

# Herefordshire Council's approach to Risk Management

## 1.0 Purpose of the paper

Herefordshire Council, like all organisations, faces a wide range of risks. Managing strategic risks is crucial for ensuring the delivery of essential services and achieving long-term goals. The Council recognises that there are risks in everything it does and has a duty to manage these risks in a balanced, structured and cost effective way.

A report to the Audit and Governance Committee in [March 2023](#) provided a review of the council's approach to risk management and detailed a number of areas for improvement. The purpose of this report is twofold:

- 1) To provide a high level overview of how the council currently manages risk across the council
- 2) An update of progress against the recommendations detailed in the March 2023 report.

## 2.0 Background / Context

The Council currently have a [risk management policy](#) which was adopted in 2020 and sets out the governance framework at the Council detailing roles and responsibilities from the executive level, through to specific staff and individuals throughout the Council. The overall aim of the policy is to embed the culture of risk management throughout the Council both at a corporate level and within operational/service delivery arrangements.

Embedding risk management throughout the Council is not just about legal requirements. Effective risk management will lead to:

- experiencing fewer shocks and unwelcome surprises allowing greater focus on planned activity;
- more efficient use of our resources;
- improved business planning due to awareness of uncertain events and integrated planning of risk mitigation
- better, more informed decision-making

## 3.0 What is risk management?

Risk is the uncertainty that surrounds future events and outcomes. This uncertainty can be a positive opportunity or a negative threat. Risk is therefore defined as “the chance of something happening that will have an impact (positive or negative) on the achievement of the Council's outcomes”. It is measured in terms of the likelihood of an incident/event occurring and the impact if it does.

Risk management is about the identification, analysis and control of the threats or opportunities that affect the achievement or execution of the Council's strategic and operational objectives. It is also the successful management of the control environment in which the decision making

process is undertaken, such that positive risks are taken in order to innovate and improve service provision.

#### **4.0 Herefordshire's Risk Management Approach**

The Council's risk management approach is designed to ensure that new and emerging risks are identified promptly and assessed realistically and effective mitigating action is taken to manage identified risks. The risk management process forms part of the council's Performance Management Framework and co-ordinated through the Council's Performance Team.

Risk management is not just about eliminating risk but about dealing with and reducing the circumstances in terms of its impact and probability (likelihood). A critical success factor in embedding a risk management culture is the commitment of Members, Directors and Heads of Service.

Risks are managed every day as part of normal business activity and the following section details the council's current approach to risk management. This paper has been informed by the councils [risk management policy](#) and officers from across the council.

#### **3.1 Identifying the risk**

As part of business planning processes, services across the council are required to self-assess their services. This involves considering the risks of delivery and the circumstances which have either, or might impact delivery and performance.

The mechanism used to undertake this may vary within each service, but might include a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, or PESTLE (Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Environmental) analysis. Through this method, services identify risks that may impact the council objectives, either at delivery and or county plan level. Risks are also often identified as a result of audit activity, decision reports, or through our Programme Management Office (PMO) who have oversight of key projects across the council.

#### **3.2 Assessment of Risk**

Once services have identified risks, risks are assessed to help determine how much attention is given to it. The council uses a 5 x 5 point scale to multiply the likelihood of the risk occurring and impact of the risk to the council which produces an inherent risk score. This is the risk score should no controls be applied - effectively the worst case scenario. Tables 1 and 2 summarise how the impact and likelihood risks are assessed by the council.

Score	Likelihood	Description
1	Rare	It is unlikely that the event will occur
2	Possible	It is likely that this event will occur
3	Likely	There is a fair chance (50:50) that this event will occur
4	Almost certain	The event will almost surely occur
5	Certain	The event has occurred or will definitely occur

Table 1. Table showing different risk likelihood score around how likely a risk may occur

