



GEDLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT - DRAFT

REMOTE WORKING REVIEW
DECEMBER 2022

Design Opinion	 Substantial
Design Effectiveness	 Moderate

IDEAS | PEOPLE | TRUST



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Mike Hill	Chief Executive Officer
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BDO LLP APPRECIATES THE TIME PROVIDED BY ALL THE INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN THIS REVIEW AND WOULD LIKE TO THANK THEM FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE AND COOPERATION.

REPORT STATUS

Auditors:	Gurpreet Dulay - Director Charlotte Thomas - Assistant Manager Azra Patel - Internal Auditor
Dates work performed:	9 August 2022 - 1 November 2022
Draft report issued:	6 December 2022
Final report issued:	31 January 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CRR REFERENCE:

3. Failure to protect staff, including health & safety issues
4. Failure to recruit and retain staff, and maintaining internal capacity
6. Failure to protect & utilise physical assets
10. Failure to maintain service standards, customer satisfaction, and/or meet customer expectations
11. Failure to prevent damage to the Council's reputation.

Design Opinion



Substantial

Design Effectiveness



Moderate

Recommendations



SCOPE

BACKGROUND

As a result of the pandemic, there has been an increase in employees working remotely at Gedling Borough Council (the Council). Currently, employees at the Council are required to work in the office 40% of the week as per the guidance from the Senior Leadership Team. Mobile Technology allows for members of staff to work from any location and encourages a flexible approach to providing local authority services.

When properly implemented, remote working supports the Council's ability to improve its ways of working and the provision of services to the public. However, it requires appropriate security controls to be deployed to prevent the Council's services from being compromised.

To comply with the health and safety regulations, Service Managers are responsible for completing the appropriate Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment to ensure workstations are adequate for individuals. Where required, the user will be issued equipment and technology which can include a monitor screen, keyboard and mouse, chair and desks.

Service Managers are responsible for ensuring the self-assessment forms are completed by employees and ordering the required equipment. For technology, the Service Manager will create an IT service request using the SysAid portal. Once processed, the IT equipment will be issued to the new starter at the Civic Centre.

This review assessed the adequacy of the controls in relation to remote working.

AREAS REVIEWED

The following areas were covered as part of this review:

- ▶ We reviewed the Council's Policy and procedure documents in relation to remote working and self-assessments
- ▶ We examined the September 2021 staff survey results and the actions the Council has made to improve areas which had a low rating
- ▶ We tested a sample of 10 individuals who work remotely to ensure they have completed the correct self-assessment form and equipment/technology has been issued to them

- ▶ We discussed with the responsible service Manager the process at the Council for issuing technology and equipment to individuals and how this is managed
- ▶ We observed how the IT Team use different systems to monitor technology and mobile phone usage compliance.



AREAS OF STRENGTH

We identified the following areas of good practice:

- ▶ We reviewed the DSE Policy which provides detailed guidance to Managers on self-assessment forms. The Policy was last updated on 14 January 2021 and is fit for purpose
- ▶ The September 2021 staff survey results contain questions which address staff wellbeing and remote working. The results are reported to the Joint Consultative & Safety Committee and Senior Leadership Team where there is discussion of the issues identified and recommendations for solutions. The Council is proactive and have identified appropriate actions for the recommendations which are assigned to a responsible officer
- ▶ The Council uses three programmes to monitor the technology issued to employees: System Centre Configuration (SCCM) which allows IT to view the primary devices of a user, Helpdesk logon Tracking (SysAid) which records an individuals logs-ons onto devices and Security Event and Incident Management (SEIM) which identifies usage and log-ons. The combination of the systems allow the Council to effectively manage technology which is used remotely
- ▶ When individuals leave the Council, the technology they received during employment must be returned on-site and a member from the IT Team will erase the laptop, which ensures there is a secure disposal arrangement. Smart phones can be wiped remotely by users and the mobile phone guidance documents instruct employees on how to conduct this
- ▶ Microsoft Intune provides live compliance status of mobile phones at the Council. Examples of non-compliance are devices which have not had the required software update or completed a password change. For devices which are not compliant, the system provides the details of the device including the primary UPN (user). Non compliant devices are ones which have not had the required software update or password change. The IT Team regularly review the programmes and email the user to resolve the issue. Review of the systems confirmed it is effective in monitoring mobile phones at the Council.



