Stirling Council
Assurance and Improvement Plan Update
2012–15

Introduction

1. The first Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP) for Stirling 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 2009/10 from the council's appointed external auditors.

- The council's own performance data and self-evaluation evidence.

- Audit Scotland Best Value Audit published November 2011.

- Evidence gathered from Education Scotland, Social Care Social Work Improvement Scotland 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.

Summary

6. In most areas of Stirling Council's work in delivering quality services, there are no significant concerns. Stirling continues to have areas of strong performance such as education and cultural services. We believe the council has the capacity to achieve further service improvements. In December 2010, Stirling Council and Clackmannanshire Council reached an innovative shared services agreement for education and social care in a bid to realise efficiencies and share good practice. This partnership offers the opportunity to increase capacity and improve services. Heads of joint services for education and social work were appointed in March 2011, with Stirling Council leading on education across both councils and Clackmannanshire leading on social work. Senior teams have been appointed in each area. However, staffing changes have meant that a new assistant head of social care only took up post in January 2012. New systems for HR, IT and other corporate functions have not yet been implemented and further work remains to be done. There are effective management arrangements in place to oversee the shared services process, but it is too early to judge the full impact of this initiative. The LAN will continue to maintain an overview of this area.

7. There is continuing uncertainty around the delivery of social services, including services to protect children. A joint interim follow-through inspection of services to protect children took place in April 2011. While a positive start was made to the action plan put in place after the Child Protection 2 (CP2) inspection, work remains to be done. More recently, the Care Inspectorate's ISLA (Initial Scrutiny Level Assessment) identified the service as a level 2 scrutiny risk overall, namely moderate risks, adequate performance and moderate activity on improvement work. Whilst only one area, assessment and care management, was identified as an area of significant concern, there were a number of areas of uncertainty identified. These included the management and support of staff, risk assessment and risk management, self-evaluation and partnership working.

8. Overall, the housing service is an area of low risk. However, there is uncertainty over aspects of the housing service, namely current tenants' rent arrears and property re-let times. The council is aware of this situation and has begun to put in place plans to effect improvements. As yet, there is no evidence that these plans will have a sufficiently positive impact on performance which has declined significantly in these areas. There is a significant risk over the council's ability to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by the Ministerial target of 2015. The council has not yet begun to gather reliable, updated stock condition data in order to fully assess its readiness to meet the SHQS by this deadline. The process of gathering and analysing this information will further limit the time available to procure and carry out any works necessary.

9. The council has a clear vision for the future and a strong focus on improvement. The council management team and elected members are committed to improving services for Stirling. There is effective corporate and political leadership and the council engages well with the local community. As a result, no significant additional scrutiny work has been identified for year one of the AIP (2012-13). However, over the course of the year the SHR will regularly monitor the council's progress in addressing the areas of weakness

highlighted in the housing service and will review the council's progress towards housing stock meeting the SHQS by 2015. Both Stirling and Clackmannanshire councils continue to work closely on both the strategic and operational plans for shared services. This initiative will be reviewed and evaluated both by the council and by the LAN in due course. This would involve some targeted scrutiny around shared services developments in education and social work and the extent to which they are achieving their desired aims.

National risk priorities

10. 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.** While progress has been made, there remain uncertainties in this area. There is still work to do to evaluate further progress with the main points for action in the CP2 inspection report. There are a number of recommendations from the fostering and adoption services inspection in September 2011 and the ISLA of the social work service completed in January 2012 has identified risk assessment and risk management as an area of uncertainty. In addition, plans to introduce a Forth Valley wide service have not yet been put in place. The new assistant head of social care for social work only took up post in January 2012. While the governance arrangements for this joint service are developing well, the impact of the initiative is not yet clear.

- **Assuring public money is being used properly.** There are no significant risks in this area. The council has made progress with a significant change programme to recognise efficiencies and has improved its budget planning processes. This now takes a medium-term perspective and elected members are effectively involved in setting the council's priorities and budget planning. There are good management processes in place to deliver the change agenda. The council has put in place effective scrutiny arrangements and has improved performance management and public reporting. The council's resource management practice has improved and there are areas where this is having a positive impact. However, there remains a need for a more strategic approach to asset management and procurement, building on the progress already made in those areas.

