

Falkirk Council

Assurance and Improvement Plan

Update 2013–16

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Introduction

1. The first Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP) for Falkirk Council (the 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 (SRA) undertaken by a local area network (LAN) made up of representatives of all of the main local government audit and inspection agencies. The aim of the SRA 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 LAN met again in November 2010 and in November 2011 to update the AIP for the period 2011-14. The last AIP update was published in May 2012 covering 2012 - 15.
2. This update is the result of the SRA which began in October 2012. The update process drew on evidence from a number of sources, including:
 - The annual report to the Controller of Audit and elected members for 2011/12 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 (including published inspection reports and other supporting evidence).
3. A timetable for proposed audit and inspection activity between April 2013 and March 2016 which reflects the revised and updated scrutiny risk assessment is at Appendix 1.
4. Following feedback about the clarity of the SRA process we have amended our criteria to make it clearer what we mean. Our assessment criteria descriptions used last year have changed from 'significant concerns' to 'scrutiny required'; 'no significant concerns' to 'no scrutiny required'; and 'uncertainty' to 'further information required'.

Summary

5. The LAN has assessed all service and outcome areas, with the exception of corporate and neighbourhood services/finance services (housing and homelessness specific), as 'no scrutiny required'. Performance information indicates that most service performance has been good compared to council targets.
6. Performance in corporate and neighbourhood services (housing and homelessness specific) has shown an improving picture in relation to council housing stock condition, and the council now has a housing audit management plan in place to prioritise investment to support SHQS compliance by 2015. The service also has an improvement plan in place to address the weaknesses identified and reported by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) in October 2011. The LAN has assessed this service area, along with finance services (housing specific), as 'further information required' to reflect the continued increase in housing rent arrears and the need for clear evidence that action is being taken to tackle this issue.
7. The LAN have discussed the corporate best value framework, and identified a few areas where further information is to be gathered by LAN members or follow-up work carried out.
8. The LAN has identified that scrutiny is required on the council's risk management arrangements. The chief executive and the leader of the council acknowledged the need to strengthen risk management arrangements in the 2011/12 annual governance statement in the annual accounts. In addition, a recent internal audit review of corporate risk management arrangements indicates that the council's existing risk management arrangements are weak. Audit Scotland will review and assess the council's progress against the internal audit action plan and include an updated position in their 2012/13 annual audit report.
9. The LAN assessed the corporate areas of performance management and challenge and improvement as 'further information required'. This assessment reflects the fact that the council has acknowledged this as an area for improvement and has identified specific actions (noted at section 35) to strengthen the performance management framework and drive challenge and improvement within the council. In this context, we have deferred any targeted best value audit work in this area to allow time for the council's planned actions to be implemented and stimulate improvements. Audit Scotland will monitor progress against the planned actions throughout the year and will report progress in their 2012/13 annual audit report. The LAN will then reassess the nature and timing of any targeted best value audit work as part of the 2014/15 AIP update.
10. The LAN noted that the 2011/12 financial position was less favourable than had been anticipated in the council's budget. However the council is responding to the challenging financial environment and is taking steps to address future budget gaps. The LAN has concluded that this as an area of 'further information required', which relates to monitoring progress against the 2012/13 budget. Audit Scotland is also to carry out a targeted follow-up audit on the national report *Scotland's Public Finances: Addressing the challenges* at all councils to fulfil this.

National risks

11. Local councils are operating within a context of significant change as a result of the challenging financial environment and the public service reform agenda, including the review of community planning, health and social care integration, police and fire reform, college regionalisation, and welfare reform. The Local Government Scrutiny Co-ordination Strategic Group is currently considering how audit and inspection arrangements should collectively respond to these significant strategic developments, recognising the increasing importance of partnerships, place and outcomes for Scotland's public services.

12. A number of core national risks are applied to all 32 councils. These are:

The protection and welfare of vulnerable people (children and adults) including access to opportunities: no scrutiny required.