AREAS OF CONCERN

We found:

- ▶ Our review of 10 remote workers we were unable to obtain three self-assessment forms. In two cases this was because previous managers retained them on their personal files and in one instance the form had not been completed as the individual was employed for a short period of time. We identified a further five exceptions where individuals completed the incorrect self-assessment form. Flexible workers were completing the Fully Agile Combined Assessment Form but the Policy states a DSE Assessment form must be completed too (see Finding 1 - Medium)

- ▶ One individual did not complete an Assessment form during their employment at the Council as the individual was employed for a short period of time. In two cases, the Assessment Forms were not completed up to standard as Line Managers did not sign or date the form (see Finding 1 - Medium)
- ▶ Discussions with Line Managers identified that the Council does not have a process for managing furniture provided to staff due to this being a rare occasion (see Finding 2 - Low)
- ▶ Our review of the Flexible and Agile Working Policy identified it was last reviewed in October 2019 which is prior to the covid-19 pandemic. The Policy outlines how posts are identified as being suitable for flexible and agile working. The Policy does not state the requirement for employees to complete a self-assessment (see Finding 3 - Low).



Overall, the Council has controls in place to manage remote working. Our review identified that the Council completes a survey every two years which is focused on addressing staff wellbeing and remote working. The results were escalated to the Joint Consultative and Safety Committee and actions were identified to tackle areas which had the lowest rating. However, the council does not have a formal process to manage furniture which has been issued to staff.

Whilst the Council monitors technology issued to staff using live robust systems, our testing identified that employees did not complete the correct self-assessment forms as per the Policy on occasions sampled.

This led us to conclude a moderate assurance over the control effectiveness and substantial assurance on the control design.

DETAILED FINDINGS

1 FINDING TITLE	
TOR Risk:	APPROPRIATE ERGONOMIC FURNITURE AND REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY HAS NOT BEEN MADE AVAILABLE TO ALL MEMBERS OF STAFF
Significance	 Medium



FINDING

All individuals which utilise a DSE workstation which includes a screen, keyboard, other computer accessories, desk and chair must complete a self-assessment form prior to their employment starting. The incompleteness of the self-assessment forms may result in employees not being issued the appropriate equipment to conduct their work or potentially having a health and safety risk within their work environment.

When individuals require equipment, this is raised through completion of a self-assessment form which is reported to the Service Manager/Line Manager within their area. Where no issues are identified, the Manager will order the equipment as required. When issues are identified that require specialist equipment, the Service Manager will report this to the Council's Health and Safety Officer who will decide if additional equipment will be provided. Once the Health and Safety Officer approves the request, the Service Manager will order and issue the equipment to the employee.

Depending on if an individual works fully remote or in the office, different self-assessment forms will need to be completed:

- DSE self-assessment - completed by office-based workers on their main workstation
- Fully Agile Combined Assessment - Home Workers based on their home workstation
- Flexible workers who work in a mixture of both the office and at home - will be required to complete both.

The difference between the two self-assessment forms is the Fully Agile Combined Assessment form contains a series of extra questions relating to hazards in the following areas:

- Slip, trip and fall hazards
- Falling object hazards
- Electrical hazards
- Substance related
- Fire
- Manual Handling and workstation
- Security
- Accidents, incidents, first aid, fire and emergency/training.

As the Council remain responsible for managing and controlling employee's work activities it is important that individuals complete the correct forms to notify Managers if workstations are not safe.

Separate risk assessments are completed in addition to the self-assessment form but is only required under certain circumstances. Situations include when an individual is working from home and they display health issues such as having a sprained ankle which would affect their mobility. These risk assessment forms are uploaded onto Assessnet for Managers to access.

We tested a sample of 10 individuals who currently work remotely and identified the following:

- Five individuals completed the wrong self-assessment form per the Policy. For example, completing a DSE assessment form instead of the Fully Agile Combined Assessment form when the individual works remotely (POST ID FRO05J, POST ID FRO07B, POST ID LZD19D, POST ID MDS01 & POST ID CSH08). Completing the incorrect self-assessment form creates a health and safety risk as the DSE self-assessment does not contain the additional questions which focus on the employees home workstation
- One individual did not complete an assessment form during their employment (POST ID FSP50) and in two cases, the Line Manager was unable to locate the forms (POST ID FSC07C/T & POST ID CCO20). This creates the risk that employees at the Council do not have the correct equipment to conduct their duties
- In two Cases, the Line Manager did not sign and date the assessment form, but we confirmed through discussion with Line Managers that these have been reviewed (POST ID FRO07B, POST ID MDS01 & POST ID CSH08).

Incorrectly completed and non-completion of self-assessment forms could result in employees not being issued the correct resources creating the risk that staff are unable to complete work efficiently whilst remaining comfortable.



RECOMMENDATION

- a. Management should be informed of the requirement to complete the correct self-assessment forms for employees via email as a minimum
- b. Self-assessment forms should be reviewed and signed by managers when there is a change in the user's individual capabilities or a significant change into the workstation
- c. For Line Managers to store the completed designated self-assessment forms in a secure shared folder with data protection to ensure it can be accessed by other appropriate employees, and/or ensure that they hand-over these documents to another colleague in the event that they leave the Council.



MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

The Council will include the requirement for new Officers to complete a DSE on the induction form to trigger Managers to ensure they are completed. The Head of Governance and Customer Services will raise this at the CHAS group.

Responsible Officer: Head of Governance and Customer Services

Implementation Date: 31 March 2023

2 FINDING TITLE

TOR Risk:	THERE IS NO PROCESS IN PLACE FOR MANAGING FURNITURE PROVIDED TO STAFF	
Significance		Low

FINDING

Staff at the Council can raise the request for furniture through completion of the self-assessment forms. If a request is made, the Line Manager reviewing the self-assessment will order the furniture and issue it to the individual. If a request is made for furniture which is a non-standard item, the Line Manager will raise this to the Council Health and Safety Officer prior to processing the order.

During our sample testing of the issuing of furniture to staff at the Council we identified there is no formal process for managing furniture which has been issued. Discussions with Line Managers identified it is rare for individuals to require equipment which needs to be ordered. This was confirmed in our sample testing of 10 employees who completed a self-assessment form which did not require additional furniture or equipment.

For example, if a staff member requires a chair when working from home, they will ask the Line Manager for permission to take the chair from the office. The Line Manager will not physically keep a record that the chair has been issued but will be aware of the request.

The lack of management of equipment creates the risk that equipment will not be returned to the Council resulting in greater expenses on equipment which is not necessary.



RECOMMENDATION

- a. For each Department to create an Equipment Tracker for certain items (Council to define) which details the item borrowed, Officer borrowing, date the item is borrowed, and date returned. Line Managers within each Department should update the tracker
- b. To integrate this requirement into the DSE Policy.



MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Management accept the recommendation and A tracker will be created to ensure items which are borrowed are managed

Responsible Officer: Head of Governance and Customer Services

Implementation Date: 31 March 2023

3 FINDING TITLE

TOR Risk:

THE COUNCIL'S EXPECTATIONS FOR REMOTE WORKING HAVE NOT BEEN DEFINED AND/OR REMOTE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS ARE NOT OPERATING AS DEFINED IN COUNCIL GUIDANCE

Significance



Low



FINDING

Flexible and Agile Working Policy

The Council has a Flexible and Agile Working Policy which is included in the Employee Handbook available for staff on the intranet. The Policy defines how posts that are suitable for flexible and agile working are identified and sets out the appropriate implementation arrangements.

We identified the following exceptions:

- The Flexible and Agile Working Policy was last reviewed in October 2019 which is prior to covid-19. The pandemic resulted in a changes to the work environment for all individuals and the policy should be updated to reflect this
- The Policy does not state the requirement for employees to complete self-assessment forms.

Discussion with the Head of HR, Performance and Service Planning confirmed the Policy is still reflective of the Council's procedures but agreed it should be updated to include the requirement for a self-assessment to be completed.

Out of date policies create the risk that they do not reflect the current procedures at the Council resulting in the Councils Officers not undergoing the correct risk assessments.

We compared Remote Working Policies from other organisations and identified the following key areas were not included in the Flexible and Agile Working Policy at the Council:

- **Terms of Employment:** This section emphasises the impact working remotely has on HMRC and working allowance, home insurance and employer's liability
- **Equipment:** The responsible Manager should create an IT Service Request when equipment is required for new starters. Individuals will be provided with the core kit on their first day at the Hub. All equipment remains the property of the firm and will need to be returned in the event the individual leaves
- **DSE:** Stating Individuals must complete the self-assessment on joining the Council, and then repeat if anything significant has changed in their environment. A description of the difference self-assessment forms which should be completed for flexible, Remote and Office workers and the duties for Management in relation to reviewing DSE forms and the monitoring of equipment which has been issued
- **The obligations for the User of the equipment which include:**
 - Keep the equipment in good working order
 - Individuals must not allow anyone else to use the equipment Individuals must not sell, loan, dispose of or modify the equipment.

The Council can use this information when reviewing and updating the Flexible and Agile working Policy to ensure it provides the required guidance for Managers and employees.



RECOMMENDATION

For HR (Performance & Service Planning) to review/update the Flexible and Agile Working Policy on an annual basis to ensure they are reflective of the Council's current procedure



MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

The need to review is accepted and this action will be included in the HR, Performance and Service Planning service plan for 2023-24.

Responsible Officer: Head of
HR, Performance and Service
Planning

Implementation Date: 30
December 2023

OBSERVATIONS

MONITORING OF EMPLOYEES WORKING ON-SITE

The Chief Executive issued a statement on 29 March 2022 which states from 1 April 2022, employees at the Council are required to attend the office 40% of the working week. This decision came from the Senior Leadership Team who reflected on feedback from the September 2021 staff survey.

