

Audit Findings & Management Action Plan – September 2024

Finding 1.

Asbestos surveys not completed, or records not updated

All properties used for temporary accommodation (TA) should have up to date Health & Safety certifications including Gas Safety, Electrical, Asbestos and Energy Performance.

Testing on 25 properties for Health & Safety (H&S) Certification was conducted. Initial testing showed that there were a number of properties that had out of date Gas Safety and Electrical Certificates. Upon review, the documentation for these certificates was acquired by the Assets and Regeneration team; these documents had not been uploaded to Huume (the system used by the Housing team). However, 14 of the properties had not undergone comprehensive asbestos surveys, or the existing records have not been appropriately maintained or updated.

This situation presents a high risk as it creates uncertainties regarding the precision of asbestos-related data for these properties, potentially compromising the well-being and safety of both occupants and contractors.

Addressing this issue is crucial to ensure the effective management of asbestos risks across the council's property assets and uphold the highest standards of Health and Safety compliance.

Action

The Assets and Property team will ensure asbestos surveys have been completed for the properties identified in our testing. In addition, a process will be implemented to make sure all housing properties are checked to ensure they have an asbestos survey.

Priority	1	SWAP Reference	AP#4994
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Responsible Officer	Corporate Director Assets and Regen
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Timescale	31 st October 2024
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All the completed asbestos annual review documents will be located and made accessible to the Temporary Accommodation team.

Priority	2	SWAP Reference	AP#5004
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Responsible Officer	Corporate Director Assets and Regen and Service Manager Housing
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Timescale	31 st March 2025
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The Housing and Assets and Property team will ensure that there is access to the premises health and safety matters for all relevant individuals

Priority	3	SWAP Reference	AP#5005
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Responsible Officer	Corporate Director Assets and Regen
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Timescale	31 st October 2024
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Finding 2.	Action			
<u>Maintenance and H&S Housing checks are inconsistent</u> The housing checks for maintenance and H&S have shown inconsistencies, with reports indicating that some properties have not received the required checks, potentially leading to unidentified safety hazards or maintenance issues. Specific areas of concern include inconsistent scheduling and completion of checks, and discrepancies in the documentation of findings. These inconsistencies pose a risk to the well-being of occupants and the overall maintenance of the properties.	The Housing service will create a centralised scheduling and tracking system for maintenance and H&S checks to ensure consistent and timely completion. A comprehensive review of all properties will be conducted to identify and address any outstanding checks or maintenance issues. Additionally, training will be provided to personnel involved in conducting and documenting these checks to ensure uniformity and accuracy.			
	Priority	2	SWAP Reference	AP#4978
	Responsible Officer		Service Manager Housing	
	Timescale		31 st March 2025	

Finding 3.	Action			
<u>An asset register will be formalised for all properties used for TA</u> An assets register for properties is not present to comprehensively track and monitor organisational assets. The absence of these essential documents not only creates a risk of inconsistent practices in sourcing accommodation but also hinders the ability to effectively monitor and manage the organisation's diverse range of assets, leading to potential inefficiencies and compliance concerns.	The Housing service will in conjunction with Assets and Property formalise a comprehensive asset register to track all accommodation assets. This includes recording property location, ownership, acquisition date, value, and related agreements which will be regularly updated to maintain accuracy and compliance with policies and regulations.			
	Priority	2	SWAP Reference	AP#5042
	Responsible Officer		Service Manager Housing	
	Timescale		31 st March 2025	

Finding 4.

The rent setting for temporary accommodation is not aligned with guidance.

The council currently does not set the rents for temporary accommodation at the level recommended by Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA) guidance. Currently the council charge all the costs incurred by housing residents in temporary accommodation back to those residents. This is more than the local housing allowance, which the residents will be claiming and the Housing Benefit support they can also claim. The result of which is that the residents will get into debt to the council leading to them staying in temporary accommodation longer as social housing companies are very reluctant to rent to anyone who already has rent arrears. Thus, stopping the council from housing anyone else in that property.

By setting rent at the level the guidance recommends, the council are more likely to receive the money owed and able to move the clients out of TA quicker. This will free up temporary accommodations quicker, meaning the council spend less money on temporary solutions such as bed and breakfasts and therefore more suitable housing is available to people who are in need.

The temporary accommodation team does not have a policy around the income management. However, they have started to draft one, this will detail the process of how the temporary accommodation team set rents and collect rent owed to them.

There is a debt management policy which covers housing and homelessness which aligns with the corporate debt management policy. The new income management policy should align with these current policies.

Action

The Housing service will ensure that temporary accommodation rents will be set at the level recommended in the Housing Revenue Accounts guidance.

