Sections and implement appropriate actions, as required.

After discussion, the Panel noted the information which had been provided.

Staff Numbers, Overtime and Agency Costs

(Mrs. J. Minne, Head of Human Resources, attended in connection with this item.)

The Panel considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose of report

This report:

- **Provides information on staff numbers for the council's seven departments at quarter one 2010/2011 and compares them to the previous quarter (quarter four 2009/2010);**
- **Compares overtime costs for the period July 2009 to June 2010 to the same time last year (July 2008 to June 2009);**
- **Compares agency costs for the period July 2009 to June 2010 to the same time last year (July 2008 to June 2009); and**
- **Details the number of agency staff employed during quarter one 2010/11**

Relevant Background Information

- On 15th February, 2010, the Audit Panel agreed that reports on staff numbers, overtime and agency costs should be made to the Chief Officers' Management Team and Audit Panel on a quarterly basis starting from quarter four 2009/2010.

Key Issues

The attached appendix provides information on the following:

- The average number of people in post at quarter one 2010/11 at corporate and departmental level compared to the previous quarter. (quarter four 2009/10);
- The cost of overtime at corporate and departmental level for the rolling year July 2009 – June 2010 compared to the same period last year July 2008 – June 2009; and
- Agency cost at corporate and departmental level for the rolling year July 2009 – June 2010 compared to the same period last year April 2008 – April 2009.

People in post

- The average number of people in post for quarter one of this year is 2383 compared to 2400 for the previous quarter (quarter four 2009/10);
- This represents an overall net decrease of 17 or (0.7%); and
- Internal movement of staff and the filling of vacant established posts within the council accounts for some of the variances, however, nine members of staff left the council during this period as a result of the recent voluntary redundancy exercise.

Overtime costs

- Overtime costs for the rolling period July 2009 to June 2010 is £4,798,801;
- Overtime costs for the same period previous year (April 08 to March 09) was £4,838,499; and
- This represents a reduction of £39,698 or (0.82%) this year

Agency costs

- Agency costs for the rolling period July 2009 to June 2010 is £3,554,010;
- Agency costs for the same period previous year (July 2008 to June 2009) was £5,519,714;
- This represents a reduction of £1,965,704 or (35.60%); and
- Health and Environmental Services accounted for £1,276,476 of the total reduction. This is as a result of posts that were covered by agency (Cleansing and Waste Management) during operational reviews being filled on a permanent basis on completion of the reviews.

Recommendation

The Audit Panel is asked to note the contents of this report.

| People in post | Average number of people in posts previous quarter (Q4 2009/10) | Average number of people in post this quarter (Q1 2010/11) | Variance between people in post quarter one year and same time last year |
|---------------------------------|---|--|--|
| BCC | 2400 | 2383 | -17 |
| Chief Executive's | 79.6 | 80.6 | +1 |
| Legal Services | 22.4 | 18.4 | -4 |
| Finance and Resources | 246.5 | 237.5 | -9 |
| Health & Environmental Services | 864 | 864 | 0 |
| Parks and Leisure | 634.1 | 630.6 | -3 |
| Development Department | 277.0 | 278.0 | +1 |
| Property and Projects | 276.0 | 273.0 | -3 |

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| Cost of overtime | Cost of overtime for the period July 2008 – June 2009 | Cost of overtime for the period July 2009 – June 2010 | Variance |
|--|--|--|-----------------|
| BCC | 4,838,499 | 4,798,801 | -39,698 |
| Chief Executive's | 56,068 | 51,994 | -4,074 |
| Legal Services | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Finance and Resources | 145,249 | 80,960 | -64,289 |
| Health & Environmental Services | 2,043,498 | 2,098,137 | 54,638 |
| Parks and Leisure | 1,674,825 | 1,679,809 | 4,983 |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Development Department | 364,452 | 341,309 | -23,143 |
| Property and Projects | 554,406 | 546,593 | -7,814 |

| Agency Costs | Agency costs for the period July 2008 – June 2009 | Agency costs for the period July 2009 – June 2010 | Variance |
|--|--|--|------------------------|
| BCC | 5,519,714 | 3,554,010 | - 1,965,704 |
| Chief Executive's | 67,297 | 85,037 | 17,739 |
| Legal Services | 68,662 | 58,663 | -9,999 |
| Finance and Resources | 238,734 | 196,799 | -41,935 |
| Health & Environmental Services | 2,287,446 | 1,010,970 | - 1,276,476 |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Parks and Leisure | 1,826,865 | 1,410,443 | -416,422 |
| | | | |
| Development Department | 616,357 | 480,529 | -135,829 |
| | | | |
| Property and Projects | 414,352 | 311,570 | -102,782 |

During discussion, several Members voiced concern that overtime costs had been reduced by less than one per cent from the previous year. The point was made that they remained unacceptably high and that Departments needed to identify ways in which to reduce this significant area of expenditure. In response, the Head of Human Resources explained that Departments had been requested to examine those operational areas which could be covered without the need for overtime working and that could contribute to the overall reduction in costs. However, she pointed out that there were areas where overtime working was unavoidable, such as in the provision of cover for front line services. The Director of Finance and Resources added that overtime working would be considered as part of the efficiency savings agenda.

