Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Audit Committee

Date: 22nd January 2025

Subject: GMCA IT Asset Audit and Leavers Audit

Report of: Mark Scoales, Head of Digital Services

        Ashley Southern, Senior Systems and MI Manager

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide the Audit Committee with progress against audits on the effectiveness of the Leavers process and IT asset management controls within Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). The audits were conducted to evaluate the current controls over the management of computer hardware and software assets, identify any gaps or weaknesses, and recommend improvements. This review is crucial for ensuring that IT assets are managed securely and efficiently, mitigating risks related to cyber security, data loss, and asset mismanagement, and ultimately supporting the organisation's operational integrity and compliance with relevant standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of the cover paper and supporting IT Asset Audit Report found at Appendix A.

CONTACT OFFICERS:

Mark Scoales – Head of Digital Services – scoalesm@manchesterfire.gov.uk

Phil Swan – Director, Digital & CIO – phil.swan@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk

Ashley Southern – Senior Systems and MI Manager –
ashley.southern@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk

Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

 N/A

Risk Management

Please refer to Risk Rating column in IT Asset Audit Report (Appendix A).

Legal Considerations

N/A

Financial Consequences – Revenue

N/A

Financial Consequences – Capital

N/A

Number of attachments to the report: 0

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

N/A

Background Papers

IT Security Audit paper - Threat and Vulnerability Management Review
(306GMF_2324_901)

Tracking/ Process

 Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution

No

Exemption from call in

Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt
from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?

No

BACKGROUND

1. The audits of the Leavers process and IT Asset Management at Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) was conducted as part of the 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan. These reviews were initiated due to the increasing complexity of managing modern IT environments, which involves the lifecycle management of computer hardware and software assets.

2. Effective management in this area is crucial for ensuring accurate inventories, correlating assets to contracts and financial records, and detecting and preventing IT and regulatory risks.

3. The audits aimed to provide an assurance opinion on the effectiveness of the IT asset management controls operated by the Digital Services Directorate. Senior management at GMCA recognised the importance of having appropriate controls in place to manage these assets effectively.

4. The audits were commissioned to obtain assurance on the current controls and to identify opportunities for improvement. Overall, the audits were undertaken to ensure that GMCA's IT assets are managed safely and securely, to identify any gaps or weaknesses in the current controls, and to provide recommendations for improvement. This proactive approach helps the organisation mitigate risks, enhance operational efficiency, and maintain compliance with relevant regulations and standards.

INTRODUCTION

5. The audits were driven by several key factors.

   - Firstly, the complexity of modern IT systems presents significant challenges in managing the lifecycle of IT assets. Effective controls can streamline and simplify the purchase and maintenance of these assets, reduce related expenses, improve asset utilisation, prevent regulatory breaches, and facilitate risk identification and mitigation across the organisation.

   - Secondly, the audits were aligned with the principles of the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF), which emphasises the importance of effective asset

management. Maintaining up-to-date knowledge of IT assets throughout their lifecycle is essential for preventing security incidents and ensuring the organisation's cyber resilience.

6. Additionally, the IT Service Desk team at GMCA is responsible for the purchase, installation, ongoing management, and disposal of Hardware and software assets. Given the critical role of this team, it was important to assess the effectiveness of the controls they have in place to manage these assets.

7. The audits coincided with the activities to improve and restructure the Service Desk function. This work aims to identify resource gaps and implement new processes and policies to enhance efficiency, improve service delivery, and better meet the needs of users across the organisation.

AUDIT FINDINGS

8. The audits have revealed several key findings, highlighting both areas of good practice and areas needing improvement.

   Areas of Good Practice:

   - **IT Asset Management Tools**: The organisation effectively used tools like Hornbill and mobile phone dashboards to manage IT assets.
   - **Physical Controls**: Physical controls for stock rooms at Fire Service Headquarters and Lee House were limited to necessary personnel, ensuring security.
   - **Standard Build Process**: A standard build process for provisioning devices was in place, including BitLocker encryption for each device.
   - **Password Security**: Passwords were required to unlock smartphones.
   - **Manual Checks**: Monthly manual checks were conducted to confirm the accuracy of staff data, including leavers and new starters.
   - **Self-Service Portal**: A self-service portal allowed users to reset their passwords.
   - **Remote Data Wipe**: The organisation could block and remotely wipe data on laptops and mobile phones identified as lost or stolen.
   - **Incident Management**: An incident management process was in place, with incidents being raised and investigated routinely.
   - **Operational Risk Log**: Digital Services maintained an operational risk log to manage IT asset incidents.

- **Recycling Procedure**: There was a procedure for recycling end-of-life mobile phones, including data erasure and the use of a recycling box.

