

Audits completed since the last Committee meeting (30th October 2023)

<u>Audit title</u>	<u>Critical Risk</u>	<u>High Risk</u>	<u>Medium Risk</u>	<u>Low Risk</u>	<u>Total no of Exceptions</u>	<u>Overall Assurance level</u>	<u>Summary</u>
Disabled Facilities Grants	0	0	2	4	6	Reasonable Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 84% of claims tested met the measure from the dates completed within uniform from the stages 'Enquiry Date – Policy Decision Date', but of the 16% not completed, all were from circumstances outside of the Housing Standards teams control - excluding one, where the documentation saved was too limited to measure accurately. Reports are produced for West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) cross council working group, these show that from March 2021 – April 2022 there were eleven out of twelve months where the average days to approval were over 100 days. This was an increase from 2020-2021. In April 2022 - March 2023 the timescales of delivery have decreased back down to 5 out of 12 months being over 100 days, but a note on the charts show that there is a reporting lag of around 6 months when reporting timescales and these will also show as decreased, but the trend is showing a downward pattern, excluding Jan 2023, (following a reduce number of referrals processed in the December 2022 period, leading to an increase in January 2023) - Internal System Pentana measure shows 51% of applications are processed to approval within 180 Days.

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							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another of these reports sent to WSCC - also shows the Status of Referrals received each month, this chart shows that since September 2021 - there has been an increase in the 'unknown' values of data entered. This is where no dates have been entered after the referral received date, so the status is recorded as unknown. The bar chart on this report shows that this has significantly increased since June 2022 and is continuing in an upward trend. • An external project company 'Amber' is being used to oversee larger more complex adaptations to alleviate some of the workload from the DFG Officers. With Amber as of June 2023 managing 30 adaptations.
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 96% of grant applications were approved by a recognised senior member of staff during the testing period, there have been significant staffing changes since April 2023 with multiple vacancies including that of a team leader, but all testing was completed in the 2022/2023 Financial year paid outs, 3 applications were self-authorized by a senior colleague. 2 of these were for additional costs onto approved grants, Survey fees and extended warranty, the other was following a hospital discharge grant.

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							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 grants are not being approved by a senior colleague, which is not the same colleague that submits the grant claim.
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is clear and comprehensive guidance around Data Retention and how data is processed within the CDC Data Retention policy and The Register of Data processing, both of which are published on the Councils external website. DFG data is held on the internal database, Uniform, over and above the above the Land Registry holding guidance of 10 years, but some elements of grants are recorded on the Land Charges for the life of the property so this will need to be address case by case, for which there is an IT solution for within the Council being used within our departments. The oldest case on Uniform is from 18/11/2005 and is a MART coded case, this is where the code 'MART' is used in the case reference, highlighting the form of ownership of the property. MART - meaning this is a Hyde group property and therefore not an Owner-occupied property so does not need to be retained. This is also the case for physical paperwork held in archive in the Depot, with records held over the stated destruction period, clearance of this has already begun once highlighted to the Housing Standards

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							<p>and Delivery Manager (HS&DM), with around 25% cleared to date.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is further guidance on the DFG Process and Procedures document, this states that the Business Support Officer, is to annually review completed cases and delete case folders once closed (on Uniform) – as referred to previously from testing it shows that cases aren't being closed using the correct closure reason. Testing of the twenty-five sample claims showed that, 1 case was closed on the system but there was still a folder containing information on the shared drive, 3 cases where the case was closed on the system and all documents had been removed. Fifteen cases where the case was not closed and there was still a folder containing information and 6 where the case was not closed, and the folders had been removed.
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							<p>the life of the property so this will need to be address case by case, for which there is an IT solution for within the Council being used within our departments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The oldest case on Uniform is from 18/11/2005 and is a MART coded case, this is where the code 'MART' is used in the case reference, highlighting the form of ownership of the property. MART - meaning this is a Hyde group property and therefore not an Owner-occupied property so does not need to be retained. This is also the case for physical paperwork held in archive in the Depot, with records held over the stated destruction period, clearance of this has already begun once highlighted to the Housing Standards and Delivery Manager (HS&DM), with around 25% cleared to date. • There is further guidance on the DFG Process and Procedures document, this states that the Business Support Officer, is to annually review completed cases and delete case folders once closed (on Uniform) – as referred to previously from testing it shows that cases aren't being closed using the correct closure reason. Testing of the twenty-five sample claims showed that, 1 case was closed on the system but there was still a folder containing information on the shared drive, 3 cases where the case was closed on the system and all documents had been

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							<p>removed. Fifteen cases where the case was not closed and there was still a folder containing information and 6 where the case was not closed, and the folders had been removed.</p>
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Uniform the internal system to record grant details – the case notes in relation to final visits, which are to check works have been completed appropriately before grant money is released to the contractors are not being documented consistently. • Only 44% of the client completion documents, which states that the client is happy with the works and for payment to the contractors of their grant monies can be made were seen in the testing completed. There is confusion over using the correct document as payment approval forms were saved as client completion documents, but these are only completed by the officer to approve contractor payment internally and not client approval. • 92% of cases were fully closed on the uniform system, but 64% had been closed using a code 8 status – which is 8_MON - Complete/Conditions outstanding Status. Following a discussion with the HS&DM (Housing Standards and Development Manager)- The information provided was that owner Occupier grants which involved Land