Score	Impact	Description
1	Negligible	Day to day operational problems that can be dealt with
2	Minor	Budgetary issues that can be resolved within Service in accordance with the finance procedure rules {link} Manageable disruption to services Noticeable internal impact, but the Service would remain on course to achieve priorities for the year Localised reputational damage
3	Significant	Significant loss, delay or interruption to services Disruption to one critical Council Service for more than 48hrs Non-delivery of corporate and service plan objectives during a quarter Significant stakeholder concern Attracting short term media attention and potential for litigation/ prosecution from legislative or regulatory bodies Long term regional damage to reputation Budgetary issues that can be resolved at Directorate level in accordance with financial procedure rules [link] Serious Injury to employees or those in the Council's care Significant complaints
4	Major	Widespread medium to long term impact on operational efficiency, performance and reputation. Major disruption to Council's critical services for more than 48hrs (e.g. major ICT failure) Breach of legal or contractual obligation attracting medium-term attention of legislative or regulatory bodies. Adverse coverage in National Press/Front page news locally Budgetary issues that can only be resolved by Section 151 Officer / Chief Executive / Members in accordance with the finance procedure rules {link} Serious Injury to employees or those in the Council's care
5	Critical	Potential to threaten the existence of a service/s Budgetary issues that cannot be resolved Death of employees or those in the Council's care Inability to function effectively, Council-wide Service delivery has to be taken over by Central Government

Table 2. Table showing risk for score for overall impact and implications arising from these scores

Risks tend to fall in to one of the following categories, which are used to guide officers in assessing the implications of risks that might impact on their service;

- Delivery and operational
- Compliance

- Financial
- Environment
- Reputation
- Health & Safety
- Risk to vulnerable people

Detailed in appendix 1 is a list of risk categories and scoring criteria against them.

The likelihood and impact scores are multiplied to give a risk score as shown in the grid below.



Figure 1. Example of PMO Portfolio Dashboard

For projects overseen by the PMO, the project, project manager & project team review the risks and quantify how big the risks are and how they can be controlled. Sometimes this might involve a risk workshop to identify more details about the risks, likelihood of risk occurring and mitigations. As part of this the project team:

- Review list of risks already identified & recorded on the risk log
- Are there any new risks?
- Can any be removed?
- Assign an owner for each risk
- Assign type/category of the risk
- Identify controls/mitigation
- Agree how likely risk will happen & impact of risk if it was to occur
- Using council risk matrix assign risk score

All project risks are managed throughout the project on the 'Risk Log' within council's project management system (Verto).

### 3.3 Addressing risk

In most instances, the council has some controls in place to help reduce the likelihood or impact of a risk, which are documented in the controls section of the risk register. Given the existing controls in place, the risk is scored again to provide a residual risk score. This residual score is used to determine how the risk should be escalated and reviewed. The score will also give an indication of what needs to happen to address the risk.

The service/directorate take one of the following approaches to identified risks;

- **Reduce:** Steps that are required to reduce either the likelihood or the impact, or both, to contain the risk to acceptable levels, e.g. mitigating action, contingency planning and more.

This might also include transferring the risk; examples include additional insurance, or outsourcing services.

- **Accept:** An informed decision to accept the likelihood and impact of a particular risk without additional controls but subject to monitoring of the impact and likelihood to see if requires different management. This will ordinarily be the option where there is little in the council's control which will have an impact on the risk scores, or where the cost (financial or staff resource) would be prohibitive.

Planned additional action to address the risk are also referenced within the mitigating activity column of the risk register, with key dates identified.

### **Risk Appetite**

The council recognises that there will always be risks to delivering our services, however sometimes these reach a threshold and something must be done to mitigate the ongoing exposure to the risk. In determining whether the council needs to do something to manage the risk the residual score will give an indication as to what should happen.

### **3.4 Monitor and Review**

Once risks and existing controls have been identified, with additional action plans put in place to manage and mitigate them as required, it is essential to routinely monitor their status on the risk register.

Directorates review their risk registers regularly to ensure that the content is accurate and risks are being managed appropriately. This is normally undertaken with support from the Performance Team. In reviewing the risk, services ensure that the residual risk score remains up to date, planned activities are refreshed to ensure completed actions are moved in to the controls column and any new future mitigating activities are included.

The Performance Team will also review and moderate Directorate Risk Registers, with a view to ensuring that scores have been applied consistently across the council and to verify or challenge directorates on escalation of risks to the Corporate Risk Register. Risk are considered each month by Directors and included in the monthly performance reports that go to the Corporate Leadership Team.

Projects managed by the PMO involve monthly project board meetings where the risks are reviewed and managed. The project manager ahead of the project board will review the risk log and identify any risks that may need to be highlighted to the project board or escalated to the next level for advice or assistance.