13. Following targeted on-site scrutiny the SHR published its report on improvement progress in October 2011. The report acknowledged improvements in the council's self awareness and highlighted recent progress impacting upon its allocation policy, choice based house letting, stock condition information and some areas of the homelessness service. However, the report also identified a number of weaknesses, many of which related to its homelessness service, some of which were significant. In response to the regulator's report, in July 2012, following extensive consultation with service users, the council put in place an improvement action plan to address the areas of weakness identified. The regulator will request a self-assessment from the council seeking evidence of improved outcomes for service users.

14. The Care Inspectorate scrutiny report for Falkirk was published in August 2012. No serious concerns were identified. Recommendations included improvement in identifying, recording and managing risk, and finalising reviews of services. Key performance indicators are in line with national averages. Delayed discharge figures have risen. An option appraisal of the council's care home provision has been commissioned. The council produced an action plan in relation to the recommendations in the scrutiny report and the Care Inspectorate will monitor the implementation of this plan.

15. At the request of Scottish ministers, the Care Inspectorate is developing a model of joint inspection of children's services in Community Planning Partnership (CPP) areas in Scotland, in co-operation with other scrutiny bodies (Education Scotland, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and HMICS). These inspections will focus on how well local public bodies (councils, the NHS, police etc.) are working together to deliver effective outcomes for children and young people. Development work involving Angus Council took place in April/May 2012. These joint inspections, which will report publicly, began in the autumn 2012.

16. In addition, the Care Inspectorate is working in co-operation with Healthcare Improvement Scotland to develop an approach to inspecting services providing care and health for adults drawing on its experience of implementing joint inspections of child protection and children's services. Development work involving a number of local authorities is underway and will

continue into the early part of 2013. Following this, the Care Inspectorate will implement a programme of these inspections. Further details of the schedule will be confirmed in due course.

17. Subject to ministerial approval, the Care Inspectorate, in partnership with the Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW) and the Risk Management Authority (RMA), will undertake supported self-evaluation across the 32 local authority criminal justice social work services during the latter part of 2013. This will look at the impact of the Level of Service Case Management Inventory (LSCMI), otherwise known as the national assessment and care planning instrument. This particular approach is one of a number of approaches the Care Inspectorate will use in its current and future scrutiny and improvement work in this area.
18. The SHR plans to carry out a thematic inspection into the outcomes that local authorities are achieving by delivering a Housing Options and Prevention of Homelessness approach. SHR will carry out this thematic inspection during the first half of 2013/14. This is likely to involve fieldwork visits to a small sample of local authorities. SHR is currently identifying potential fieldwork sites and will be contacting those councils that it would like to visit in early 2013.

Assuring public money is being used properly: no scrutiny required.

19. The annual audit forms part of the baseline scrutiny of councils. This audit examines the financial management and controls in each council. Overall the council's governance arrangements in 2011/12 were sound and operated effectively. No material weaknesses in the accounting and internal control systems were identified during the 2011/12 annual audit.
20. There is evidence that the council is taking action to improve the scrutiny function. A full review of the council's decision-making structure is in progress. In addition, the council's learning and development policy for staff has been expanded to cover members.
21. The council's existing self-assessment programme has been revised to ensure that activity is targeted to priority areas. The programme will be reviewed annually to take account of external factors and changes to the council's working practices.

How councils are responding to the challenging financial environment: no local scrutiny required other than monitoring of the financial position through the annual audit.

22. Audit Scotland's 2011/12 annual audit report said that the 2011/12 financial position was less favourable than had been anticipated in the council's budget. As at 31 March 2012 the council reported a general fund balance of £32.234 million, a reduction of £4.482 million on the 2010/11 balance. However this balance includes uncommitted reserves of £15.557 million, which is above the target range set out in the council's reserves strategy. The council planned to use around £3.4 million of this to balance the 2012/13 budget.
23. The council has approved the 2013/14 budget and has prepared indicative budgets for the years 2014/15 to 2016/17 to aid forward planning by identifying medium-term spending pressures and funding constraints. The council has identified a spending gap of £10.7 million in 2013/14 and a further £8.0 million, £8.7 million and £8.5 million in 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 respectively. As noted in the 2011/12 annual audit report, the use of reserves to fund

expenditure is not sustainable and the council must ensure that its longer term financial plans reflect this.