- **How councils are responding to the challenging financial environment.** All councils are facing significant financial challenges in the current economic climate. This has the potential to impact on the council's outcome targets and delivery of services and represents an area of uncertainty. However, the council continues to seek efficiencies through its change programme whilst remaining mindful of service delivery. There are no significant risks in the council's financial management and scrutiny arrangements. Therefore, no additional scrutiny work is planned in this area but the relevant auditors will continue to monitor the financial position of the council.

11. The LAN is committed to maintaining its engagement with the council between now and the next SRA/AIP process 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

12. This update focuses predominantly on those areas assessed as being uncertain or having 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. The following comments relate to issues where perceived risks in the council's processes and activities remain unchanged since the 2011/12 AIP Update.

Area	R/A/G	2011/12 Update
Education	**No significant concerns**	Positive progress in maintaining and improving service in this area. Schools continue to have positive inspection reports.
Social work	**Area of uncertainty**	There have been some improvements in this area but uncertainty remains around a number of areas such as the extent of progress in child protection services and requirements for fostering. The ISLA also identified uncertainties around governance and financial management, staff morale and approaches to self-evaluation and partnership working. Appropriate scrutiny activity undertaken by the Care Inspectorate in February 2012. The scrutiny findings will be published in May 2012 and will be taken into account in the shared risk assessment for 2013/14
Housing	**No significant concerns**	The housing service generally performs well with the exception of three specific areas. (These are outlined in Section 13 below).
Environmental services	**No significant concerns**	Positive progress in maintaining and improving in this area, particularly in recycling and improving cleanliness.
Cultural services	**No significant concerns**	Positive progress in maintaining and improving in this area. Good practice in self-evaluation tool used across adult learning provision.
Corporate services	**No significant concerns**	SPI data indicates improvements compared with the previous year for the majority of indicators.
Economy: Making Stirling a place with a vibrant economy and jobs and opportunities for all	**Area of uncertainty**	Unemployment claimant count has increased at a greater rate than the national average. Uncertainty over targets for the Stirling Economic Partnership and costs of associated action plans. Wealthier and fairer theme outcomes showing mixed improvement. The LAN will monitor progress in this area of the council's work.
Lifelong learning: Making Stirling a place with where lifelong learning is valued and encouraged with jobs and opportunities for all	**No significant concerns**	Positive progress in maintaining and improving in this area. Good performance for adult learners.
Community safety: Making Stirling a place with safe, strong and	**No significant concerns**	Positive progress in maintaining and improving in this area. Improvements in community safety initiatives. Lower crime rate than the Scottish average.

Area	R/A/G	2011/12 Update
resilient communities		
Environment: Making Stirling a place with a high quality environment. Making Stirling more sustainable.	**No significant concerns**	Positive progress in maintaining and improving in this area, particularly in waste recycling and cleanliness. Some concern over emissions target but figures are improving.
Community engagement	**No significant concerns**	Positive progress in maintaining and improving in this area. Performance against a range of indicators is regularly reported through Stirling Performs.
Partnership working (Child protection services)	**Area of uncertainty**	While there are now no significant concerns in partnership working overall (See Section 13 below), there is a need to evaluate recent progress with the action plan following the CP2 inspection. The Care Inspectorate will revisit the Stirling Council Area between September and December 2012 to provide independent public assurance on progress.
ICT	**Area of uncertainty**	The council is making progress with new electronic systems but the work is still on-going. There is uncertainty over marrying the two different ICT systems of Stirling and Clackmannanshire. The LAN will monitor progress in this area of the council's work.
Use of resources - competitiveness	**Area of uncertainty**	The council has improved its budget planning processes and has used the PSIF model to complete a corporate self-assessment. In February 2011, the council approved the roll-out of PSIF to all services. This will provide a consistent approach to challenging current methods of service delivery and standards. However, it is too early to fully assess the impact of this work. The LAN will monitor progress in this area of the council's work.
Asset management	**Area of uncertainty**	The council has made progress with its strategic approach to asset management but there is more work to be done to apply this consistently across all of its assets. There is no corporate asset management strategy in place. The LAN will monitor progress in this area of the council's work.
Managing people	**Area of uncertainty**	The council is improving its workforce planning arrangements. Some improvements, such as the revised absence management procedures, have had a positive impact. However, there is a need to ensure a consistent strategic approach in this area of the council's work to secure further improvements. The LAN will monitor progress in this area of the council's work.
Sustainability	**No significant concerns**	Positive progress in maintaining and improving in this area as seen under SOA on environment above. Council officers continue to monitor and provide updates to Governance and Audit Committee on the financial positions of group entities

