

West Dunbartonshire Council

Local Scrutiny Plan 2016/17



March 2016

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Introduction

1. This local scrutiny plan (LSP) sets out the planned scrutiny activity in West Dunbartonshire Council during 2016/17. The plan is based on a shared risk assessment undertaken by a local area network (LAN), comprising representatives of all the scrutiny bodies who engage with the council. The shared risk assessment process draws on a range of evidence with the aim of determining any scrutiny activity required and focusing this in the most proportionate way.
2. This plan does not identify or address all risks in the council. It covers only those risk areas that the LAN has identified as requiring scrutiny, or where scrutiny is planned as part of a national programme. Planned scrutiny activity across all councils in Scotland informs the National Scrutiny Plan for 2016/17, which is available on the Audit Scotland website.

Scrutiny risks

3. The LAN is of the view that the council continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to best value and has strong leadership, a clear vision and a focus on continuous improvement. The LAN noted that the council are in the process of implementing a new leadership structure which reduces the number of strategic directors from four to three and establishes twelve strategic leads, formally Heads of Service, with specific areas of responsibility for the council and the health and social care partnership (HSCP). The council should monitor the impact of these changes to ensure it continues to deliver the anticipated strategic leadership and service delivery improvements.
4. The LAN did not identify any specific areas from the risk assessment where specific scrutiny was required, other than scrutiny that was nationally directed or part of a planned programme of work.
5. The 2015/16 LSP did not identify any areas where specific scrutiny activity was required however it did identify three areas that required ongoing oversight and monitoring. These were:
 - Housing & Homelessness – the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) wished to continue monitoring progress against the findings of its enquiry carried out in 2013.
 - People Management – Audit Scotland agreed to monitor progress reducing absence levels.
 - Efficiency – Audit Scotland agreed to monitor the delivery of efficiency savings.

6. During the year the council have met SHR on a quarterly basis to discuss progress against the findings of the 2013 SHR enquiry. Positive progress has been made in a number of areas including tenancy sustainment, void rent loss, emergency repairs and resolution of anti-social behaviour cases and tenant satisfaction and focus. However, despite some improvement, tenancy satisfaction and focus is still an area requiring attention and the LAN have ongoing concerns about levels of rent collection, the management of non-emergency repairs, repeat applications for homelessness and access to temporary and emergency accommodation. The LAN has maintained its opinion that, whilst there is evidence of positive progress in Housing, the pace of improvement could be increased. The Head of Housing has recently left the council and a new strategic lead has been appointed as part of the restructure referenced in paragraph 3. Due to the ongoing areas of concern coupled with the change in strategic leadership the LAN has assessed Housing & Homelessness as an area that requires ongoing oversight and monitoring.
7. Attendance management continues to be strategic priority for the council. During 2014/15 the council lost 57,211 full time equivalent working days through staff absence at an estimated cost of £6.75 million. In 2014/15 the average number of days lost per employee due to sickness absence was 12.81 days (2013/14 – 13 days). Projected sickness absence results for 2015/16 show a further improved position of 11.7 days. A joint attendance working group, with the trade unions, is now in its third year, and has been developing initiatives to improve performance and develop a revised attendance management policy with supporting arrangements, such as carers leave, cancer support, tailored adjustments for disability. Whilst there has been some evidence of improvement in attendance across the council, increasing attendance at work continues to be an area of significant focus for the council. The LAN have identified staff absence as an area that requires ongoing oversight and monitoring.
8. In February 2016 a report to full council provided an update on the general services revenue estimates for 2016/17 to 2018/19. This took account of identified management adjustments, spend to save options, and the December 2015 financial settlement announced by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance. This projected cumulative budget gaps of £0.41 million, £2.5 million and £7.31 million for 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19 respectively. The LAN recognised that the council has managed its finances proactively however, as there is still uncertainty in the wider economic climate and an ongoing requirement for the council to identify savings options, they have decided to maintain their assessment that Efficiency is an area that requires ongoing oversight and monitoring.
9. As referenced in paragraph 3 a new senior leadership is in place which sees the departure of the former Director of Education. Leadership for education services is driven through the strategic director, the strategic lead/chief education officer together with the head teachers across the schools. This is taking place at a time when the council's education estate is subject to a transformation process and when elected members continue their ongoing scrutiny of the strategy to raise attainment. The council

has established a robust action and data plan to take forward the Scottish Attainment Challenge which is underpinned by the required baseline information. The LAN is of the view that it would be appropriate for the Education Scotland Area Lead Officer through the normal engagement processes to regularly monitor the council's current level of service delivery and provide support as necessary. Therefore delivery of education has been identified as an area for ongoing oversight and monitoring.

