

Shared risk assessment: Assurance and improvement plan 2011–14

Scottish Borders Council



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Assurance and Improvement Plan

Update 2011–14

Introduction

1. The Shared Risk Assessment (SRA) process for 2011/12 is to revisit the Assurance and Improvement Plan for 2010/11 to update risk assessments and to propose scrutiny plans, taking account of any new evidence.

Summary

2. Over the past year the council has continued to progress with service objectives, in the form of its Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) and to progress with internal service redesign through the Business Transformation Programme and a series of strategic reviews. From a collation of updated evidence and discussion across all members of the Local Area Network (LAN), positive developments were noted in a number of areas, in particular in the areas of: improving the health and well being of the Scottish Borders population; in the provision of homecare for people aged over 65; and in education and lifelong learning.

Risk assessment changes

3. Areas where risk assessments have changed as a result of updated evidence or a change in circumstances are detailed below. In the previous assessment, no area of significant scrutiny risk was identified. However, in light of the substantial reductions in government funding for all public sector areas, we have identified 'use of resources' as an area of significant risk. Further explanation is given in paragraph 7.
4. **SOA priority: reduce alcohol related problems among young people and adults and the harmful impact on communities in the Scottish Borders.** The 2010/11 AIP identified this SOA priority as an area where no significant risks had been identified. Looking at recent evidence, eg: the number of individuals accessing specialist alcohol services has decreased and is below target; the number of brief alcohol interventions whilst going up is below target; and data on teenage drinking is only collected every four years, we have concluded that this is, from the perspective of the LAN, an area of uncertainty. Whilst no specific scrutiny work is proposed in the three year plan, SCSWS will gain an understanding as to how the council is monitoring progress in this area through the Initial Scrutiny Level Assessment (ISLA) scheduled for 2011/12.

5. **SOA priority: develop greater community resilience within Scottish Borders.** The 2010/11 AIP identified this SOA priority as an area of uncertainty. Through review of SBC material and from the contribution of LAN members there is now considerably more evidence to illustrate the extent to which the council is: tackling significant inequalities in Scottish society; striving to ensure well-designed, sustainable places where people can access the services and amenities they require; striving to ensure there are strong resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others; and striving to ensure looked after and accommodated children and young people have the same life chances as others. Whilst there is a mix of positive and negative evidence, on balance it is positive and therefore the LAN concludes no significant risks have been identified in this area.
6. **Corporate assessment area: performance management and improvement.** The 2010/11 AIP identified this corporate assessment area as an area of uncertainty. Through review of SBC material and from the contribution of LAN members there is now considerably more evidence to illustrate how the council is addressing these areas: SOA progress reports are placed on the SBC web-site, an internal group is working to improve the quality and robustness of performance measures, the Performance Monitoring Panel is monitoring progress on 59 priorities in 4 topics, and reporting to PMP has become more effective. As a result we consider there is no significant scrutiny risk in this area.
7. **Corporate assessment area: use of resources.** The 2010/11 AIP identified this corporate assessment area as one where no significant risks had been identified. During the year the impact of the decisions of central government on local government funding has become more apparent: all councils in Scotland are revising their revenue and capital financial plans downwards. The council has demonstrated a good understanding of the financial challenges it faces and has been pro-active in preparing financial plans to manage budget reductions. However, in common with a handful of other Scottish councils, until the creditor status of the council in relation to Icelandic Bank deposits is confirmed there is a risk of further loss of that financial asset. Consequently use of resources has now been identified as an area of significant concern. Use of resources is an area which is routinely reviewed by the local auditor, Audit Scotland, in the course of the annual statutory audit.

Areas of on-going risk and uncertainties

8. Risks and uncertainties in the council's processes and activities which were identified in the 2010/11 AIP and which remain unchanged include: the SOA - Increase connectivity of Scottish Borders, and the Service area – Technical Services. In respect of the former there is evidence of improvement in accessibility of public transport, but in the areas of broadband and the railway project, whilst important milestones have been reached the outcomes have not yet changed from the perspective of users. In respect of the second area, whilst again there is progress, with a

strategic review underway, again there is uncertainty as to the impact on service delivery at this stage.