Changes to 2011/12 risk assessments

13.   The following table relates to risk assessments that have been changed from the 2011/12 AIP Update.

Area	2011/12 Risk Assessment	2012/13 Risk Assessment	Reason for Change
Housing (SHQS)	**No significant concerns**	**Significant concerns**	The housing service generally performs well (See section 12, above). However, the council's ability to meet the SHQS by 2015 is a significant concern as this cannot be verified due to the council's heavy reliance on cloned, historic stock condition data. The council's programme for carrying out a new, comprehensive stock condition survey has not been maintained.
Housing (Current tenants' rent arrears, property re-let times)	**No significant concerns**	**Area of uncertainty**	The housing service generally performs well (See section 12, above). However, there are some risks related to the collection of current tenants' rent arrears and property re-let times. Performance in both areas has deteriorated significantly over the last 18 months. The SHR inspector will closely monitor the council's performance in these areas.
Homelessness	**Area of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	SHR inspectors found that the council's self-assessments demonstrated progress in a number of key areas.
Roads and street lighting	**Area of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	Slight improvement in road condition, despite the harsh winter of 2010-2011. Development of open space strategy.
Health and wellbeing: Making Stirling a place where improved well-being adds life to years not just years to life.	**Area of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	Healthy theme outcomes show a positive picture. Strong performances in indicators for life expectancy, behaviour related indicators, injury and mental health.
Inclusive society: Encouraging participation and responsibility. Equalities and diversity	**No significant concerns**	**Area of uncertainty**	Some areas of strength such as pre-school provision and regeneration work at Raploch. Equality schemes in place but now a need to demonstrate the impact of this work better. Uncertainty around services to protect vulnerable children. The council does not clearly demonstrate the impact of its activities in addressing economic inequality. The LAN will continue to monitor progress in this area of the council's work.
Vision and strategic direction	**Areas of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	BV audit report notes the council has set a clear vision for the area which recognises the local context
Leadership and culture	**Areas of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	BV audit report notes strong corporate and political leadership. Strong focus on improvement.
Planning and resource alignment	**Areas of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	BV audit report notes the council has improved its budget planning process and involves elected members effectively in setting priorities and budget planning.
Partnership working and community leadership	**Area of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	Innovative shared services agreement aims to share good practice and achieve efficiencies. Joint management structures for this in place and effective

Area	2011/12 Risk Assessment	2012/13 Risk Assessment	Reason for Change
			management arrangements to oversee the process, involving elected members.
			The council has promoted partnership working across the Forth Valley area although this is not yet in place.
			Plan to improve governance and performance of Stirling Community Partnership is in place although not yet fully implemented.
			(Child protection partnership working an area of uncertainty, Section 12 above)
Governance and accountability	**Area of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	The council's governance and scrutiny arrangements are effective, as noted in the BV audit report.
Performance management	**Area of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	BV audit report notes that the council has put in place effective scrutiny arrangements and has improved performance management and public reporting. Good progress in the improvement areas arising from the 2005 BV audit. The PSIF is being applied more widely across council services.
Challenge and improvement	**Area of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	The council is committed to self-evaluation and has identified a number of improvements. BV audit report notes that the council is self-aware and has a strong focus on improvement. Elected members are actively involved in change and improvement. However, approaches to self-evaluation could be improved in social work.
Customer focus/ responsiveness	**Area of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	BV audit report notes that satisfaction with council services is good and improving and the council engages well with service users.
Risk management	**Area of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	The council has refined its risk management process and reports on the council risk register regularly to the Governance and Audit committee. The register is regularly scrutinised by the council management team.
Use of resources - efficiency	**Area of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	The council is making good progress with its budget workstreams, and with its change programme, to realise efficiency savings.
Use of resources – financial management	**Area of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	The BV audit report noted that the council has improved its budget planning processes. Financial arrangements are sound.
Use of resources - procurement	**Area of uncertainty**	**No significant concerns**	The council has now moved into the 'conformance' banding re the recommendations of the McClelland Report. The procurement strategy has been updated over 2010/11 to include clearer targets and actions.
Equalities	**No significant concerns**	**Area of uncertainty**	The council is still in the process of developing a single equalities scheme to simplify monitoring and reporting. The council needs to be in a position to demonstrate the impact of equality activities based