Planned scrutiny activity

10. As shown in [Appendix 1](#), the council will be subject to a range of risk-based and nationally driven scrutiny activity during 2016/17. For some of their scrutiny activity in 2016/17, scrutiny bodies are still to determine their work programmes and which specific council areas they will cover. Where a council is to be involved, the relevant scrutiny body will confirm this with the council and the appropriate LAN lead.
11. In addition to specific work shown in [Appendix 1](#), routine, scheduled audit and inspection work will take place through the annual audit process and the ongoing inspection of school and care services by Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate respectively.
12. Audit Scotland plans to undertake performance audit work in three areas covering local government during 2016/17. It will undertake a performance audit on early learning and childcare and a follow-up on audit of self-directed support. Audit Scotland will also carry out audit work on equal pay, but is still considering the focus and outputs of work in this area. Any engagement with councils is still to be determined. Details of future audit work are available on the Audit Scotland website [here](#).
13. In December 2014, the Accounts Commission concluded its review of Best Value and set out principles for a new approach to auditing Best Value. These principles include the need for more frequent assurance on Best Value across all 32 councils, integrating the audit processes, an increased emphasis on driving improvement, and a strong focus on the quality of service experienced by the public and the outcomes achieved.
14. The new approach will be rolled out from October 2016 but will continue to evolve. It will include assessment each year of aspects of Best Value as part of an integrated annual audit and a public report, (Controller of Audit report to the Accounts Commission) for each council at least once in a five year period, that will bring together an overall picture of the council drawn from a range of audit activity. The initial iteration of the rolling programme, which will be reviewed and refreshed annually in response to factors including the SRA, will be presented to the Accounts Commission in April 2016. The results of this current SRA will make a significant contribution to the audit intelligence that will underpin the new approach, and inform the development of the initial programme.
15. 2016 is a transition year. This includes development of the intelligence about each council for the new approach and the handover to new audit appointments. While

preparation for the new approach progresses, Best Value audit work will continue. But, appropriate elements of the new approach, such as reporting mechanisms, will also be tested in some councils.

16. To assess the risk to social landlord services SHR has reviewed and compared the performance of all Scottish social landlords to identify the weakest performing landlords. It was found that West Dunbartonshire Council is in the bottom quartile for all social landlords in relation to some tenant satisfaction indicators, rent collection, rent arrears and non-emergency repairs. SHR will therefore engage with the council with regard to these areas during 2016/17. SHR will also engage with the council in relation to repeat applications for homelessness and access to temporary and emergency accommodation.
17. SHR will publish the findings of its thematic inquiry work completed during 2015/16. It will carry out further thematic inquiries during 2016/17. SHR will also review the Charter data submitted by landlords and carry out data accuracy visits during the second quarter of 2016/17. If the council is to be involved in a thematic inquiry or a data accuracy visit SHR will confirm this directly with the council and the LAN lead.
18. The Care Inspectorate will work together with partner regulatory agencies to continue to deliver a coordinated programme of joint scrutiny of Community Planning Partnerships and integration joint boards. Partner agencies are reviewing the methodology for joint inspections of Adults' services. As well as joint strategic scrutiny programmes, the Care Inspectorate will also be reviewing its approach to strategic commissioning and undertaking a variety of thematic programmes of work. The Care Inspectorate plans to carry out a joint strategic inspection of services for children and young people in the West Dunbartonshire Council area during the second and third quarters of 2016/17.
19. HMICS will continue to inspect local policing across Scotland during 2016/17 as part of its rolling work programme. These inspections will examine, amongst other things, local scrutiny and engagement between Police Scotland and councils. HMICS will identify and notify LANs and the local Policing Divisions to be inspected approximately three months prior to inspection.
20. The Scottish Government has confirmed in its funding letters to Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships (ADPs) that the Care Inspectorate will undertake Validated Self-Evaluation (VSE) activity with Alcohol and Drug Partnerships. The purpose of this activity is to support the validation of ADP and services' self-assessment of local implementation and service compliance with the Quality Principles: Standard Expectations of Care and Support in Drug & Alcohol Services. The findings from this validation work will be reviewed by the Scottish Government to consider and inform the future programme of national support that will further encourage and support delivery of continued improvements at ADP and service level. It is anticipated that all 30 ADPs will participate. On site activity is likely to commence in March 2016 with a national overview report completed by the end of 2016. The Care Inspectorate will also provide brief, customised feedback to each ADP in order to help build their capacity for self-evaluation.

Appendix 1: Scrutiny plan

Scrutiny body	Scrutiny activity	Date
Audit Scotland	Audit Scotland has three planned performance audits covering local government in 2016/17 focusing on early learning and childcare, self-directed support and equal pay.	Dates to be determined
Care Inspectorate	The Care Inspectorate will undertake Validated Self-Evaluation (VSE) activity with Alcohol and Drug Partnerships with a national overview report completed by the end of 2016.	From March 2016 to December 2016
	The Care Inspectorate will lead joint inspection of services for children and young people, and will also involve participation by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Education Scotland and HMICS. These inspections are part of the Care Inspectorate's wider planned programme of national scrutiny work.	Second and third quarters of 2016/17
Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)	SHR will monitor the council's progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in relation to aspects of tenant satisfaction, rent collection, rent arrears, non-emergency repairs, repeat applications for homelessness and access to temporary and emergency accommodation. The council will submit quarterly progress reports in relation to its proposed improvement actions and their outcomes. This will be followed by meetings with council officials.	Quarterly
	SHR will publish the findings of its thematic inquiry work completed during 2015/16. It will carry out further thematic inquiries during 2016/17. SHR will also review the Charter data submitted by landlords and carry out data accuracy visits during the second quarter of 2016/17. If the council is to be involved in a thematic inquiry or a data accuracy visit SHR will confirm this directly with the council and the LAN lead.	Dates and councils to be determined


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A summary of local government strategic scrutiny activity

This report is available in PDF and RTF formats,
along with a podcast summary at:

www.audit-scotland.gov.uk 

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