Reviewing the Shared Risk Assessment in Scottish Councils
Research report for Audit Scotland

January 2011
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Executive Summary

There was universal support among participants for the principles underpinning the SRA process: they very much welcomed the promise of a more collective, streamlined approach among the scrutiny bodies, and the more risk-based and proportionate scrutiny that they felt would flow from this. There was also widespread support for the broad SRA framework, including the LAN structure.

However, views were more mixed on how well the SRA process worked in practice. On the one hand, there was general agreement that the LAN model was effective in bringing the different scrutiny bodies together, and in promoting mutual understanding among these bodies. Additionally, the majority of chief executives who participated in our survey were satisfied with the contact between their Council and LAN, felt that the Assurance and Improvement Plan was of high quality, and the risk assessment accurate.

On the other hand, there were perceived inconsistencies in the application of the SRA process across Scotland’s 32 councils. These inconsistencies related to:

- the performance of the Local Area Network lead
- the level and nature of engagement and communication between LANs and councils
- the degree of transparency in key stages of the process, particularly LAN meetings
- the definition of risk applied by different LANs
- the interpretation of the Red-Amber-Gold-Green (RAGG)\(^1\) scale by LAN members

There was a sense in which these perceived inconsistencies undermined confidence in the process.

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\(^1\) The RAGG scale is the classification system used in the SRA to identify scrutiny risk. Significant concerns and risks are classified as red; areas of uncertainty are classified as amber; areas where there are no significant concerns and risks are classified as green; and exceptional performance, outstanding improvement or promising innovation are classified as gold.
Still, most participants accepted that the first year of the SRA was very much a learning process for all involved, and that the approach would most likely improve in the future.

Below we set out key findings from the research in more detail.

**Local Area Networks**

A key inconsistency highlighted by the research was the quality of Local Area Network (LAN) leads. Although the online survey found that the majority of chief executives were satisfied with their LAN lead in terms of the level of contact and their knowledge, this was not universal and 2 in 10 expressed dissatisfaction. These differences were also apparent in the qualitative research – for example, whereas one chief executive said that communication between his council and the LAN lead was hard to fault, another said that the LAN lead had not convened a meeting with the council until after the first round-table discussions. Unsurprisingly perceptions of LAN leads were crucial in determining perceptions of the SRA process overall.

For their part, LAN leads highlighted the difficult job they, and the wider LAN, were facing. They referred, in particular, to the limited time they had to perform the various functions associated with the SRA, and the fact that, for many of them, these tasks had to be fitted in around their ‘day jobs.’

**The risk assessment process**

By and large there was agreement that the risk assessments produced were accurate and considered self-evaluation evidence supplied by individual councils. However, one in four chief executives thought they had insufficient opportunity to submit their own evidence while a further one in four did not think that the LAN’s analysis of evidence was thorough.

The most negative comment from the survey however was around the transparency of the risk assessment process. A majority (11 out of 20) disagreed with the statement that the process was transparent. This theme was picked up strongly in the qualitative research, with a number of respondents saying that they were not always aware of how the process was progressing, particularly when it came to LAN meetings.
LAN members commonly felt that there was a lack of challenge during the round-table discussions. Some of them attributed this to the fact that members did not feel knowledgeable enough to question evidence in areas beyond their remit, while others felt that it was due to the lack of time available to LANs to “get under the skin” of the evidence.

**Agreeing the scrutiny response**
LAN leads and members felt the SRA process was effective in bringing different scrutiny bodies together, improving mutual understanding between these bodies and bringing a more co-ordinated approach. However, it was also apparent that there was a lack of challenge between scrutiny bodies at the second roundtable discussion aimed at agreeing a scrutiny response, just as there was at the risk assessment stage. Again, some felt that this was due to LAN members’ lack of knowledge of each others’ areas. Others felt that there was a lack of clarity around the extent to which LAN leads and members were empowered to challenge the proposed scrutiny responses put forward by each body. Related to this, there was a view among some LAN leads that certain LAN members lacked the authority to negotiate and amend their proposed scrutiny responses during LAN discussions.

The RAGG scale used in the report to indicate levels of risk was generally welcomed. However, among LANs and chief executives, there were concerns about the extent to which the scale was being applied consistently across councils. This concern related in particular to the amber indicator (area of uncertainty). Some scrutiny team members used this indicator where there was insufficient evidence available, while others used it to indicate a ‘medium’ level of risk.

**Assurance and Improvement Plans (AIPs)**
The survey of chief executives revealed broad satisfaction with the AIP reports, with a majority viewing the reports as being of high quality and useful. There was also agreement that the reports clearly linked the risks identified with planned scrutiny and set out proportionate future activity.
However, a minority of councils viewed their AIP report less positively. The qualitative interviews threw more light on considerations underpinning dissatisfaction, with a few chief executives commenting that:

- judgements in the AIPs were not always well evidenced or were based on out of date evidence
- the reports felt more like performance assessments than risk assessments
- the proposed scrutiny response didn’t always match the risk assessment
1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of the independent review of the Shared Risk Assessment (SRA) process, relating to public scrutiny in Scottish local authorities. The review was undertaken by Ipsos MORI. The findings from this research will help inform Audit Scotland’s consideration of the further development of the SRA process.

This opening chapter provides some background information about the development of the SRA, and the resulting approach, before setting out the aims of the review and the methodological approach adopted.

1.1 The development of the Shared Risk Assessment

In 2006, Professor Lorne Crerar was commissioned by the Scottish Government to conduct a review of the regulation, audit and inspection systems and complaints handling in Scotland. The Crerar report, published in 2007, set out the review’s recommendations for reforming external scrutiny for public services in Scotland. In response to the findings of this review, the Scottish Government stated its aim of establishing a simplified and coherent approach to local government scrutiny. In order to fulfil this agenda, more co-ordinated, streamlined scrutiny was required.

The Accounts Commission was asked to play a ‘gate-keeping’ role in the development of scrutiny in local government and a strategic group was established to set priorities and oversee this development.

In the summer of 2009 the SRA approach was tested out in seven development council sites, five of which were also BV2 Pathfinder audits. After the completion of the test sites, Audit Scotland conducted an internal evaluation of the SRA process in order to improve the approach and finalise guidance. The lessons learned during this internal review were applied to the subsequent roll out of the SRA process to all 32 local authorities.

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1.2 The Shared Risk Assessment process

In each council area, a Local Area Network (LAN) was established, made up of representatives from the different scrutiny bodies including Audit Scotland, SWIA, HMIE, the Care Commission, SHR and HMICS. In each LAN, a lead was appointed in order to coordinate and manage the process. The LAN leads were representatives of Audit Scotland, SWIA or HMIE.

