

Shared risk assessment: Assurance and improvement plan 2011–14

Stirling Council



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Assurance and Improvement Plan

Update 2011–14

Introduction

1. The Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP) for Stirling Council was published in July 2010. It set out the planned scrutiny activity for the council for the period from April 2010 to March 2013. Planned scrutiny was proportionate, based on an assessment of scrutiny risks.
2. In early 2011 the local area network (LAN) undertook an interim refresh of the AIP. It considered the implications of new evidence emerging from scrutiny activity, the council's own information and other readily available data on its assessment of risk and future scrutiny plans. This report summarises the outcomes of this exercise. Appendix 1 provides an updated timetable of planned scrutiny for the period April 2011 to March 2014.
3. Over the past year, the council has continued to make improvements in its arrangements for delivering services to its citizens. This has reduced risk and uncertainty in a number of areas, although concerns relating to services to protect children have emerged following a multi-agency inspection. The LAN has recognised the council's commitment to continuous improvement. We believe the council is well placed to manage the challenges posed by the financial context, although some uncertainty remains about the future pace of change.

Review of 2010-11 planned activity

4. Scrutiny during 2010-11 was largely completed in line with the plan set out in the AIP. SWIA carried out an inspection of social work services in prisons which included services provided at Cornton Vale. SWIA also conducted a follow-up inspection in September 2010 following their 2009 performance inspection. A child protection inspection, piloting a combined inspection approach with the Care Commission's reviews of fostering and adoption services, was carried out in March 2010.

Risk assessment changes

5. Overall, the LAN recognised that improvement had been achieved in a number of areas, reducing risk and uncertainty for a number of the issues previously highlighted. However, the LAN recognises that serious concerns have emerged from a multi-agency inspection of services to protect children.
6. Key areas where risk and uncertainty were considered to have reduced included:

- Environment – uncertainty over future progress in delivering on this strategic priority has reduced with outcome indicators showing a generally positive direction of travel over the medium term. However, the condition of the roads network remains an area of uncertainty. This has been an area of priority investment in recent years, and the council considers the road network condition to have stabilised as a result, but the Statutory Performance Indicator measuring the percentage of the roads network that should be considered for maintenance continues to rank Stirling’s roads in the lowest quartile for Scottish councils.
 - Inclusive society – performance indicators on participation and responsibility are largely on or near target; HMIE’s inspection evidence confirms that early years provision continues to be a strength in the council’s approach to addressing the inequalities in the lives of children and families; the **HMIE Post School Psychological Service visit noted the significant work done by Educational Psychology Services** to support vulnerable young people in relation to post school transition. HMIE will review positive destinations data annually with the education service.
 - Partnership working – evidence of effective partnership working was available in some specific areas, and shared management of education and social work services across Stirling and Clackmannanshire is being introduced. Partnership working in some areas such as child protection could be improved. In advance of planned audit activity in relation to more strategic aspects of partnership working this remains an area of uncertainty.
 - Sustainability – most outcome indicators are on or around target and showing an improving trend. The Carbon Management Plan has delivered a two per cent reduction in emissions since the 2006-07 baseline. However, street lighting emissions have increased year on year and there has been a significant increase in emissions from buildings as new properties such as The Peak have been added to the council’s estate. Internal audit have recommended a review of the Carbon Management Plan and its projects as a priority.
 - Equalities – the council has approved its gender equality scheme 2010-13 and associated action plan and the role, remit and membership of the council’s Diversity Working Group has recently been reviewed to allow a better focus on the priorities within the Equalities and Diversity agenda, including the development of a Single Equality Scheme for the council.
7. Following the Child Protection 2 inspection, it was considered that risk had increased significantly in social care. Several areas of concern were identified and follow through inspections have been scheduled to look at progress in making improvements.

National risk priorities

The protection and welfare of vulnerable people (children and adults)

8. As a result of the Child Protection 2 inspection the LAN considers that risk has increased significantly in relation to the protection and welfare of children. SWIA’s follow-up inspection indicated the need for further improvements in relation to children and families and is consistent with the conclusions of HMIE’s child protection inspection. However, SWIA’s follow up inspection also noted progress in

addressing previous recommendations for improvement in services for vulnerable people, including: progress in modernising care services for older people, leading to shifts in the balance of care; progress in modernising services for adults with learning disabilities; some progress in improving outcomes for young people leaving the care of the authority; improvement in professional leadership.

