



Report of the Head of Housing and Public Health

Governance and Audit Committee – 14 December 2022

Response to the Rechargeable Works Report 2022/23

Purpose:	To provide an update and response to the 2022 internal audit of Rechargeable Works
Report Author:	Paula Livingstone – Divisional Environmental Health Officer, Pollution Control & Private Sector Housing
Finance Officer:	Aimee Dyer
Legal Officer:	Debbie Smith
Access to Services Officer:	Rhian Millar
For Information	

Service response to the internal audit of Rechargeable Works

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As a result of an internal audit of the Rechargeable Works (RW) procedures in Public Health completed in August 2022, an assurance level of Moderate was given.
- 1.2 This report addresses the one High Risk (HR) and one Medium Risk (MR). There were additionally one Low Risk (LR) and one Good Practice (GP) item.
- 1.3 An action plan was developed in response to the findings and responsibilities assigned for implementation. This is appended to this report at Appendix A. The action plan includes all the recommendations from the audit and associated actions.
- 1.4 It should be noted that actions to address the Low Risk and Good Practice recommendations have been completed.

1.5 The action plan identified one Medium Risk action:

Recharges to Property Owners/Tenants

(2.2.3 & 2.2.4) All invoices should be created promptly.

Progress to date/agreed and updated actions:

There have been some historic issues with lack of staff resources in the team dealing with this area of work. Rechargeable works (RWs) where invoices were yet to be created were reviewed to ensure all those invoices, where full costs were available, were created within two weeks of the audit recommendation. Invoicing procedures were highlighted in the officer's 1-2-1 meeting in September and were included as a standing item for future meetings.

The Senior Public Health Support Officer, dealing with the RW process, resigned in early October 2022. The post is currently vacant and may not be filled due to potential budget restrictions. This will be reviewed once the Council's revenue budget for 2023/24 is set, however reduced resource in this area has an adverse impact on rechargeable works procedures and other Service support work, including management of the team and oversight of rechargeable works. Invoicing is being done, but subsequent reviews have not yet been carried out.

1.6 The action plan identified one High Risk action:

Monitoring arrears

(2.3.2 & 2.3.3) The unpaid invoices report should be reviewed and contact made with the customer to encourage payment. Notes of any contact should be then be recorded on the Accounts Receivable (AR) system.

Progress to date/agreed and updated actions:

A meeting took place after the audit with our Principal Finance Partner regarding monitoring of unpaid invoices. A plan was put in place to review old invoices and to report to the Cabinet Member to write-off old invoices where no recovery action is possible e.g. where the person invoiced could not be found, had died with no estate, or where the debt was below the agreed level for legal action. This report is due to be reported to the Cabinet Member in Q4 of 2022/23, not Q1 as that was a typographical error in the action plan.

Staffing resources do not allow for a review of 60 day report each month, but time was planned to be spent to review unpaid invoices wherever possible to try to reduce RW debt. Relevant notes are added to the invoice on the AR system. It was noted that this item has been classed as High Risk, but that procedures are already in place for AR team to refer debts for write-off and to Legal and as such there is shared corporate responsibility for trying to increase debt recovery .

Since October, the vacant Senior Public Health Officer post has had an adverse impact and resulted in reduced resources available to deal with

monitoring arrears. As indicated, filling of this post will be reviewed once Council budgets are set for the 2023/24 financial year.

It has been confirmed that procedures are already in place in Finance Accounts Receivable (AR) for contacting customers who have unpaid debts. Duplication of this work is not necessary. A review of the process for debt recovery actions across all relevant Services could assist in streamlining the process. Such a review would need to be considered and agreed by all relevant Services.

We now aim to review unpaid invoices every two months with current staffing resources to ensure that any updates, e.g. change of address for the invoice recipient, have amendments instigated with AR for new invoices to be issued.

Details of unpaid invoices will be reviewed, starting in Q4 2022/23 and reports prepared for Head of Service authorisation if the enforced sale process can be instigated under The Law of Property Act 1925 following an established Service procedure. The legal process specifically relates to empty properties if specific criteria apply and allows the local authority to recover debts owed if they can be made as a charge against the property.

2. Integrated Assessment Implications

2.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

2.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

2.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

2.1.3 AN IIA screening (Appendix B) has been undertaken which confirms there are no equality and engagement implications associated with this report as it addresses internal processes and risk of non-compliance, with no impact on the relevant protected groups.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 There are no financial implications other than the invoicing for rechargeable works and debt recovery that are the subject of the rechargeable works procedure.

4. Legal Implications

4.1 There are no legal implications.

Background Papers: None.

Appendices:

Appendix A - Management Action Plan – Rechargeable Works 2022/23.

Appendix B - Integrated Impact Assessment Screening Form.