

National scrutiny plan 2015/16

A summary of local government
strategic scrutiny activity



Prepared on behalf of the Strategic Scrutiny Group
March 2015



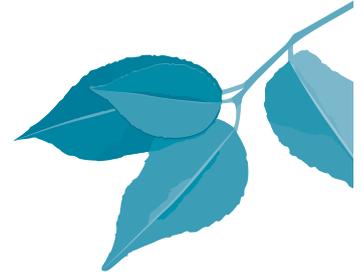
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Background



- 1.** The National Scrutiny Plan for local government has been jointly prepared by members of the Strategic Scrutiny Group (SSG). This group comprises Scotland's main public sector scrutiny bodies – the Accounts Commission, Audit Scotland, Education Scotland, the Care Inspectorate, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland, Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland and the Scottish Housing Regulator. Details of each body can be found in [Appendix 1](#). In this report, they are collectively referred to as scrutiny bodies.
- 2.** The SSG was established In February 2008 following publication of the Crerar Report, when the Scottish Government asked the Accounts Commission to take on a gatekeeping role in respect of the scrutiny of local government to support the delivery of better coordinated more proportionate and risk-based local government scrutiny.
- 3.** Since 2008, all the main scrutiny bodies for local government have worked together through Local Area Networks (LANs) to share intelligence and agree the key scrutiny risks in each of Scotland's 32 councils. Annually, each LAN has prepared an Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP) (now known as a Local Scrutiny Plan), setting out the planned scrutiny activity for the council to respond to those specific risks. This approach, called Shared Risk Assessment (SRA), is designed to ensure proportionate and risk-based scrutiny.
- 4.** This 2015/16 National Scrutiny Plan for local government is one of the key outputs from the SRA process. It is the sixth such plan and summarises the strategic scrutiny work¹ from April 2015 to March 2016 in each of Scotland's 32 councils. The plan includes all strategic scrutiny activity of which we are currently aware. This is a combination of risk-based scrutiny identified locally by LANs and scrutiny that is planned as part of national inspection programmes, such as the Care Inspectorate's joint inspections of services for children, young people and families and strategic inspections of adult services. It also includes assisted self-evaluation work requested by councils that is designed to build self-evaluation capacity and support improvement.
- 5.** A separate table showing planned scrutiny activity is available on the [Audit Scotland website \[PDF\]](#) .

¹ Strategic scrutiny work does not include scrutiny activity carried out at service unit or institution level, such as inspections of individual schools or care homes, or the annual financial audit of public bodies.

Part 1

Shared Risk Assessment developments for 2015/16



6. As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we review the SRA process each year. Our review process involves feedback from staff who are involved in the process; consultation with relevant stakeholders (such as local authority chief executives); and consideration of changes to the scrutiny and public policy landscape. Each year recommendations for change and improvement are considered by the Strategic Scrutiny Group (SSG).

7. The key findings from the review activity that took place in the summer of 2014 (which informed the current SRA cycle) were that there is a general consensus among councils and scrutiny bodies that the SRA process is beneficial, and that if it did not already exist a similar set of arrangements to coordinate local government scrutiny activity and provide a framework for ensuring effective liaison between scrutiny bodies and local authorities would need to be introduced. However, there was a widespread view that over time the process had become too resource intensive and time-consuming for scrutiny bodies. Inconsistent engagement and communication between LAN and councils also emerged as another significant theme, as did the need to improve the links between the SRA and some national scrutiny programmes.

8. In response to those findings, we introduced a number of developments in the SRA process for 2015/16. These included:

- enhancing the central planning and scheduling of national scrutiny activity across scrutiny bodies through more regular ongoing dialogue among senior officers
- improving the way LANs operate and making their interaction with councils more consistent and more regular
- refocusing the scrutiny risk assessment framework to align it more closely with the core statutory roles and responsibilities of the scrutiny bodies that are involved in the process
- streamlining SRA documentation.

9. A key development for 2015/16 has been to replace Assurance and Improvement Plans (AIPs) (which for many councils had become very lengthy documents) with much shorter Local Scrutiny Plans (LSPs) that are more clearly focused on the specific local scrutiny risks and responses identified by the LAN.

10. The risk assessments made by LANs have also changed. In previous years risk assessments resulted in one of the following judgements: no scrutiny required; further information needed; or scrutiny required. For 2015/16 we

introduced a new risk assessment option of 'ongoing oversight and monitoring required'. This scrutiny risk assessment option has been introduced to provide LANs with an opportunity to capture and reflect areas of risk or uncertainty within councils that require ongoing oversight and monitoring, but where additional scrutiny activity is unlikely to add value. Areas that might fall in to this category might include:

- identified risks (eg, local impact of welfare reform, developing longer-term financial plans and strategies) that are being managed and/or mitigated by the council where additional scrutiny activity is unlikely to add value in supporting improvement
- risks that have been identified but which are not yet significant enough to justify scrutiny at present.

