

National Scrutiny Plan for Local Government 2013/14

A summary of Local Government
Strategic Scrutiny Activity



Prepared by the Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group

April 2013



Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000 under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. Together they ensure that the Scottish Government and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

Contents

Background
Page 2

Part 1. Context
Page 3

**Part 2. The National Scrutiny Plan
for Local Government 2013/14**
Page 4

**Appendix 1. The Local Government
Scrutiny Coordination Strategic
Group members**
Page 5

Appendix 2. Glossary
Page 6

Background

Following the publication of the Crerar report on the *Independent Review of Regulation, Audit, Inspection and Complaints Handling of Public Services in Scotland* in September 2007, the Scottish Government undertook to develop a simplified and more coherent approach to local government scrutiny, as part of its wider approach to improving the arrangements for the external scrutiny of public services.

A key aspect of this was the need to better coordinate and streamline strategic scrutiny work at corporate and service level, while continuing to provide assurance to the public. This marked a fundamental shift from scrutiny which had typically been based on standard audits and inspections done on a routine cyclical basis, to a more risk-based and proportionate approach.

In March 2008, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth asked the Accounts Commission to undertake a transitional 'coordinating and gatekeeping role' in the planning of scrutiny activity in local government in Scotland. The Accounts Commission's transitional role was subsequently placed on a permanent footing by the Cabinet Secretary in March 2011, when he wrote to the chair of the Accounts Commission confirming that, "facilitating and coordinating... scrutiny relating to the corporate and strategic role of local government" should now be regarded as one of the accepted functions of the Accounts Commission.

We have sought to be open and transparent when preparing the National Scrutiny Plan and have therefore included all strategic scrutiny activity of which we are currently aware, as well as assisted self-evaluation work requested by councils which is designed to support improvement and build self evaluation capacity. In line with the phased approach requested by the Cabinet Secretary, our focus has been on planned scrutiny activity which assesses whole services or corporate functions. The plan does not therefore, focus on scrutiny activity carried out at service unit or institution level, eg school or care home inspections. The annual financial audit is also not included in the National Scrutiny Plan as this was considered by the Cabinet Secretary to be baseline scrutiny activity.

The *National Scrutiny Plan for Local Government* has been jointly prepared by the Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group. This group includes the Accounts Commission, Audit Scotland, Education Scotland (ES), the Care Inspectorate (CI), Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS), Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) and Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS). Details of each body can be found in [Appendix 1](#); they are collectively referred to as 'scrutiny bodies' in this report.

In developing this plan we have engaged with COSLA and SOLACE on an ongoing basis and we acknowledge the input we have had from them and councils to date in taking forward this scrutiny improvement work.

Part 1. Context

1. This fourth National Scrutiny Plan has been developed against the backdrop of significant change in the public sector and scrutiny landscape of Scotland including the Children's Bill, health and social care integration and police and fire reform. Local government continues to adapt and change in relation to significant budget pressures and in response to the four pillars of the Scottish Government's public sector reform agenda:

- Prevention – shifting resources to preventative activity.
- Place – integrated local services driven by better partnership working.
- People – workforce development.
- Performance – transparent and improving performance.

2. To ensure that scrutiny evolves and responds to the reform agenda, the Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group has identified four workstreams to continue to improve scrutiny in Scotland. These workstreams are:

- improving the use of information and intelligence across scrutiny bodies – improving the manner in which information and intelligence is gathered and used by scrutiny bodies
- reviewing the Shared Risk Assessment (SRA) process – to align more effectively with scrutiny bodies risk assessment and planning and scheduling arrangements

- supporting self-evaluation – to develop a common understanding and approach to supporting self-evaluation and improvement within public bodies in line with our commitment to the Reducing Burdens Action Group recommendation to use self-evaluation information to inform scrutiny activity
- an approach to place-based audit and inspection – to design a framework to assess the quality, impact and effectiveness of local public services.

3. This work is unlikely to add to the scrutiny activity planned in the 2013/14 National Scrutiny Plan, but will have an impact on the way scrutiny bodies work together.

4. At the request of Scottish ministers, the Care Inspectorate tested a joint inspection of children's services last year and will be rolling this out across each local authority area in Scotland from 2013/14. The selection of local authority areas for inspection is based on intelligence and risk and takes account of the SRA and are included in the National Scrutiny Plan.

5. In addition, the Care Inspectorate is currently developing an approach to inspecting adult care services drawing on its experience of implementing multi-agency strategic inspections of children's services. The adult care services inspection sites planned for 2013/14 are included in the National Scrutiny Plan.

6. At the request of Scottish ministers, Audit Scotland developed an approach to auditing community planning partnerships (CPP) and the delivery of local outcomes. The CPP audit model was tested during 2012/13 in three councils. A comprehensive evaluation will be undertaken early in 2013/14. Following the results of this evaluation Audit Scotland will consider plans to undertake further CPP audits. Any sites identified for 2013/14 will be added to the National Scrutiny Plan in due course.