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							<p>Charges would be 'closed' using Code 8 whilst the Land Charge was valid. But on review of the grants. 6 were owner occupied which is correct but 3 were Hyde Properties, 6 were LRDH and 1 was a Tenant none of which are valid for Land charges to be recorded. The HS&DM has already addressed this matter following our discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 48% of grants had final visits correctly documented within the uniform system and 'IVA', which is the case notes sections for each grant.
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From the 25 grants tested - 12 came under Owner Occupied status and therefore would meet the guidelines for a Land Registry Charge. 6 of these had the appropriate document recording a Land Charge was to be recorded against the property, which is produced by the Business Support Officer and sent to the Local Land Charges Dept, 3 did not meet the financial guidelines, 1 is at an interim point of building works and was currently below financial guidelines and 2 had no documentation recorded even though they met all the guidelines. • Further investigations with both the Local Land Charges Manager and the HS&DM it was identified that these were missed from being recorded with Land Charges - resulting in £39,674.98 being missed from possible

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							<p>reclaim for the council if these properties were to be sold. These have now been recorded with the Local land Charges.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A copy of The West Sussex DFG - Funding Table was sent to me by the County Adaptations and Housing Project Manager for the cross council joint working group. This role supports the collation and analysis of all the data for the 7 councils under WSCC, this document is a tracker showing the funding and spending for the 7 councils for the DFG, but only on a year-end basis. • Reports are run via the uniform internal system and checked against Civica, the internal financial system. These are recorded under the action raised in Pentana, – the internal system used to record actions and targets, but this is only being completed annually.
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Cash & Bank	0	0	0	6	6	Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of the Customer Service Centre process for issuing refunds identified that although there are written procedures in place for staff to follow, these were last updated in 2021. These will require a refresh to ensure they are relevant. • The upgrade to Pay360 became effective on 21 February and, the team are learning the new system. At the time of the audit,

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							procedures notes reflecting the new system were not available
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing on the issue of refunds identified one transaction where there was no email requesting the refund. The refund made was due to human error, which was identified immediately, and payment recovered, resulting in no loss of income to the Council • No reconciliations are performed by the service which would have identified this error. A simple reconciliation could be undertaken by the Customer Services Team which lists the number of refunds made compared to number of authorising emails per service area. • Alternatively, services should process their own refunds.
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently, there is no process for ensuring all CSC staff are trained in the Run Hide Tell protocol and other training procedures covering lockdowns and Invacuations.
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the time of the audit, there were no written procedures for the clearing of unidentified receipts. The task is undertaken approximately every 2 weeks and where amounts cannot be identified, the receipts are returned to the originating bank account.
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the time of the audit, it was unclear who was responsible for reconciling the AIM Direct Posting Suspense Accounts. The Cashiers

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							function was undertaking this function, but it was not formally assigned to this section.
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For the period under review, it was noted that although bank reconciliations are being performed, they are not being undertaken or reviewed regularly. It was noted that this is partly due to the fact that the cumulative balance is used and partly due to a new post holder taking over the process. For 2023/24 it was noted that the June reconciliation had been completed as at November 2023. The whole bank reconciliation process seems detailed and over complicated. It may benefit from being streamlined with possibly having more than one bank reconciliation rather than a combined one
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NNDR	0	0	0	2	2	Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A review of the NDR procedure notes found the majority were updated between 2021 to 2023, however some had not been updated since 2015 such as preparation for committal proceedings.
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A review of the reconciliations between Civica and NEC should be performed monthly by the SSITL and reviewed by the Revenues and Debt Recovery Manager.

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Asset Management	0	0	0	2	2	Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A review of the Investment Opportunity Protocol found that it has not been updated since its inception in 2016. Some of the criteria and process may need revising.
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A review of the procedure notes relevant to asset management within Estates shows that the disposal and acquisition processes have not been updated since 2019 for acquisitions and disposals, although some revision has been made to the disposal procedure notes in 2023. It is noted that the disposals procedure notes have been placed in a folder for review.
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Housing Benefit – Overpayments	0	0	0	3	3	Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council's operations could be negatively impacted as the level of write offs may not be monitored on a timely basis leading to unexpected levels of write offs.
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently, the final stage for recovering HB overpayment debts is debt collection with Enforcement Agents, although CDC can take legal action through the courts, they currently do not as this is not the most effective method in all cases.
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For the year under review, the level of write offs are up to £100 by the Revenues and Debt Recovery Manager, between £100 and £999 by the Divisional Manager for

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							<p>Revenues, Benefits and Housing and over £1,000 by Director Corporate Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This matter has been raised as part of the wider Corporate Debt recovery Policy to the Divisional Manager for Financial Services