

National Scrutiny Plan for Local Government 2012/13

A summary of Local Government
Strategic Scrutiny Activity



Prepared by the Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group

May 2012



Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000 under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. Together they ensure that the Scottish Government and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

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Background

Following the publication of the Crerar report on the *Independent Review of Regulation, Audit, Inspection and Complaints Handling of Public Services in Scotland* in September 2007, the Scottish Government undertook to develop a simplified and more coherent approach to local government scrutiny, as part of its wider approach to improving the arrangements for the external scrutiny of public services.

A key aspect of this was the need to better coordinate and streamline strategic scrutiny work at corporate and service level, while continuing to provide assurance to the public. This marked a fundamental shift from scrutiny which had typically been based on standard audits and inspections done on a routine cyclical basis, to a more risk-based and proportionate approach.

In March 2008, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth asked the Accounts Commission to undertake a transitional 'coordinating and gatekeeping role' in the planning of scrutiny activity in local government in Scotland. The Accounts Commission's transitional role was subsequently placed on a permanent footing by the Cabinet Secretary in March 2011 when he wrote to the chair of the Accounts Commission confirming that, "facilitating and coordinating... scrutiny relating to the corporate and strategic role of local government" should now be regarded as one of the accepted functions of the Accounts Commission.

We have sought to be open and transparent when preparing the National Scrutiny Plan and have therefore included all strategic scrutiny activity of which we are currently aware, as well as assisted self-evaluation work requested by councils which is designed to support improvement and build self evaluation capacity. In line with the phased approach requested by the Cabinet Secretary, our focus has been on planned scrutiny activity which assesses whole services or corporate functions. The plan does not, therefore, focus on scrutiny activity carried out at service unit or institution level, eg school or care home inspections. The annual financial audit is also not included in the National Scrutiny Plan as this was considered by the by the Cabinet Secretary to be baseline scrutiny activity.

The *National Scrutiny Plan for Local Government* has been jointly prepared by the Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group. This group includes the Accounts Commission, Audit Scotland, Education Scotland (ES), the Care Inspectorate (CI), Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS) and Healthcare Improvement Scotland. Details of each body can be found in [Appendix 1](#); they are collectively referred to as 'scrutiny bodies' in this report.

In developing this plan we have engaged with COSLA and SOLACE on an ongoing basis and we acknowledge the input we have had from them and councils to date in taking forward this scrutiny improvement work.

Part 1. Context

- 1.** This third National Scrutiny Plan has been developed against the backdrop of significant change in the public sector and scrutiny landscape of Scotland. The new scrutiny bodies created in 2011, the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland, continue to develop and consolidate. On 1 April 2012, the Scottish Housing Regulator status will change from an executive agency to a non-ministerial department and will exercise new functions provided for in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 2.** 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 inspections of services for children which will report publicly from autumn 2012. The selection of local authority areas for inspection is based on intelligence and risk and takes account of the shared risk assessment. The selection of local authority areas includes Angus, Edinburgh, Argyll & Bute, Orkney, East Dunbartonshire and North Ayrshire Councils.
- 3.** In addition, the Care Inspectorate is currently developing an approach to inspecting adult care services drawing on its experience of implementing multi-agency strategic inspections of children's services. The adult care services inspection sites have not yet been finalised and these will be added to the National Scrutiny Plan in due course.
- 4.** At the request of Scottish ministers, Audit Scotland is developing an approach to auditing community planning partnerships and the delivery of local outcomes. The CPP audit model will be tested during 2012/13 in a number of councils. The CPP audit sites will be included in the National Scrutiny Plan once they are identified.
- 5.** Scrutiny bodies continue to work with councils to support self evaluation activity. The scrutiny bodies will consider opportunities to further develop this type of support activity over the coming year.
- 6.** Local Government continues to adapt and change in relation to significant budget pressures and in response to the four pillars of the Scottish Government's public sector reform agenda; shifting resources to preventative activity, integrated local services driven by better partnership working, workforce development and transparent and improving performance.