11. This year LANs continued to maintain an interest in how the national public service reform agenda is being implemented by councils and their partners. In particular:

- community planning (including community empowerment, the shift towards prevention and local approaches to co-production)
- preparations for implementation of health and social care integration
- the local impact of police and fire reform
- welfare reform planning (including local partnership working to mitigate any potential negative local impacts).

12. The outcomes of local discussions between LANs and councils on these topics have not been reported in LSPs but have, instead, been used to inform the SSG's assessment of progress that is being made by councils in responding to Scotland's wide-ranging and complex public service reform agenda.

Part 2

Scrutiny activity



National scrutiny programmes

13. There is a range of national scrutiny activity planned across councils over the next year and beyond. Where activity has been identified for 2015/16 that impacts on individual councils it is included in the National Scrutiny Plan. Significant pieces of national scrutiny activity that are planned during 2015/16 include:

- Audit Scotland's programme of national performance audits that it undertakes on behalf of the Accounts Commission and Auditor General for Scotland. Audit Scotland has three performance audits covering local government planned during 2015/16. It will be developing a performance audit on social care services (which will involve some joint working with the Care Inspectorate) and will also be working jointly with the Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) on an initial position statement on Health and Social Care integration arrangements across Scotland. The third piece of work will be a follow-up audit on the progress that is being made across Scotland in improving roads maintenance. The [performance audit programme for 2015/16](#)  is available online. Audit Scotland will also continue to carry out a national programme of housing benefit risk assessments across councils.
- The Care Inspectorate will begin to review Alcohol and Drug Partnerships' self-assessment of performance and progress of implementing the *Quality Principles: Standard Expectations of Care and Support in Drug and Alcohol Services*, within the Quality Improvement Framework.
- 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. It will also review of the quality of careers information advice and guidance services delivered by Skills Development Scotland across all council areas. This will be a three-year programme beginning in 2015/16. In addition, Education Scotland will continue to engage with councils for the purpose of VSE.
- HMICS will be inspecting local policing divisions across Scotland over the next three years. This includes three divisions during 2015/16. Divisional inspections will cover partnership working and in particular, local scrutiny and engagement between Police Scotland and councils and the local Community Planning Partnership and Community Safety Partnership. Local police inspections also include a 'plus' element, which aims to investigate national issues through a local lens. These elements are subject to separate reports published on its website www.hmics.org.uk .

- HMFSI will be inspecting local fire and rescue services across Scotland over the next five years. These inspections will examine, among other things, local scrutiny and engagement between the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and councils. As part of its programme, HMFSI will inspect four local fire and rescue services during 2015/16. Additionally, HMFSI has a programme of thematic inspections, which in 2015 will include a look at SFRS preparedness for a serious flooding event. HMFSI may also carry out ad hoc inspections in response to specific events, which can involve contact with local authorities.
- The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) will carry out a programme of thematic inquiries across 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. It will also carry out regulatory assessments focused on the Scottish Social Housing Charter indicators. In carrying out its work, the SHR does not necessarily have any engagement with a council. Where this is the case, details of these are not shown in this plan.

Collaborative scrutiny

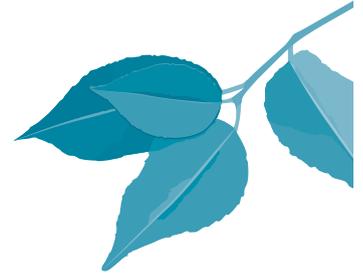
14. There is a range of collaborative scrutiny planned across local government in 2015/16:

- As highlighted above, Audit Scotland will be working jointly with the Care Inspectorate looking at social care and jointly with both the Care Inspectorate and HIS on a Health and Social Care integration position statement.
- The Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Improvement Scotland will be carrying out joint inspections of services for adults during 2015-16. Inspections will initially focus on services for older people then, at the latter part of the year, it is envisaged these will encompass other adults' services.
- The Care Inspectorate and HMICS will be undertaking a joint thematic review of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in Scotland during 2015. The purpose of the review will be to assess the status, efficiency and effectiveness of the MAPPA process 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 Care Inspectorate will lead joint inspection of services for children and young people, which will also involve participation by HIS, Education Scotland and HMICS. These inspections are part of the Care Inspectorate's wider planned programme of national scrutiny work.
- HMICS is currently exploring opportunities with HMFSI around common inspection methodology and joint approaches, where appropriate, to examine local police and fire scrutiny engagement.

