

Agenda Item	4
Report No	AS/19/18

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Audit & Scrutiny Committee

Date: 29th November 2018

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 3 of this report.
- 1.2 The outcome of this process is reported to the Audit & Scrutiny Committee on a six-monthly basis. This report covers the period from 01/06/18 to 31/10/18.

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.

3. Action Tracking Process

3.1 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.

3.2 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.

4. Action Tracking/ Follow-up results

4.1 Summary

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. This shows that a total of 48 audit recommendations were made and the current position is that:

- 36 (75%) actions have been satisfactorily implemented.
- 9 (19%) actions have not yet been implemented and revised target dates have been agreed.
- 2 actions are outstanding as the target dates are not yet due.
- 1 recommendation was not accepted at the time.

4.2 Actions with revised target dates

A total of 4 audits have revised target dates as detailed below.

(i) Grass Cutting contract – monitoring and contract payment arrangements (follow-up)

1 medium grade action in respect of identifying and evaluating the grounds maintenance work recharged to the Housing Revenue Account and other organisations has yet to be completed. The original date for action was 31/03/17 but has been revised and a final date of 31/01/19 now agreed. This has been delayed due to difficulty with getting key stakeholders together to agree the way forward.

(ii) Review of Burials and Cremations – Policy, Legislation and Processes

There has been work done on several of the actions but impetus has been lost due to delayed recruitment of a key post (Burials & Cremations Officer) which has proven difficult to fill. A graduate intern is also now in post to support some of the key record keeping activity and both these appointments have now freed up the Bereavement Services Manager to deliver the other actions. More realistic completion dates have been agreed and the Service is confident these dates will deliver on all the actions. An update is provided at **Appendix 2**.

(iii) Inspection of Roads and Bridges

Although the audit covered the inspections of both Roads and Bridges, the action plan was focussed on Bridge Inspections. The objectives of the audit were largely

achieved and substantial assurance was given. However, some actions remain outstanding and these are picked up in the update at **Appendix 3**.

(iv) PPP Schools Contracts – Review of Value for Money Arrangements

The target date for a low grade action in respect of removing benchmarking of PPP1 costs has changed from 31/03/18 to 31/03/19. This has been delayed as the responsible officer has been diverted to dealing with ongoing issues with contracts for other schools.

5. Implications

- 5.1 Resource – any resource implications arising from audit actions should be addressed by the relevant Services and where required, will be reported to Committee.

Legal; Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural); Climate Change/Carbon Clever Gaelic – none.

Risk – The implementation of the management agreed actions will assist in reducing the risk exposure to the Council.

Designation: Corporate Audit Manager

Date: 21st November 2018

Author: Donna Sutherland

Background Papers:

Action Tracking Report - Highland Council Completed Actions

Report Ref and Name	Final Issued	Number of Recommendations	Number				Comments
			Cleared	Date Revised	No Action	Outstanding	
HCD05/001.bf - Grass Cutting contract - monitoring and contract payment arrangements (follow-up)	31/05/16	4	3	1	0	0	
HAD02/001.bf.bf Investigation into missing school meals income at Primary School	06/04/17	5	4	0	1	0	1 action was not accepted by the Service in the report action plan.
HEA01/001.bf - Planning and Building Control Fees and Charges	27/04/17	5	5	0	0	0	
HAB01/008.bf Review of Financial Procedures in Schools	15/06/17	7	7	0	0	0	
HCD07/001 - Review of Burials and Cremations – Policy, Legislation and Processes	05/09/17	9	2	5	0	2	See Appendix 2.
HCD004/001 - Inspection of Roads and Bridges	11/09/17	3	1	2	0	0	See Appendix 3.
HC13/021.bf.bf.bf.bf - High School Investigation	20/09/17	6	6	0	0	0	

Report Ref and Name	Final Issued	Number of Recommendations	Number				Comments
			Cleared	Date Revised	No Action	Outstanding	
HCC03/003 Cromarty Primary School - Review of Extension & Refurbishment Project	14/11/17	4	4	0	0	0	
HAB03/001 - PPP Schools Contracts – Review of Value for Money Arrangements	07/02/18	2	1	1	0	0	
HEE04/001.bf Developer Contributions	08/05/18	3	3	0	0	0	
Totals		48	36	9	1	2	

Review of Burials and Cremations – Policy, Legislation and Processes

Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Implementation		Service Update
			Responsible Officer	Target Date (Revised)	
High	<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>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>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	31/03/18 (31/03/19)	<p>The post of Burials and Cremations Officer is critical to releasing the Bereavement Services Manager to complete many of the outstanding actions in this Action Plan. The Officer post has only recently been filled due to recruitment difficulties.</p>
High	<p>The Service should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the existing storage facilities and identify where fire safes are needed. A process for the storage and retention of the historic paper records needs to be created. 	<p>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.</p> <p>Fire safes will be provided where required.</p>	<p>Bereavement Services Manager</p> <p>Bereavement Services Manager</p>	<p>30/04/18 (31/03/19)</p> <p>31/01/18</p>	<p>The recently appointed Burials and Cremations Officer will release the BSM to deliver this action.</p> <p>Complete</p>

Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Implementation		Service Update
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate possibility of installing/creating datum points in all burial grounds to standardise the identification and measuring of lair locations. Arrange to properly document the information which is not held on our registers. Thereafter, any future changes should be promptly documented 	<p>Datum points for all of the cemeteries still in use will be provided. The Service is investigating the employment of a graduate intern to undertake the marking out and planning of these cemeteries.</p> <p>Arrangements will be made to record all lair information in ledgers or electronic systems.</p>	<p>Bereavement Services Manager</p> <p>Bereavement Services Manager</p>	<p>31/10/18</p> <p>31/07/18 (31/03/19)</p>	<p>Complete. Graduate Intern has been appointed and currently working through all burial ground layouts and capacities.</p> <p>Information being supplied from Intern's research to centralise digital record keeping. Ongoing discussion with suppliers of BACAS software to enable the complete centralisation of our records.</p>
High	<p>The Service should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the existing practices for advance lair purchases, and amend policy to ensure all offices are following one consistent procedure; Investigate the possibility of extra income for bespoke services with choices. 	<p>Consultation with stakeholders will be required before implementing any new policy.</p>	<p>Bereavement Services Manager</p>	<p>28/02/18 (31/03/19)</p>	<p>New Burials and Cremations Officer will release BSM to address these administration variations.</p> <p>Complete. Research has shown that there is no measurable income from this source.</p>

Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Implementation		Update
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High	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.	<p>Consultation with stakeholders will be required before implementing any new policy.</p> <p>Working patterns at Kilvean Crematorium to be reviewed.</p>	<p>Bereavement Services Manager</p> <p>Bereavement Services Manager</p>	<p>28/02/18</p> <p>28/02/18 (31/03/19)</p>	<p>Most of this is complete with exception of staggered start times. Discussions are ongoing with Trade Unions regarding staggered starting times and what changes can be made to time slots to have a minimum impact on the working day.</p> <p>Lunchtime cover and overtime at the end of shifts has been resolved and staggered start times remains under discussion.</p>
High	<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. 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.</p>	<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.</p> <p>Consultation with stakeholders will be required before implementing any new policy.</p> <p>Financial monitoring to be standardised.</p>	<p>Bereavement Services Manager</p> <p>Bereavement Services Manager</p> <p>Bereavement Services Manager</p>	<p>28/02/18 (28/02/19)</p> <p>28/02/18 (31/03/19)</p> <p>28/02/18</p>	<p>It is the intention to meet with all Funeral Directors (FD) on a regular basis to discuss this issue. BSM time can now be released to take this action forward.</p> <p>Debtors section is now implementing financial regulations regarding payment.</p>

Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Implementation		Update
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High	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	<p>ICCM or FBCA training in Crematorium Operations to be provided for all staff.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Burial and Cremations Officer</p> <p>Bereavement Services Manager</p>	<p>28/02/18</p> <p>28/02/18</p>	<p>Complete. Basic FBCA training ongoing. BSM is part of a validation panel to establish an SVQ level 5 in both cremations and burials. This training award is expected to be rolled out early in 2019.</p> <p>Initiative to develop a SVQ will give those wishing to further their career to management level 7</p>
Medium	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. This should also be done for the information issued to lair purchasers to include easily understood guidance on understanding the Management Rules for Cemeteries.	<p>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.</p> <p>The process for issuing information to lair holders is inconsistent across the Highlands and will be reviewed.</p>	<p>Bereavement Services Manager/ Burial and Cremations Officer</p> <p>Bereavement Services Manager/ Burial and Cremations Officer</p>	<p>31/03/18 (28/02/19)</p>	<p>Draft report ready for committee in February 2019. Meeting to be arranged with local area officers to establish ideas on how to deliver consistently across the Highlands.</p>

Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Implementation		Update
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Medium	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	21/12/18	Meeting to be convened with the Head of Environmental and Amenity Services and Funeral Directors to explain THC requirements to enable a better service delivery.
Low	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 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	Guidelines being drawn up and expect publication early in 2019.