National risk priorities

9. The LAN is required to give consideration to three 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. Nevertheless areas of concern have been identified, for example: reported rates of domestic abuse have continued upwards; the proportion of children re-registered on the child protection register within two years has increased from three to 13 per cent, the percentage of young people receiving aftercare support who are under 19 and have experienced a period of homelessness fell to ten per cent, well below the target of 32 per cent; and the number of adult service users and carers in receipt of respite services has dropped since 2007/08 and falls short of target. We recognise that due to the nature of these areas it may be that *reporting* of incidents has increased and not the *actual volume* of incidents, and also that due to the small numbers involved, a change in number may well have a disproportionate effect on percentages. None of these matters warrant specific scrutiny work and LAN members will monitor these areas through on-going liaison between link managers and council officers.
11. **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. The council's last best value audit was published in May 2010 and the overall conclusion was positive, stating that the council was *improving well* in its pace and direction of change, and *well-placed* to deliver future improvement. The Accounts Commission carries out a programme of performance audits and SBC has been selected as one of five fieldwork sites for an audit of the planning system. The criteria used for the selection of fieldwork sites included: size and nature of council; nature of planning applications; and type of electronic system used.
12. **How councils are responding to the challenging financial environment.** As captured in previous Reports to Members and the BV2 report, the council has been proactive in preparing financial plans and identifying savings through an extensive business transformation programme which pre-dates the economic recession. However when the Comprehensive Spending Review was announced in October 2010, the Scottish Government responded by announcing a single year Scottish Budget for 2011/12. This creates uncertainty for medium term financial planning and may impact on the council's ability to deliver its outcome targets, maintain service performance and progress capital investment plans in the future. Overall the LAN has concluded this to be an area of uncertainty. As part of the annual audit process Audit Scotland will routinely review the financial position of the council.

Review of 2010/11 planned activity

13. The 2010/11 scrutiny plan has been substantively completed in accordance with 2010/11 AIP; the High Risk Offenders supported self-evaluation will be completed in spring 2011.

Scrutiny plan changes

14. When the first AIP for the council was published in 2010 two areas of scrutiny work were identified for 2011/12: a Child Protection 2 Inspection by SCSWS and an Initial Scrutiny Level Assessment (ISLA) by SCSWS.
15. In refreshing the SRA and AIP, two additional areas have been identified for 2011/12: an on-site scrutiny visits: one by SHR to assess the council's self-assessment of progress in the delivery of its homelessness services, with a particular focus on the homelessness target in 2012, and a self-evaluation process to be validated by HMIE. There will now be an increase to the scope of the Child Protection 2 Inspection to integrate a review of adoption and fostering services. There may be some follow-up by SCSWS as a consequence of the High Risk Offenders Inspection; it is due to conclude in spring 2011.
16. In February 2011 the Accounts Commission approved a programme of Best Value audits covering all eight fire and rescue authorities in Scotland will be carried out during 2011. It is anticipated that the work covering Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue would be carried out towards the end of the year. A Best Value audit of Lothian & Borders Police Board has recently been approved. This may involve interviews with Board members in respective councils. Finally, a series of Housing Benefit audits is now underway across all councils in Scotland. The details are included in Appendix 1.
17. A review of adoption and fostering services has been included in the AIP for 2013/14 (reflecting a two year cyclical pattern).
18. 2011/2012 - HMIE have been invited by the Council to carry out a validated self-evaluation with education services. A report will be published in 2012. This is not a scrutiny response to identified risks.

Appendix 1 – Summary of scrutiny activity

Scottish Borders Scrutiny Plan	Year 1: 2011/12											
Scrutiny activity year 1	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
SCSWIS – Initial Scrutiny Level Assessment (ISLA) review, including progress on self-evaluation, in particular the Transforming Children’s Services programme (tbc)												
SCSWIS post ISLA (tbc)												
SCSWIS – Integrated Child Protection 2 Inspection, including Adoption and Fostering												
SHR – assess progress in the delivery of homelessness services, with a particular focus on the 2012 homelessness target.												
HMIE – validated self-evaluation process												
Lothian and Borders Police Board Best Value audit, Audit Scotland												
Lothian and Borders Fire & Rescue Board Best Value audit, Audit Scotland												
Housing Benefit audit, Audit Scotland												
	Year 2: 2012/13											
Scrutiny activity year 2	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
None identified												
	Year 3: 2013/14											
Indicative scrutiny activity for rolling third year	Potential scrutiny bodies involved											

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.