Within the PMO project portfolio dashboard reporting, there is a section that provides details of Risks and Issues. The dashboard is live reporting and covers the PMO portfolio of projects. It illustrates how projects are rag rated within the risk matrix and also provides details of the split of projects across each of the defined categories (see figure 1).

### 3.5 Reporting Risks

The council operates three tiers of risk registers in relation to its business as usual activities; a corporate risk register, directorate risk register and service risk register. In addition, the council also maintains project and programme risk registers to record risks in relation to projects.

Risks move between registers in order to allow effective management and visibility of risk. The council uses one set of scores to evaluate risks in service, directorate and corporate risk registers.

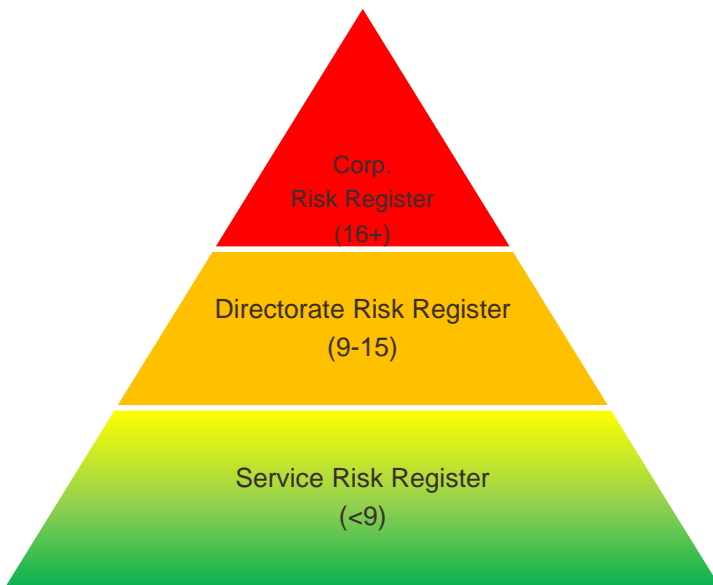


Figure 2. Diagram illustrating how different risks

#### **Service Risk Registers - > Directorate Risk Registers - > Corporate Risk Registers**

Heads of Service are required to ensure that risks from their service level registers which score over 9 are escalated to the directorate risk register because there is a fair chance significant impact will occur. Risks from at service levels which score over 16 are escalated to the corporate risk register because there is a fair chance major impact will occur.

Risks can be de-escalated from the corporate and directorate risk register but will remain in the service risk register until such time as the Head of Service accepts the risk and the risk is moved to the accepted risk list for the service. De-escalation is consistent with the triggers above, scores dropping below 16 will step down from the corporate risk register to directorate risk registers, and will drop to service risk registers as they drop below 9.

Risk Score	Colour	Register Level
> 16	Red	Corporate Risk Register
9 – 25	Amber	Directorate Risk Register
0 – 25	Yellow & Green	Service Risk Register

Table 3. Escalation and de-escalation thresholds across tiers

Whilst some risks will be ever-present, as work is done to mitigate risks some risks will reach a

point where they no longer need to be reported. Heads of Service accept these risks by moving them into the list of accepted risks in the risk register.

Corporate Risk Register	<p>This register flows out from the directorates risk registers and is owned by Corporate Leadership Team.</p> <p>These risks are reviewed by the Performance Team monthly and by the Corporate Leadership via monthly performance reports</p> <p>Risks which are escalated here are with a risk score of 16 or greater.</p>
Directorate risk register	<p>This register flows out from the Service risk registers and is owned by the Directorate Management Teams (DMTs).</p> <p>These risk registers are challenged by the Performance Team on a quarterly basis to ensure consistent application of the risk plan and scoring criteria.</p> <p>Risks which are escalated here are those with a risk score of 9 or above.</p> <p>Any corporate risks owned by the directorate are kept in the directorate risk register, to ensure the visibility.</p>
Service risk register	<p>This register flows out from the Service area/Team (risk registers) and is regularly reviewed at Service Team Meetings (STs).</p> <p>This is the master risk register and controls the escalation and closure of all risks in the service areas.</p> <p>All relevant service risks are kept in this document as the master copy for services, which are then referenced in either directorate or corporate risk registers.</p>
Programme and Project risk registers	<p>Where it is considered appropriate, major partnerships, programmes and projects will produce and maintain their own risk registers. Risk to the programme/project should be recorded within</p> <p>Verto and managed through the corporate project framework. Risks will be assessed at programme level and will be escalated on to the Corporate Centre Risk Register, should it score 9 or more in the scoring criteria below. This is the responsibility of programme managers</p>

Table 4. Summary of the attributes of each tier of the risk register.