Area	2011/12 Risk Assessment	2012/13 Risk Assessment	Reason for Change
			on clear, planned outcomes. Senior managers recognise the need to further develop the council's approach to equalities and embed this across the council. The LAN will monitor progress in this area of the council's work.

Scrutiny plan changes

14. **Child protection services.** The Care Inspectorate will revisit the Stirling Council area between September and December 2012 with a view to providing independent public assurance about the extent to which services are continuing to improve the quality of their work to protect children.

15. **Social work services.** The Care Inspectorate undertook scrutiny activity in February 2012, as planned, based on the findings of the ISLA process. The scrutiny findings are due to be published in May 2012 and will be taken into account in the shared risk assessment for 2013/14.

16. **Scottish Housing Regulator.** The council requires to focus its resources on addressing the three areas of weakness identified in paragraph eight above, particularly on forming a clear and unequivocal picture of its own state of readiness to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by the Ministerial target of 2015. Consequently, there will no longer be an SRA housing inspection follow-up. However, the SHR inspector will continue to liaise regularly with the council and will closely monitor its performance in current tenants' rent arrears, property re-let times and most importantly, the council's progress towards meeting the SHQS by 2015. In March 2012, SHR will review the council's stock condition data, planning and progress towards its housing stock meeting the SHQS by 2015.

17. **Audit Scotland** will conduct an audit of Housing Benefit performance in October 2012 as part of the ongoing rolling programme of Housing Benefit audits being carried out by Audit Scotland. They will also conduct a follow up audit to Audit Scotland's national report *Maintaining Scotland's roads: a follow-up report* (published February 2011). This is not specific to the council but is a planned follow-up review across all Scottish Local Authorities. The timing will be agreed with the external auditor.

Review of 2011/2012 scrutiny activity

18. There were three scrutiny activities planned for 2011-2012. **Audit Scotland** carried out a Best Value audit in Stirling between February and August 2011. The report, published in November 2011, described Stirling's overall performance and prospects for future improvement as good.

19. **The Care Inspectorate.** A joint interim follow-through inspection of services to protect children took place in June 2011. At that time, inspectors found clear signs of improvement although progress in addressing the main points for action was at a very early stage.

20. The **SHR** review of the council's self-assessment of progress towards the 2012 Homelessness target found that the council's self-assessments provided a good degree of reassurance. SHR inspectors will continue to liaise with the council over a small number of performance areas.

21. In addition, the **Care Inspectorate** carried out an ISLA between December 2011 and January 2012. A number of areas of uncertainty were identified and these have been described earlier in this report.

All of the scrutiny work outlined above informed the 2012-2013 risk assessment.

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.

STIRLING COUNCIL	2012-13											
Scrutiny activity year 1	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
SHR review of stock condition data, planning and progress towards meeting the SHQS by 2015.												(shaded)
Audit Scotland follow up on Maintaining Scotland's Roads (timing to be confirmed)	(shaded)	(shaded)	(shaded)	(shaded)	(shaded)	(shaded)	(shaded)	(shaded)	(shaded)	(shaded)	(shaded)	(shaded)
Audit Scotland audit of Housing Benefit Performance							(blue)					
	2013-14											
Scrutiny activity year 2	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Possible targeted scrutiny around shared services developments and the extent to which they are achieving their desired aims							(blue)	(blue)				
	2014-15											
Indicative scrutiny activity for rolling third year	Potential scrutiny bodies involved											
No planned activity												

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.