

Report title: Absence Management Audit Progress Update	
Report to: Audit, Governance and Standards Committee	
Report author: Paul Turner, Director, Legal and Assurance	
Date: 18 December 2023	For: Discussion
Enquiries to: Paul Turner, Director, Legal and Assurance, paul.turner@essex.gov.uk	
County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Audit Governance and Standards Committee has a role to maintain oversight and to monitor the effectiveness of internal controls, governance and risk management arrangements as well as the work of Internal Audit.
- 1.2 This report provides the Committee with the current position regarding activity in relation to the ECC Absence Management Audit. Alison Woods, Director, People Business Partnering and Employment Practice has been invited to attend the committee to provide an update on the actions being taken to respond to the Audit Report.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the progress in relation to the implementation of the recommendations from the ECC Absence Management Audit be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1 At the September 2023 meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee it was reported that the Absence Management audit had received a Limited Assurance opinion. Members therefore agreed that relevant officers should be invited to provide an update to the Committee.

4. Links to our Strategic Ambitions

- 4.1 Internal Audit and Counter Fraud activity is critical in ensuring that the Council successfully mitigates its risks in all areas of work and that the public purse is protected to ensure that available resources reach those most in need.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 It is important to implement internal audit recommendations in order to ensure that our risks, including financial risks are managed.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 Internal Audit is a key way in which councillors can be assured that the Council is using its resources effectively and that the Council is discharging its fiduciary duties concerning taxpayers' money. It helps services to design systems which have appropriate controls and also helps identify and respond to breaches if they occur.
- 6.2 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require the authority to have adequate systems of internal control and internal audit is a way of demonstrating this.

7. Equality and Diversity Considerations

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 7.3 No equality impact assessment has been made because this report relates to the progress in implementing recommendations to manage risk.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Absence Management Update PowerPoint presentation

9. List of background papers

- 9.1 Internal audit report to the extent that it does not include exempt information.