The risk assessment process had several stages, as summarised in figure 1 below. First the LAN members were asked to conduct an individual risk assessment for their council in their particular field of expertise. The LAN lead then collated and analysed the individual risk assessment to produce a single shared risk assessment of the council. A round-table discussion was held for the LAN to agree the shared risk assessment as a group. Once the risk assessment was agreed, the LAN then met for another round-table discussion in order to agree a scrutiny response. Once the risk assessment and scrutiny response were finalised, the LAN lead drafted an Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP). AIPs were produced for all 32 local authorities and the final documents were published on the Audit Scotland website along with the National Scrutiny Plan on 1 July 2010.
1.3 The review

In 2009, the Accounts Commission began a review of the developments that had been made in external scrutiny of public services. Having already conducted reviews of Pathfinder Best Value 2 (BV2) audits and Police Best Value pilots, Ipsos MORI was again commissioned by Audit Scotland to assess the first round of the SRA process. The review focused on the views of the councils and the LANs, as well as key national stakeholders, including the scrutiny bodies themselves.

The overall objective of the review was to assess the effectiveness of the SRA approaches and methodologies against a set of objectives and benefits, and make
recommendations to support the further evolution and development of the SRA process.

1.3.1 Methodology
The review was conducted primarily through qualitative research with a variety of stakeholders in the SRA process. We conducted face-to-face in-depth interviews with five council chief executives and telephone interviews with nine key national stakeholders. In addition to the interviews, we carried out three workshops, one with LAN leads and two with LAN members. All qualitative fieldwork was carried out between August and October 2010.

Additionally, an online survey was conducted with local authority chief executives. Email invitations were sent out to all 32 chief executives with a personalised survey link. A total of 20 chief executives completed the online survey, while a further three participated in, but did not complete, the survey. Survey fieldwork took place between 24 August 2010 and 25 October 2010. Throughout the report, results from the chief executives survey are reported as numbers rather than percentages due to the small base sizes. A full topline of the results can be found in appendix A.

1.3.2 Topic guides and questionnaire
The interviews and workshops were structured around topic guides designed by Ipsos MORI. The content of the guides varied slightly depending on the role of participants in the SRA process but all versions addressed a common set of themes. These included:

- overall perceptions of the SRA process
- general support for, and understanding of, the SRA
- perceptions of the Local Area Networks
- views on the risk assessment procedures
- views of the Assurance and Improvement Plans
- perceptions of the National Scrutiny Plan and Risk Priorities
- the future of the SRA

The questionnaire covered similar topics. Copies of the topic guides and questionnaire are provided in Appendix B.

1.3.3 Structure of the report
The following chapter sets out the main findings from the review, focusing on key stages of the process. It then draws on these findings to outline some key recommendations for enhancing the SRA process in the future.

1.4 Acknowledgements

Ipsos MORI would like to thank all of the chief executives, national stakeholders and the members of the Local Area Networks who gave up their time to take part in the review.
2 Support for the SRA in principle

To provide context for participants’ reflections on the first round of Shared Risk Assessments, national stakeholders and the chief executives of the five case study councils were asked what they saw as being the overall objectives of the SRA process, and to what extent they supported these objectives in principle.

The Crerar Review was widely cited as being a major impetus for the development of the SRA. Participants therefore tended to discuss the objectives of the process with reference to the Review’s main recommendations; in particular, the need for more effective joint working between the scrutiny bodies, improved co-ordination and scheduling of scrutiny activity, and a reduced scrutiny burden on local authorities. A few chief executives further suggested that the SRA process is aimed at providing councils with some assurance about where they currently stand on “the journey of continuous improvement” and at helping them plan accordingly.

There was universal and strong support for all of these objectives and, indeed, for the broad SRA framework, including the LAN structure. Of the 20 chief executives who took part in the online survey, 13 considered the SRA to be an effective way of planning scrutiny activity, and none of them considered it to be ineffective.

…this is the way it should be. The audit burden for the public sector and for councils in particular has to be reduced and this is a sensible way of doing it, because it should combine in one, all the issues and concerns and processes the various audit bodies have.

Chief executive

We’re very supportive of having this kind of corporate shared assessment done so that the inspectorates have a very clear and consistent view of the strengths and weaknesses so we don’t get this repeated request for measures.

Chief executive

A couple of chief executives were keen to emphasise that effective external risk assessment and scrutiny planning is all the more important for local government in the current economic climate as councils are slimming down their senior management teams and so have less capacity to undertake audit work internally.
All of us moving forward are going to have fewer people to be able to get this rigour internally so the importance of the external view and evidenced opinion is going to be more and more important.

Chief executive

Despite strong support for the SRA, the research identified some confusion among chief executives about the relationship between the SRA and the wider audit and inspection processes. This confusion was discussed at some length in the workshops among LAN members and leads who felt that, in particular, councils were not always making the distinction between the risk assessment focus of the SRA and the performance assessment focus of Best Value. They attributed the problem to a combination of factors, including a lack of clarity in some of the communication about the SRA, a lack of engagement with the process among some councils, and a tendency for the Assurance and Improvement Plans to read like Best Value reports. Each of these factors is discussed more fully in later sections of this report.

...We are still a bit unclear as to how Shared Risk Assessment actually leads to an annual inspection, an annual risk assessment in the improvement plan, and how that sits alongside the processes of Best Value in its wider sense and community planning and the SOA.

Chief executive

Now we're going back doing the annual audit, [the Council] don't understand that I'm not [there in the capacity of] LAN lead. Everything about the AIP gets brought up; every single detail.

LAN lead

Yes, the councils are having a real struggle trying to mark the difference between Audit Scotland’s continual engagement on the performance of the council and what the SRA is doing.

LAN lead
3 The Shared Risk Assessment Framework and Process

In general, participants felt that the SRA process was the correct approach for improving scrutiny in Scottish councils. While some aspects of the process were seen to have worked well, there was universal acknowledgement that improvements needed to be made, though most agreed that this was inevitable given that it represents a new way of working.

I think for me the SRA process is the only show in town; it has to be the way we go forward, so there is no question whatsoever about any lessening of commitment to the process. I think it’s just about making it better, making it more streamlined.

National stakeholder

The remainder of this section explores experiences of the Shared Risk Assessment process in detail. It mainly covers the views expressed by LAN leads and members, though relevant findings from the research among stakeholders and council chief executives have also been included where appropriate.

3.1 Organisation and timings

3.1.1 Guidance

Some councils felt that it had not been made clear to them what the SRA would involve. They commented that they did not have much detail about the process and that the information they did have seemed to change over time:

We all had to understand what was changing and I think, certainly local authorities were kept in the dark a wee bit about what was happening...We thought, yes; good idea, but let's see how it works.

Chief executive

Conversely, most LAN members felt that the training and guidance they received had been fairly clear in setting out the different stages of the process. However, there were specific areas that they felt suffered from a lack of clarity. These areas were:

- The Red-Amber-Gold-Green (RAGG) scale – LAN members felt that the guidance did not provide clear enough guidelines on how to use this scale
• The AIP document – LAN members felt the guidance was unclear regarding the purpose of the document.

3.1.2 Timing issues

The online survey revealed some concerns among chief executives in relation to timings of the SRA. The main issues raised in the survey were that:

• the introduction of the SRA felt rushed
• councils need to be involved earlier in the process
• parts of the process took longer than expected, particularly the reporting stage

There was agreement from some stakeholders that the introduction of the process felt rushed and, consequently, that both councils and scrutiny bodies were not as prepared as they could have been.