The Panel noted the information which had been provided.

Postal Charges

(Mr. E. Deeny, Head of Corporate Communications, attended in connection with this item.)

The Panel considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

At its meeting on 7th June, the Audit Panel requested information on the costs incurred on postage across the Council. This report sets out the information requested.

Key Issues

The cost of postage for the Council for the past three years is as follows:

| | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 2007/08 | £257,000 |
| 2008/09 | £251,000 |
| 2009/10 | £304,000 |

The main items of expenditure incorporated within the 2009/2010 figures are:

- **A-Z publication £12,000**
- **City Matters £82,000**
- **Cheques & Remittance Advices £15,000**
- **ISB External Work £22,000 (this is reclaimed from external bodies)**
- **WFH Event Guides £21,000**
- **WFH Box Office Tickets £12,000.**

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These areas account for approximately £164,000 of the Councils postage costs for 2009/2010. The balance of the costs approximately £140,000 relates to the normal ongoing postage associated with the running of the Council.

A detailed split of all outgoing Council post sent 1st/2nd class is not readily available from existing systems/records. However the table below provides details regarding the mailing arrangements in place for the main items of expenditure (as listed above) and it demonstrates the arrangements in place to ensure value for money.

| <u>Items of Expenditure</u> | <u>Mailing Arrangements</u> |
|--|---|
| A – Z Publication and City Matters | These publications are mainly delivered via the Royal Mail door to door service, which neither equates to first or second class service but is a cheaper option than either of these. A condition of this delivery is that it can only be used in parts of the city which are exclusively in the Belfast City area e.g. BT1, BT9 and which do not 'share' postcodes with other adjacent council areas. In the case of the latter, 2nd class post is used. |
| Cheques and Remittance Advice Notices | These are issued 2nd class unless an urgent cheque payment has to be made. The majority of electronic payments (BACS) advice notices are issued electronically. |
| ISB External Work | This mainly relates to the postage costs associated with external contracts such as sending student grants to nurses and is based on a contract with the Department of Health in England. Some of these letters are issued first class and others via special delivery. All costs are 100% recouped. |

| <u>Items of Expenditure</u> | <u>Mailing Arrangements</u> |
|--|--|
| WFH Event Guides WFH Box Office Tickets | <p>Approximately 30,000 guides are issued 3 times a year to persons on a mailing list. A mailing house deals with the administration of this postage via a mailsort contract and the delivery of each guide costs c 19p/20p, considerably less than regular 1st^t and 2nd class mail.</p> <p>Box Office tickets are issued by 2nd class post and the costs are met through the 50p per transaction booking fee which is charged to customers at the point of sale of tickets. 1st class post is used in exceptional circumstances.</p> |

Departments either use their own or share franking machines with other departments and purchase pre-paid credits which enable them to frank other outgoing mail. Unless marked otherwise, this mail will be sent 2nd class.

Resource Implications

Financial

None.

Human Resources

None.

Asset and Other Implications

None.

Recommendation

The Audit Panel is requested to note the information contained in the report.”

After discussion, during which several Members voiced concern in relation to the overall costs of postage within the Council, the Panel noted the information which had been provided and agreed that the Director of Finance and Resources should advise Directors that, where possible, letters should be sent by second class post.

Health and Safety Audit Programme

The Panel considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose of report

This report seeks to give an overview of the Health and Safety (H&S) arrangements in place in the Council. The report focuses on the following areas:

- Health and Safety inspections
- Health and Safety assurance framework
- Management of stress

Relevant Background Information

Health and safety is an important issue in any workplace. In addition to the legal duties under The Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978, there are moral and financial considerations. Legally, all employers must provide a safe and healthy working environment for their employees and those affected by their undertaking (which include contractors and members of the public). A safe and healthy working environment includes safe access and egress, safe equipment, safe premises and safe work practices and procedures.

If these legal duties are not complied with, legal sanctions can then be taken against the employer resulting in fines or imprisonment or both.

Good health and safety practices result in savings through fewer accidents hence:

- fewer claims,
- less sickness payments
- less damage to property/equipment
- less need for agency/temporary staff
- lower insurance costs

Following a fatal accident in September, 2006 at the Council's landfill site, Audit Risk and Governance Services (AGRS) carried out a review of health and safety throughout Council departments and, subsequently, made a number of recommendations. One of these recommendations resulted in a review of the remit of the Workplace Health Unit Manager which resulted in the creation and recruitment of a Corporate H&S Manager with increased responsibilities.

Following consultation and advice from the Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive, it also resulted in the creation of a H&S Assurance Board to which the Corporate H&S Manager reports on a quarterly basis. The H&S Assurance Board ensures that the Council's legal obligations with regard to health and safety are being met and both enhances its profile and demonstrates the importance that the Council gives to health and safety matters.

The H&S Assurance Board comprises the Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and Resources and the Director of Health and Environmental Services.

Key Findings

Health and Safety Inspections

As a key element of the H&S assurance mechanisms, the Corporate H&S Unit (COHSU) has implemented a new workplace inspection regime. This includes an element of audit and the intention is to inspect / audit each property annually, briefly this process is comprised of the following activities.

COHSU assigned a desk top risk rating to each Council property, which is based on occupancy numbers and activities carried out within them.

This risk rating process identified 29 properties which were classified as high risk and therefore would be targeted first. Some of these properties i.e. City Hall, Cecil Ward Building, Adelaide Exchange and Lanyon Place, house a number of Departments which required separate inspections thus increasing the number of high risk inspections/audits to 40.

In order to ensure best practice, Marsh Consultants were engaged to review and prepare a report and action plans on 7 of the highest priority locations. This exercise involved a series of meetings with property managers who answered a number of questions designed to identify issues which posed a risk to the organisation. These meetings were concluded in December, 2009 and action plans were issued at that time. Progress is currently being made on these and update reports are presented to the H&S Assurance Board on a quarterly basis.

The new inspection programme carried out by COSHU staff commenced at the end of June, 2010 and to date 36 locations have been inspected/audited and reports/action plans issued. All high risk areas will be completed by the end of September 2010 and the inspections of the remaining properties will then commence.

An inspection/audit report/action plan is sent to local managers, business support managers, Heads of Service and Directors within two weeks of the inspection/audit to ensure that all levels of management are aware of the actions required to improve H&S compliance.

Follow up correspondence is sent to the same recipients one month and then six months after the report / action plan has been sent enquiring about the progress of the action plan(s). The responsibility for progressing action plans lies with departmental management and therefore senior management are kept informed of the recommendations made and progress towards implementation.

An inspection programme has been circulated to the Panel for information.

Management of Stress

Stress is a common ailment in the workplace throughout Britain and both the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on the mainland and Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) are encouraging employers to take this problem seriously. They are contacting/visiting employers/organisations and checking their stress management systems to ensure these systems are adequate.

To date, the Council has carried out stress audits in Health and Environmental Services and most recently, in the Parks and Leisure Department.

Focus groups were set up and met at Musgrave Park on 27th May, Ormeau Park on 27th May and Grove Park on 1st June. The Employee Counsellor facilitated these groups and presented a report to Parks management meeting on 4th June. The meeting was also attended by two representatives from the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland who were pleased with the progress being made. Each of the services has developed an action plan for managing stress more effectively.

Health and Safety Assurance Framework

There are existing arrangements within the Council for ensuring effective Health and Safety activity.

However, assurance is about knowing what is actually going on and more importantly having the evidence to prove it. At a corporate level, the Council has a high level assurance framework in place with H&S as one of the key elements of assurance. Moving forward the existing H&S control environment would be further strengthened if an assurance framework was in place, specifically focusing on the management of Health and Safety.

The health and safety assurance framework would help identify linkages between the relevant sources of assurance, highlight communication mechanisms. This would also identify gaps allowing us to put appropriate measures in place to manage them.

To reflect the fact that health and safety focuses on the management of a specific type of risk, the risk management strategy is currently being updated to include appropriate guidance on the health and safety risk management process, this includes the integration of health and safety risk into corporate risk management processes and reporting.

A specific health and safety assurance framework will be explored further in a follow up paper to the Assurance Board/Audit Panel in November, 2010.

Recommendation

The Audit Panel is asked to note the contents of this report.

Health and Safety Inspection/Audit Programme

| <u>Risk Category</u> | <u>Premises</u> | <u>Proposed Completion Date</u> |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| High | 7 premises | 17/9/2010 |
| Medium | 68 premises | 26/11/2010 |
| Low | 200 premises | 31/3/2011 |

Details of Completed Inspections

| <u>Risk Category</u> | <u>Premises Inspected</u> | <u>Completed</u> |
|----------------------|---|------------------|
| Medium – Pilot | Ligoniel Community Centre | May 2010 |
| High | Shankill Leisure Centre Palmerston Recycling Centre Blackstaff Recycling Centre Ozone/Tennis Centre Ballysillan Leisure Centre Avoniel Leisure Centre Andersonstown Leisure Centre Agnes Street Civic Amenity Site | June 2010 |

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| <u>Risk Category</u> | <u>Premises Inspected</u> | <u>Completed</u> |
|----------------------|--|------------------|
| High | Loughside Recreation Centre Waste Transfer Station - Dargan Malone House Alexandra Recycling Centre Building services Duncrue Roselawn Crematorium Information Services Belfast x 2 Ulster Hall Good relations City Hall Corporate Comms City Hall Legal Services City Hall Ormeau Recycling Centre Belfast Castle Vehicle Maintenance Duncrue Grove Wellbeing Centre St Georges Market Falls Leisure Centre | July 2010 |
| High | Central Stores Duncrue Development – Cecil Ward Building Smithfield Market Transport Duncrue Olympia Leisure Centre Waterfront Hall | August 2010 |

The Panel adopted the recommendation.

Chairman