

Shared risk assessment: Assurance and improvement plan 2011–14

North Lanarkshire Council



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Assurance and Improvement Plan

Update 2011–14

Introduction

1. The Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP) for North Lanarkshire 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. The local area network (LAN) met in January 2011 to update the AIP, review previous assessments and consider the level of scrutiny required for the council. This update provides a revised timetable for proposed reviews and includes a brief report which summarises any changes to risk assessments, scrutiny responses and illustrations of good practice.

2. The updated AIP draws on evidence from a range of sources, including:
 - The annual report to the Controller of Audit and elected members for 2009/10.
 - The supporting evidence provided by the council.
 - Evidence gathered from HMIE, SWIA, SHR and the Care Commission (including published inspection reports and other supporting evidence).

3. North Lanarkshire Council continues to deliver effective services. We are confident in the council's ability to manage identified areas of uncertainty. SWIA's overall appraisal is that social work services deliver well. HMIE inspections reports show a positive picture. A joint HMIE and Care Commission inspection of services to protect children and fostering arrangements was also positive. We believe that the council is performing well and has the capacity to achieve further improvements in service delivery.

Areas of no change in risks and uncertainties

The table below sets out the areas in which the LAN evaluated that there was no change in the risks and uncertainties in North Lanarkshire Council's processes and activities.

Area	LAN evaluation	2011/12 Update
Health and wellbeing	No significant risks	There has been positive progress in maintaining and developing standards of provision, with positive progress in relation to most Single Outcome Agreement objectives.
Community safety	No significant risks	There has been positive progress in maintaining and developing standards of provision. The planned scrutiny undertaken by SWIA found positive provision overall.

Sustainable environment	No significant risks	The Single Outcome Agreement Performance report shows performance has been sustained. Recycling rates are improving and are better than the Scottish average.
Lifelong learning	No significant risks	Some improvement is evident in aspects of performance in SQA examinations at S4 to S6. The council has undertaken strong and effective work in implementing the <i>More Choices, More Chances</i> initiative to support vulnerable young people into positive destinations.
Regeneration	Areas of uncertainty	Council acknowledges that the economic downturn is having a disproportionate effect on North Lanarkshire. Uncertainties remain regarding the impact of the development of Ravenscraig.
Council owned improvement areas	No significant risks	There has been positive progress in maintaining and developing standards of provision. The council's Service and People First Transformation Programme shows a sound strategic approach to implementing change and service efficiencies.
Education	No significant risks	There has been positive progress in maintaining and developing standards of provision. The Validated Self Evaluation carried out by HMIE and North Lanarkshire Council showed a strong capacity to improve further. The council have continued to build and extend their very successful <i>Schools and Centres 21</i> programme.
Social Work	No significant risks	There has been positive progress in maintaining and developing standards of provision. Agreed scrutiny carried out by HMIE and SWIA showed sound practice, with some areas for development.
Housing	Areas of uncertainty	North Lanarkshire Council and SHR agreed to postpone proposed scrutiny work from February 2011 until May 2011.
Corporate services	No significant risks	There has been positive progress in maintaining and developing standards of provision. Performance in relevant areas has been sustained.
Environmental services	No significant risks	The Corporate Performance Report shows there has been a slight decline in waste PIs, but two remain above the Scottish average.
Regulatory services	No significant risks	The Corporate Performance Report shows a mixed picture, with some PIs showing a slight decline, some remaining static and some improving.
Cultural services	No significant risks	There has been positive progress in maintaining and developing standards of provision. The Corporate Performance Report shows all relevant PIs improving.
Roads and street lighting	No significant risks	The Corporate Performance Report shows two out of three PIs improving.
Vision and strategic direction	No significant risks	There is a continuing positive evaluation of the overall quality of leadership and direction. North Lanarkshire Council's Service and People First Transformation Programme demonstrates an effective strategic approach to organisational change and the implementation of efficiencies. The Validated Self Evaluation of education provision carried out by HMIE and North Lanarkshire Council identified very strong leadership and direction.
Partnership working and community leadership	No significant risks	There has been positive progress in maintaining and developing standards of provision. Partnership working with the Clyde Valley Partnership is progressing.

