

Shared risk assessment: Assurance and improvement plan 2011–14

West Lothian Council



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Assurance and Improvement Plan

Update: 2011 - 14

Introduction and summary

1. The Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP) for West Lothian Council was published in July 2010, setting out the planned scrutiny activity for the council for the period April 2010 to March 2013 based on a risk assessment. As part of the process of on-going scrutiny, the local area network (LAN) has revised its assessment of risks to produce an updated AIP and reconsidered the level of scrutiny required for the council. The appendix provides a revised timetable for proposed scrutiny activity.
2. West Lothian Council continues to make good progress against the majority of the outcomes defined in the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) while delivering a range of quality services. Once again no significant scrutiny risks have been identified by the local area network (LAN) scrutiny bodies.

Areas of on-going risk and uncertainty

3. **Improving the health and wellbeing of communities.** This strategic priority remains an area of uncertainty as a number of the council's initiatives are at an early stage and the impact is not yet known. The LAN will monitor progress in this area for the 2012 shared risk assessment (SRA) process.

Risk assessment changes

4. **Making the economy stronger.** This strategic priority has been reassessed from no significant scrutiny risks to an area of uncertainty as the economic downturn may constrain the council's ability to achieve the agreed outcomes. The planned re-opening of the Bathgate – Airdrie rail line in December 2010 is expected to attract new employers and widen the prospective labour market resulting in a boost to the economy. However the impact of this is not yet clear. The LAN will monitor the impact of this on the outcomes and indicators for the 2012 SRA process.
5. **Performance management and improvement.** The council has introduced new performance management and reporting arrangements. An improvement strategy 2011/13 is in place and the use of strategy mapping to link the national outcomes in the single outcome agreement to the council's key service activities is currently being piloted. These changes are designed to strengthen the existing arrangements.
6. The council also plans to use members of the Citizens Panel to identify improvements in the public performance reporting information, which currently is not easily accessible due to its length and

complexity. As the positive impact of these new performance management structures is not yet proven Audit Scotland will monitor them as part of the annual audit process to confirm that the anticipated improvements are delivered.

- 7. Financial position.** No scrutiny risks have been identified with the council's financial management processes. The council has been proactive in preparing financial plans and identifying savings to reflect the reduced local government settlements. As at 31 March 2010 the council reported a general fund balance of £10.14 million, with £7.51 million earmarked for specific commitments leaving the unallocated general fund balance of £2.63 million. The council recently agreed to increase the target minimum general fund balance from £2 million to £2.5 million, however this equates to less than one per cent of net operating expenditure. In the context of this lean financial position, and the level of savings to be delivered by all councils, we consider that it will be difficult for the council to maintain its financial position and this is therefore an area of uncertainty for us. Audit Scotland will continue to monitor the financial position of the council during the annual audit process.

National risk priorities

- 8. The protection and welfare of vulnerable people (children and adults) including access to opportunities.** The LAN has not identified any significant scrutiny risks for the council for this national risk priority. Inspections carried out by the Care Commission in 2010 note that the majority of services are maintaining consistently good grades and that the council compares favourably with other local authorities over all four quality themes. The Joint Inspection of Services to Protect Children carried out in 2010 was extremely positive and HMIE was confident that services will be able to make any improvements and do not intend to visit further in connection with their inspection.
- 9. Assuring public money is being used properly.** Assurance on the financial position of the council is obtained through the annual audit process and Best Value audits conducted by Audit Scotland. The council has completed efficiency reviews of all services and has identified and implemented significant efficiencies. The LAN has not identified any significant scrutiny risks for this national risk priority.
- 10. How councils are responding to the challenging financial environment.** The council has been proactive in preparing financial plans and identifying savings to reflect the reduced local government settlements. The council has developed a contingency strategy to address the forecast budget gap of £45 million for the three years to 2013/14. In recognition of the difficult decisions needed the council completed a detailed community consultation exercise "Tough Choices". The council continues to be proactive in responding to the current financial environment and the LAN has therefore concluded that there are no significant scrutiny risks for this area.

Scrutiny plan changes

- 11.** Some changes to the scrutiny plans for 2011/12 have been identified. Best value audits of both Fire and Rescue services and Lothian and Borders Police will be undertaken during the year, along with a

SCSWIS adoption and fostering review. The timing of the adoption and fostering review has still to be confirmed. . The details are included in Appendix 1.

Review of 2010/11 planned activity

12. The 2010/11 scrutiny plan has been substantively completed in accordance with the timetable reported. The ISLA that was planned by SWIA for October 2010 was delayed and was rescheduled for completion by the end of March 2011.
13. In addition West Lothian was one of the councils covered by the themed multi-agency inspection of services for people with learning disabilities which was reported in December 2010.

Appendix 1 Summary of scrutiny activity

West Lothian Council Scrutiny Plan	2011-12 (Year 1)											
Scrutiny activity	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Audit Scotland Fire and Rescue Best Value audit												
SCSWIS Adoption and Fostering (tbc)												
SCSWIS ISLA (tbc)												
BV Audit of Lothian and Borders Police.												
2012-13 (Year 2)												
Indicative scrutiny activity	Potential scrutiny bodies involved											
Scrutiny arrangements to be confirmed following establishment of SCSWIS in April 2011	SCSWIS											
2013-14 (Year 3)												
Indicative scrutiny activity	Potential scrutiny bodies involved											
Scrutiny arrangements to be confirmed following establishment of SCSWIS in April 2011	SCSWIS											

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 the 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 of 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.