

North Lanarkshire Council

Assurance and Improvement Plan Update

2012–15

Introduction

1. The first Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP) for North Lanarkshire Council was published in July 2010. That document set out the planned scrutiny activity for the council for the period April 2010 to March 2013 based on a shared risk assessment undertaken by a local area network (LAN) made up of representatives of all of the main local government audit and inspection agencies.
2. The aim of the shared risk assessment process was to focus scrutiny activity where it is most needed and to determine the most proportionate scrutiny response over a three year period. The AIP gave an overview of the information that informed the risk assessment and showed how this links to the proposed scrutiny response.
3. The local area network met again in November 2010 to update the AIP for the period 2011-14. The AIP update was published in May 2011.
4. This report is the result of the shared risk assessment which began in November 2011. The update process drew on evidence from a number of sources, including:
 - The annual report to the Controller of Audit and elected members for 2010/11 from the council's appointed external auditors.
 - The council's own performance data and self-evaluation evidence.
 - Evidence gathered from Education Scotland, the Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) (including published inspection reports and other supporting evidence).
5. The outcomes of that exercise are contained in this short report which summarises changes to risk assessments and proposed scrutiny responses. Appendix 1 to this report sets out a timetable for proposed audit and inspection activity between April 2012 and March 2015 which reflects the revised and updated scrutiny risk assessment.
6. North Lanarkshire Council has continued to build on its strengths and to improve those areas identified in the previous AIP. Despite the increasing fiscal challenges, the council has continued to develop its workforce, has achieved positive outcomes for vulnerable adults, children and young people, and has continued to develop interventions and systems to help address disadvantage. In many areas they have

demonstrated sector leading performance, particularly in social care and in the education of children and young people who are looked after, and for those with additional support needs. The Council's Service and People First Transformation Programme has been instrumental in many of the improvements noted above. Strong leadership continues to make a positive difference with almost all scrutiny activities commending the shared corporate vision and energy of staff in taking forward a continuous improvement agenda. Areas which continue to require further development are impacted upon by the current efficiency savings being made nationally together with new Scottish Government targets related to housing lets and homelessness. All planned scrutiny work for 2011/12 took place. SHR reported improvements in gas safety and lettings and the audit of Strathclyde Fire and Rescue was successfully completed. Scrutiny work for 2012/13 will involve the continuation of the ISLA work started in 2011/12 and monitoring of roads.

National risk priorities

7. A number of core national risk priorities will be applied to all 32 councils. These are:
 - **The protection and welfare of vulnerable people (children and adults) including access to opportunities:** There are no significant risks in this area. The council has demonstrated continuous improvements in the protection and welfare of vulnerable people, as evidenced by the Child Protection Inspection. They have also continued to develop resources and opportunities for vulnerable groups resulting in positive outcomes. Many of these developments such as those around MCMC, GIRFEC, and 16+ choices, continue to demonstrate aspects of outstanding practice.
 - **Assuring public money is being used properly:** There are no significant risks in this area. The council has sound financial planning arrangements which work effectively. There are annual and longer term financial plans in place. The council's Service and People First Transformation Programme shows an effective approach to managing change and efficiencies. The arrangements for scrutiny and audit are sound.
 - **How councils are responding to the challenging financial environment:** The financial climate will impact on the council's ability to deliver its outcome targets and maintain service performance into the future. The extent of this is currently uncertain and will be kept under review by LAN members. There are no significant scrutiny risks in the council's financial management. The council's budget scrutiny arrangements are sound and financial information is appropriately monitored. No additional scrutiny work is planned but the relevant auditors will continue to monitor the financial position of the council.
8. The LAN is committed to maintaining its engagement with the council between now and the next SRA/AIP refresh so that we can retain an overview of how the council is managing its response to the significant financial challenges that it and all other Scottish public bodies face.

Areas of unchanged scrutiny risk assessments

9. This update focuses predominantly on those areas assessed as being uncertain or having no significant risk. However, in the interest of providing a broader view of the council's overall risk assessment, it is important to highlight those areas that were previously assessed as having no significant risks which, based on additional evidence in the current year, continue to be so.