Working in an office environment includes on-site meetings, training, 'touch down' sessions at leisure centres or other types of work which do not occur at home. For employees which have been working in an office for less than 40% of the week, the Line Manager will arrange meetings to discuss the improvement of attendance in the office.

Currently, Team Managers are responsible for implementing and monitoring the attendance of employees at the Council. This was raised as an observation as there is a risk that employees do not attend the office at the required number of days. The Council could consider implementing a process for Team Managers to follow to allow the effective monitoring of employee attendance on-site.

APPENDIX I - DEFINITIONS

LEVEL OF ASSURANCE	DESIGN OF INTERNAL CONTROL FRAMEWORK		OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTROLS	
	FINDINGS FROM REVIEW	DESIGN OPINION	FINDINGS FROM REVIEW	EFFECTIVENESS OPINION
Substantial	Appropriate procedures and controls in place to mitigate the key risks.	There is a sound system of internal control designed to achieve system objectives.	No, or only minor, exceptions found in testing of the procedures and controls.	The controls that are in place are being consistently applied.
Moderate	In the main there are appropriate procedures and controls in place to mitigate the key risks reviewed albeit with some that are not fully effective.	Generally a sound system of internal control designed to achieve system objectives with some exceptions.	A small number of exceptions found in testing of the procedures and controls.	Evidence of non compliance with some controls, that may put some of the system objectives at risk.
Limited	A number of significant gaps identified in the procedures and controls in key areas. Where practical, efforts should be made to address in-year.	System of internal controls is weakened with system objectives at risk of not being achieved.	A number of reoccurring exceptions found in testing of the procedures and controls. Where practical, efforts should be made to address in-year.	Non-compliance with key procedures and controls places the system objectives at risk.
No	For all risk areas there are significant gaps in the procedures and controls. Failure to address in-year affects the quality of the organisation's overall internal control framework.	Poor system of internal control.	Due to absence of effective controls and procedures, no reliance can be placed on their operation. Failure to address in-year affects the quality of the organisation's overall internal control framework.	Non compliance and/or compliance with inadequate controls.

RECOMMENDATION SIGNIFICANCE

High	A weakness where there is substantial risk of loss, fraud, impropriety, poor value for money, or failure to achieve organisational objectives. Such risk could lead to an adverse impact on the business. Remedial action must be taken urgently.
Medium	A weakness in control which, although not fundamental, relates to shortcomings which expose individual business systems to a less immediate level of threatening risk or poor value for money. Such a risk could impact on operational objectives and should be of concern to senior management and requires prompt specific action.
Low	Areas that individually have no significant impact, but where management would benefit from improved controls and/or have the opportunity to achieve greater effectiveness and/or efficiency.

APPENDIX II - TERMS OF REFERENCE

PURPOSE OF REVIEW

The purpose of our audit is to provide assurance that the Council has appropriate controls in place for remote working.

KEY RISKS

Based upon the risk assessment undertaken during the development of the internal audit operational plan, through discussions with management, and our collective audit knowledge and understanding the key risks associated with the area under review are:

- ▶ The Council's expectations for remote working have not been defined and/or remote working arrangements are not operating as defined in Council guidance
- ▶ Staff feedback and wellbeing is not monitored, and any arising issues from remote working are not addressed
- ▶ Appropriate ergonomic furniture and required technology has not been made available to all members of staff
- ▶ There is no process in place for managing furniture/technology provided to staff (for example, secure disposal arrangements)
- ▶ IT security in relation to mobile devices has not been implemented and staff have not received guidance on this topic.

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The following areas will be covered as part of this review:

- ▶ That the standards for remote working have been defined, communicated, and are enforced
- ▶ That the feedback from staff particularly around their wellbeing is monitored and responded to
- ▶ That the Council has assessed the needs of all applicable members of staff
- ▶ That mobile devices and remote connections are appropriately secured
- ▶ That information can be secured in the event of a device being lost or stolen
- ▶ That technology is securely disposed of when no longer necessary.

However, Internal Audit will bring to the attention of management any points relating to other areas that come to their attention during the course of the audit. We assume for the purposes of estimating the number of days of audit work that there is one control environment, and that we will be providing assurance over controls in this environment. If this is not the case, our estimate of audit days may not be accurate.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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The matters raised in this report are only those which came to our attention during the course of our audit and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist or all improvements that might be made. The report has been prepared solely for the management of the organisation and should not be quoted in whole or in part without our prior written consent. BDO LLP neither owes nor accepts any duty to any third party whether in contract or in tort and shall not be liable, in respect of any loss, damage or expense which is caused by their reliance on this report.

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