Generally speaking, stakeholders, particularly those from scrutiny bodies, felt that the timescales set for some aspects of the SRA – including the analysis and synthesis of individual risk assessments, and the production of the AIPs – were very tight. While this required a huge amount of effort from those involved, deadlines were met. They felt that this demonstrated real commitment to the SRA. Scrutiny bodies commented that meeting the resource and time commitment required for the SRA was extremely challenging for their organisations, particularly resourcing the LANs, and that it meant individuals had to considerably increase their work load with the SRA effectively being an add on to their “day job”. A number of stakeholders mentioned that the process would have to be streamlined, to some degree, in future years as the time and resource input could not be sustained at current levels.

3.2 The Local Area Networks

The majority of LAN leads, members and stakeholders commented that the composition of the LANs was “right” in that all “core” scrutiny bodies were represented. That said, a number of LAN leads and stakeholders commented that the membership of the LANs was “limited” in terms of assessing outcomes that councils deliver in conjunction with their community planning partners. As such, there were suggestions for extending membership of the LANs to include a broader range of scrutiny bodies, for example NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, in the future.

These was general agreement that the LAN model was very effective in bringing together the core scrutiny bodies and in promoting:
- the development of mutual understanding between these bodies
- the strengthening of communication channels between them
- the pooling of evidence across a range of sources providing a more “powerful” and “in-depth” assessment of risk in councils

At the same time, however, LAN members and leads (hereafter collectively referred to as LANs) raised a number of challenges in relation to the LAN model. These challenges, which are explored more fully over subsequent sections, relate to: variation in the knowledge of LAN members; a lack of authority among some LAN members to make decisions required of them; and a lack of clarity about whether authority for final decisions on scrutiny activity lay with the LAN lead or with the individual scrutiny bodies.

Views of LAN leads were explored in the research among chief executives as LAN leads were mainly responsible for the communication between councils and the LANs. As can be seen in figure 3.1, the majority of chief executives (13 out of 22) rated their LAN lead’s knowledge of their council as good, three rated it as poor and five were ambivalent on this issue.

**Figure 3.1: Perceptions of the knowledge of LAN leads**

Q. How would you rate the LAN lead’s knowledge of your council and the issues you face?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly good</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither good nor poor</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly poor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All respondents (22) Source: Ipsos MORI

Notwithstanding these positive findings, the qualitative research among chief executives highlighted a degree of inconsistency in the quality of LAN leads; particularly in the approach that they pursued in engaging with councils throughout the process. These inconsistencies, discussed in detail in section 3.6, included the extent to which the LAN leads attempted to engage with chief executives. Where this
engagement was seen as being insufficient, chief executives were more likely to feel dissatisfied with the SRA process as whole. This highlighted the crucial role that LAN leads played in determining perceptions of the SRA process overall.

### 3.3 The risk assessment process

#### 3.3.1 Individual risk assessments

At the start of the SRA process, each LAN member was asked to carry out an individual risk assessment based on existing inspection reports and additional evidence collected by the LAN lead.

The LAN members who took part in the research generally did not experience any problems in terms of sourcing evidence upon which to base their individual risk assessments. They did, however, experience some difficulties in carrying out the assessment, particularly in applying the RAGG scale.

First, there was confusion around how the ‘amber’ classification should be used and this appears to have led to a degree of inconsistency in its application. Some LAN members used the classification where there was insufficient evidence available, while others used it to reflect a ‘medium’ level of risk.

Second, it was noted that the RAGG scale did not include a classification for areas where performance was poor but where there was strong evidence of improvement. One LAN used the colour purple to accommodate these areas.

Lastly, there were difficulties with assigning a single classification to very broad service areas, not least when evidence showed that some elements of those service areas were performing well while others were not. Some LANs decided to assign multiple classifications in such cases.

#### 3.3.2 Synthesis of the individual risk assessments

LAN leads generally found the task of synthesising the individual risk assessments into an initial shared risk assessment fairly onerous. This was due to a combination of factors including:

- the sheer volume of evidence that LAN members provided
- variation in the quality of assessments – some were described as “very concise” and “helpful”, and others as “cut and paste” jobs, “cryptic” or out of date
• variation in the level of detail of evidence included in the assessments – in particular, social work and education tended to contain much more detailed evidence than others, which skewed the balance of the initial shared risk assessments

It was clear that non-Audit Scotland LAN leads found the process particularly challenging as they had less experience of corporate and Best Value assessments. As such, they relied quite heavily on the local Audit Scotland auditor(s) to help them populate parts of the initial shared risk assessment template.

### 3.4 Agreeing the shared risk assessments

LAN leads commented that the first round-table discussions had been well attended and both members and leads found the discussions useful in terms of getting to know the other LAN members. Moreover, the round-tables were seen as a useful forum for debating the applications of the RAGG scale and the differences between performance and risk judgements.

[The] first time our [shared risk assessment] came out with the colours, the majority were amber, because people were playing safe... and we had a great meeting at that point, saying: “okay let’s be really clear [about] what me mean by these colours and let’s talk about performance versus risk and what we mean by risk”...it was very useful to have that discussion.

#### LAN member

However, LAN leads commented that some LAN members’ knowledge was very service specific, and this affected their ability to fully participate in the round-table discussions which focused on performance and risk across the council as a whole.

In terms of agreeing the shared risk assessments, LAN leads generally felt that agreement came too easily and that there was a lack of challenge between LAN members. This was attributed primarily to a lack of confidence among members to comment on areas outwith their remit.

I don’t know enough about education and social work to really challenge anybody on that; you feel ridiculous to.

#### LAN member

What we were finding... was [an attitude of]: “well they are the professionals in this area and if that’s what they want in, then that’s what needs to go in”, and we deferred, if you like, to the expert in that particular area.

#### LAN lead
One LAN lead felt that there was simply not enough time for members to “get under the skin” of all the evidence and thus to challenge each other robustly.

3.5 Agreeing the scrutiny responses

As with the process of agreeing the shared risk assessments, LAN leads generally felt that reaching agreement on the scrutiny response was “fairly straightforward” and that there was little challenge. Indeed, LAN leads admitted that they were reluctant to robustly challenge the scrutiny responses proposed by LAN members. This was partly attributed to a lack of clarity around whether final accountability for the scrutiny response lay with the LAN leads or with the individual scrutiny bodies. Additionally, one LAN lead felt that, on balance, it was more important to build relationships with LAN members than challenge their scrutiny responses.

In cases where there was challenge, it was evident that some LAN members lacked the authority to negotiate and amend their proposed scrutiny responses during the round-table discussions. Instead, they had to obtain approval from their organisations to do so. As well as causing delays, this led to a feeling among LAN leads that the members concerned had come to the round-tables as “delegates” with the role of justifying the scrutiny responses devised by their organisations.

I think there was difficulty of other people seeing themselves as delegates or representatives... I had people come and say: “Well this is what we’re going to do”, and then we [would] discuss [it] and say: “Well that doesn’t fit with that”. They were unable to make a decision and said: “Well, I need to go back and check”...they didn't feel as [if] they had the responsibility...to negotiate or to say: “Well, I can shift this to that or we can link that ...”