#### 4.0 Roles and Responsibilities

Risk management should be an intrinsic part of corporate governance. For this to be effective it is vital that everybody within the council understands the role they play in effective management of risk. The table below summarises the different roles across the council.

Tier	Responsibility and reporting framework
Audit and Governance Committee	Responsible for ensuring that the council's risk management process is carried out effectively. It is not a function of the committee to examine specific risks in detail, but satisfy itself that risk management in the council is operating effectively. Should the committee have a concern about the scoring or detail of the risk, it might refer back to officers attending the committee, or scrutiny.

Cabinet	Oversee risk management as part of the quarterly performance monitoring on the Budget & Performance Report. Cabinet might be required to drive active steps to manage certain risks, particularly risks to strategic objectives, through decision making. Individual Cabinet members should also regularly review risks within their portfolio as part of Cabinet Member Briefings
Corporate Leadership Team	Own the council's Corporate Risk Register. Monitor and review risks on the corporate risk register ensuring adequate response. As part of this review, Management Board should challenge one another in their delivery of activity which effectively mitigates identified risks.
Internal Audit	Responsible for considering the risk registers when proposing the annual plan.
Performance Team	<p>Assess risks for inclusion on corporate risk register when escalated from Directorates.</p> <p>Consider risks which appear high on directorate risk registers which have not been escalated to the corporate risk register. This will typically be done by challenging the application of scoring on directorate risk registers to ensure comparability across the council.</p> <p>Consider any risks identified in internal and or external audit reports and challenge directorates on their inclusion.</p> <p>Undertake an annual review of national risks, considering local implications of emerging national risks.</p>
Solicitor to the council	<p>Responsible for promoting the consistent use of risk management, developing the risk management plan and facilitation of the council's corporate risk register.</p> <p>Will review the Risk Management Plan annually in order to ensure effective management.</p>
Directors	<p>Accountable for effective risk management within their directorate, escalating risks to the corporate register as appropriate. This requires directors to ensure that staff are continually identifying emerging risks, monitoring and reviewing their risks in line with guidance. In addition, it is necessary that directors ensure that risks which are an unacceptable levels are managed to reduce the risk/impact to the council, and that these risks are an integral part of business planning processes.</p> <p>Responsible for providing cabinet members of the oversight of significant risks within their portfolios.</p>
Heads of Service	Accountable for effective risk management within their service, escalating risks to the directorate register as appropriate. This requires them to ensure that staff are continually identifying emerging risks and monitoring and reviewing their risks in line with guidance. In addition, it is necessary that they ensure risks that have been managed can be accepted and transferred to the accepted risks section of the register.
Risk Owners	Risk owners are responsible for recording risks, updating risks, managing actions and ensuring that risk registers are up to date.



Performance Leads	<p>Will support directorates to update risk registers and provide advice and support with their completion. However, directorate &amp; service risk registers remain the responsibility of operational staff not performance leads.</p> <p>Performance Leads will provide challenge to directorates on their risk recording and support directors to embed risk within their directorates.</p>
All Staff	<p>Responsibility to be risk aware; to assess and manage risk effectively in their job and report potential hazards or risks to their managers, work to mitigate risks and to work within the appropriate risk management guidelines.</p>

Table 5. Roles and responsibilities for risk across the council

## 5.0 Areas for Improvement

Whilst there have been a number of organisational challenges and organisational changes, the council recognises the need to further improve our approach to risk management. The table below summarises the areas that have previously been identified for improvement and progress to date:

Area for improvement	Progress
There is a need for more consistency in the use of the scoring matrix	The performance team and PMO regularly meet with Heads of Service/Service Directors to review risks and assess any need for escalation/de-escalation. However, further training across the council would facilitate a more consistent approach.
Some risks stay on the register for a long time.	As above, the performance team and PMO office regularly meet with Heads of Service/Service Directors to discuss risks. It is recognised that some risks are strategic risks and are therefore likely to be more 'static' than operational risks. However, these are not sufficiently captured and further work is needed to capture these.
There needs to be more robust identification of action to mitigate risk. Actions need to be smarter.	Work is ongoing to support staff across the council to provide sufficient detail within the risk registers. Support is provided by the PMO and the Performance Team. Further training for staff is currently being explored.
<p>There is a lack of clarity in use of terminology between strategic and corporate risks</p> <p>There is evidence of confusion about the difference between strategic and corporate risks.</p>	<p>This still needs to be addressed and options are currently being scoped to ensure a systematic approach to strategic and corporate risks.</p> <p>The corporate lead for risk management is now the Director of Public Health who also sits on the Local Resilience Forum (LRF). This will enable alignment with national and regional risk registers.</p>
More could be done to aggregate similar risks within or across	It is anticipated that this should form part of the strategic risk register. A review of the performance team is currently underway which will facilitated

Directorates, for example, risks related to recruitment and retention.	more 'cross directorate working' with the role of the corporate leadership team to have further oversight and identification of synergies between risks
The risk management plan will be revised to reflect the strengthened, more proactive role to be taken by CLT in managing strategic risks.	The corporate leadership team have recently agreed a new timetable for meetings that will allow for greater focus and attention on strategic issues, such as the risk register. This will be in addition to the continuation of monthly performance reports which includes directorate risks
CLT will set the organisational risk strategy in relation to the council's transformation programme, Thrive.  Adopting a strategic approach to risk management to make better informed decisions will be crucial for successful transformational change	Work continues around the Council's 'future operating model' and how we can be more efficient and effective in the delivery of support services, which is part of the Thrive Transformation Programme. Performance and risk management will be a key component of the new model
Commission training	Options for training for risk management are currently being scoped

Table 6. Areas for improvement and progress

## Appendix 1 – Risk Categories and Impact Scoring

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
	<b>Insignificant</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Significant</b>
Delivery and operational	Day to day operational problems	Manageable disruption to the service	Disruption to one critical Council Service for more than 48hrs	Major disruption to Council's critical services for more than 48hrs (e.g. major ICT failure)	Potential to threaten the existence of a service/s
Compliance	Concern raised Complaint received	Warning received	Breach Improvement Notice	Enforcement Action Breach of legal or contractual obligation attracting medium-term attention of legislative or regulatory bodies	Prosecution Service delivery has to be taken over by Central Government
Financial as per the finance procedure rules	Up to £100,000 – within a directorate	Up to £100,000 – across directorates	Between £100,001 & £250,000 – within a directorate Between £100,001 & £250,000 – across directorates	Between £250,001 & £500,000 – within a directorate Over £250,001 – across directorates	Over £500,001 – within a directorate
Environment (incl. consideration of - Biodiversity - Carbon emissions - Waste & pollution - Air Quality)	Minimal impact on waste/pollution levels/carbon emissions requiring no/minimal intervention	Minor impact on waste/pollution levels/carbon emissions requiring minor intervention	Moderate impact on waste/pollution levels/carbon emissions requiring intervention	Increase in pollutant/carbon emissions/waste from service delivery requiring additional offsetting and mitigation measures	Significant increase in pollutant/waste/carbon emission levels which compromise the Council's ability to deliver carbon neutrality and biodiversity net gain.

					Significant loss to protected sites, species and loss of life.
Reputation	Short term local media attention	Sustained local media attention	Front page news locally	Adverse coverage in National Press	Potential public interest report, third party intervention
Health & Safety	Minimal injury requiring no/minimal intervention	Minor injury or illness, requiring minor intervention	Moderate injury requiring professional intervention. RIDDOR/ agency reportable incident.	Major injury leading to long-term incapacity/ disability	Incident leading to death, multiple permanent injuries or irreversible health effects Death of employees
Risk to vulnerable people	Minimal impact on individuals in the authorities care	Minor impact on individuals in the authorities care requiring minor intervention	An event which impacts on a small number of individuals in the authorities care	Serious impact to individuals in the authorities care Mis-management of care with long term effects Breach of human rights	Death to individuals in the authorities care



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Council**