Part 2. The National Scrutiny Plan for Local Government 2012/13

7. Since 2008, the main scrutiny bodies for local government have worked together through the Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group to identify and agree the key risks in each individual council and to develop a plan of scrutiny activity to respond to those specific risks. This approach, called Shared Risk Assessment (SRA), is designed to ensure proportionate and focused scrutiny and reduce the overall amount of external scrutiny activity in local government, while continuing to provide public assurance and help councils to improve.

8. The 32 Local Area Networks (LANs) of representatives of the scrutiny bodies meet annually to share intelligence and agree the scrutiny risks for each council. Each LAN prepares an Assurance and Improvement Plan update containing a scrutiny plan setting out the planned scrutiny activity over a rolling three-year period from 2012/13. These individual plans are aggregated to form the National Scrutiny Plan.

9. The National Scrutiny Plan for Local Government is one of the key outputs from the SRA work. The plan for 2012/13 is the third such plan and summarises the strategic scrutiny work from April 2012 to March 2013 as described in each of the 32 council's individual scrutiny plans.

Appendix 1.

The Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group Members

The Accounts Commission

The Accounts Commission is a non-departmental public body (NDPB). The Accounts Commission is the public's independent watchdog for local government in Scotland. Its role is to examine how Scotland's 32 councils and 45 joint boards manage their finances, help these bodies manage their resources efficiently and effectively, promote Best Value and publish information every year about how they perform.

Audit Scotland

Audit Scotland is a significant national body. Audit Scotland is a statutory body providing services to the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland (AGS). Working together, the Accounts Commission, the AGS and Audit Scotland ensure that public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

Education Scotland

Education Scotland (ES) is an executive agency. ES is the Scottish Government's national development and improvement agency for education. It is charged with providing support and challenge to the education system, from the early years to adult learning, in furtherance of the government's policy objectives.

The Care Inspectorate (Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland)

The Care Inspectorate is a non-departmental public body (NDPB). The Care Inspectorate's purpose is to provide assurance and protection for people who use care, social work and children's services.

The Scottish Housing Regulator

The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) is a non-ministerial department. The statutory objective of SHR is to safeguard and promote the interests of persons who are, or who may become: homeless; tenants of social landlords; or recipients of housing services provided by social landlords.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS) is a significant national body. The purpose of HMICS is to promote efficiency and effectiveness in respect of the standards of the police service in Scotland.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland

Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) is a health body. The function of HIS is to improve the quality of the care and experience of every person in Scotland every time they access healthcare by supporting healthcare providers.

Appendix 2.

Glossary

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| Assurance & Improvement Plan (AIP) | Document which captures agreed areas of risk and the resulting scrutiny response for each council. It is the primary planning document for scrutiny bodies |
| Fieldwork | The part of the scrutiny work that is undertaken at the council |
| Local Area Network (LAN) | Representatives from all the scrutiny bodies for each council to maximise the benefit of the scrutiny knowledge and understanding of the council |
| LAN lead | LAN representative facilitating LAN discussions and responsible for engagement with the council and producing the AIP |
| National Scrutiny Plan (NSP) | The aggregation of the individual council's scrutiny plans into a national plan detailing all the scrutiny work planned across Scottish councils |
| Scrutiny contact days | The number of days spent in the council conducting fieldwork multiplied by the number of auditors/inspectors involved in the work |
| Scrutiny events | An individually defined piece of scrutiny work |
| Shared risk assessment (SRA) | A joint approach using key information about local government to plan scrutiny activity that is proportionate and based on risk |
| Supported self-evaluation (SSE) | Assistance provided by the Care Inspectorate to councils on request, to help them develop their own methods and quality of self scrutiny |
| Validated self-evaluation (VSE) | Assistance provided by Education Scotland to councils on request, to help them develop their own methods and quality of self scrutiny |

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