

Falkirk Council

Local Scrutiny Plan

2017/18



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Introduction

1. This local scrutiny plan sets out the planned scrutiny activity in Falkirk Council (the Council) during 2017/18. 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 2017/18, which is available on the Audit Scotland website.

Scrutiny risks

3. The LAN's conclusion from this year's shared risk assessment is that no new scrutiny risks have been identified which require specific scrutiny work during 2017/18. The LAN, however, notes the findings of the Accounts Commission in the Best Value follow-up report published on 1 December 2016 which reported that while the council has taken steps to address the issues raised in the last Best Value report in 2015, the pace of improvement remains slow.
4. Key areas for improvement reported in the Best Value follow-up are that the council needs to:
 - identify and clearly communicate its strategic priorities and ensure that all activity is aligned with these priorities
 - review the process for preparing the budget to ensure all costs and income are more accurately anticipated
 - develop its approach to medium and longer-term financial planning which:
 - takes into account uncertainties around future funding and income
 - includes scenario planning for a range of options
 - ensure all improvement activities are aligned with strategic priorities and the budget-setting process, and that senior officers support the improvement programme

- manager, by providing strategic leadership and direction to deliver the change required
- ensure that workforce reductions are informed by detailed workforce plans and that budgets reflect any planned workforce changes
 - provide timely and complete performance information to councillors and the public to promote effective challenge and drive improvement, and introduce tracked action plans to ensure that improvement happens where poor performance is identified.
5. The Accounts Commission has asked for an update by the Controller of Audit by the end of 2017. This will be undertaken by the appointed auditor through the annual audit and the revised approach to Best Value, working with Audit Scotland.
 6. To assess the risk to social landlord services the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) has reviewed and compared the 2015/16 performance of all Scottish social landlords to identify the weakest performing landlords. It found that Falkirk is in the bottom quartile for all social landlords in relation to: overall satisfaction; tenants who feel the landlord is good at keeping them informed; tenants satisfied with the quality of their home; time to complete non-emergency repairs; anti-social behaviour cases resolved in target timescales; time to re-let properties; and percentage of gross rent arrears of rent due. In addition, aspects of its homelessness service such as lost contact with homeless people and closure of its homelessness duty to house cases are areas where improvement is required.
 7. The council is aware of these areas of weaker performance. It has already taken steps to address this and has reported improving performance.

Planned scrutiny activity

8. As shown in Appendix 1, the council will be subject to a range of risk-based and nationally driven scrutiny activity during 2017/18. For some of their scrutiny activity in 2017/18, 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.
9. 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 establishments by Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate, respectively. Education Scotland are also monitoring the potential impact of staffing changes in education, but without conducting specific scrutiny in this area.
10. Audit Scotland will carry out a programme of performance audits during 2017/18 and individual audit and inspection agencies will continue to monitor developments in key areas of council activity and will provide support and challenge as appropriate. This will help to inform future assessment of scrutiny risk.

Appendix 1: Scrutiny plan

Scrutiny body	Scrutiny activity	Date
Ernst & Young / Audit Scotland	The appointed external auditor (Ernst & Young LLP) and Audit Scotland will carry out audit work during 2017 in response to the latest findings by the Accounts Commission in the Best Value follow-up report on the council in December 2016. The results of this audit work will be reported to the Accounts Commission by the end of 2017.	Ongoing through April – October 2017
Audit Scotland	Audit Scotland plans to undertake performance audit work in a range of areas covering local government during 2017/18. These include ALEOs, city deals, children's mental health and health and social care integration. Any engagement with individual councils is still to be determined. Details of future audit work are available on the Audit Scotland website here .	2017/18 Specific engagement with councils to be determined
Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Improvement Scotland	The Care Inspectorate will lead on thematic activity in the areas of adult support and protection and self-directed support, working with a range of scrutiny partners. Decisions have not yet been made about which areas will be involved.	
Education Scotland	The authority has spent all of its allocated Scottish Attainment Challenge funding. Plans for taking forward the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) are under discussion. Educational Psychological Services (EPS) inspection programme.	October 2017
Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)	The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) will monitor the council's progress in addressing the housing service weaknesses identified in this plan. It will review the council's quarterly performance management reports and meet council officials as necessary. SHR will publish the findings of its thematic inquiry work into gas safety and repairs completed during 2016/17. It may carry out further thematic inquiries during 2017/18. SHR will also review the Scottish Social Housing Charter data submitted by landlords and carry out data accuracy visits during the second quarter of 2017/18. Where councils are to be involved in a thematic inquiry or a data accuracy visit, the SHR will confirm this directly with the council and the LAN lead.	

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A summary of local government strategic scrutiny activity

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