

Meeting:	Audit and governance committee
Meeting date:	23 September 2015
Title of report:	Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA) working group update
Report by:	Governance manager

Classification

Open

Key Decision

This is not an executive decision.

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

To inform the committee of the activities of the working group formed to review the actions taken in response to the recommendations made by Grant Thornton following their review of the customer relationship management system implementation.

Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- (a) the report be noted.**

Alternative options

- 1 There are no alternative options as the report is for information only.

Reasons for recommendations

- 2 To provide assurance that agreed actions have been implemented and had an appropriate impact.

Key considerations

- 3 In January 2014 Grant Thornton received a disclosure under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) from a member of staff of the council. The disclosure

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concerned the implementation of the council's IT-based customer relationship management (CRM) system implemented in 2011. Grant Thornton undertook an investigation of the areas of concern raised in the disclosure and produced a report which was considered by the audit and governance committee in September 2014 (see agenda item 16 at <http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/AGC>).

4 In summary, the investigation found no evidence of impropriety in the procurement process, but did find some areas where lessons could be learned for future major project implementation. These recommendations and the management actions in response are attached at appendix 1. Having reviewed the report, the committee resolved to establish a working group to scope and research work on governance structures systems and procedures relating to procurement and projects. Following a further report to the committee in November ([http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/further report](http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/further_report)) it was agreed that the digital strategy task and finish group, established by the general overview and scrutiny committee (GOSC), be asked to review the way forward for the CRM system and whether any further financial benefits could be delivered. This request was forwarded to GOSC but the digital strategy task and finish group has not been active in the past year. It was also agreed that the following issues form the focus of activity for the working group:

- management and monitoring of savings schemes
- concerns about the timing and pace of decisions; the level at which decisions are made; decision-making during the pre-election (or 'purdah') period
- collective working of members and officers to be embedded into the governance structure
- reports and statistical data concerning staff issues such as bullying, harassment and whistleblowing

5 The working group met in December and reviewed financial reporting arrangements for the management and monitoring of savings schemes and were satisfied that the arrangements were robust. They recommended that reports could be strengthened by the inclusion of hyperlinks to additional information and these are now routinely included.

6 The working group agreed five further areas where further information would be welcomed; these are set out in the table below together with the activity areas agreed initially (as set out at paragraph 4) and an update on progress is given.

	Action	Update
1	Management and monitoring of savings schemes	Addressed at the working group meeting in December 2014. No further action identified.
2	Concerns about the timing and pace of decisions; the level at which decisions are made; decision-making during the pre-election (or 'purdah') period	Pre-election period guidance was published on the council's website and circulated to all members and staff. Information on the decision making process has been collated on a dedicated page of the intranet (internal only) at: forward plan . The level at which decisions are made is determined by the functions scheme within

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	Action	Update
		the constitution and will be reviewed as part of the ongoing review of the constitution.
3	Collective working of members and officers to be embedded into the governance structure	How this is best achieved, whilst maintaining transparency in relation to accountability and clarity regarding the respective roles of members and officers will be considered as part of the ongoing review of the constitution.
4	Reports and statistical data concerning staff issues such as bullying, harassment and whistleblowing	Whistleblowing data is reported to the committee in the annual report of the monitoring officer. The annual staff survey provides an overview of staff views regarding bullying and harassment (see 7 below).
5	Report process: officers to explain the process in full, how the report template goes through different departments, and the process by which decisions are taken through the governance structure	This information has been collated on a dedicated page of the intranet (see 2 above)
6	Induction of members post election: officers to give further information about the plans for induction of members to ensure that incoming committee members were aware of the committee's work plan	Online handbooks were developed, in consultation with the outgoing committee chairman. These remain available on the councillor handbook pages of the intranet.
7	Staff survey: data on the latest staff survey	The chief executive attended a meeting of the committee in January and provided a briefing on the key issues arising from the latest staff survey. It was agreed that in future the committee would receive this information annually and this is included in the annual work programme.
8	Staff statistics: data on staff sickness and grievances.	Sickness absence rates for the organisation are reported to Cabinet as part of the quarterly corporate performance reporting process (see databooks). Information on HR case management (covering conduct, capability and performance, absence management, grievance and other issues) is reported monthly to the management board. In the

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	Action	Update
		first seven months of this calendar year, six new grievances were opened.
9	Decide any subjects that need further work by the working group	No further meetings were held.

Community impact

- 7 The council's corporate plan includes clear commitments both to maintaining openness and accountability for decision making, service delivery and impact and to making the best use of resources available in order to meet the council's priorities. The areas for improvement identified in the report and the actions agreed in response support achievement of those.

Equality duty

- 8 No implications identified; the report is for information only.

Financial implications

- 9 No implications identified; the report is for information only.

Legal implications

- 10 There are no legal implications.

Risk management

- 11 As the report is for information only there are no direct risks in relation to the recommendations. Ensuring robust governance processes are in place and understood mitigates against the risk that decisions are not taken in accordance with the principles of good decision making.

Consultees

- 10 None.

Appendices

Appendix A – Recommendations and management response.

Background papers

- None identified.