9. The Care Commission has inspected all registered care services in line with their Regulatory Support Assessment and has reported positively on the quality of these services, although a small number of services have been awarded lower grades. The interim head of social care is aware of the Care Commission concerns regarding some services and is implementing improvements.
10. This scrutiny priority will be considered further by the child protection interim and full follow through inspections scheduled for 2011-12 and as part of the **Initial Scrutiny Level Assessment (ISLA) review planned by SCSWIS.**

Assuring public money is being used properly

11. The annual audit has confirmed that at the corporate level, the council has appropriate arrangements in place to help prevent and detect fraud, inappropriate conduct and corruption. The council has consistently received an unqualified audit opinion on its financial statements. No significant concerns are noted for this national priority.

The council's response to the challenging financial environment

12. Like all public sector organisations the council faces significant financial pressures as a result of the economic downturn and the outcome of the national spending review. The council has been proactive in preparing financial plans and its change programme has been tasked with delivering wide-ranging, sustainable efficiencies across the council's services for the financial years 2011-12 to 2013-14. This is managed through eight workstreams: costs of employment; education; social care; procurement; property; charges; transport; and shared services.
13. A budget gap of £8.5 million has been identified for 2011-12 following the announcement of the Scottish Government's budget proposals. The council is taking a prudent approach and maintaining a savings target of £10 million per year for 2011-12 to 2013-14. Progress of the budget workstreams established to help deliver a sustainable medium-term financial strategy for the council is regularly reported to elected members.
14. Stirling Council is well placed to address this risk, but it is acknowledged that the financial climate may impact on the council's ability to deliver its outcome targets and maintain service performance into the future. The extent of this is currently uncertain and will be kept under review by LAN members.

Scrutiny plan changes

15. The individual exercises included in the forward scrutiny plan for the council are generally consistent with that previously established. Increased risk in relation to child protection has resulted in interim and full follow through inspections of this area being programmed for May 2011 and March 2012.

16. The reduction in risk in other areas summarised above will have the effect of narrowing the scope of a number of other exercises. The timing of a number of exercises has also been amended. Key changes are:

- It had been planned that the Scottish Housing Regulator would verify the council's plans to fulfil its statutory obligations relating to unintentionally homeless people by 2012. This was delayed in agreement with the council to allow for the implementation of the new housing management system and to enable work to be fully coordinated with a wider self-evaluation of the homelessness service;
- The scope of the council's BV2 audit planned for 2011-12 will be narrower than envisaged previously, recognising a reduction in the areas of uncertainty and improvements in arrangements for self-evaluation. The overall aims of the audit will remain as described last year. Other changes to the scope include:
 - a greater focus on performance in maintaining the roads network
 - coverage of equalities and sustainability will focus on the impact of improvements made in these areas.

The timing of the audit has been delayed in agreement with the council and onsite work **started in April 2011.**

17. Stirling Council and Clackmannanshire Council have agreed to appoint a shared director of education and director of social work from 31st March 2011. Detailed arrangements are currently being developed for the operation of the services under shared management. As arrangements develop over time, the LAN will consider whether integrated scrutiny of both councils would be appropriate for these services in the longer term.

Appendix 1 Summary of scrutiny activity

Stirling Council Scrutiny Plan		2011-12 (Year 1)											
Scrutiny activity	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
Best Value 2 audit													
Audit Scotland Fire and Rescue Best Value audit													
Child protection interim and full follow through inspections including Adoption and Fostering													
SCSWIS Initial Scrutiny Level Assessment (ISLA) (tbc)													
SCSWIS Post- ISLA scrutiny work (tbc)													
2012-13 (Year 2)													
Issues for scrutiny/improvement				Scrutiny bodies/council potential involvement									
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Follow up of Best Value improvement plan (Quarter 2) ▪ Housing inspection follow up – self assessment to demonstrate progress following improvement plan process (Quarter 2) 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ External auditor ▪ Scottish Housing Regulator 									
2013-14 (Year 3)													
Issues for scrutiny/improvement				Scrutiny bodies/council potential involvement									
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Follow up of Best Value improvement plan (Quarter 2) 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ External auditor 									

Footnotes

- The focus of the AIP 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. 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. HMIE, through the District Inspector, will continue to support and challenge Education Services regularly and as appropriate.

- The new body, Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS), will be in place from April 1st 2011 and will regulate care services and inspect social work services based on the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010.
- SCSWIS will undertake supported self evaluation work with councils during 2011. Planning is currently taking place and SCSWIS will contact LAN leads when the detail of the fieldwork is established.
- HMIE and Learning and Teaching Scotland are to form a new quality and improvement agency on 1 July 2011.
- The Accounts Commission has decided to undertake Best Value audits of Fire & Rescue Services and Authorities during 2011. Planning is currently taking place and Audit Scotland will contact LAN leads when the detail of the fieldwork is established.
- Audit Scotland also undertakes a series of national performance audit studies. Field visits to individual local authorities often form part of this work. When a visit is planned to a council this will be communicated to the council through the LAN lead.
- 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 timing of the audits will be confirmed through the LAN lead.