24. A corporate working group has been established to develop a medium term strategy clearly linked to the community, corporate and service plans and the workforce and asset management strategies. The council refreshed the public consultation exercise on service standards and customer priorities in March 2012 to support the 2013/14 budget setting process.
25. Generally, we are satisfied that the council is taking appropriate steps to manage the budget reductions. Recognising the significance of the uncertain financial context within which councils operate, Audit Scotland produced Scotland's Public Finances: Addressing the challenges, in August 2011. Follow-up work around the issues raised in the report will be undertaken in each council during 2013/14 to provide the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland with evidence on the progress that public bodies are making in developing a strategic response to these long-term financial challenges. In addition, a specific piece of work on Reshaping Scotland's public sector workforce will be undertaken in 2013/14.
26. At the request of Scottish ministers, Audit Scotland has piloted an approach to auditing CPPs and the delivery of local outcomes. The CPP audit model was tested during 2012/13 in three council areas (Aberdeen City, North Ayrshire and Scottish Borders). Following evaluation of the approach in early 2013, a number of CPPs will be audited during the second half of 2013/14. Audit Scotland will be contacting any likely audit sites in spring 2013.
27. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has commissioned a piece of work to assess the extent to which Scottish public authorities have complied with the specific duties of section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 during 2013. Analysis of each public authority's compliance with the duty to publish equality outcomes and employment information will be available later in 2013. The results of this activity will be reflected in future shared risk-assessment work.
28. The LAN is committed to maintaining its engagement with the council between now and the next SRA cycle 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 that remain 'no scrutiny required'

30. This update focuses predominantly on those areas assessed as 'scrutiny required' and 'further information required'. 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 requiring no scrutiny which continue to be so. The LAN identified no scrutiny is required in the following areas:

Area	Update
Education services	SQA attainment data for secondary schools demonstrate a clear improving trend against key indicators. Inspection evidence is positive with some very strong evaluations in recent inspections of Falkirk High School and St Mungo's. One primary school is currently subject to follow through inspection as a result of weak evaluations against quality indicators. The LAN has concluded that no scrutiny is required.
Corporate and neighbourhood services (non-housing)	The 2011/12 statutory performance indicators show that performance in this area is generally good.
Development services	The 2011/12 statutory performance indicators show an overall improvement in this area including the speed of processing planning applications and recycling/composting rates. The net cost of refuse collection still lies above the Scottish average; however, the council is taking action to address this.
Chief Executive Office - finance	No significant issues were identified through the 2011/12 annual audit process. The 2011/12 statutory performance indicators demonstrate improving performance in this service area, with the exception of current tenant rent arrears (see section 35).
Chief Executive Office - governance	The council's 2012 performance statement shows demonstrable improvements in the

Area	Update
	sickness absence rate, job completion and turnover in printworks, supporting conflict resolution services and council house sale offers. Areas for further improvement include the speed of response to freedom of information requests, speed of settling council house sales, issuing agendas/papers and responding to members' enquiries. The service has successfully established the Falkirk Community Trust and delivered the elections. The LAN has concluded that no scrutiny is required.
Lifelong learning	Overall, the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS) local outcome indicators under the smarter theme are performing well. Links between schools, local business and Forth Valley College are strong and the council's employment training unit works productively with local employers to develop skills for work programmes for young people.
Community safety	Performance information in this area is mixed, however the LAN has concluded that no specific scrutiny is required. A single police service and fire and rescue service will be operational from 1 April 2013. The community safety strategic assessment is being refreshed, and this will contribute to the local policing and fire and rescue plans.
Sustainable environment	Overall, progress against this outcome is moving in a positive direction. All the SNS local outcome indicators under the greener theme are improving and the 2011/12 statutory performance indicators show improvements in recycling/composting and cleanliness.
Community regeneration	Performance in this area is mixed. The SOA monitoring statement shows that 86% of residents rate their neighbourhood as a good/very good place to live and there has been a rise in the number of affordable homes

Area	Update
	completed. However, the number of homeless households and benefit claimants has risen. This reflects the challenging economic conditions that we face and the LAN does not consider any specific scrutiny necessary.
Vision and strategic direction	Members and officers have agreed a clear set of priorities for the council. A revised corporate plan was approved by members in September 2012. The corporate goals are linked to the local outcomes in the SOA, and the plan is supported by service performance plans.
Leadership and culture	There was no significant loss of leadership or experience as a result of the May 2012 local elections. The council is continuing to develop training for members by widening the scope of the existing staff learning and development policy to cover members.
Planning and resource alignment	The council is developing a medium term financial strategy with clear reference to strategic service delivery aims and objectives. The council refreshed the public consultation exercise on service standards and customer priorities in March 2012 to support the 2013/14 budget setting process.
Partnership working and community leadership	The Community Planning Partnership continues to progress its self-assessment improvement plan. The council has successfully adopted a public social partnership approach for children's services, including fostering and adopting, and now plans to roll this out to services for older people. In June 2011, the council had a positive joint inspection of services to protect children. In addition, the council is exploring shared service opportunities with West Lothian Council.
Community engagement	The council carried out their biennial customer satisfaction survey in 2012. The results showed an improvement on the 2010 survey.

Area	Update
	The council operates a citizens panel with over 1,500 members that provide views on services and issues via regular questionnaires.
Governance and accountability (including public performance reporting)	Overall, the council's governance arrangements in 2011/12 were soundly based and operated effectively. The council's financial regulations and contract standing orders have been reviewed to reflect procurement legislation and best practice. Performance is reported publicly through the 'performance zone' on the council's website.
Customer focus and responsiveness	The council is using various tools to improve customer focus such as satisfaction surveys, the citizen's panel, public social partnerships and tenant led inspections in housing. Customer factors are also built into the prioritisation tool for determining the council's future self-assessment programme.
ICT	The council makes effective use of ICT to support and deliver services, and recognises the need for continuing capital investment in the ICT infrastructure.
Use of resources - competitiveness	The LAN has concluded that no specific scrutiny is required; however, this is an area that is closely linked to the work that the council has planned to drive forward challenge and improvement.
Use of resources - financial planning	The council has approved the 2013/14 budget and has prepared indicative budgets for the years 2014/15 to 2016/17 to aid forward planning by identifying medium-term spending pressures and funding constraints. The council has identified a spending gap of £10.7m in 2013/14 and a further £8.0m, £8.7m and £8.5m in 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 respectively. A corporate working group has been established to develop a medium term strategy clearly linked to the community, corporate and service plans and

Area	Update
	the workforce and asset management strategies. Audit Scotland will continue to monitor developments in this area through the 2012/13 annual audit process.
Use of resources - financial position	<p>Audit Scotland's 2011/12 annual audit report said that the 31 March 2012 financial position was less favourable than had been anticipated in the council's budget.</p> <p>The 2012/13 financial position reported as at 30 November 2012 projected a general fund revenue underspend of £2.7m, and an uncommitted general fund balance of £12.9m at 31 March 2013 (£15.6m at 31 March 2012). Audit Scotland will monitor the position through the 2012/13 annual audit process.</p>
Use of resources - asset management	The council has a corporate asset management strategy 2011/14, 'Better Assets, Better Services', which is supported by plans for different classes of assets. The council and its Forth Valley partners also have an area wide strategic plan. Specific activity in 2011/12 has included the creation of a housing audit investment plan and the completion of the first phase of an office utilisation review.
Use of resources - managing people	Overall, absence rates are improving and are better than the Scottish average. In 2011/12, 96 people were accepted for voluntary severance. The council will need to carefully manage the loss of experience and resources and ensure that this does not have an adverse effect on service delivery and staff morale.
Use of resources - procurement	In 2012 the council achieved a procurement capability assessment (PCA) score of 56%, which is classed as 'improved' and demonstrates a significant improvement on the 2011 score of 35%.
Equalities	The EHRC are reviewing how councils have responded to the requirements of the Equality

Area	Update
	Act 2010. The results of this activity will be reflected in future shared risk assessment work.
Sustainability	The council's Scottish climate change declaration progress report shows that the council has performed well in the carbon reduction commitment and energy efficiency scheme. In addition, the SNS local outcome indicators under the greener theme are improving.

Areas that remain 'scrutiny or further information required'

31. The LAN identified that, in common with the SRA last year, scrutiny or further information is required in the following areas:

Area	Assessment	Update
Use of resources - efficiency	Further information required	<p>In 2011/12 the council reported total cash efficiencies of £5.061m, £4.522m of which are recurring. The council approved the use of an element of the general fund uncommitted reserves to balance the 2012/13 budget. As noted in Audit Scotland's annual report on the 2011/12 audit, this approach is not sustainable in the longer term. The LAN is planning to monitor actions being taking to address future budget gaps as part of the work to be carried out on the national risk, how the council is responding to the challenging financial environment.</p>

Areas with changed assessments

32. The following table relates to assessments of scrutiny risk that have been changed from the 2012/13 update.

Area	2012/13 Risk Assessment	2013/14 Risk Assessment	Reason for Change
Social work services	Area of uncertainty	No scrutiny required	The Care Inspectorate scrutiny report found no areas of significant concern. The 6 recommendations are the basis of an action plan which will be monitored. Performance indicators are mixed. There is a recognised need to improve some of the care home services. Generally, Falkirk social work services are making progress, if slowly, particularly in relation to redesigning services.
Corporate and neighbourhood services/Chief Executive Office - finance (housing and homelessness specific)	No significant risks	Further information required	In response to the Scottish Housing Regulator's report in October 2011, the council produced an improvement action plan to address the weaknesses identified. Current performance information shows improvement across a number of service areas; however, reported performance in rent arrears has continued to decline. Given the context of the impending welfare reforms, the LAN has concluded that further information is required to establish what action the council is taking to tackle increasing rent arrears among its tenants. In relation to the improvement action plan, the regulator will request a self assessment from the council seeking evidence of improved outcomes for service users.

Area	2012/13 Risk Assessment	2013/14 Risk Assessment	Reason for Change
Community services (Falkirk Community Trust)	Area of uncertainty	No scrutiny required	This was marked as an area of uncertainty in the 2012-15 AIP update because the impact of the transfer of community services to the trust was unknown. Falkirk Community Trust's 2011/12 performance report shows that overall the trust has performed well for its first 9 months in operation. The LAN has concluded that no specific scrutiny is required, although the trust's performance will be kept under review as part of the routine annual audit process.
Economy	Area of uncertainty	No scrutiny required	The current economic climate continues to present the council with challenges. No specific scrutiny is planned for this outcome; however, the LAN will monitor performance in this area over the next year.
Health and wellbeing	Area of uncertainty	No scrutiny required	Overall, performance information in this area is still mixed. No specific scrutiny is planned for this outcome; however, the LAN will monitor performance in this area next year.
Performance management	No significant risks	Further information required	<p>Audit Scotland's 2011/12 annual audit report noted that some performance indicators are being met by a large margin. It was recommended that the council review targets in the interest of promoting continuous improvement. The council has recognised the need to improve aspects of the performance management arrangements and has identified the following actions to address this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the self-assessment programme and the accompanying improvement planning process to reflect changes in the council's

Area	2012/13 Risk Assessment	2013/14 Risk Assessment	Reason for Change
			<p>structure and working practices, and ensure that assessments focus on priority areas and achieve improvements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review performance indicators to support the revised Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) and take account of the SOLACE benchmarking exercise • Review performance targets to ensure that they promote continuous improvement • Deliver training at manager level that focuses on the importance of a performance management culture • Explore opportunities to make performance management information more readily available eg Covalent site license. <p>The agreed timescale for all of the above actions is April 2013 and on going.</p> <p>The LAN has concluded that Audit Scotland will monitor the council's progress against these actions throughout the year and include a comment in the 2012/13 annual audit report. Based on this work, the LAN will reassess the need for targeted best value audit work in the 2014/15 AIP update.</p>
Challenge and improvement	No significant risks	Further information required	The council is refreshing the existing self-assessment programme to reflect changes to the council's structure and working arrangements. Going forward, the programme of work will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that self-assessment activity is