LAN lead

Finally, there was a perception that not enough time had been devoted to discussing the scrutiny responses as the task of populating the initial shared risk assessment template had demanded most of the LANs’ time and effort. Additionally, a number of LANs felt that not enough time was spent on identifying opportunities for more collaborative ways of working between the scrutiny bodies; for example, undertaking joint scrutiny activity. They felt that this would be an important area for development in futures rounds of SRAs.
3.6 Council engagement in the process

Although the survey found that the majority of council chief executives were satisfied with the level of contact between their LAN lead and their council, this was not universal and several expressed dissatisfaction (figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Satisfaction with level of contact between LAN lead and council

Q. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the level of contact between the LAN lead and your council?  

- Very satisfied: 2
- Fairly satisfied: 13
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 3
- Fairly dissatisfied: 1
- Very dissatisfied: 1
- Don’t know: 1

Base: All respondents (22)  
Source: Ipsos MORI

These differences in opinion were also apparent in the qualitative research among council chief executives; for example, whereas one chief executive said that the communication between their council and the LAN lead was hard to fault, another said that their LAN lead had not convened a meeting with the council until after the first round-table discussions. Additionally, there was a sense in which the SRA process had worked better in authorities where councils had established and positive working relationships with individual LAN members.

For their part, LANs acknowledged that there were widespread inconsistencies in the approach taken to engaging with councils. Some LANs followed the minimal engagement approach recommended in the guidance so as not to overburden councils. In retrospect, they felt that this approach was problematic and contributed to a lack of understanding among councils of what the SRA process was trying to achieve.

LANs that engaged more fully with councils had more positive experiences. Features of engagement that these LANs found particularly helpful were:
the initial set up meeting as it provided an opportunity for LANs to outline the process and respond to any council queries and concerns, and it gave councils the opportunity to present their cases to LANs

- providing councils with a document summarising their conclusions from the first round table discussions as this enabled councils to provide LANs with feedback prior to the drafting of the Assurance and Improvement Plans

In terms of opportunities for councils to submit evidence to LANs, the majority of chief executives who responded to the survey agreed that they been provided with enough opportunities of this kind (figure 3.3). Again, this view was not universal and several disagreed.

**Figure 3.3: Opportunities to submit evidence to LANs**

Q. To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statement about the initial risk assessment undertaken by the LAN?

My council had enough opportunity to submit evidence

- Don’t know
- Strongly disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to agree
- Strongly agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Tend to disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Tend to agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All respondents (21)  
Source: Ipsos MORI

Again, this variation in views was reflected in the qualitative research among chief executives. For example, while one chief executive praised the guidance for not overburdening councils by requiring them to submit a large amount of paperwork and evidence, others would have liked more opportunities to submit their self-evaluation evidence earlier on in the process. There was also a sense in which the process of submitting evidence to the LANs worked better in councils which already had robust self-evaluation mechanisms in place.
4 Assurance and Improvement Plans

The survey of chief executives uncovered broad satisfaction with Assurance and Improvement Plans (AIPs). As figure 4.1 shows, a majority of respondents agreed that their AIP was of high quality and useful. These views were reiterated by most of the chief executives in the qualitative research, who referred in particular to the value of having a single corporate assessment document on which members and officers can draw, rather than a series of service-specific reports.

**Figure 4.1: Perceptions of AIPs**

*Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your council’s Assurance and Improvement Plan?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Tend to agree</th>
<th>Neither / nor</th>
<th>Tend to disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It was of high quality</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was useful</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All respondents (20)  
Source: Ipsos MORI

While these are positive findings, they belie to an extent the more mixed or qualified assessments chief executives and other stakeholder gave of specific aspects of the AIPs. These aspects include: the focus and tone of the documents; the risk assessment; the RAGG scale; and the scrutiny and improvement plans.

4.1 Focus and tone

Participants in the qualitative research were broadly happy with the content of the AIPs, although some felt that the documents at times veered towards being performance rather than risk assessments. One chief executive commented that their draft report was "heavily biased towards commenting on PIs". Other participants commented more generally that there was simply too much discussion of councils' strengths and
weaknesses (current and historical) in the AIPs, with the effect that the documents at times read like Best Value reports. A representative of one of the scrutiny bodies suggested that this situation had arisen because some LAN members “felt they had to describe what they were seeing in the Council rather than simply say where they had identified the risks”.

Notwithstanding these findings, participants recognised and accepted that the analysis of performance information is a necessary component of risk assessment. Reviewing the level of focus on this information in the AIPs may be key to improving perceptions of the documents in the future.

On a separate issue, representatives from the scrutiny bodies and some LAN leads felt that the AIPs generally contained too much unnecessary contextual information and needed to be much shorter and sharper. A few suggested that the content should be limited to a description of where the risks lie and a summary of the associated scrutiny activity. One individual went as far as to suggest that the documents should contain no discussion of non-risk areas. These sorts of changes, it was felt, would make the AIPs easier to produce, more readable, and more distinct from Best Value reports.

In terms of the tone of the AIPs, a few of the chief executives in the qualitative research described this as quite negative – as one of them put it: “there was always a but”. The same individuals also felt that there was a lack of focus on good practice in the documents vis a vis commentary on risk.

4.2 The risk assessment document

Despite concerns around inconsistencies in the application of the RAGG scale, most respondents to the chief executives survey agreed that their LAN’s assessment of risk was accurate and that it reflected evidence presented by the Council. Views were more divided over the analysis that informed the assessment, however. As fig 4.2 shows, whereas nine chief executives agreed the analysis was thorough, six disagreed and three were ambivalent on the issue.
The analysis of evidence also emerged as a prominent theme in the qualitative research. One of the chief executives interviewed felt that their risk assessment was based almost entirely on past inspection reports, some of which were “out of date”, and did not reflect other, more recent evidence highlighting progress the Council has made since those reports were published. Similarly, another chief executive felt that the number of ‘areas of uncertainty' identified in early drafts of their AIP was high, relative to the amount of relevant intelligence available and that this was a indictment of the LAN’s poor engagement with that intelligence. Two of the areas concerned, they noted, had been subject to inspection just months prior to the SRA; therefore, it should have been a straightforward task for the LAN to assess the level of risk in each case.

The risk assessment wasn’t current because some of it was based on work that had been done by inspection agencies back in 2008. Despite the fact that we had been sending them updates on a quarterly basis, …none of that work in progress if you like was taken into account … that was kind of deflating …We think we’ve put some big and robust improvement plans in place, have sent these off to the regulators, heard nothing back from them, but yet the comments are still based on historically out of date reports.

Chief executive

The early drafts were way off the pace…We were down for [x] areas of uncertainty which kind of signalled to me they didn’t know us very well. This was the combined intelligence of the inspectorates that had been brought to bear to say: “we didn’t really know very much about your council.”