Area	R/A/G	2011/12 Update
Health and Wellbeing	No significant risks	Overall the council continues to maintain and improve standards of provision across all services. Long term trends are mostly positive with a few better than the Scottish average.
Community Safety	No significant risks	The council are maintaining some aspects of provision and improving others. National criminal justice statistics show better than average performance, child protection and supported self-evaluation of services to support high risk offenders both show improvement and high levels of performance. Longer term trends are generally static.
Sustainable environment	No significant risks	Generally the long term trends show improvement. For example, CO2 emissions have decreased, increased cycle paths have been created and alternative energy sources have been explored and developed.
Lifelong Learning	No significant risks	The council are making very good progress across almost all of the performance indicators and SOA targets. Services are contributing positively to improvements.
Regeneration	Areas of uncertainty	4 of 7 SOA targets were better than expected. Impact of the development of Ravenscraig has been reduced but there still remain areas of uncertainty. The council have continued to improve through increased housing, better links with local businesses and the use of Gateway to support an increasing number of new businesses. However, long term trend shows a worsening position despite positive impact of council initiatives. The economic recession has had, and continues to have a significant impact on North Lanarkshire's labour market with an increase in the number of people claiming unemployment benefit.
Council owned improvement areas	No significant risks	The council have a robust programme (Service and People First Transformation Programme) which has demonstrated improvements. They are aware of the need to increase the pace of change within phase 2 of the programme.
Education	No significant risks	Positive Trends for attainment over the last three years, and comparing more favourably with comparators but not with national attainment figures. Post school destinations are good and improving. Progress being maintained or improved in almost all areas, particularly for vulnerable groups.
Social Work	No significant risks	Social work services continue to make progress, with increased capacity in the delivery of services. An ISLA planned for this year will provide additional scrutiny information to support evaluation and add to evidence base.
Housing	Areas of	The council has made improvements in the areas identified last

Area	R/A/G	2011/12 Update
	uncertainty	year and overall is performing well across most of the housing indicators. The council report that they are on target to achieving the SHQS target by 2015. However, there remains a lack of external scrutiny information to provide an informed judgement about the possible risks involved. SHR will continue to work with the council to increase evidence base thereby enabling a more informed assessment of risk for next year.
Corporate services	No significant risks	Services continue to perform well when compared with national figures. Performance has been maintained.
Environmental services	No significant risks	The council have made improvements in some areas and maintained others. Recycling is above the National average and that of their own performance target.
Regulatory services	No significant risks	Generally the Corporate Performance Report shows an increasing number of PIs improving or exceeding targets as compared with last year.
Cultural services	No significant risks	The council have continued to meet or exceed their targets across all cultural services.
Roads and lighting	No significant risks	The council have improved or maintained their performance in four out of seven of their PIs. Three of the PIs not met relate to road maintenance which is in line with the national picture.
Leadership & Culture and Vision & strategic direction	No significant risks	There is a continuing positive evaluation of strong leadership and direction from elected members downwards. The council remains firmly focused on its mission. The ability to achieve its vision and strategic direction however, will be impacted in the coming years by the challenging economic environment in which the council is currently operating. The corporate and community plans have been redrafted in light of the challenging financial outlook
Partnership working and community leadership	No significant risks	<p>Recent scrutiny and reporting of performance shows continued improvement in partnership working. The Clyde Valley Partnership continues to progress at a steady pace. Detailed business cases for the Clyde Valley Shared Services workstreams were presented to Clyde Valley Leaders and the Chief Executives Forum in June 2011 outlining proposals for shared support services and waste management.</p> <p>The Service and People First Transformation Programme identifies significant savings to be achieved from shared services initiatives.</p>
Community Engagement	No significant risks	<p>The Community Engagement Strategy effectively supports the Community Plan, the SOA and the Community Engagement Action Plan for 2011-2014.</p> <p>A comprehensive programme of citizen engagement has been established that covers the period 2008 to 2011. The programme includes polling of a Citizens Panel over the three year period, a resident's survey each year and several focus groups or other qualitative data capture activities. The most recent residents survey (April 2011) shows positive trends.</p>
Governance and	No significant	The political and management arrangements remain largely

