

Dumfries and Galloway Council

Local Scrutiny Plan 2017/18



Dumfries and Galloway Council

Local Scrutiny Plan – April 2017 to March 2018

Introduction

1. This local scrutiny plan sets out the planned scrutiny activity in Dumfries and Galloway Council during the financial year 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. There is evidence that Dumfries and Galloway Council uses scrutiny activity as a driver to help it improve services. In particular, the LAN has noted improvements in education and social care services followed previous inspections. Scrutiny of adult services during 2016/17 found improvements in services for older people following previous reviews. The Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Improvement Scotland carried out a progress review of children's services during 2016/17. This also highlighted improvements in services since the initial review in 2015/16. The LAN noted the strong leadership of education services and positive progress that is being made across the National Improvement Framework within the Directorate of Children, Young People and Lifelong Learning, with key strategies in place to improve attainment whilst tackling the roots and impact of inequality of educational outcomes. The authority has spent the majority of its allocated Scottish Attainment Challenge funding. Plans for taking forward the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) are under discussion.
4. In contrast, the LAN identified a range of scrutiny risks in relation to the council's homelessness service for the third year in a row. Risks include: the council's failure to meet its statutory requirement to accommodate all cases that require temporary accommodation; the increasing average time that people spend in temporary accommodation in the area; and, outcomes for homelessness people.

5. Dumfries and Galloway Council has set out its plans to transform the council in *Shape of the Council*, which it agreed in 2014. Key activities have included the council reorganising and reducing its directorates, and a programme of twelve service reviews with improvement actions. The council has set savings targets, and it has reported that it is on track to achieve the planned savings in 2016/17. The LAN will continue to monitor the council's progress in achieving its transformation plans and realising the planned savings.
6. In common with other councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council faces a number of challenges which the LAN will continue to monitor, particularly:
 - Financial management and sustainability – the Scottish Government's local government financial settlement for 2017/18 means that the council's revenue funding has reduced by £8.55 million. The council has identified a funding gap of £15.96 million for the year. This compares with an anticipated budget gap of around £20 million prior to the budget settlement being announced. The council's draft budget shows savings plans and a council tax increase, leaving a funding gap of £2.74 million (update after budget meeting on 28 Feb). The paper also sets out further savings options to bridge that gap. While the financial settlement for 2017/18 has reduced the council's funding gap, it needs to continue to plan for difficult decisions to meet its savings targets and address its longer-term gap.
 - The impact of the local government elections in May 2017 – this will lead to some uncertainty for a period, and the council will need to plan well to provide support and training to any newly elected members.
 - The challenge for all councils and their health partners of implementing health and social care integration at a time of increased demand, due to demographic pressures, and reducing public finances.
7. The external auditors will continue to monitor these areas through the 2017/18 annual audit process and any relevant Best Value audit work.

Planned scrutiny activity

8. As shown in Appendix 1, the council will be subject to a range of risk-based based and nationally driven scrutiny activity between April 2017 and March 2018. For some of their scrutiny activity in 2017/18, scrutiny bodies are still to determine which specific council areas their work programmes 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. The council's performance in delivering its housing options and homelessness services continues to be an area of significant risk. The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) has identified ongoing risks in relation to access, rough sleeping, homeless assessments, offers of temporary accommodation and outcomes for homeless people, including tenancy sustainment levels. The council is not always meeting its statutory duties in relation to homelessness. The council has been receptive to engagement from the SHR and fully recognises the need to make sustainable improvements to its homelessness service.
10. In 2015/16, in recognition of concerns about its homelessness service, the council commissioned an independent assessment of its services. This found significant areas of weaknesses across the service and made recommendations for improvement. The council accepted the report findings and is working on a series of improvement actions. These actions include for example, the implementation of a new management structure, staff training, work with partner Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and a review of its temporary accommodation provision. An improvement programme has been agreed and is monitored regularly by the council.
11. The SHR will continue its scrutiny of the council's housing options and homelessness services. It will engage with the council in relation to the delivery of its improvement actions and will seek assurance that there are improved outcomes for homeless people.
12. Later this year SHR will publish the findings of its national thematic inquiry work into gas safety and repairs that was 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.
13. The Accounts Commission agreed the overall framework for a new approach to auditing Best Value in June 2016. Best Value will be assessed over the five year audit appointment, as part of the annual audit work. In addition a Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) for each council will be considered by the Accounts Commission at least once in this five year period. The BVAR report for Dumfries and Galloway Council is not planned in the period covered by this scrutiny plan. The Best Value audit work planned this year will focus on the council's arrangements for demonstrating Best Value in financial and service planning, financial governance and resource management, and will be reported in the Annual Audit Report. This work will be used to inform the Best Value Assurance reporting to the Accounts Commission on Dumfries and Galloway Council that is planned to take place in 2018/19.
14. External audit in their draft audit plan outline the following key areas of risk-based wider scope audit work during 2017: financial sustainability and longer term financial planning; effective governance and scrutiny and financial management. Particular areas of focus will be progress against the council's transformation programme; the development of longer term financial scenario planning and planned elected member training after the