Chief executive
Both chief executives also felt that some statements made in early drafts of their AIPs were not properly evidenced and that this made it difficult to judge, and indeed challenge, the validity of those statements.

Beyond these issues concerning the evidence-base of the risk assessments, the qualitative research uncovered perceived inconsistencies in different LANs’ approaches to the assessment. For example, one chief executive felt that their LAN had been very cautious in its approach compared with other LANs, particularly in its use of the ‘amber’ classification. Others referred specifically to the treatment of financial risk, commenting that their council had been assessed very differently to other councils facing similar financial challenges.

In some cases we know about other councils [that] are actually facing the same kind of size and scale of challenges we are…risks which are well known to the auditor, they just don’t really appear on the radar at all of the AIPs... Just in that area alone, it is quite clear there are different views of risk being taken.

Chief executive

There was a clear sense in which this perceived inconsistency undermined participants’ confidence in the SRA process as a whole.

4.3 The RAGG scale
Views of the RAGG scale were explored in some detail in the qualitative research. On the whole, participants spoke in positive terms about the scale, describing it as “clear”, “well presented” and “easy to understand”. Consistent with findings reported in section 3.4, however, a couple of chief executives had concerns about the practice of assigning a single colour to a very broad service area:

...they will often take a huge subject area, like Children and Family Services, and because there is one element of that […] not deemed to be adequate, that influences your overall score and I don't think that is quite right because the purpose of audit now is to focus on outcomes and while these things are important, they don't necessarily affect the outcomes that you are delivering significantly.

Chief executive

Representatives of the scrutiny bodies suggested ways in which the RAGG scale might be developed for future rounds of the SRA. One person felt that an additional colour should be added to indicate ministerially-directed scrutiny work, so that it is clear, at a glance, that this work is not a response to perceived risk in the council. Others felt –
although for diametrically opposed reasons – that the gold classification needs to be reviewed: one individual commented that while a focus on good practice is essential, greater clarity is required around what best practice means in the context of the SRA. Another felt that consideration of good practice is problematic as it moves the report further in the direction of being a performance assessment.

### 4.4 The scrutiny and improvement plans

In the survey of chief executives, 13 out of 20 respondents felt that there was a clear link between the level of risk identified in their AIP, and the planned scrutiny response. A similar proportion felt that the planned scrutiny activity was proportionate (figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3: perceptions of planned scrutiny activity**

| Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your council’s Assurance and Improvement Plan? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly agree | Tend to agree | Neither / nor agree | Tend to disagree | Strongly disagree | Don’t know |
| There is a clear link between the level of risk identified and the planned scrutiny activity | 5 | 8 | 6 | 1 |
| The planned scrutiny activity is proportionate | 2 | 10 | | 8 |

While the level of negative responding to these statements was very low – indeed, non-existent in the case of the second statement – the proportion of respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing was relatively high. Findings from the qualitative research point to possible reasons for this. Most of the chief executives interviewed, though generally content with the scrutiny response set out in their AIP, said they were reserving judgement on the question of proportionality until after some of the planned activity has taken place. One of them added that almost all of the activity set out in their AIP would have happened irrespective of whether the SRA had been undertaken, and that this too made it difficult to assess the direct impact of the process on levels of scrutiny.
For their part, representatives of the scrutiny bodies highlighted a degree of variability in the level of detail provided in the scrutiny and improvement plans, commenting that some of the plans included too much information, while others did not provide enough – particularly in respect of the scale and duration of planned activity.

### 4.5 Opportunities for councils to comment on AIPs

The chief executives interviewed in the qualitative research were generally content with the opportunities they had been given to comment on their AIP and with the LAN’s willingness to take feedback on board and make changes to the document. Those chief executives who earlier had expressed reservations about the LAN’s analysis of evidence, referred specifically to the LAN’s willing to consider fresh evidence at this stage and reconsider its judgements. However, they were also keen to emphasise that the process of pulling together this information and negotiating the final draft of the AIP took a considerable amount of time and effort, and that this could have been avoided had the LAN been more ‘up to speed’ with developments in the council.

> It became a very demanding process to get the auditors and the cause behind them to actually fully understand this council. We arrived at the right point at the end of the process but it was pretty tortuous and heavily demanding to actually get there.

  
  **Chief executive**

### 4.6 Quality panel

In the main, stakeholders held the quality panels in a positive light. They felt that the balance of individuals on the panels was beneficial as it brought together different types of knowledge and expertise. One of the most highly regarded aspects of the quality panel was the inclusion of a LA peer reviewer as this added credibility to the quality process for councils.

> I think it was excellent to have a combination of chief executives of councils and senior people from scrutiny bodies …….. we had a lot of shared knowledge about the circumstances in individual areas and I thought it was a positive experience.

  
  **National stakeholder**

Despite these favourable comments, there were some stakeholders who felt that, going forward, the quality process should be slimmed down. Although they considered the
quality of the AIP documents to be of upmost importance they felt that, in practice, a better balance must be struck between quality assurance and time.

LAN members’ experiences of the quality and consistency panel varied to a greater extent, particularly in relation to the feedback they received. In some cases, participants felt that the panel made constructive observations, which helped them to produce higher quality AIPs, while others felt that they gained little from the process with one commenting that it was a ‘waste of time’.

Having said this, stakeholders felt that there was also variation in the LANs’ engagement with the quality panel. Whereas in some LANs’ a number of members attended, in others only the LAN lead was present. Stakeholders felt that the former arrangement was preferable as it meant that the different scrutiny bodies could contribute their respective specialised knowledge, allowing for more informed discussion of the issues.

### 4.7 National Scrutiny Plan/priorities

#### 4.7.1 National Scrutiny Plan

Overall, participants felt that the National Scrutiny Plan was a useful document. Stakeholders, in particular, highlighted several benefits of the Plan:

- it provides an overview of the scrutiny work being carried out in Scotland, allowing a clear picture of the scale of the work and how it has been concentrated.
- it enables scrutiny bodies to get a broad view of their own commitments across the country in the next year.
- one stakeholder suggested that councils may use the National Scrutiny Plan to make comparisons of their scrutiny schedule with other local authorities.

However, not all views of the National Scrutiny Plan were wholly favourable:

- LAN members felt that they had little involvement in the development of the National Scrutiny Plan. This led to concerns that the Plan had been developed in isolation from the individual AIPs.
- councils were generally focused on their AIPs and had little comment on the National Plan. However, one council did feel that the Plan was lacking in
transparency and could have included more detail on the rational for what was proposed:

I suppose from the outside looking in, it seemed fairly difficult to understand...for example, why the first council to be given a BV2 audit was [...] why would that happen as opposed to somebody else? It seemed a bit strange, a bit difficult to follow.

Chief executive

One key issue for the scrutiny bodies was to ensure that, as far as possible, the National Scrutiny Plan should be indicative and not 'set in stone.' For a range of regulated services, particularly social care services to vulnerable groups, there is a need for the regulator to act quickly in the public interest in cases where levels of risk quickly change. This means that, in any year, there is likely to be scrutiny activity that responds to that change in risk, but which cannot be reflected in the National Scrutiny Plan.