15. On behalf of the SSG, national scrutiny partners will also be continuing to carry out a collaborative piece of work in partnership with Perth and Kinross Council and its community planning partners during 2015/16. This work aims to devise and assess a potential methodology for the evaluation and scrutiny of how community planning is operating at a local level, known as place-based scrutiny. This methodology will have particular focus on the four pillars of public service reform – prevention, partnership, people and performance.

Part 3

Strategic scrutiny group development and improvement priorities



16. The context in which the SSG operates has changed significantly since its establishment in 2008. A number of new scrutiny bodies have been created (Education Scotland, Care Inspectorate, HIS) and others have seen either their role and status amended (ie, SHR) or the nature of the service that they inspect change from a local to national service (HMICS, HMFSI).

17. Over the same period the Scottish Government has also been implementing a wide-ranging public service reform agenda, which includes:

- the Scottish Government/COSLA review of community planning
- the creation of single national police, and fire and rescue services
- health and social care integration
- Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- college regionalisation.

18. A common feature of these developments is that they extend beyond local government and affect a range of different public sector bodies. However, the formal remit of the SSG currently remains the same as when it was established in 2008, ie focused on local government scrutiny coordination.

19. In the context of this changing public sector policy and delivery landscape, the SSG has been clear that it could add more value as a group if it were to:

- become the main forum for scrutiny bodies to develop coordinated strategic responses to major public sector legislative changes or policy developments (including public service reform)
- broaden its scrutiny coordination role to include national thematic scrutiny activity and partnership-based audit and inspection work
- strengthen its focus on supporting improvement and promoting best practice in Scotland's public services
- better drive continuous improvements in operational scrutiny practices (eg, the alignment of scrutiny approaches, promoting more shared training across agencies, implementing more consistent approaches to self evaluation and supporting improvement).

20. This changing context led the SSG, during 2014, to agree a new Terms of Reference that is designed to capture these broader ambitions for its role. During 2014 the SSG also implemented four improvement projects to help it deliver its improvement ambitions. These projects were:

- **Achieving effective alignment between external scrutiny and the public service reform agenda:** the purpose of this improvement project is to ensure that scrutiny developments reflect the evolving public service reform agenda, with its focus on place, partnership, prevention, and performance.
- **Implementing arrangements for improved coordination and alignment of national thematic scrutiny and the scrutiny of partnerships:** the purpose of this improvement project is to establish new arrangements for ensuring appropriate 'joined-up' approaches to the scrutiny of key national policy developments and to improve the planning, scheduling and alignment of partnership-based scrutiny activity.
- **Place-based scrutiny pilot:** the purpose of this pilot is to devise and assess a potential methodology for the evaluation and scrutiny of how well public bodies are operating in partnership at a local level to deliver high quality integrated public services that reflect the needs of local people. The pilot will have a particular focus on the four pillars of public service reform – prevention, partnership, people and performance.
- **Programme of operational scrutiny improvement:** the purpose of this improvement project is to support the strategic group in driving continuous improvement in operational scrutiny practices that contribute to shared learning and the more consistent application of best practice across the scrutiny sector.

21. These projects are still being implemented and their outcomes will be reported later in the year.

Appendix 1

The Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group members



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 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 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.
Care Inspectorate	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.
Education Scotland	Education Scotland is an executive agency. It 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 early years to adult learning, in line with the government's policy objectives.
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.
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. Its purpose is to give assurance to the Scottish public and Scottish ministers that the Service is working in an efficient and effective way, and to promote improvement in the Service. Through this, the Inspectorate provides external quality assurance to the Service, and provides support to the Service in delivering its functions.
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) provides independent scrutiny of both Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority. Its approach is to support Police Scotland and the Authority to deliver services that are high quality, continually improving, effective and responsive to local needs. It can inspect other UK police services that operate in Scotland and are members of the National Preventive Mechanism, inspecting police custody centres to monitor the treatment and conditions for detainees.
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland is required to inspect the 15 prison establishments throughout Scotland in order to examine the treatment of, and the conditions for prisoners. The Chief Inspector also has responsibility for the inspection of legalised police cells and the treatment of and conditions for prisoners under escort.
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 people who are or may become homeless, tenants of social landlords, or recipients of housing services provided by social landlords.

Appendix 2

Glossary



Local Scrutiny Plan (LSP)	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.
Local Area Network (LAN)	There is a LAN for each council, comprising representatives of all the scrutiny bodies who engage with the council. LAN members ensure that information and intelligence held by each scrutiny body is shared.
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.
Scottish Social Housing Charter	The Scottish Social Housing Charter sets the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities. The Charter was approved by the Scottish Parliament and came into effect from 1 April.
Shared Risk Assessment (SRA)	A joint approach using key information about local government to plan scrutiny activity that is proportionate and based on risk.
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.

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This report is available in PDF and RTF formats,
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