elections in May, including any planned governance structure changes. The final areas of work will be confirmed with the council after further scoping work by Grant Thornton, the council's external auditor.

15. Education Scotland will be undertaking an inspection of the council's careers information advice and guidance service in October 2017. They will also be undertaking an inspection of the council's Community Learning and Development (CLD) service in December 2017. In addition to these two nationally-driven pieces of inspection work Education Scotland will also be undertaking validated self-evaluation work with the council's education psychology service in early 2018. The exact timing of this work is yet to be agreed with the council.
16. The Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Improvement Scotland will introduce a revised approach to the joint strategic inspections of services for adults for 2017/18 which will assess the extent to which the planning, organisation and coordination of services comply with the principles of integration and contribute to the national health and wellbeing outcomes. Inspections will include a focus on joint strategic commissioning. In 2017/18, the Care Inspectorate will also lead on thematic activity in the areas of adult support and protection and self-directed support, working with a range of scrutiny partners. Dumfries and Galloway Council may be subject to a thematic inspection in 2017/18.
17. 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. 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.

May 2017

Appendix 1: Scrutiny plan

Scrutiny body	Scrutiny activity	Date
Audit Scotland	Audit Scotland has four planned performance audits covering local government in 2017/18: children's mental health; City Deals; ALEOs; and a follow-up audit on health and social care integration. Any engagement with individual councils is still to be decided.	None indicated at present
Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Improvement Scotland	Adult services inspections as part of the Care Inspectorate's wider programme of national work and not as a result of the LAN's assessment.	None indicated at present
	Children's services inspections as part of the Care Inspectorate's wider programme of national work and not as a result of the LAN's assessment.	None indicated at present
Education Scotland	Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG) inspection.	October 2017
	Community Learning and Development (CLD) strategic inspection activity.	December 2017
	Validated self-evaluation (VSE) arranged by negotiation between Education Scotland and the council.	Jan – March 2018 (exact date tbc with council)
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMICS)	Inspections of local policing in the council's area over the next year.	None indicated at present
Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI)	Relevant inspections of local fire and rescue arrangements in the council's area over the next year.	None indicated at present
Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)	The SHR will carry out scrutiny of the council's homelessness services to address a range of scrutiny risks in relation to the council's homelessness service. These risks include: the council is not meeting its statutory requirement to accommodate all cases that require temporary accommodation; the average time that people spend in temporary accommodation is increasing; the two major registered social landlords in the area allocate a far lower percentage of all stock to homeless applicants than the average across Scotland.	The timing of this work will be discussed and agreed with the council

Dumfries and Galloway Council

Local Scrutiny Plan 2017/18

A summary of local government strategic scrutiny activity

This report is available in PDF and RTF formats,
along with a podcast summary at:

www.audit-scotland.gov.uk 

If you require this publication in an alternative
format and/or language, please contact us to
discuss your needs: 0131 625 1500
or info@audit-scotland.gov.uk 

For the latest news, reports
and updates, follow us on:



Audit Scotland, 4th Floor, 102 West Port, Edinburgh EH3 9DN

T: 0131 625 1500 E: info@audit-scotland.gov.uk 

www.audit-scotland.gov.uk 