



Internal Audit Report Vulnerable Communities

January 2020

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Background and Context

Vulnerable communities within West Lindsey are characterised by compounding environmental and socio-economic risk factors that have a negative effect not only on the community as a whole, but on individuals and specific groups within them.

The issues facing these communities also adversely impact the Council's ability to realise the potential of its growth ambitions.

The Vulnerable Communities strategy has been in place since January 2018. The Lead Officer for Housing Strategy, Health & Wellbeing was given responsibility for coordinating the strategy in April 2019. The role was taken on after the Wellbeing & Health Manager left the Authority in October 2018 and there was no handover.

The strategy is made up of various documents – the place based strategy and the ward-based normalisation and stabilisation strategies. The aim of these documents is to support social regeneration and focus on stabilising and normalising vulnerable communities.

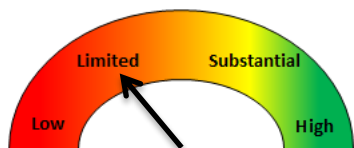
There are currently two identified vulnerable communities; Hemswell Cliff and the South West Ward. The strategy also details that it allows for monitoring and analysis to identify and intervene earlier in any other communities that are considered to be showing signs of vulnerability.

Scope

Our audit aimed to provide assurance on the Council's strategic approach to supporting and identifying vulnerable communities. To do this we reviewed areas including:

- Home Choices
- Enterprising Communities
- Housing & Enforcement
- Housing Strategy
- Waste Management
- Benefits

Executive Summary



Limited Assurance

Risk	Current Rating (R-A-G)	Recommendations	
		High	Medium
Risk management	Red	1	0
Strategic approach and corporate overview	Amber	1	1
Performance reporting & early flagging	Amber	2	2

Key Messages



In April 2019 the Lead Officer for Housing Strategy, Health & Wellbeing was given the task of co-ordinating delivery of the Vulnerable Communities Strategy, which had been agreed by Prosperous Communities Committee in January 2018. Actions to coordinate include running a workshop with various managers and frontline staff working across the strategies. The Council can develop further actions to improve delivery of the strategies, including:

- Increased co-ordination between the teams across the strategies
- Regular reporting and monitoring of performance
- An annual report, including lessons learnt, that goes to committee
- Streamlining the intervention approval process
- Engagement with Police and LCC

The vulnerable communities strategies rely on the work of managers at both an operational and strategic level to be delivered effectively. We found that operationally there is some good work being delivered – managers are experienced and knowledgeable in their area of work and are monitoring performance while delivering an effective service. Operational managers report to different directors which may mean different priority is given to the strategy. At both levels there are areas which

Executive Summary

Key Messages



could be strengthened to ensure that risks are identified and mitigated, performance is monitored and reported, and potential vulnerable communities are identified in advance.

In addition to working with the two already identified communities, it was intended that a methodology of identifying other communities that might need assistance would be developed. This has not yet happened but should be implemented to support a more proactive rather than reactive response.

We found that improvements can be made in risk management by producing a risk register specifically for vulnerable communities as well as separate registers at an operational level. This would support the improvements to the day-to-day activities and future planning when moving forward with the overall strategy.

There can also be some improvements made in terms of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). Attempts have been made with KPI's but these are usually just monitored by managers for service performance and they need to be taken further by managing the performance data and identifying implications.

Areas of Good Practice



There were several areas of good practice found during the audit:

- All of the teams focus on the two already identified vulnerable communities, even if they are not aware that their work is feeding into the strategy
- All the teams report on performance to progress and delivery monthly, with a quarterly report containing more narrative about where the service is with regards to budget and performance
- Good working relationships between several of the teams involved in the strategy

Management Response

Operationally and strategically the coordination of the delivery of the Place Based Strategies and the actions within has strengthened in recent months through the work of the Housing Board as the Board has matured.

Aligning the work of housing, homelessness prevention, economic growth, community safety, safeguarding, health and wellbeing, communities, employment and skills and environmental protection functions through the Board and positioning the work as a key programme within the Housing Strategy has allowed for the development of a strategic approach to social regeneration.

Officers welcome the acknowledgement that good work has and is being delivered by the relevant teams. Officers also welcome the acknowledgement that much of this work was undertaken during a period with no staff resource in a coordinating/lead role for a number of months and as such progress to date should be applauded.

Moving forward the focus for the Board in relation to vulnerable communities will be to further monitor performance, identify and mitigate risk and ensure procedures and practices are in place and maintained where actions have become embedded as business as usual. This will ensure the stability of the current identified communities and will provide the mechanism for identifying communities at risk of becoming vulnerable in the future all contributing to social regeneration aligned to the objectives within the corporate plan.

Diane Krochmal
Lead Officer – Housing Strategy, Health & Wellbeing

1	Risk Description	Current Rating	Target Rating
	Risk Management	RED	GREEN
Findings			
The review found that the Council's approach to Vulnerable Communities could be enhanced through the development of an operational risk register or through specific Vulnerable Communities risks in current service risk registers.			
Implications			
Current and emerging risks specific to the strategy and/or actions to mitigate them are not identified, issues and problems arise which could have been prevented.			
Recommendation			Priority level
The Council develops an operational risk register or specific service risks to identifying current and future risks specific to the strategy and mitigating actions with an allocated responsible officer.			High
Agreed Action		Responsibility	Implementation date
Grant White, the Strategic Manager for Enterprising Communities, is currently in the process of creating an overarching Communities at risk Policy Document which will replace anything previous. This will include an operational risk register specific to vulnerable communities. Aiming for the policy document to be adopted by June 2020.		Grant White	October 2020

2	Risk Description	Current Rating	Target Rating
	Strategic approach and corporate overview	AMBER	GREEN
Findings			
<p>There are currently two strategic plans in place which are specific to each vulnerable community – the Stabilisation and Normalisation strategy and the Place Based strategy. Each outlines the reasons for the strategy being implemented, aims for the vulnerable community in question, and the budget set to achieve these targets. However, these strategies have currently not been updated since January 2018.</p> <p>With regard to effective corporate overview within the service, there has been limited formal communication or coordination between the managers of each service to ensure that the overall Vulnerable Communities strategy is being implemented. Several of the staff we interviewed are aware of the two vulnerable communities but are unaware that there is a strategy surrounding them.</p>			
Implications			
<p>Not communicating and coordinating between each service means that the overall strategy cannot be implemented effectively. Each department may be contributing to the strategy but will not be aware if there is a more efficient method of doing so or if working with others will be more useful. If the strategy isn't communicated then staff cannot be expected to understand their role in achieving the strategy.</p> <p>Not regularly updating the strategy may mean that the work being done is based on historic information.</p>			

Action Plan

Recommendation	Priority level	
<p>1.1. A regular, formal meeting should be set up between the managers of the service areas identified as feeding into the strategy. All information on the two vulnerable communities and any other potentially emerging communities at risk of becoming vulnerable should be discussed and recorded. Consider making the workshop previously run a regular meeting.</p> <p>1.2. The strategy should be regularly reviewed and updated.</p>	<p>High</p>	
Agreed Actions	Responsibility	Implementation date
<p>The Communities at Risk policy document to become a regular agenda item on the Housing Board 6-8 weekly meetings, as this includes all the same officers as the previously run workshop.</p> <p>The Communities at Risk Policy Document currently being drafted will draw a line under the existing strategies, subject to approval.</p>	<p>Diane Krochmal</p>	<p>Implemented October 2019</p> <p>Policy Document adoption implementation June 2020.</p>

3	Risk Description	Current Rating	Target Rating
	Strategic approach and corporate overview	AMBER	GREEN
Findings			
It was mentioned during the fieldwork that intervention in the vulnerable communities should be a collective process with other parties such as the Police or LCC as they may be able to intervene in different ways.			
Implications			
Not liaising with other parties may mean that intervention work is implemented slower or less effectively.			
Recommendation			Priority level
Develop a protocol for engaging with relevant agencies where vulnerable communities are identified.			Medium
Agreed Action		Responsibility	Implementation date
Include as an agenda item and discuss at Housing Board meetings.		Diane Krochmal	Implemented October 2019

Action Plan

4	Risk Description	Current Rating	Target Rating
	Performance reporting and early flagging	AMBER	GREEN
Findings			
Each service reports monthly with a quarterly report which includes more narrative about where the service is with regards to budget and performance. However, no annual report is produced detailing performance on budgets and improvements made.			
Implications			
Without an annual report, SLT and Members will be unaware of the progress of work relating the Communities at Risk policy document			
Recommendation			Priority level
An annual report should be produced to summarise performance of the different areas of the strategy and performance against budget.			High
Agreed Action		Responsibility	Implementation date
Develop a basket of measures to be reported through P and D to be Included in the production of an annual report as part of the new Communities at Risk Policy Document.		Grant White	March 2021

5	Risk Description	Current Rating	Target Rating
	Performance reporting and early flagging	AMBER	GREEN
Findings			
<p>All officers involved in the strategy are aware of the two vulnerable communities and acting upon them. There is limited oversight for identify early indicators that other communities are becoming vulnerable or awareness of what level of vulnerability they should be flagging up.</p> <p>On an operational level there are KPI's however they are used for personal reflection and are not reported on. There are no strategic KPI's. However, this may be because in some areas targets are difficult to quantify.</p> <p>Relevant data that contributes to the strategy may be available in areas not previously considered. In a separate audit we identified a manager who was collecting information that may be useful for identifying emerging vulnerable communities.</p>			
Implications			
Lack of awareness of emerging vulnerable communities meaning there is a lack of action to rectify situations and areas are left to deteriorate. Performance cannot be properly measured without having effective KPI's in place.			
Recommendation			Priority level
<p>1.1. Guidelines should be produced detailing what vulnerability indicators officers in each service should be looking for and who they should flag this up with.</p> <p>1.2. Undertake a data assessment to establish how the data already collected feeds into the Communities at Risk Policy Document and identify any other areas that may contribute that aren't currently.</p>			High

Action Plan

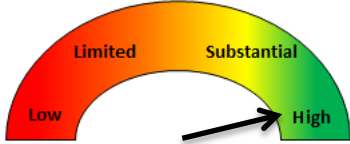
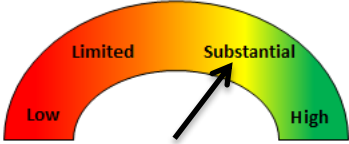
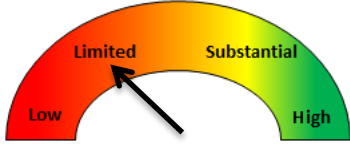
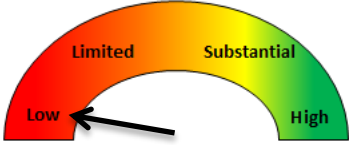
Agreed Actions	Responsibility	Implementation date
<p>Include vulnerability indicators aligned to the Communities at Risk Policy Document within the measures developed for P and D .</p> <p>Determine what vulnerability indicators may be utilised when the new Communities at Risk Policy Document has been in place for a number of months.</p>	<p>Grant White</p>	<p>March 2021</p> <p>October 2020</p>

Action Plan

6	Risk Description	Current Rating	Target Rating
	Performance reporting and early flagging	AMBER	GREEN
Findings			
Currently no 'lessons learnt' exercise is being undertaken identifying areas of good practice from work previously done to be repeated in the future.			
Implications			
Beneficial work may not get repeated or mistakes may be made again.			
Recommendation			Priority level
Undertake a 'lessons learnt' exercise for work done in the vulnerable communities to be drawn upon in the future.			Medium
Agreed Action		Responsibility	Implementation date
Discuss lessons learnt as a Housing Board agenda item.		Diane Krochmal	Implemented January 2020 (Special Housing Board)

7	Risk Description	Current Rating	Target Rating
	Performance reporting and early flagging	AMBER	GREEN
Findings			
<p>The approval process for any intervention work is currently quite lengthy. There is an opportunity for the Council to review this and consider streamlining the process to support timely interventions.</p>			
Implications			
<p>Leaves the opportunity for a situation to worsen before action is taken.</p>			
Recommendation			Priority level
<p>Identify a means for streamlining the intervention approval process so that any interventions can be actioned quicker.</p>			Medium
Agreed Action		Responsibility	Implementation date
<p>Streamline the approval process ensuring that proper delegations are in place</p>		Diane Krochmal	June 2020

Appendix 1 - Assurance Definitions

High	Substantial
<p>Our critical review or assessment on the activity gives us a high level of confidence on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, and the operation of controls and / or performance.</p>  <p>The risk of the activity not achieving its objectives or outcomes is low. Controls have been evaluated as adequate, appropriate and are operating effectively.</p>	<p>Our critical review or assessment on the activity gives us a substantial level of confidence (assurance) on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, and operation of controls and / or performance.</p>  <p>There are some improvements needed in the application of controls to manage risks. However, the controls have been evaluated as adequate, appropriate and operating sufficiently so that the risk of the activity not achieving its objectives is medium to low.</p>
Limited	Low
<p>Our critical review or assessment on the activity gives us a limited level of confidence on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, and operation of controls and / or performance.</p>  <p>The controls to manage the key risks were found not always to be operating or are inadequate. Therefore, the controls evaluated are unlikely to give a reasonable level of confidence (assurance) that the risks are being managed effectively. It is unlikely that the activity will achieve its objectives.</p>	<p>Our critical review or assessment on the activity identified significant concerns on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, and operation of controls and / or performance.</p>  <p>There are either gaps in the control framework managing the key risks or the controls have been evaluated as not adequate, appropriate or are not being effectively operated. Therefore the risk of the activity not achieving its objectives is high.</p>

Appendix 1 - Assurance Definitions

Action Priority	
High	Immediate management attention is required - an internal control or risk issue where there is a high certainty of: substantial loss / non-compliance with corporate strategies, policies or values / serious reputational damage / adverse regulatory impact and / or material fines (action taken usually within 3 months).
Medium	Timely management action is warranted - an internal control or risk issue that could lead to financial loss / reputational damage / adverse regulatory impact, public sanction and / or immaterial fines (action taken usually within 6 to 12 months).



Distribution List



Diane Krochmal – Lead Officer – Housing Strategy, Health & Wellbeing

Grant White – Enterprising Communities Manager

Alan Robinson – Director of Governance

External Audit

Disclaimer

The matters raised in this report are only those which came to our attention during our internal audit work. Our quality assurance processes ensure that our work is conducted in conformance with the UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and that the information contained in this report is as accurate as possible – we do not provide absolute assurance that material errors, fraud or loss do not exist.

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