

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Report to: Audit Committee

Date: 10 March 2025

Subject: Risk Management Update

Report of: Director of Audit, Risk, Fraud and Insurance

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Audit Committee with an update on risk management across the Council.

RECOMMENDATION

For the Committee to review, note and comment on the report.

Wards Affected: None

H&F Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Building shared prosperity	<i>Good risk management helps to: maintain and promote the Council's reputation;</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Creating a compassionate council	<i>Is an enabling tool to help protect residents and staff including some of the most vulnerable in society;</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Doing things with local residents, not to them	<i>Place people, businesses and the wider community at the heart of everything we do;</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Being ruthlessly financially efficient	<i>Ensure robust financial and information management and supports internal control, opportunity and innovation;</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Taking pride in H&F	<i>Protect valuable assets and the built and natural environment.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	<i>Enabling an approach to climate-sensitive decision making</i>

Financial Impact

The current and future strategic operating environment for local government represents a significant risk to the council with the ongoing challenge of delivering services with increased demand and legislative pressures. This is further impacted by wider economic factors leading to rising costs from inflation and reduced funding. This has seen the Council incur additional expenditure whilst at the same time seeing pressures in the level of resources available through a combination of lower income levels and inherent demographic/legislative pressures.

There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Services are expected to manage their risks within current budgets. Where additional funds are required to mitigate or manage risks, separate decisions reports will be required for the approval of unbudgeted expenditure. The council holds a corporate contingency budget and adequate levels of reserves to enable it to manage unforeseen costs.

A standing corporate risk, Financial Management and Medium-Term Planning, identifies the risks to balancing the budget in response to continued government funding and demand pressures faced by the Council and the sector more generally and is assessed as high risk. The in-year position is reported in the Corporate Revenue Monitor to Cabinet and includes financial risks. Other corporate risks also identify financial pressures arising from demand and complexity of service provision which need to be managed.

Comments verified by Sukvinder Kalsi, Director of Finance, 24 February 2025

Legal implications

There are no particular legal implications arising from this report.

Comments verified by Grant Deg, Assistant Director of Legal Services, 24 February 2025

Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Background

1. To achieve the ambitions, outcomes and priorities set out in our Business Plan, it is essential that we continue to understand, manage and communicate the diverse range of risks and challenges that could threaten the organisation and vital services. Risks originate from a variety of sources, many of which are out of our direct control for example global events such as the coronavirus pandemic, the ongoing situations in Ukraine and Gaza, economic or market shocks, austerity or from climate change. More localised incidents can impact on residents, individuals, services and infrastructure.

2. It is paramount that all risks are clearly identified, managed and reported through the relevant channel. Risks can never be eliminated entirely but proportionate and targeted action can be taken to reduce risks to an acceptable level. Furthermore, the work of the Council's Policy and Accountability Committees is acknowledged as a source of robust and additional assurance for the management of risk across its services.
3. Effective governance and management of risks are particularly significant as funding for local government has diminished authorities' objectives and are becoming increasingly fundamental and relate, for instance, to continuing to meet statutory service obligations. Arrangements must therefore be effective in a riskier, more time-pressured and less well-resourced context.
4. Local authorities are required to maintain a sound system of internal control, including risk management, internal audit, and whistleblowing arrangements. Risk management is the application of Council strategies, governance, policies and processes to identify and manage risks that are unacceptable to the Council. Managing risk processes effectively enables the Council to safeguard against potential threats and take advantage of potential opportunities to improve services whilst continuing to provide better value for money for residents, visitors, local businesses and service users.
5. The Council is accountable to the public for its performance and financial management. This means that the Council naturally has a low appetite for risk, however as financial challenges continue the Council will need to take carefully considered risks to develop new and innovative ways to deliver services, support communities and ensure the long-term wellbeing of communities is not impaired by decisions made in the short term. This makes good risk management essential.
6. As part of its governance arrangements, the Council's approach to risk management requires Executive Directors, managers and staff, through their departmental management teams to; identify risks; assess the risk; agree and take action to manage the risk and; monitor, review and escalate risks.
7. The Council has robust risk management arrangements in place which feed into the Corporate Risk Register, which is set out in Appendix 1. This register contains the most significant cross-cutting risks that could impact on the outcomes that are set out in the Council's priorities. These risks can be internal or external facing. The Corporate Risk Register is reviewed on a regular basis by the Council's Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and then presented to the Audit Committee.
8. Over the Spring/Summer, work will be done with risk owners and directors to amend the structure and content of the Register to provide greater focus on current assurance over risk mitigations and on planned mitigations. This will enable a better understanding of whether current and planned mitigations are having the desired effect or whether different or further corrective action is required. The Register being presented at this meeting begins the process by clearly setting out the current position (including controls) and planned mitigations for each risk.
9. This report provides the Committee with an updated Corporate Risk Register, presenting a suite of risks as reviewed by SLT.