4.7.2 National risk priorities

Overall, participants were happy with the national scrutiny priorities and had little to say about them. While there were no objections to what the priorities were, some LAN members did feel that there was a lack of clarity about how they related to scheduled scrutiny work. They felt that the priorities were simply ‘tagged on’ to the AIPs once the SRA process was completed. This created a problem for LANs if they had already shared a draft of the AIP with their council.
5 Looking to the future

Following the conclusion of the first round of the SRA process, the delivery of AIPS to all 32 local authorities and the production of the National Scrutiny Plan, it is likely that subsequent rounds of the process will be more light-touch in nature, concentrating on updating and modifying the baseline position in light of new evidence from external scrutiny and self-evaluation.

Participants in this research had a range of opinions about the impact that the SRA had already had on public scrutiny and a range of ideas around how the process should develop in the future. However the model develops, it is clear that there are a number of challenges in making it work better, both in terms of its practical application and the wider environment in which it takes place.

5.1 What difference has the SRA already made?

Given that the first AIP reports were published earlier in July 2010, significant changes to the scrutiny landscape in local authorities would not be expected to have occurred already.

Over half of chief executives who responded to the online survey agreed with the statement that their AIP contained proportionate plans for future scrutiny activity in their council, suggesting that the SRA will make an impact in this regard. However, among those chief executives from councils which had experienced scrutiny activity since receiving their AIP (14 out of 21), there were a range of opinions about the extent to which this activity has incorporated SRA principles so far.

In terms of the proportionality of post-AIP scrutiny activity, six of the 14 agreed that it had been proportionate while three disagreed. Half of chief executives (seven out of 14) also felt that recent scrutiny activity had been more focussed than that which they had experienced in the past, and an equal number felt it had been more risk-based. As might be expected, chief executives who gave a positive response on one of these measures also tended to respond positively on the other two.
It is estimated that the first year of SRA activity has resulted in a 36% reduction in the scrutiny ‘footprint’ in local authorities\(^4\). However, a number of respondents were keen to point out that this reduction did not always correlate with a reduced ‘burden’ within authorities. Among the 14 chief executives whose authorities had experienced scrutiny since receiving their AIP report, only four agreed with the statement that this most recent activity had required less preparation and input in their council while four disagreed with this statement.

### 5.2 The challenges ahead

A number of challenges need to be addressed in order to improve the SRA. These challenges relate both to the SRA process and to the context within which the process operates.

#### 5.2.1 Changes to the process

- **Engaging with councils**

The majority of suggestions for improving the SRA made by chief executives in the online survey, centred around providing more opportunities for councils to engage in the process. Six of them felt that the process would be improved by allowing councils more chance to challenge findings and more time to review their draft AIP before it was finalised.

These views were echoed by LAN leads and members who agreed that engagement with councils needed to improve. One suggestion was for the LANs to meet each council every 6 or 12 months to discuss performance figures included in the council’s Single Outcome Agreement and the impact of these figures on the LAN’s understanding of risk. It was argued that this would help LANs develop a long term understanding of progress in councils, as well as a snap shot of performance.

While there was support for more and better engagement with councils, this was not a universal view among chief executives. A minority view was that substantial amounts of additional engagement would not be welcome in current economic conditions as it would place considerable extra burden on councils whose current focus is on managing budget reductions.

• **Using better evidence**

One criticism of the first round of the SRA was that scrutiny bodies tended to rely on a narrow range of evidence, some of which could be out of date. This issue was also raised, unprompted, by chief executives in the online survey, four of whom felt that the SRA process would be improved by using better quality, more timely evidence.

A number of stakeholders also picked up on this issue. They argued that, as scrutiny bodies move away from cycles of inspections and conduct their work based on risk, they will not have the same quality of information and evidence on which to base future risk assessments. One stakeholder commented that a risk-based approach to scrutiny must be information rich. One way in which some stakeholders felt this could be resolved was to put a greater emphasis on councils' self evaluations. However, it was stressed that there needs to be some level of assurance that these evaluations are reliable.

• **Updating RAGG and AIPs**

As far as LAN leads were concerned, it should not be necessary to produce new RAGG and AIP reports for a number of years, since the next three years of scrutiny activity are set out in the benchmark reports. Instead, LAN leads envisaged reviewing each AIP on an annual basis, updating them where there have been significant developments. As one LAN lead put it:

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..... now I think they need to do something that is a lot less intensive going forward to achieve the same ends..... I think we could probably say we've got a three year plan. Let's stick with the three year plan, let's just see if anything significant has changed that we need to amend.
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LAN Lead

• **LAN composition**

LAN leads in particular pointed out that the membership of LANs was limited and did not fully represent the range of services provided by councils. For example, the lack of representation by NHS QIS meant that LANs were unable to gain a comprehensive understanding of outcomes which councils were delivering in partnership with the NHS. In addition, in the first round of the SRA LANs had to undertake risk assessments on service areas which were beyond their remit such as roads, waste, water and health
and safety. The result of this was that often the risk assessment for these services fell into the amber category as the LANs did not feel qualified to make a firm judgement.

For some LAN leads, this issue was fundamental to the future scope of the SRA and poses the question, as one LAN lead suggested:

**Is the risk assessment about increasing what we know and then deciding what it is that we’re going to do, or is it about deciding about what it is we’re going to do based on what we know?**

LAN Lead

It was suggested during the LAN workshops that this fundamental issue must be addressed before future rounds of SRA as it wasn’t clear in the first round. One stakeholder suggested that the SRA should be based around the work of Community Health Partnerships in order to capture health service. They also felt that the private sector needed some representation on LANs since a proportion of public services are provided by private companies. Although there was a majority view among LAN members in favour of widening membership, some did feel that the SRA could lose focus if membership was too wide.

### 5.2.2 The wider context

Many participants in the research felt that improvements to the SRA process had to be made in the context of the wider environment, particularly the changing nature of the scrutiny landscape in Scotland and the current economic situation being faced by councils.

- **Changes to the scrutiny landscape in Scotland**

  One of the key strengths of the SRA process was seen as the extent to which scrutiny bodies co-operated to produce risk assessments and AIPs. These relationships were seen as vital to the success of the SRA process but still need to be improved and enhanced.

  A range of developments in the scrutiny landscape present challenges for future rounds of the SRA process. Firstly, if there is less public scrutiny being conducted, this will mean that scrutiny bodies could have less evidence upon which to base their risk assessments, particularly on ‘less risky’ councils for whom the volume of future scrutiny will fall the most.
Secondly, if the SRA process itself is to become more streamlined and light-touch, this will make it more difficult for representatives from different scrutiny bodies to challenge each other’s findings in the risk assessment and scrutiny response.

- **Expectations in the current economic climate**

A number of chief executives and stakeholders felt that the scope and purpose of the SRA process needs to be carefully considered in the current economic climate.

It is clear that all councils are facing cuts in budgets which will have knock-on effects for the service they provide. In this environment, some feel that expectations about the extent to which services can be improve need to be reconsidered and made more realistic.