7. Scrutiny bodies continue to work with councils to support self-evaluation activity. The scrutiny bodies will consider opportunities to further develop this type of support activity over the coming year.

Part 2. The National Scrutiny Plan for Local Government 2013/14

8. Since 2008, the main scrutiny bodies for local government have worked together through the Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group to identify and agree the key risks in each individual council and to develop a plan of scrutiny activity to respond to those specific risks. This approach, called Shared Risk Assessment (SRA), is designed to ensure proportionate and focused scrutiny and reduce the overall amount of external scrutiny activity in local government, while continuing to provide public assurance and help councils to improve.

9. The 32 Local Area Networks (LANs), representatives of the scrutiny bodies, meet annually to share intelligence and agree the scrutiny risks for each council. Each LAN prepares an Assurance and Improvement Plan update containing a scrutiny plan setting out the planned scrutiny activity over a rolling three-year period from 2013/14. These individual plans are aggregated to form the National Scrutiny Plan.

10. The *National Scrutiny Plan for Local Government* is one of the key outputs from the SRA work. The plan for 2013/14 is the fourth such plan and summarises the strategic scrutiny work from April 2013 to March 2014 as described in each of the 32 councils' individual scrutiny plans.

Appendix 1

The Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group members

The Accounts Commission

The Accounts Commission is a non-departmental public body (NDPB). The Accounts Commission is the public's independent watchdog for local government in Scotland. Its role is to examine how Scotland's 32 councils and 45 joint boards manage their finances, help these bodies manage their resources efficiently and effectively, promote Best Value and publish information every year about how they perform.

Audit Scotland

Audit Scotland is a significant national body. Audit Scotland is a statutory body providing services to the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland (AGS). Working together, the Accounts Commission, the AGS and Audit Scotland ensure that public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

Education Scotland

Education Scotland (ES) is an executive agency. ES is the Scottish Government's national development and improvement agency for education. It is charged with providing support and challenge to the education system, from the early years to adult learning, in furtherance of the government's policy objectives.

The Care Inspectorate (Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland)

The Care Inspectorate is a non-departmental public body (NDPB). The Care Inspectorate's purpose is to provide assurance and protection for people who use care, social work and children's services.

The Scottish Housing Regulator

The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) is a non-ministerial department. The statutory objective of the SHR is to safeguard and promote the interests of persons who are, or who may become: homeless; tenants of social landlords; or recipients of housing services provided by social landlords.

Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate

The Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland exists to provide independent, risk-based and proportionate professional inspection of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (the Service). Its purpose is to support the Service in delivering its functions, to promote improvement in the Service and to give assurance to the Scottish public and Scottish ministers that the Service is working in an efficient and effective way. Through this, the Inspectorate provides external quality assurance to the Service.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS) is a significant national body. The purpose of HMICS is to promote efficiency and effectiveness in respect of the standards of the police service in Scotland.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland

Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) is a health body. The function of HIS is to improve the quality of the care and experience of every person in Scotland every time they access healthcare by supporting healthcare providers.

Appendix 2

Glossary

Assurance & Improvement Plan (AIP)	Document which captures agreed areas of risk and good practice, and the resulting scrutiny response for each council. It is the primary planning document for scrutiny bodies
Fieldwork	The part of the scrutiny work that is undertaken at the council
Local Area Network (LAN)	Representatives from all the scrutiny bodies for each council to maximise the benefit of the scrutiny knowledge and understanding of the council
LAN lead	LAN representative facilitating LAN discussions and responsible for engagement with the council and producing the AIP
National Scrutiny Plan (NSP)	The aggregation of the individual council's scrutiny plans into a national plan detailing all the scrutiny work planned across Scottish councils
Scrutiny contact days	The number of days spent in the council conducting fieldwork multiplied by the number of auditors/inspectors involved in the work
Scrutiny events	An individually defined piece of scrutiny work
Shared Risk Assessment (SRA)	A joint approach using key information about local government to plan scrutiny activity that is proportionate and based on risk
Supported self-evaluation (SSE)	Assistance provided by the Care Inspectorate to councils on request, to help them develop their own methods and quality of self scrutiny
Validated self-evaluation (VSE)	Assistance provided by Education Scotland to councils on request, to help them develop their own methods and quality of self scrutiny

National Scrutiny Plan for Local Government 2013/14

A summary of Local Government Strategic Scrutiny Activity

If you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language, please contact us to discuss your needs.

You can also download this document in PDF, black and white PDF or RTF at:
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk



Audit Scotland, 110 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4LH
T: 0845 146 1010 E: info@audit-scotland.gov.uk
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk