

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

LICENSING COMMITTEE – 28 JUNE 2017

REPORT BY HEAD OF HOUSING AND HEALTH

EAST HERTS COUNCIL SAFEGUARDING 2016/17 – SHARED
INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE REPORT

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To update the Licensing Committee on the results and recommendations of the Safeguarding Audit carried out by the Shared Internal Audit Service, SIAS.

RECOMMENDATION FOR DECISION:

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(A)	That the information detailed in the report be noted; and
(B)	Members' comments be forwarded to the Head of Housing and Health.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Shared Internal Audit Service, SIAS, provides East Herts Council (the Council) with an independent and objective opinion on the organisation's governance arrangements, encompassing internal control and risk management. The 2016/17 audit plan for East Herts Council included a review of the council's safeguarding arrangements.
- 1.2 Following the events concerning child sexual exploitation, CSE, perpetrated by taxi drivers in Rotherham, there has been much effort nationally to ensure that councils are doing enough to protect vulnerable children and adults. Therefore, the SIAS audit included a review of the council's work regarding the licensing and enforcement of taxis with regard to safeguarding. This sought to provide the council with external oversight and to inform and, where relevant, empower change.
- 1.3 The SIAS audit was carried out within the context of the report of Inspection of Rotherham and subsequent information such as the

Local Government Association's (LGA) 'The importance of oversight and scrutiny'.

2.0 Report

2.1 **Overall Audit Opinion**

2.2 Based on the work performed during their audit, SIAS found that overall there was **substantial assurance** that the council has put in place effective controls for those elements of the risk management processes covered by this review.

2.3 In relation to taxi licensing the areas audited included the issue, review and renewal of licences. The approach focused on how the council has applied the learning from the LGA guidance following the Inspection of Rotherham report as it applies to taxi licensing as a specific area of risk.

2.4 This audit sought to provide assurance to Members, Directors and other Senior Managers that the council's safeguarding risks are adequately and effectively identified and controlled. It took a strategic approach and the overall audit opinion was formed from management and Officer assurances given in response to enquiries. The examination of appropriate documentary evidence linked to the council's commitment to safeguarding was also undertaken.

2.5 The audit scope covered the areas of corporate safeguarding and taxi licensing. A gap analysis was undertaken using a questionnaire which has been effectively used at other SIAS clients. The questionnaire covered the following themes as identified by the LGA following the Inspection of Rotherham as critical to effective safeguarding activity in a local authority: strategy and policy, training, convictions, complaints, promotion of CSE awareness, reporting, scrutiny and analysis of data and intelligence.

2.6 The audit highlighted that the council is committed to effectively discharging its safeguarding responsibilities. A comprehensive safeguarding policy exists and the council has identified clear Officer roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding, including the identification of a lead Officer for safeguarding (Head of Housing and Health). Training programmes are in place for staff who come into contact with children, teenagers and vulnerable adults and for those expected to review and refer safeguarding concerns. SIAS noted, however, scope to enhance

the safeguarding role of Members. As a result, the remit of the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing has been extended to explicitly cover an oversight of safeguarding issues and furthermore, the newly formed Community Wellbeing Forum covers safeguarding.

2.7 In respect of safeguarding responsibilities in relation to taxi licensing, it was noted that comprehensive licensing and driver conviction policies exist and the council has a strong process for application checks including the requirement to provide details of convictions from countries outside the UK. Other factors such as demeanour, general character and non-criminal behaviour are considered alongside convictions when making a determination as to whether an individual is fit and proper.

2.8 **Summary of Recommendations**

2.9 The report made four recommendations; none were high priority recommendations, two were of medium priority with the other two 'meriting attention'. Only one of the medium recommendations related to taxi licensing.

2.10 The recommendation covered changes and improvements to increase safeguarding awareness by introducing a regular report submitted to Licensing Committee regarding complaints and test purchasing.

2.11 The audit identified that the quarterly report had been withdrawn as Members had found the information included in it of limited use so suggested that a revised report be put to the Licensing Committee on a quarterly basis with the content reflecting the needs of the Committee members.

2.12 The associated risk of not having such a report was identified as the Council not being able to evidence that it is effectively carrying out its enforcement responsibilities, leading to potential damage to its reputation and failure to meet its safeguarding responsibilities.

2.13 A report will now be made to the Licensing Committee on a quarterly basis commencing in June 2017.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

None.

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