Inspection of Roads and Bridges

Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Implementation		Service Update
			Responsible Officer	Target Date (Revised)	
High	<p>The Service should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deploy the monitoring spreadsheet already being used in the Lochaber office. This will enable improved financial and progress reporting internally across all the areas offices. Organise refresher budget analysis/ financial system training for accountable budget holders specifically to cover roads maintenance activities. <p>Performance indicators data should be reviewed to ensure that the programmed works expenditure reflects a year on year improvement in the survey data.</p> <p>Additional internal PIs being introduced would identify early slippage within the planned programme of inspections and would allow officers to take appropriate remedial action.</p>	<p>It is agreed that the Lochaber monitoring spreadsheet will be deployed and used across all areas.</p> <p>It is agreed that refresher financial system training will be provided.</p> <p>It is agreed there is a lack of good quality performance information. We will review how we monitor inspections undertaken against the annual programme.</p> <p>Performance Indicators will be developed to monitor improvement in the condition of the road structure asset base following works undertaken.</p>	<p>Head of Roads & Transport</p> <p>Head of Roads & Transport/ Finance Manager</p> <p>Head of Roads & Transport</p> <p>Head of Roads & Transport</p>	<p>31/01/18 (31/03/19)</p> <p>31/01/18 (31/03/19)</p> <p>31/01/18</p> <p>31/01/18 (28/02/19)</p>	<p>The Lochaber spreadsheet has not been deployed across Highland yet due to lack of resources. The Senior Engineer in Lochaber, who has developed the spreadsheet, has been deployed to other work (Investigating Officer for a significant investigation) that has taken priority.</p> <p>Complete. Performance Information has been presented to EDI committee.</p> <p>Internal PIs are being developed through the Bridges Working Group (Senior Engineers for CS and D & I sit on this group) and will be confirmed at the Q3 meeting next month. This will be implemented now that the PIs for EDI have been agreed and reported.</p>

Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Implementation		Service Update
			Responsible Officer	Target Date (Revised)	
Medium	<p>The Service should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand the use of the WDM system asset module to ensure all "wish lists" /identified future works are recorded consistently in one central location, across all offices to aid development with the future planning of programmes. Investigate the benefit in continuing and further implementation of the current localised collection of video data in addition to the WDM surveys records. Alternatively the practice should cease if there is no benefit identified. 	<p>It is agreed to expand the use of WDM to hold data relating to inspections and future works, to aid with future programming of works.</p> <p>The collection of video data can be a useful addition for determining works, but should only be used in addition to the WDM. The use of this will however be reviewed.</p>	<p>Policy & Programmes Manager/ Senior Engineer</p> <p>Policy & Programmes Manager/ Senior Engineer</p>	<p>31/03/18 (31/03/19)</p> <p>31/03/18 (31/03/19)</p>	<p>Both actions concern the expansion of the use of WDM database to provide better intelligence on inspections and the condition of the bridge stock. It is acknowledged that additional resources are required to do this. A technician post was previously converted to fund the War Memorials post and the work with this post is nearing completion. The plan is to convert this post back to a technician and then these actions can be completed.</p>
Low	<p>Committee reports should include details on how required work is prioritised for inclusion on the programme for particular areas, and would also benefit from including a condition categories key (Very Poor, Poor, Fair, Good, Very Good) for clarification.</p>	<p>It is agreed that prioritisation criteria for maintenance programmes and works undertaken annually in each financial year will be presented to Area Committees using a standardised template.</p>	<p>Policy & Programmes Manager/ Roads Operations Managers</p>	<p>30/06/18</p>	<p>Complete. Committee report to EDI has been actioned. Area reports will now follow – on target for presentation in Quarter 4.</p>