Area	R/A/G	2011/12 Update
accountability	risks	unchanged within the council.
Performance management	No significant risks	The council's performance management framework effectively brings together all related strategic and operational planning activities. Performance reports to the Scrutiny Panel have been aligned with the Performance Management Framework which has resulted in a wider range of information being reported for scrutiny and not just the statutory performance indicators as previously reported.
Use of resources – financial management	No significant risk	The council continues to have a strategic, well managed approach to managing budgets and identifying savings. However, due to the uncertain National financial climate there continues to be a need to monitor.
Use of resources - ICT	No significant risks	The council has recently completed a review of ICT resources and provision (part of the council's Service and People First Transformation Programme). The council has concluded that there is scope to use ICT resources more effectively to support the delivery of service priorities and as a result a new structure for a consolidated ICT service is to be implemented.
Sustainability	No significant risks	Performance measures show sustained and or improved performance.
Equality	No significant risks	Performance measures as reported in SOA and Corporate Plan improvement reports all indicate improved or maintained performance. Baseline data for reporting purposes show improvements.

Changes to 2011/12 risk assessments

10. There are no areas of changed risk. Two areas remain areas of uncertainty (Amber). These are:

- **Regeneration:** there is a need to monitor progress in the context of increasing efficiencies and changing financial climate. No proposed scrutiny work is planned.
- **Housing:** SHR will continue to work with the council to gather on-going evidence of performance.

Scrutiny plan changes

11. 2012/13 - The Care Inspectorate will proceed with the planned ISLA scrutiny activity scheduled to take place week beginning 19 March 2012. Maintaining roads follow-up will be undertaken during 2012/13, exact date to be confirmed.

12. 2013/14 - No planned scrutiny activity.

13. 2014/15 - No planned scrutiny work.

Scrutiny plans

Scrutiny activity in the shaded rows does not result from the shared risk assessment but is either at the request of the council eg supported self-evaluation work or national activity eg national follow-up work or work requested by Ministers.

North Lanarkshire Council		2012-13											
Scrutiny activity year 1		Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Maintaining roads follow-up: Date to be confirmed													
		2013-14											
Scrutiny activity year 2		Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
No scrutiny planned													
		2014-15											
Indicative scrutiny activity for rolling third year	Potential scrutiny bodies involved												
No scrutiny planned													

Footnotes

- The focus of the AIP Update is **strategic scrutiny activity**, that is scrutiny activity which is focused at corporate or whole service level, but there will also be baseline scrutiny activity at unit level on-going throughout the period of the AIP. This will include, for example, school and residential home inspections.
- At the request of Scottish Ministers the Care Inspectorate will lead a **Joint Inspection of Children's Services** in each local authority area in Scotland. These inspections will commence in 2012/13 starting with a development site in April/May 2012 and a cycle of inspection of services for children which will report publicly from Autumn 2012. The selection of local authority areas for inspection will be based on intelligence and risk and take account of the Shared Risk Assessment. LAN leads will be advised in due course.
- In addition, Audit Scotland will be working with scrutiny partners to pilot an approach to assessing the **delivery of outcomes by community planning partnerships**. Pilot sites will be confirmed with the LAN lead in due course.
- Audit Scotland undertake an annual rolling programme of **thematic performance audits**. The fieldwork sites are identified as part of the development of the scope for each individual audit. Fieldwork sites will be confirmed with LAN leads as each audit is developed.

- The **annual audit** of local government also comprises part of the baseline activity for all councils. In April 2008, the Accounts Commission agreed to a request from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to take over the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's responsibility for inspecting housing and council tax benefit (benefits) services in Scotland. As Audit Scotland has no inspection function, this '**benefits performance audit**' work has been incorporated into the annual audit of local government. The exact timing of the audits will be confirmed through the LAN lead.
- **Education Scotland**, through the District Inspector, will continue to support and challenge Education Services regularly and as appropriate the **Care Inspectorate** will regulate care services and inspect social work services based on the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010.
- Scrutiny bodies also reserve the right to make unannounced scrutiny visits. These will generally be made in relation to care services for vulnerable client groups.