

Shared risk assessment: Assurance and improvement plan 2011–14

Highland Council



The Highland Council

Assurance and Improvement Plan

Update 2011-14

Summary

1. The Shared Risk Assessment (SRA) process for 2011-12 is to revisit the Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP) for 2010-11 and update risk assessments and proposed scrutiny plans taking account of any new evidence. As in the previous assessment, no areas of significant scrutiny risk have been identified overall by the local area network (LAN) scrutiny bodies.

Areas of on-going risks and uncertainties

2. **Housing and property services.** In August 2010, the council provided the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) with a presentation on service delivery performance. SHR will be meeting with the council in quarter four to follow-up on the initial discussions on service delivery with more focused work planned during 2011. Until this work is concluded the LAN do not have a full picture of the council's performance in this area.
3. **Social work services.** The council is currently working with NHS Highland to deliver services in a different way. The council will be responsible for children's services and NHS Highland for adult community care. However the new governance arrangements between the council and NHS Highland to manage these services are not yet finalised. This joint approach is at a very early stage and SWIA will monitor the impact of these changes on services.
4. SWIA are currently carrying out an Initial Scrutiny Level Assessment (ISLA) in the council's social work service. The evaluation of this work will determine the level of scrutiny to be applied in 2011. Information gathered so far has identified that a key area of concern remains community care services, particularly for older people. The council remains one of the poorest performing local authorities in relation to key performance indicators such as the number of older people aged 65+ receiving home care per 1,000 population and the percentage of older people receiving home care as a percentage of long-term care. This aspect of the service will be subject to detailed scrutiny work in 2011.

Risk assessment changes

Areas where risk assessments have changed as a result of updated evidence are as follows:

5. **Healthier Highlands.** The overall assessment in this outcome area remains that overall there are no significant scrutiny risks. However as noted above SWIA have identified continuing concerns regarding shifting the balance of care for older people in Highland, which will be subject to detailed scrutiny work in 2011.

6. **Education, Culture & Sport (ECS).** The overall assessment on this service remains that overall there are no significant scrutiny risks. However there was a mixed picture in the inspections of learning communities carried out by HMIE from August 2008 until September 2010. Main points for improvement are related to improving the quality of partnership working. Joint working between HMIE and the council is scheduled during 2011 to identify improvement actions in this specific area.
7. The LAN also noted that there have been a number of changes at senior levels in ECS which could impact on the way that the service performs in the future.
8. **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.
9. During 2009/10 the council's general fund decreased by £6.7 million to a balance of £22.3 million at 31 March 2010 which equates to 3.9 per cent of the council's net operating expenditure. Of this balance £8.9 million has been earmarked for specific purposes leaving an unallocated balance of £13.3 million, which is 2.3 per cent of the council's revenue budget. This is within the council's aim of keeping up to 3 per cent of the revenue budget as a contingency in non earmarked balances. The high level of earmarking also provides some protection to the council's overall reserve position for future years. However, given the scale of the savings to be delivered by all councils, the ability of the council to maintain its financial position into the future is yet to be proven 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

10. **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. However as noted above the council is currently working with NHS Highland to deliver services in a different way. The impact on services will be monitored by SWIA.
11. A review on fostering and adoption services was completed by the Care Commission in November 2010. Both services achieved a 5 (Very Good) for Quality of Care and Support which was the only theme examined at this inspection. This was a reduction in the overall 6 (Excellent) grade from 2009/10 for both services.
12. **Assuring public money is being used properly.** Assurance on the financial position of the council is obtained through the annual audit process conducted by Audit Scotland and best value reviews. In May 2010 a BV2 report on the council was published, which concluded that the council's pace of change and direction of travel are positive and the council is demonstrating that it is improving well and the council is well placed to deliver future improvement. A number of areas for improvement were identified in the report. For example the council needs to have more effective arrangements in place and be more consistent and challenging in its use of options appraisal to assess whether it is achieving Best Value for local communities and explaining the choices made. Whilst there are no

significant scrutiny risks identified, Audit Scotland will monitor actions put in place by the council to address the areas of improvement as part of the annual audit.

13. **How councils are responding to the challenging financial environment.** As noted above the council has been proactive in preparing financial plans and has shown a good understanding of the financial challenges it faces - aggregate savings of £76 million will be required by 2012/13. It has initiated a significant public budget consultation exercise to gauge public views on ways to address budget challenges and to assist in service prioritization. Robust budgeting procedures are in place including rolling scrutiny meetings with services to ensure suitable steps are being taken to identify and take forward options for savings. The council is promoting a strong efficiency agenda across services and has a Corporate Improvement Programme running with nine initiatives to generate operational savings. It actively participates in the Government's Shared Services agenda across a number of initiatives. 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. However, it is acknowledged that the financial climate will 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

Review of 2010/11 planned activity

14. The 2010/11 scrutiny plan has been substantively completed in accordance with the timetable reported. During 2010 the SHR met with the council to determine the type of focused work to be undertaken. In August 2010, the council provided the SHR with a presentation on the housing and property service's delivery performance. The Regulator now plans to meet with the council by 31 March 2011 to follow-up on these initial discussions.
15. SWIA are currently undertaking the ISLA which was scheduled for the last quarter of 2010. The evaluation of this work will determine the level of scrutiny to be applied in 2011. This will include the balance of care for older people in the Highlands.
16. A prison based social work review was carried out in May 2010 by SWIA. A report was issued to the council in September 2010 and an action plan to address the areas for improvement has been agreed with the council.
17. The Care Commission completed planned work on fostering and adoption services in November 2010. Both services achieved a 5 (Very Good) for Quality of Care and Support which was the only theme examined at this inspection. This represents a reduction in grade from 2009/10 which was a 6 (Excellent) for both services.

Scrutiny plan changes

18. For 2011/12 the SHR intend to follow up their previous year's discussions with a more focused piece of work in some service delivery areas. This is to include compliance with the SHQS and 2012 homeless requirements.

19. HMIE identified common weaknesses from inspections of learning communities carried out from August 2008 until September 2010. As a result of the 2010 validated self-evaluation work the council is aware of the need for action in this area and joint work between the council and HMIE is scheduled to take place in April 2011 on this improvement area.

Appendix 1 Summary of scrutiny activity

Highland Council Scrutiny Plan	2011-12											
Scrutiny activity	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
SHR focused review on service delivery areas including SHQS and homelessness												
HMIE to undertake joint working with education culture and sport services regarding learning communities with report requested from the council.												
Audit Scotland Fire and Rescue												
SCSWIS (formerly SWIA) focused review on service delivery following completion of the current ISLA work (TBC).												
2012-13												
Indicative scrutiny activity for rolling third year	Potential scrutiny bodies involved											
Initial Scrutiny Level Assessment (ISLA) review (timing to be confirmed)	SCSWIS											
2013-14												
Indicative scrutiny activity for rolling third year	Potential scrutiny bodies involved											
Initial Scrutiny Level Assessment (ISLA) review	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 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 Highland Council s benefits performance audit was carried out during 2010. The timing of any future audits will be confirmed through the LAN lead.