Priority	2	SWAP Reference	AP#5012
Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing		
Timescale	31 st March 2026		

The Housing service will ensure the new income management policy should align with the debt management policy housing.

Priority	3	SWAP Reference	AP#4895
Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing		
Timescale	30 th April 2025		

Finding 5.

Data Recording of current TA residents is inconsistent

The review found inconsistencies in the recording of current residents' data across different temporary accommodation properties. These inconsistencies relate to the completeness and accuracy of personal information, living areas and reasons for residency.

Areas are either not being completed or are irrelevant as a whole due to the system being adopted as a Housing Management tool. There has been no cleansing of fields to populate or indeed regular training with usage of the software.

An inconsistent approach to data recording hinders the ability to effectively monitor and manage temporary accommodation facilities.

There is a significant lack of staff training in using the internal software system Huume, leading to inefficiencies, errors, and reduced proficiency. The system lacks completeness and there are areas that show incorrect information which needs to be cleansed.

Comprehensive and ongoing training programs are essential to ensure staff can fully leverage the software, optimize efficiency, and safeguard sensitive information.

Action

The Housing service will design and roll out a thorough staff training program for effective use of the internal software system (Huume).

Priority	2	SWAP Reference	AP#4937
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Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing
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Timescale	30 th April 2025
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A review and cleanse of the data recording software within Huume will be carried out to make sure fields are relevant and completed where necessary.

Priority	3	SWAP Reference	AP#4906
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Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing
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Timescale	31 st December 2024
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Finding 6.

Completion of Policies

Action is needed to finalise essential policies such as Sourcing Accommodation, Voids, and Allocations & Letting, in order to adapt to changing regulations and industry standards. All three of these policies were currently in the draft phase at the time of the audit.

These policies are crucial for strengthening the operational framework by providing clear guidelines for procurement, property management, and tenant allocation, thereby ensuring comprehensive risk management, compliance excellence, and a culture of transparency and accountability.

Action

The Housing service will undertake a comprehensive review and revision process for the Sourcing Accommodation, Voids, and Allocations & Letting policies to align with current regulations and industry standards. The necessary approvals for the finalised policies to ensure adherence to compliance requirements and risk management will be obtained.

Priority	3	SWAP Reference	AP#4963
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Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing
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Timescale	30th April 2025
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Finding 7.

Data collection method

We are aware and have obtained evidence that Dorset Council already collect placement data. The Service Manager for Temporary Accommodation & Supply provides a weekly update on the placement data to the Service Manager for Housing Strategy & Performance. In addition to this, we have obtained a copy of the Performance and KPI spreadsheet master copy which outlines KPI's, however these are not all in use yet as there is uncertainty around the collection of KPI data.

Currently, managers will have 1-2-1 meetings with officers to establish data in relation to the KPI's and then this information should be entered onto the Performance and KPI spreadsheet. This does not provide a turnover to distinguish the amount of work due to be carried out in comparison to the actual amount of work carried out. Furthermore, it appears that this data cannot be relied on as this may not be a true and accurate representation of data at any given time due to the manual input expectation from managers. At the moment, it is understood that the Business Insight team are investigating how a BI Dashboard could be established and utilised for data collection. It would be desirable if the BI dashboard could be used for officers to upload their work onto and then data is extracted and highlighted via the dashboard.

Action

The Housing service will assess the capacity of the BI dashboard in the role of data collection for performance purposes.

Priority	3	SWAP Reference	AP#4905
Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing		
Timescale	30th April 2025		

Finding 8.

Establish a performance governance structure to illustrate KPI's and their reporting routes

At the moment, the Property Management team share Placement data with the Service Manager for Housing Strategy and Performance initially which is then reported to the Head of Service and Corporate Director on a weekly basis. The directorate also has a set of placement KPIs agreed with the Head of Service, Corporate Director and Executive Director which are reported to the Senior Leadership Team, Scrutiny Committee and published externally.

The team have already identified which other performance indicators, in addition to the above, that they would like to utilise, however these are not yet fully established due to uncertainties around collection methods. Once all other temporary accommodation KPI's are in use, the Property Management team should then establish a governance structure to show the reporting route that all other KPI's should take. Terms of references for groups should be updated to reflect this.

Action

The Housing service will implement a KPI reporting route to highlight the reporting function of temporary accommodation data.

