

Inverclyde Council

Assurance and Improvement Plan

Update 2013–16

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Introduction

1. The first Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP) for Inverclyde 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 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.
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 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 (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. Inverclyde council continues to build on the good work it has established over the past few years. It has made progress in its corporate arrangements and has good awareness of where it needs to improve. The majority of the areas remain unchanged from last years assessment and these along with a further seven areas (partnership working, governance and accountability, performance management, customer focus, risk management, procurement, and sustainability) will not be subject to any scrutiny activity this year. Further information is required in relation to the outcome area – Thriving, Diverse Economy.
6. In terms of services, education and social work are performing well, however the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) has raised significant concerns around some aspects of the council's services to the homeless. There has been a drop in the proportion of lets secured for homeless households from local Registered Social Landlords (RSL) and the council's performance in this area is among the poorest of Scottish local authorities. The council's failure to access sufficient housing is adversely impacting upon the length of time homeless households have to wait for settled accommodation. As there has been some recent improvement in the numbers of offers of housing received, the regulator plans to regularly monitor the council's and local RSL's performance in this area and seek evidence of improving outcomes for service users.
7. Scrutiny will continue in unit level registered services and national activity when requested by ministers. Scrutiny agencies will continue to monitor activity through their established communication channels. Previously Audit Scotland had scheduled some focused Best Value audit work during 2013/14. We have reviewed this work as part of this SRA and the LAN has decided to remove it from the schedule as it does not consider there to be significant issues which require scrutiny work of this nature.

National risks

8. 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.

9. A number of core National Risk Priorities are applied to all 32 councils. These are:

The protection and welfare of vulnerable people (children and adults) including access to opportunities.

10. 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.

11. 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. Inverclyde is one of the pilot sites for these joint inspections and this work commenced in January 2013. Following the pilot work, the Care Inspectorate will implement a programme of these inspections. Further details of the schedule will be confirmed in due course.

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. The risk assessments relating to the 'Educate, informed, responsible citizens', 'Healthy, caring communities' and 'Safe, sustainable communities' outcome areas and social work services do not identify that scrutiny is required. The social work service has a new leadership team and the service continues to perform well. The adult social work service delivers high levels of home care enabling older people to live independently in their own home. Services for children perform well in ensuring children are safe and protected, and in meeting the needs of those who are vulnerable or need additional support. The Community Health Care Partnership reports considerable improvement in attainment rates for looked after children.

Assuring public money is being used properly:

15. The annual audit of councils forms part of the baseline scrutiny of councils. This audit examines the financial management and controls in each council.
16. Our risk assessment of the corporate management of the council does not indicate that there are areas requiring specific scrutiny work during 2013/14. The council has the appropriate arrangements in place to provide assurance and this is supported by its Audit Committee. It has adopted PSIF and is using this self-evaluation to drive improvement and efficiencies.

How councils are responding to the challenging financial environment:

17. 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.
18. The council is in sound financial health with a strong general fund position. It has made good progress in delivering savings through its programme of efficiency work-streams and has recently approved a three-year revenue and capital budget covering the period 2013-16. The Medium Term Financial Planning and Management Framework includes a number of key challenges facing the council in the year ahead such as the uncertainty around the impact of welfare reform and continuing pressures on the council's budgets. This national priority will be monitored by the local audits given the ongoing economic situation.
19. 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.
20. The 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 public authorities' 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.

21. 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'

22. 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. This is based on evidence from various sources including where applicable, recent inspection reports, annual audit work, national and local performance information and additional file reviews. The LAN identified no scrutiny is required in the following areas:

Service Areas	Outcomes	Corporate Assessment
Education	Educated, Informed, Responsible Citizens	Vision and Strategic Direction
Social Work	Healthy, Caring Communities	Planning and resource alignment
Cultural Services		Partnership working and community leadership
Roads & Street Lighting		Community Engagement
		Governance and Accountability
		Use of resources (Financial Management, People management, Asset Management, ICT, Procurement)
		Performance management
		Customer focus and responsiveness
		Risk management
		Equalities
		Sustainability

Areas that remain 'scrutiny or further information required'

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

Area	Assessment	Update
Outcome: Thriving and diverse economy	Further information required	There is insufficient performance data at present in this outcome area to make a fully informed risk assessment. The LAN lead will engage with the council on this during the first quarter of 2013/14.

Areas with changed assessments

26. 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
Service: Homelessness	No significant risks	Further information required	The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) has been monitoring the proportion of Registered Social Landlord (RSL) lets the council secures for homeless households. This continued to fall in 2011/12 and is below the council's own target and of other similar local authorities. This failure to access adequate numbers of appropriate houses impacts on the length of time homeless households have to wait for settled accommodation. Since January 2013, there appears to have been a significant improvement in the council's performance. As a consequence, over the coming year, the regulator plans to regularly monitor the council's performance in this area and seek evidence of improving outcomes for service users.
Service: Regeneration & environment	Areas of uncertainty	No scrutiny required	The service performance is generally improving and the service costs are comparatively low.
Outcome: Safe, Sustainable Communities	Areas of uncertainty	No scrutiny required	Progress on this outcome thematic is showing some signs of improvement
Corporate assessment: Efficiency & competitiveness	No separate risk assessment in 2011/12	No scrutiny required	The council has delivered work-stream savings of £4.5m during 2011-2012.

Area	2012/13 Risk Assessment	2013/14 Risk Assessment	Reason for change
Corporate assessment: Challenge & Improvement/	No separate risk assessment in 2011/12	No scrutiny required	The council has revised its strategic planning and performance management framework which places a strong emphasis on robust self-evaluation. Improvements include a programme of PSIF assessments and the development of a guide to self-evaluation, all supported by training. Scrutiny arrangements operate well.

Scrutiny plans

27. In response to the issues identified around the length of time homeless households are awaiting settled accommodation, the SHR plans to regularly monitor the council's performance in accessing Registered Social Landlord lets over 2013 and seek evidence of improving outcomes for service users.
28. During the first quarter of 2013/14 the LAN lead will engage with the council about limited data available of the 'thriving and diverse economy' outcome area.
29. Scheduled audit and inspection work will take place through the annual audit process and the ongoing inspections of schools and care establishments carried out by Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate. This will inform future risk assessment work.
30. Previously Audit Scotland had scheduled some focused Best Value audit work during 2013/14. We have reviewed this work as part of this shared risk assessment and the LAN has decided to remove it from the schedule as it does not consider there to be significant issues which require scrutiny work of this nature.

Appendix 1

INVERCLYDE COUNCIL 2013-14												
Scrutiny activity year 1 arising from the shared risk assessment.	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
No local scrutiny work planned												
National or supported self-evaluation work year 1												
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 (Care Inspectorate) tbc												
Scotland's Public Finances: Addressing the challenges follow-up (Audit Scotland)												
Reshaping Scotland's public sector workforce (Audit Scotland) tbc	X											

INVERCLYDE COUNCIL 2014-15												
Scrutiny activity year 2	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
No local scrutiny work planned												
National or supported self evaluation work year 2												
No national work planned.												

INVERCLYDE COUNCIL 2015-16	
Indicative scrutiny activity for rolling third year	Potential scrutiny bodies involved
No local scrutiny work 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 their responsibilities under the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010.