A number of stakeholders pointed out that, in an era of cutbacks, the risk of some services deteriorating and becoming more ‘risky’ will increase. Therefore, it is important for all scrutiny bodies to be able to adjust AIPs and the National Scrutiny Plan to reflect sudden changes in risk assessment following a sharp deterioration in a particular service. This point was picked up by LAN leads in the qualitative workshops and as one LAN lead put it:

> …more risks may emerge consequent to what decisions are made by individuals in relation to the spending review and that I think talking about operating within this context is going to be crucial.

LAN Lead
Appendix A

Evaluation of the SRA process

Final Questionnaire for Chief Executives

Q1 Overall how effective would you say SRA process is as a way of planning scrutiny activity?

Base: 23 (n)

Very effective -
Fairly effective 14
Neither effective nor ineffective 8
Fairly ineffective -
Very ineffective -
Don't know 1

Q2 Why do you say that?

Base: 22 (n)

There should be more engagement with council 6
Increased joint working between scrutiny bodies 4
Highlights major areas of risk 3
The approach is a step in the right direction but is not there yet 3
The process was not clearly set out 3
The process was time consuming/prolonged 2
Has resulted in more proportionate scrutiny/reduced duplication in scrutiny 2
A 3 year plan has been developed 1
It gives work a better focus 1
Meets most of the requirements of an effective approach 1
Scrutiny has not been reduced 1
The evidence used by scrutiny bodies was out of date/insufficient 1
The approach only covers corporate scrutiny and not operational/facilities level scrutiny 1
The final report is biased to LAN lead’s organisation 1
Not all scrutiny bodies contributed as much as Audit Scotland 1
Would rather not say 2
Q3 How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the level of contact between the LAN lead and your council?

Base: 22 (n)
Very satisfied 2
Fairly satisfied 12
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 3
Fairly dissatisfied 3
Very dissatisfied 1
Don’t know 1

Q4 How would you rate the LAN lead’s knowledge of your council and the issues you face? Would you say it was...

Base: 22 (n)
Very good 4
Fairly good 9
Neither good nor poor 5
Fairly poor 3
Very poor -
Don’t know 1

Q5 To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements about the initial risk assessment undertaken by the LAN:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Tend to agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Tend to disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base: 21</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process was transparent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My council had enough opportunity to submit evidence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The LAN’s analysis of evidence was thorough</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The LAN’s assessment of risk was accurate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My council’s self assessment was considered fully</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q6  And to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your council’s Assurance and Improvement Plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Tend to agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Tend to disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It was of high quality</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was useful</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It reflected the evidence presented by my council</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a clear link between the level of risk identified and the planned scrutiny activity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The planned scrutiny activity is proportionate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q7  Do you have any observation concerning the timing of the SRA process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The process took longer than expected</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process was too rushed</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council's should be involved earlier in the process</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be better coordination with BV2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The timing of the SRA should tie into service/budget planning at council</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council's should see AIP drafts earlier</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The SRA did not recognise other activity that was going on</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was sufficient time to deal with issues</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The financial climate means that management capacity is reducing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q8  Finally, what aspects of the SRA process, if any, do you feel worked well?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LAN/LAN lead engagement with council</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the opportunity to comment on draft report</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting a good result in SRA</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having an opportunity to make a self assessment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very few things worked well</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q9  And what aspects of the process, if any, do you feel most need improved upon?

Base: 21
Opportunities for councils to challenge findings/more time to review draft report 6
Council should attend round table discussions/LAN meetings 4
The quality of evidence used 4
There should be more engagement with council 4
The process should be shorter 3
Consistency across scrutiny bodies’ methodologies 2
The process needs to be more proportionate 2
There should be more scrutiny bodies involved 2
Quality panel saw products before/more than councils did 2
Consistency across LANs 1
Organisation should be improved 1
The process overlaps with BV2 1
The process should be more transparent 1

Q10  Has your council taken part in any scrutiny activity since you have received your Assurance and Improvement Plan?

Base: 21
Yes 14
No 6
Don’t know 1

Q11  To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements about any changes in scrutiny activity carried out at your council since you received your Assurance and Improvement Plan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Tend to agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Tend to disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base: 14</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It required less preparation and input</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was more proportionate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was more focused</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was a greater focus on risk areas</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was a greater level of joint working between scrutiny bodies</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was a greater focus on supporting improvement</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Shared Risk Assessment
Final topic guide for Chief Executives

Introduction
- Introduce self, Ipsos MORI and the research
- Explain the purpose of the interviews: WE HAVE BEEN COMMISSIONED BY AUDIT SCOTLAND TO CONDUCT THIS RESEARCH TO REVIEW ASPECTS OF THE SHARED RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS
- Explain the interview will take around 45 minutes
- Emphasise confidentiality, anonymity etc: BEFORE WE BEGIN, I'D LIKE TO REASSURE YOU THAT EVERYTHING YOU SAY WILL BE TREATED IN CONFIDENCE AND YOU WILL NOT BE NAMED IN ANY REPORTS THAT WE PRODUCE FOR AUDIT SCOTLAND
- Request permission to record and explain can be turned off at any point

Background
- To provide some context for your comments, I'd like to begin by asking what your level of involvement was with the SRA process?
- What did you think the SRA was trying to achieve?
- Did you buy in to these objectives? Why/not?
- In advance of the SRA process, what did you think about the proposed approach? PROBE FOR: positives, negatives
- What problems, if any, did you foresee?

Overall perceptions
I'D NOW JUST LIKE TO TALK ABOUT YOUR OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF THE SRA PROCESS AS YOU EXPERIENCED IT. I'LL THEN MOVE ON AND ASK ABOUT SOME SPECIFIC ASPECT OF THE PROCESS.

- So, now that the SRA process is complete, what is your view of the approach overall? Why do you say that?
- What would you say were the strengths of the approach?
- And what would you say were the main weaknesses of the approach?
- How organised would you say the SRA process was? PROBE FOR: scheduling, timescales
- Overall, to what extent do you agree that ‘the process was transparent’? Why do you say that?
- To what extent do you think the process make for a more proportionate and risk based approach to scrutiny in local government? Why do you say that?
Local Area Networks

MOVING ON TO TALK ABOUT SOME SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PROCESS, WE UNDERSTAND THAT IN THE INITIAL STAGES THERE WAS A SETUP MEETING BETWEEN THE LAN AND THE COUNCIL TO OUTLINE THE SRA PROCESS.

- How useful did you find the meeting? Why do you say that?
- Who attended the setup meeting? Was this appropriate?
- Overall, how did you view the LAN? PROBE FOR:
  - Strengths/weaknesses
  - Composition – did it include the right people?
  - Skills and experience
  - Knowledge of your council
- And, what did you think of the LAN lead? PROBE FOR:
  - Strengths/Weaknesses
  - Skills and experience
  - Knowledge of your council
- How was communication between the council and the LAN organised? PROBE FOR:
  - Single council contact
  - Single LAN contact
- And what was communication like between the council and the LAN/LAN lead? PROBE FOR:
  - level of engagement
  - quality of engagement

The Evidence gathering phase

AFTER THE INITIAL SETUP MEETING WITH THE LAN, THE COUNCIL HAD TO LIAISE WITH THE LAN LEAD TO PROVIDE SELF EVALUATION AND OTHER PERFORMANCE AND OUTCOME EVIDENCE.