Changes made to the Corporate Risk Register

10. SLT members and Risk Owners have reviewed the Corporate Risk Register and agreed a number of changes which are reflected in the updated Risk Register provided in Appendix 1.
11. A number of risks continue to highlight the continuing economic uncertainty, regarding the ongoing impact of recent high levels of inflation, current interest rate level and increased costs for employers, including the changes to employer's national insurance, coupled with uncertainty on future funding for local authorities beyond 2024/25.
12. SLT Assurance reviewed the Corporate Risk Register on 5 February 2025, with the following changes were agreed:

Increase in risk score:

- Risk 3 (Failure to maintain services to residents in the event of IT systems being compromised and affecting service resilience). This reflects the ongoing and sustained threat faced by UK public sector organisations.

Reduction in risk score:

- Risk 27 (Repair system and contractor management not delivering performance at required levels). This reflects the steps taken to improve contractor performance, mobilising additional contractors, along with ongoing focus and challenge from the Chief Executive and SLT, the prioritisation of disrepair cases and void works to aid quicker allocation of properties.

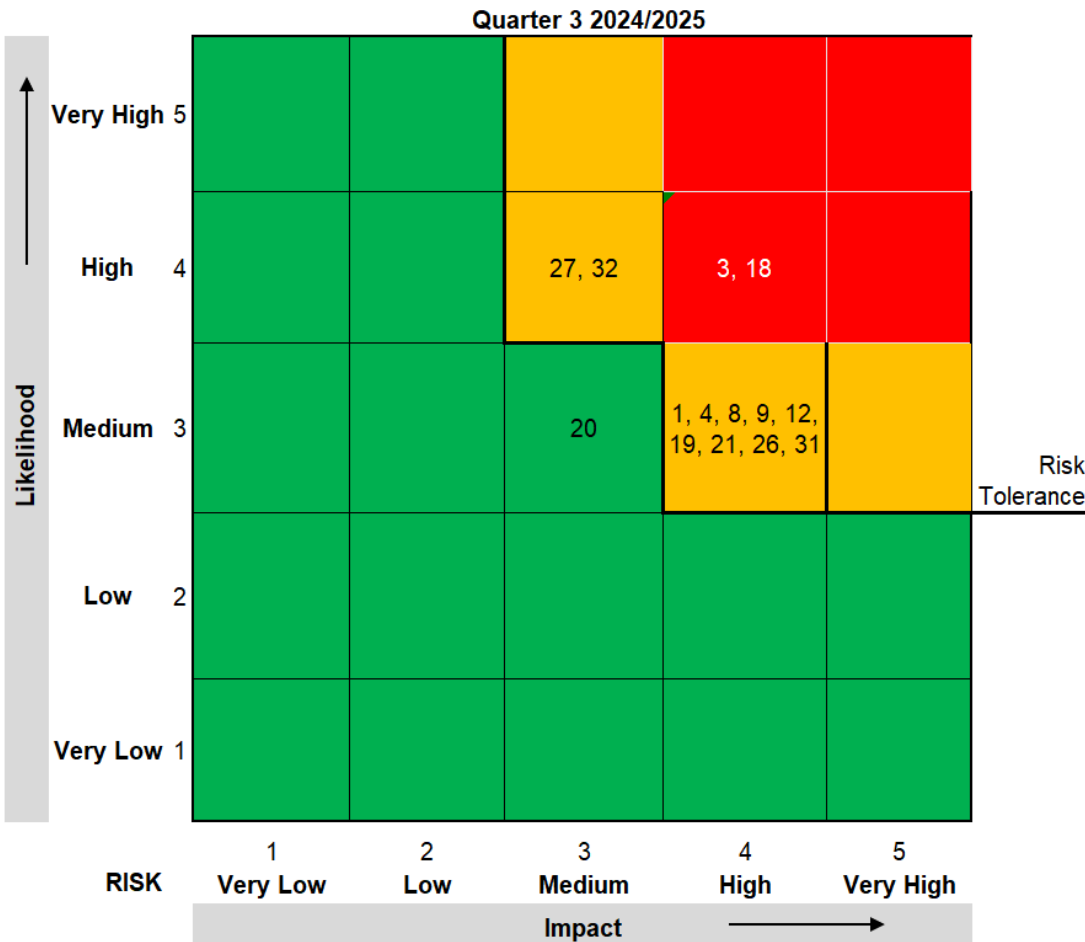
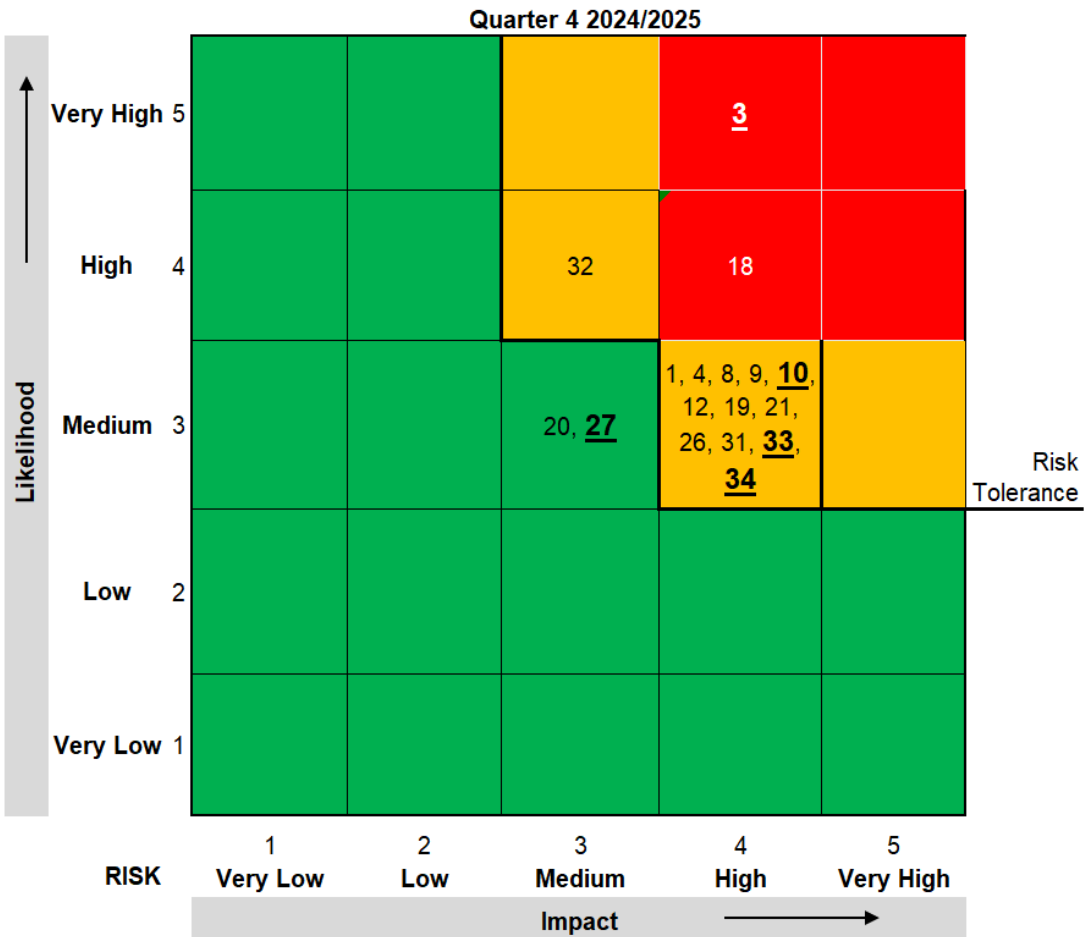
New risks added:

- Risk 10 (Failure to comply with the new Building Safety Act and certification of 49 Higher Risk Buildings): The Council has already submitted 26 Building Safety Cases, within the required timescales, and is awaiting certification of these documents from the Building Safety Regulator.
- Risk 33: Covers both Children's Services and Adult Social Care (in the People Directorate):
 - i) Standards and delivery of care, protection of children and adults and associated data quality and information risks.
 - ii) Reliance on external assurance regulators and providers to identify and communicate issues arising from inspections e.g. Ofsted and Care Quality Commission
- Risk 34: relate specifically to Children's Services and reflects a national pressure on local authorities around the financial sustainability risk of the High Needs Block with demand and pressures exceeding the opportunities to mitigate.

Corporate risk register – heat map

13. The Corporate Risk Register is set out in Appendix 1 and summarised in the following Heat Map as at Quarter 4 for 2024/25, with the Heat Map for Quarter 3 for 2024/25 provided for comparison. Risks which have been subject to change since the Quarter 3 2024/25 Risk Register are shown in the larger bold underlined type:

OVERVIEW RISK HEAT MAP



Risk appetite

14. The Council remains accountable to the public for its performance and financial management. This means that the Council naturally has a low appetite for risk, however with the ongoing challenges faced by the Council, there is a need to continue to develop new and innovative ways to continue to deliver services, support and ensure the long-term wellbeing of communities is not impaired by decisions made in the short term. This makes good risk management essential.
15. There is ongoing pressure arising from the cost of domestic and business energy costs and fuel costs for activities such as transport and heating. Inflation has reduced from a very high level but the cumulative effect, along with the current level of interest rates continues to put pressure on local authority finances. The cost of living crisis will continue to drive increased demand for services where residents will need more support.
16. These factors impact on the Council in a number of ways including its staffing costs (including the level of pay awards and the national insurance increase for employers), the cost of borrowing (particularly where it is needed for ongoing/planned capital works), cost pressures on contractors providing Council services (staffing, fuel, materials). The impact will also be felt by partner organisations (such as schools and the voluntary and community sector, where officers will closely monitor the impact and consider any support the Council will be able to provide.
17. A key concern for the Council is the impact that the cost of living crisis being experienced by residents through inflation and rising energy costs as well as the ongoing economic uncertainty (including the potential for rising unemployment). A [range of support measures](#) are being offered to residents and officers will continue to assess the situation and consider what further actions can be taken.
18. These and other factors are kept under regular review by SLT. This is done to ensure that ongoing impacts are recognised, and appropriate mitigations put in place to protect Council services and local residents.
19. This report provides assurance on the Council's corporate risk management arrangements, explaining the internal control arrangements in place at a strategic level. It provides one of the sources of assurance the Committee can consider when approving the Annual Governance Statement. It also enables the Committee to fulfil its roles under the Committee's Terms of Reference to review the adequacy of Council's Corporate Governance arrangements, including matters such as internal control and risk management.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Corporate Risk Register