

Falkirk Council

Local Scrutiny Plan

2015/16



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Introduction

1. This local scrutiny plan sets out the planned scrutiny activity in Falkirk Council during 2015/16. 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 2015/16, which is available on the Audit Scotland website.

Update on Scrutiny Plan 2014/15

3. In the 2014-17 Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP), the LAN concluded that scrutiny was required in the area of governance and accountability. New decision-making structures were agreed by the council in March 2013, and the first meetings under the new structure commenced in May 2013, however, some members declined to participate fully in the new arrangements. The LAN, judging that local governance and scrutiny arrangements could be undermined by this unwillingness to engage in the governance and scrutiny process, proposed that targeted best value audit work should be carried out to establish the effectiveness of the new decision making and scrutiny arrangements. This work was carried out by Audit Scotland at the end of 2014, and focused on whether the council's governance arrangements are working effectively and supporting strategic decision making and scrutiny of service delivery. Findings are due to be reported in the spring of 2015.
4. In the 2014-17 AIP, the LAN also identified the need for scrutiny of the effectiveness of new developments in the council's performance management arrangements. Targeted best value work on how performance management arrangements supported scrutiny of the council's performance was planned, and was carried out in conjunction with the best value audit work noted above. The findings are also expected to be reported in the spring of 2015.
5. In addition to the scrutiny risks identified, the LAN also reported the need for more information to be obtained in connection with weaknesses in the council's housing and

homelessness services. Poorer performing areas included average times to re-let low demand housing, tenancy sustainment and rent arrears among tenants. The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) asked the council to carry out a self assessment covering the identified areas of weaker performance. The resulting submission and improvement plans were considered by the Regulator and discussed with the council in November 2014. No specific scrutiny risks are now evident as the council has an awareness of where improvements are needed and has put plans in place to improve its performance.

6. The LAN noted in the 2014-17 AIP that the Care Inspectorate (CI) and Healthcare Improvement Scotland would be carrying out a joint inspection of health and social work services for older people in the Falkirk area during September/October 2014 as part of their wider programme of national work. The results of this inspection are still to be reported and the CI will provide monitoring and support to achieve any required improvement during 2015/16.
7. Targeted follow up work on two national performance audits was carried out in 2014:
 - The follow up review of the council's response to the audit on *Arms length external organisations* concluded that governance could be improved further if opposition members took up places allocated on ALEO boards.
 - The review of actions taken in response to the audit of *Major capital investment in councils* concluded that the council had made improvements based on the original report, but that there was scope for further improvement.

Progress in achieving improvement will be assessed as part of the 2014/15 annual audit process.

Scrutiny risks

8. **Financial sustainability:** Audit Scotland reported in October 2013 that the council faces a significant challenge in delivering services with resources which continue to reduce. Officers recognise this and that members will face difficult decisions over the medium term on how services are to be delivered.
9. The council's financial position worsened during 2013/14 to the point where it has identified the need to make savings of £46 million over the three years to 2017/18, with a funding gap of £10.5 million to be met in 2014/15. A budget framework document was approved by the council in November 2014 which confirmed that, to achieve the necessary savings, significant contraction in services and reduction in staffing would be required. Consultations are ongoing to consider proposals for savings and these have informed the final budget setting process in February 2015. Of particular concern is the significant overspend being forecast for Social Work Services in the current year (2014/15), however, despite the demographic pressures on social work budgets, management do not anticipate further overspends going forward.

10. £30.8 million in savings and other measures for the upcoming two years have been identified, and agreed by the council at its budget meeting held 11 February, leaving a residual budget gap of £15.2 million for 2017/18.
11. To support its future financial plans the council has recognised the need for a multi-year approach to budgeting. A review by the council of its reserves strategy has been completed, and the strategy in place confirmed as fit for purpose in a report to Executive Committee on 13 January, 2015. The LAN has concluded that whilst no specific scrutiny is required in this area, Audit Scotland will continue to review the financial position of the council, and its progress in these areas, as part of the annual audit process.
12. **Education and children's services:** The LAN has not identified the need for any specific scrutiny in this area beyond normal ongoing oversight and monitoring. Inspections carried out over the last year have been positive, and good performance has been noted against the council's local improvement priorities for education services. As a result of the previous Director of Education Services leaving and a retirement at Head of Service level, there have been some temporary changes made in the management structure of education services. Also, the council has recently agreed to bring education and social work together in a new children's services division. The appointment of the new Director of Children's Services will take place before the end of 2014/15. The impact of these structural changes on delivery of services and related outcomes will require monitoring in the short to medium term, as will the potential dilution of the council's detailed knowledge of its schools.
13. **Social Work/Social Care:** No requirement for specific additional scrutiny has been identified by the LAN. No significant concerns have been raised in relation to adult or children's services, public protection issues or criminal justice
14. Progress is being made on health and social care integration, and a shadow Health and Social Care Integration Joint Board has been established. The council are on track to submit their integration scheme by 1 April, 2015 and implement full integration by 1 April, 2016. Audit Scotland will continue to monitor progress in implementing the governance arrangements for the new Integration Joint Board and will maintain a national oversight on developments.