Community engagement	No significant risks	There has been an improvement in the frequency of the residents' survey. The Community Engagement Strategy provides evidence which informs decision making.
Governance and accountability	No significant risks	The council remains open and accountable with effective scrutiny through a Scrutiny Panel and an Audit and Governance panel. The council makes effective use of citizen panel focus groups and staff input as part of the council's approach to planning and reporting on performance.
Performance management and improvement	No significant risks	Performance arrangements remain sound and the Service and People First Transformation Programme is developing well.
Use of resources- Finance Budget setting	No significant risks	The council continues to have a strategic, well managed approach to managing budgets and identifying possible savings.
Use of resources- People	No significant risks	There has been some improvement in staff absence figures overall. In the education service, there has been an increase in teacher absence and this remains above the national average.
Use of resources- Assets	No significant risks	The relevant Corporate Performance Report PIs are improving. They are better than the Scottish average but remain below the targets set.
Use of resources- Procurement	No significant risks	North Lanarkshire Council were assessed as being conformant in the Procurement Capability Assessment. The performance is above the Scottish average, but there remain areas for improvement.
Use of resources- ICT	No significant risks	The council have secured a new ICT service delivery partner in 2010 and have used ICT improvements to improve customer access to services.
Sustainability	No significant risks	The Single Outcome Agreement report and Corporate Performance Report show a sustained performance from a sound level.
Equality	No significant risks	The Corporate Performance Report shows improvements in all relevant PIs.

National risk priorities

North Lanarkshire Council's position on topics identified as being of national importance is as follows:

4. **The protection and welfare of vulnerable people (children and adults) including access to opportunities** – There are no significant risks in this area. The HMIE and Care Commission inspections of services to protect children and of fostering adoption arrangements showed a positive provision. North Lanarkshire Council's work in assisting vulnerable young people as part of the *More Choices, More Chances* initiative continues to be a very strong area. The percentage of young people who have positive post school destinations is above comparator authorities.
5. **Assuring public money is being used properly** – There are no significant risks in this area. The council has sound financial planning arrangements which work effectively. There are annual and longer term financial plans in place. The council's Service and People First Transformation Programme shows an effective approach to managing change and efficiencies. The arrangements for scrutiny and audit are sound.

6. **How councils are responding to the challenging financial environment** – In this aspect there are areas of uncertainty. The Comprehensive Spending Review covering public sector expenditure for the period 2011/15 was announced in October 2010 and the Scottish Government responded to it by announcing a single year Scottish budget for 2011/12. This creates an uncertainty over medium term financial planning. 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. There are no significant scrutiny risks in the council's financial management. The council's budget scrutiny arrangements are sound and financial information is appropriately monitored. No additional scrutiny work is planned but the relevant auditors will continue to monitor the financial position of the council.

Scrutiny plan changes

7. North Lanarkshire Council and SHR agreed to postpone proposed scrutiny work, planned for February 2011, until May 2011.
8. As part of the planned scrutiny of services to protect children and young people, HMIE agreed with the Care Commission to offer each area listed for inspection an inspection of Fostering and Adoption Services. This was carried out in November and December 2010 as part of the HMIE inspection rather than undertaken by the Care Commission separately. North Lanarkshire Council agreed to these arrangements.
9. HMIE were invited by the council to carry out a validated self-evaluation with education services. This was not a scrutiny response to any identified risks. A joint report was published in July 2010.

Review of 2010/11 Planned Activity

10. The planned HMICS and Audit Scotland Best Value Audit and Inspection of Strathclyde Police Force and Board took place in January 2011.
11. The planned SWIA inspection of prison based social work services was carried out in May 2010. This was a very positive report, which found sound leadership and management and effective services to prisoners.

Appendix 1 Summary of scrutiny activity

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL SCRUTINY PLAN	2011-12											
	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Scrutiny activity year 1												
Planned ISLA inspection by Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland												
SCSWIS post ISLA (tbc)												
SHR postponed review of identified areas of uncertainty												
Audit Scotland Fire and Rescue												
	2012-13											
Scrutiny activity year 2	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
No scrutiny planned												
	2013-14											
Indicative scrutiny activity for rolling third year	Potential scrutiny bodies involved											
No scrutiny planned												

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.