Priority	3	SWAP Reference	AP#4922
Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing		
Timescale	30 th April 2025		

Finding 9.	Action														
<u>Housing debt and rent statements.</u>	The Housing service will review the processes they need to produce accurate rent statements.														
Currently all the financial information for the residents and former residents of temporary accommodation is held on the Council’s financial system, SAP. The policy of having one account across the council for each person makes it hard for the housing service to chase the money owed to them specifically. Therefore, the Housing service must go through the debts for each person and extrapolate the amount of rent owed to the housing team. Because housing rent has different rules for collection compared to a sundry debt, the Council’s normal dunning process cannot be used. The differences include producing rent statements, which need to be issued with the breakdown of the debt for each resident. Currently, the system the Temporary Accommodation team use, Huume, does not interact with SAP. The process outlined in the above paragraph uses a lot of resource to find out what rent is owed, and then create a rent statement to send to the residents. The service should review the process they need to produce an accurate rent statement to make it more efficient.	<table><tr><td>Priority</td><td>3</td><td>SWAP Reference</td><td>AP#4897</td></tr><tr><td>Responsible Officer</td><td colspan="3">Service Manager Housing</td></tr><tr><td>Timescale</td><td colspan="3">31st March 2026</td></tr></table>	Priority	3	SWAP Reference	AP#4897	Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing			Timescale	31 st March 2026				
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	Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing													
	Timescale	31 st March 2026													
	The Housing service will review the new finance element in Humme to establish if it will help the service produce accurate rent statements or if they need to procure a new housing management system														
	<table><tr><td>Priority</td><td>3</td><td>SWAP Reference</td><td>AP#4897</td></tr><tr><td>Responsible Officer</td><td colspan="3">Service Manager Housing</td></tr><tr><td>Timescale</td><td colspan="3">31st March 2026</td></tr></table>				Priority	3	SWAP Reference	AP#4897	Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing			Timescale	31 st March 2026	
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Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing														
Timescale	31 st March 2026														
Finding 10.	Action														
<u>Deleted Properties</u>	The Housing service will review all of the deleted properties on the Huume system and archive them where appropriate. Advice will be sought from the Councils Data Protection Officer regarding retention of records concerning deleted properties.														
Properties that have been "deleted" are still appearing on live data in Huume, creating the risk of misreporting and confusion. At the time of testing, 369 properties were reported to be deleted which means they are no longer available to the Council for reasons such as the landlord has not renewed an agreement. We were informed that these records are kept on Huume in case they became active again to prevent creating another record for the same address. It would be useful to establish an archived area to segregate deleted properties from active ones and prevent their appearance in live data, ensuring accurate reporting and data integrity. Retention of records relating to deleted properties could be a data protection issue and advice should be sought from the Council’s data protection officer.	<table><tr><td>Priority</td><td>3</td><td>SWAP Reference</td><td>AP#4936</td></tr><tr><td>Responsible Officer</td><td colspan="3">Service Manager Housing</td></tr><tr><td>Timescale</td><td colspan="3">31st December 2024</td></tr></table>	Priority	3	SWAP Reference	AP#4936	Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing			Timescale	31 st December 2024				
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	Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing													
Timescale	31 st December 2024														

Finding 11.	Action												
<u>Monthly housing inspection form to be drawn up</u>	The Housing service will complete a standardised monthly housing inspection form covering key areas including health and safety, maintenance, and regulatory compliance.												
Housing authorities have a continuing obligation to keep the suitability of accommodation under review and adhere to the Lettable Standard drawn up by the Council. Monthly inspections at the time of testing, are being carried out on between 30 and 50 properties, the results of which should be uploaded to the internal system Huume.													
Currently, inspection data is held with the relevant officers with a view to this data being centralised onto the Huume system.													
A monthly housing inspection form should be developed to standardise the inspection process across all properties. This form should encompass key areas of concern, such as health and safety, maintenance, and compliance with regulations.													
	<table><tr><td>Priority</td><td>3</td><td>SWAP Reference</td><td>AP#5021</td></tr><tr><td>Responsible Officer</td><td colspan="3">Service Manager Housing</td></tr><tr><td>Timescale</td><td colspan="3">31st December 2024</td></tr></table>	Priority	3	SWAP Reference	AP#5021	Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing			Timescale	31 st December 2024		
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Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing												
Timescale	31 st December 2024												
Finding 12.	Action												
<u>Tenant Satisfaction Surveys</u>	The Housing service will distribute tenant satisfaction surveys to tenants in order to assess performance of the team and Council overall. This will aid in improving the service.												
Dorset Council officers visit tenants for settling in visits however in order to monitor performance surrounding tenant satisfaction, the service could implement tenant satisfaction surveys which could identify improvement areas and potential learnings to be taken forward.													
	<table><tr><td>Priority</td><td>3</td><td>SWAP Reference</td><td>AP#4916</td></tr><tr><td>Responsible Officer</td><td colspan="3">Service Manager Housing</td></tr><tr><td>Timescale</td><td colspan="3">31st August 2025</td></tr></table>	Priority	3	SWAP Reference	AP#4916	Responsible Officer	Service Manager Housing			Timescale	31 st August 2025		
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