Area	2012/13 Risk Assessment	2013/14 Risk Assessment	Reason for Change
			<p>targeted on priority areas. This exercise, along with the performance management improvements documented in the row above will be key to improving the council's challenge and improvement processes.</p> <p>The LAN has concluded that no scrutiny is required on the basis that this will allow the council time to implement the planned improvements.</p> <p>The LAN will reassess the need for targeted best value audit work in this area in the 2014/15 AIP update.</p>
Risk management	No significant risks	Scrutiny required	<p>A recent internal audit report has indicated that the council's corporate risk management arrangements are weak. The council has a good level of self-awareness and recognised the need for improvement in this area in the 2011/12 annual governance statement. The LAN has concluded that scrutiny is required. Audit Scotland will follow-up the council's progress against the internal audit action plan and include a comment in the 2012/13 annual audit report.</p>

Scrutiny plans

33. As part of the 2012/13 annual audit, Audit Scotland will monitor the council's progress against the actions set out to improve the corporate performance management and challenge and improvement processes. Based on this work, the LAN will reassess the need for targeted best value audit work in the 2014/15 AIP update.
34. Audit Scotland will undertake targeted follow-up work on its national report *Scotland's Public Finances: Addressing the challenges*. This work will consider the action taken to address the issues raised in the report and the impact of this action. The findings of this work will be reported by 31 August 2013. In addition, a specific piece of work on Reshaping Scotland's public sector workforce will be undertaken in 2013/14.
35. Audit Scotland will also carry out additional scrutiny of the council's corporate risk management arrangements. In year 1 of the scrutiny plan this will involve reviewing and assessing the council's reported progress against the internal audit action plan, agreed in response to a recent review of the council's corporate risk management arrangements.
36. Audit Scotland plan to carry out a housing benefit risk assessment at the council in November 2013. The timing of this work may be subject to change. A risk model is used to inform the risk assessment activity and therefore the plan needs to be flexible to take account of emerging risks.
37. As reported in the national risks section of this report, a programme of national scrutiny work and joint inspections is being developed for the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and HMICS. Also, subject to ministerial approval, the Care Inspectorate in partnership with the Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW) and the Risk Management Authority (RMA) will undertake supported self-evaluation across the 32 local authority criminal justice social work services during the latter part of 2013.
38. The Scottish Housing Regulator plans to carry out a thematic inspection into the outcomes that local authorities are achieving by delivering a Housing Options and Prevention of Homelessness approach. The regulator will carry out this thematic inspection during the first half of 2013/14 and will identify a range of local authorities to take part by the end of March 2013.

Appendix 1

National scrutiny activity 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.

FALKIRK COUNCIL		2013-14											
Scrutiny activity year 1	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
Audit Scotland - corporate risk management arrangements: assess progress against internal audit action plan				x									
National or supported self-evaluation work year 1													
Audit Scotland - Reshaping Scotland's public sector workforce	x												
Audit Scotland - follow-up of Audit Scotland national report, Scotland's Public Finances: Addressing the challenges		x											
Audit Scotland - housing benefit risk assessment								x					
Care Inspectorate - supported self-evaluation of the impact on quality of the newly introduced national assessment and care planning instrument (LSCMI) in local criminal justice social work services (timing to be confirmed)													

FALKIRK COUNCIL		2014-15											
Scrutiny activity year 2	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
Audit Scotland - targeted best value audit work (nature and timing to be determined)													
Scottish Housing Regulator - improvement plan follow-up self assessment			x										

FALKIRK COUNCIL		2015-16	
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 ongoing throughout the period of the AIP. This will include, for example, school and residential home inspections. 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. The annual audit of local government also comprises part of the baseline activity for all councils and this includes work necessary to complete the audit of housing benefit and council tax benefit arrangements. Education Scotland, through the District Inspector, will continue to support and challenge education services regularly and as appropriate. The Care Inspectorate will continue to regulate care services and inspect social work services in accordance with their responsibilities under the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010.