Areas for Improvement:

- **Policy for Leavers** and its effective communications and adoption.
- **IT Asset Management Framework**: The framework required maturing and embedding across the organisation to provide a consistent approach to managing the full lifecycle of IT assets.
- **Training and Awareness**: A GMCA-wide training strategy was needed to ensure staff were aware of how to return assets and maintain their security.
- **Asset Ownership**: IT assets were owned by individual divisions rather than Digital Services, impacting the ability to repurpose depreciating assets.
- **Reconciliation Processes**: Regular reconciliation processes were needed to identify and remediate dormant, duplicate, or missing assets.
- **Disposal Processes**: The processes for disposing of IT assets required strengthening to ensure compliance with the latest standards and to provide a full audit trail.
- **Change Management**: Improvements were needed in managing changes to IT assets, including upgrades and end-of-life support.
- **Policies and Procedures**: Comprehensive and up-to-date IT asset management policies and procedures were lacking and needed to be developed and maintained.

PROGRESS TO-DATE

9. The Digital Team has made considerable progress since the audits. 8 out of 12 high-priority recommendations in the ICT Asset Management audit have been successfully addressed, with the remaining 4 in progress and expected to be completed by the end of December 2025 Additionally, we have completed 4 out of 15 medium-risk recommendations, with 7 more scheduled for completion by April 2025, and the rest to be finished by the end of this year.

10. Digital Services believes that to complete the recommendations following the audit it has taken over 100 hours of resource across six teams within both the Digital and People services directorates, and we have still elements that still require completion this year.

11. Below is a summary of the progress made against the recommendations:

12. The starters and leavers process has been successfully automated, ensuring secure removal of access and data from devices no longer assigned to GMCA members. This automation enhances our ability to track and manage assets effectively and ensures completeness of records throughout the equipment's lifecycle.

13. Additionally, periodic audit checks will be conducted to verify that processes are being followed. To support this approach, training and guidance materials have been developed for our team.

14. A data quality process has been implemented to ensure that all IT equipment is asset-tagged and entered into our asset management tool (Hornbill) upon delivery of new equipment. This process ensures that when equipment reaches end-of-life or is due for replacement, the system will escalate this via a monthly report. As a result, current equipment can be more accurately monitored, and the clear disposal of IT assets can be managed effectively.

15. An IT Equipment Policy has been drafted and shared on the Corporate Document Centre to complement a new Leavers Policy. These will sit alongside updated Mobile Phone and Acceptable Usage policies that support and enhance our recent efforts. These policies are in the process of being consulted upon in line with the GMCA's Equalities Impact Assessment process.

16. The ICT Equipment policy outlines the roles and responsibilities across key directorates, ensuring improved governance and control over our IT assets. It aims to enhance change management processes and assist with upgrades and end-of-life support, ensuring that all modifications are systematically documented and executed.

17. Development of an induction pack for newly appointed staff to facilitate onboarding has commenced. This training document will ensure that our Service Operations staff effectively inform and educate both the wider Digital Team and new GMCA employees about their roles and responsibilities regarding the IT assets assigned to them by the service desk.

18. The Digital Management Team is collaborating with partners across key governance boards to ensure that directorates clearly understand IT policies and procedures. This collaboration will also ensure that new policies align with our Digital and Data Strategy, as well as other Digital policies, promoting a consistent approach across all GMCA directorates.

19. The People Services team have developed a leaver protocol document within the CDC, to provide guidance around the roles and responsibilities of individuals and line managers as part of the leaver process, providing an understanding of what stakeholders will do to support the process. Digital colleagues have helped to shape this and ensure it covers key audit recommendations and links to other ongoing work.

20. The People Services have developed a leavers/offboarding area within the intranet, which dovetails with the leaver protocol to provide support for those going through or thinking about commencing the leaver process.

NEXT STEPS

21. Digital Services will continue to undertake the remaining actions and effectively respond to the recommendations from the audit. This includes prioritising actions that address the remaining issues, ensuring timely implementation, and regularly reviewing our progress via the GMCA Digital Strategy governance group to maintain accountability and improve our processes.

22. Digital Services will continue to actively promote our newly introduced policies and procedures among both the Digital teams and the wider GMCA family to ensure a consistent and accurate approach is maintained. This will include regular communication, training sessions, and updates to reinforce understanding and compliance across all directorates.

23. Digital Services will collaborate with colleagues in the Audit team to introduce and develop both existing and new policies and processes, ensuring we maintain a high level of assurance. This will ensure a focus on identifying areas for improvement, aligning our practices with audit standards, and implementing solutions that enhance overall governance and compliance.

24. People Services will look to present to the senior leadership teams in Quarter 4 the new intranet page and leaver protocol guidance, while re-iterating the responsibilities of individuals and managers going through the leaver process.

25. People Services are creating a KPI to measure the success of the actions brought by the audit findings, to monitor and report the number of retrospective leavers. This will allow investigations to understand why any leavers are being reported to the department later than expected and what further work is required to address this.