Planned scrutiny activity

15. As shown in Appendix 1, the council will be subject to a range of risk-based and nationally driven scrutiny activity during 2015/16. For some of their scrutiny activity in 2015/16, scrutiny bodies are still to determine within their work programmes 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 with the appropriate LAN lead.
16. In the area of governance and accountability, Audit Scotland will review and assess developments in decision-making structures and in performance management arrangements through the 2015/16 annual audit process, and in particular the action

taken by the council in response to findings from the targeted best value work noted above.

17. Falkirk is one of eight areas where an audit of the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) has been carried out. Audit Scotland will carry out follow-up work across all eight areas during 2015/16 to assess what progress the CPP has made in addressing outstanding improvement areas. This work will be carried out as part of the annual external audit process.
18. Audit Scotland will continue to carry out a programme of housing benefit risk assessments across councils in 2015/16. For Falkirk Council this is planned for completion during December 2015.
19. The Care Inspectorate will lead a joint inspection of services for children and young people in the Falkirk area during 2015/16, involving participation by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Education Scotland and HMICS. These inspections are part of the Care Inspectorate's wider planned programme of national scrutiny work.
20. The Care Inspectorate and HMICS will carry out a joint thematic review of multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) in Scotland during 2015. This forms part of a wider programme of national inspection, and is not a result of the LAN shared risk assessment. The purpose of the review will be to assess the state, efficiency and effectiveness of the MAPPA in Scotland, in terms of keeping people safe and reducing the potential risk of serious harm by registered sex offenders in our communities. It will cover all 32 local authorities and involve local authorities, Police Scotland, NHS Boards and the Scottish Prison Service. The joint review will cover the Falkirk Council area in May 2015.
21. Education Scotland will be working in partnership with councils to carry out validated self evaluation (VSE) of educational psychology services across all councils over a two-year period beginning in 2015/16. Education Scotland will notify councils of its VSE plans each academic term. 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.
22. Audit Scotland has planned three performance audits covering local government during 2015/16. It will be working jointly with the Care Inspectorate looking at social care and jointly with both the Care Inspectorate and Health Improvement Scotland (HIS) on a Health and Social care integration position statement. It will also carry out a follow-up audit on roads maintenance. Any engagement with councils is still to be determined. Publication of these reports is scheduled for between October 2015 and February 2016.
23. The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) has a planned programme of thematic inquiries into housing services which will be carried out largely in the first quarter of 2015/16, with publication of inquiry reports in the first and second quarters of the year. The thematic inquiries will cover a range of housing services including: Gypsy/Travellers; factoring

services; gas safety; complaints handling; customer service standards; repairs; rent consultation; equalities; and openness and accessibility. Some of the thematic inquiries will not involve any on-site work at all and no local authority will be selected for on-site work in more than one thematic. The SHR will contact individual landlords with details about their potential inclusion.

24. During the first and second quarters of the year, the SHR will review the Charter data submitted by social landlords in May 2015 and identify topics for a further programme of thematic inquiries to be taken forward in the second and third quarters of the year.
25. 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 the future assessment of scrutiny risk.

March 2015

Appendix 1: Scrutiny plan

Scrutiny body	Scrutiny activity	Date
Audit Scotland	Performance audit work	To be confirmed
	Any follow-up Best Value work will be determined when the report is issued in Spring 2015.	To be confirmed
	Follow-up work to assess what progress the CPP has made in addressing outstanding improvement areas.	September 2015 as part of the annual external audit process.
	Housing Benefit Performance Audit	December 2015
Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Improvement Scotland/HMICS	Joint inspection of children's services as part of the Care Inspectorate's wider programme of national work and not as a result of the LAN's assessment.	November/December 2015
	The Care Inspectorate and HMICS will undertake a review of the multi agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) in Scotland.	Forth Valley fieldwork 11-15 May, 2015
Education Scotland	Education Scotland will be working in partnership with councils to carry out a validated self-evaluation (VSE) of educational psychology services across all councils over a two-year period beginning in 2015/16. Education Scotland will notify councils of its VSE plans each academic term.	Dates to be determined
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMICS)	HMICS will be inspecting local policing across Scotland over the next three years. These inspections will examine, amongst other things, local scrutiny and engagement between Police Scotland and councils. Two local Policing Divisions are programmed to be inspected in addition to Edinburgh Division in 2015/16. The Divisions will be identified approximately three months prior to inspection, the first being no earlier than October.	Dates to be determined
Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI)	HMFSI will be inspecting local fire and rescue services across Scotland over the next five years. These inspections will examine, amongst other things, local scrutiny and engagement between the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and councils. As part of its programme, HMFSI will inspect four local fire and rescue services during 2015/16. Falkirk is not included in the programme	Dates over the next five years to be determined.

	this year.	
Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)	The SHR will carry out a number of thematic inquiries during 2015/16. If Falkirk Council is to be involved in a thematic inquiry, SHR will confirm this with the council and the LAN lead.	Councils involved to be determined.