

Update on the Follow up of Care Proceedings – 2012-13

At the request of the Standards & Audit Committee, a follow up of the above audit has just been completed. It was noted that the current Head of Legal Services has only been in post for a relatively short time and was not in post when the original review was carried out. This has resulted in a slight delay in fully implementing all of the recommendations. However, all are either in progress or have been implemented. In our opinion Thurrock Council has demonstrated **reasonable progress** in implementing actions agreed to address internal audit recommendations.

SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

This review only covered audit recommendations previously made and did not review the whole control framework. Therefore, we are not providing assurance on the entire risk and control framework of those areas.

Testing was only carried out on recommendations rated High or Medium and management assurance was noted for recommendations rated as low.

Where testing has been undertaken, our samples have been selected over the period since actions were implemented or controls enhanced.

Our work does not provide any guarantee or absolute assurance against material errors, loss or fraud.

Ref	Categorisation	Recommendation	Status	Action taken	Manager responsible
1.2	Low	When conflicting advice is given by solicitors in the same case, the client department should notify the Head of Legal Services so she can look at the issue and ensure accurate, consistent advice is provided.	Complete	Efforts are being made to ensure that the solicitor with conduct of the case attends all meetings relating to the case to avoid conflicting advice being given.	Service Manager for Looked After Children and Service Manager for Safeguarding
2.3	Medium	Once the new People Services SLA is agreed, it should be cascaded down to Managers. This will ensure that they are aware of what is included in the services provided by Legal.	In progress. Further follow-up March 13	This recommendation was due to be completed by September 2012. The delay is attributed to changes in Management. However, it is understood that a new Service Level Agreement is in the process of being drafted and will be in place by the end of February 2013.	Business Support Manager & Principal Solicitor

Appendix A

Ref	Categorisation	Recommendation	Status	Action taken	Manager responsible
2.4	High	More care should be taken to ensure that core assessments are completed within the timescales as their absence may delay court proceedings and will impact upon the reputation of the Council.	In progress. Further follow-up March 13	There was evidence that the Service Manager has given instructions to the Quality Assurance Team to carry out an audit of cases where care proceedings have been initiated within the last 6 months. The purpose of the audit is to look at issues regarding delays and the quality of core assessments. This will provide assurance that unnecessary delays are being addressed and the quality of the core assessment is good. This should help to reduce the costs of a case and speed up the Court Proceedings.	Service Managers for Safeguarding and for Looked After Children. Principal Solicitor
3.2	Low	The Service Manager should meet with the Principal Solicitor to review and agree actions within the Local Performance Improvement Group Action Plan.	Complete	The meeting has taken place and the Service Manager is in the process of drafting the Action Plan	Service Manager and Principal Solicitor
3.4	Medium	Full case reference and/or name should be quoted for each payment made. This information would not only provide a clear audit trail but would be useful management information, especially in view of the fact that the cases are becoming more and more expensive. All associated care proceeding costs should be allocated to the same code to allow the total cost of proceedings to be identified.	Complete	A transaction list from August to the end of November 2012 was obtained from Oracle and reviewed. It was confirmed that payments made now show the case references or names. This helps provide a clearer audit trail and will assist in identifying the total cost of proceedings.	Service Manager & Principal Solicitor