- How readily available was the self evaluation information at your council?
- How would you rate the quality of the self evaluation information that your council provided? PROBE FOR:
  - Coverage
  - level of detail
  - relative focus on strengths and weaknesses/improvement activity
- How much guidance was provided around self evaluation and the evidence gathering stage of the SRA process more generally? How did you feel about this?
- How much self evaluation and other evidence were you required to provide? How did you feel about this – was it too little/too much?
- Who requested the evidence from you? PROBE FOR: whether just LAN lead or members of other scrutiny bodies too
• IF MORE THAN ONE PERSON REQUESTED INFORMATION: Was there any duplication in the information that was requested? IF YES: Can you tell me a bit about this?

• Overall, how much of a burden did the evidence gathering stage of the process place on you and your organisation?

Scrubity Risk and Interim Feedback

WHEN THE LAN MEMBERS HAD AGREED ON THEIR RISK ASSESSMENT, THE COUNCIL WAS PROVIDED WITH INTERIM FEEDBACK.

- Before we talk about the feedback you received, can I just check, to what extent did you feel clear on what constituted ‘risk’ in the context of the SRA?
- What were your views of the feedback you received? PROBE FOR: positives and negatives.
- Was the feedback provided at an appropriate stage in the process? IF NO: When should it have been provided?
- Did you agree with the risk assessment? IF NO? What did you disagree with?
- Was the risk assessment clearly evidenced? IF NO: Why do you say that?
- Was the right evidence used? IF NO: Why do you say that?
- To what extent do feel your self evaluation evidence influenced the risk assessment? How do you feel about this?
- Were you given an opportunity to provide additional information at this stage?
- To what extent was it clear to you what influence the different scrutiny bodies had on the risk assessment?
- To what extent did you get the sense that the SRA process was a collaborative effort between scrutiny bodies? Why do you say that?
- To what extent were you able to challenge the risk assessment at this stage? Do you feel your views were taken on board?

Assurance and Improvement Plans

ONCE THE RISK ASSESSMENT HAD BEEN MADE AND THE LAN HAD SET OUT ITS SCRUTINY RESPONSE, THEY PRODUCED AN ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR YOUR COUNCIL.

- Before you received your AIP, were you clear on what the purpose of the AIP was and what it would contain? IF NO: What were you unclear on?
- And when you received it, what did you think of it? PROBE FOR:
  - Strengths/weaknesses
  - Content: balance between risk and good practice
  - Tone
  - Structure/length
  - How useful it was it was – including as a planning tool
• To what extent was it clear was it from the AIP document what sources of evidence informed the risk assessment?
• Do you think these were the right sources? Why/not?
• What did you think of the RAGG scale used to categorise risk? Why do you say that? Was it clear to you what the different colours indicate?
• How clear were the links between the risk assessment outcomes and the scrutiny response?
• To what extent did the plan offer more proportionate and risk based approach to scrutiny?
• How much information did the AIP provide you about the planned scrutiny activity at your council? Was this what you expected?
• Do you feel there was sufficient opportunity to discuss the AIP with the LAN?
  PROBE FOR:
  o Stage at which discussion took place
  o Amount of discussion
  o Extent to which their views were taken on board

National scrutiny plan

IF WE NOW MOVE ON TO THE NATIONAL SCRUTINY PLAN THAT WAS PRODUCED BY AUDIT SCOTLAND

• Have you seen the national scrutiny plan?
• IF YES: What are your views on this document? PROBE FOR:
  o What they wanted to get from the document – whether it fulfilled their expectations
  o How useful they found comparisons with other councils in their region
  o How useful they found comparisons with similar councils e.g. urban/rural
  o Whether the felt anything was missing

National priorities

• Have you seen the national risk priorities?
• IF YES: Do you think these:
  o Are valid?
  o Need to change? In what way?

Looking to the future

• In general, were your experiences of the SRA process consistent with what you expected?
• Do you think that the SRA process will result in more proportionate scrutiny in the long term - for your local authority? Nationwide?
• What changes would you like to see to the SRA process?
• Do you have any other views on future developments?

FINALLY:

• Have you experienced any scrutiny activity since you received your AIP?
• In what ways, if at all, has scrutiny activity changed since you received your AIP? PROBE FOR:
  o Extent to which council input/preparation has changed
  o Change in the number of inspectors
  o Extent to which more focused on risk areas
  o Extent to which more focused on supporting improvement
  o Extent to which there was greater collaborative working between scrutiny bodies
Evaluation of the Shared Risk Assessment process

Final topic guide for Local Area Network Leads

Introduction
- Introduce self, Ipsos MORI and the research
- Explain the purpose of the workshop: WE HAVE BEEN COMMISSIONED BY AUDIT SCOTLAND TO CONDUCT THIS RESEARCH TO EVALUATE ASPECTS OF THE SHARED RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS
- Explain the workshop will last around 90 minutes
- Emphasise confidentiality, anonymity etc: BEFORE WE BEGIN, I’D LIKE TO REASSURE YOU THAT EVERYTHING YOU SAY WILL BE TREATED IN CONFIDENCE AND YOU WILL NOT BE NAMED IN ANY REPORTS THAT WE PRODUCE FOR AUDIT SCOTLAND
- Request permission to record and explain can be turned off at any point

Overall perceptions
I’D LIKE TO BEGIN BY TALKING VERY GENERALLY ABOUT YOUR VIEWS OF THE SRA PROCESS, BEFORE MOVING ON TO TALK ABOUT THE LAN, YOUR ROLE AS LAN LEAD AND SPECIFIC STAGES OF THE SRA PROCESS.
- So, now that the SRA process is complete, how effective would you say it was overall? PROBE FOR:
  - What worked well/less well
  - Timetable and organisation
  - Extent to which made for a more proportionate/risk based approach to scrutiny

The LANs and LAN lead role
- How did you find the role of LAN lead? What did you enjoy most about it? What did you find most difficult/challenging?
- Was the role clearly defined in advance of the SRA? PROBE FOR:
  - Skills, experience, knowledge required
  - Tasks expected to undertake
  - Time commitment
- What additional information or guidance, if any, do you think should have been provided on the role?
- Thinking about the LAN as a whole, what were your views of it? PROBE FOR:
  - Strengths/weaknesses
  - Composition – did it include the right organisations?
  - Skills, experience and knowledge of members
To what extent did you feel LAN members had a clear and shared understanding of:

- The SRA process and their collective role?
- Each others' roles and remits?

What additional information or guidance if any should the LAN have been given?

Were the timings and locations of the LAN meetings suitable for members? IF NO: What were the main difficulties encountered in this regard

Evidence gathering and synthesis of initial risk assessment judgements

ONE OF THE FIRST STAGES OF THE PROCESS WAS AN INITIAL SET UP MEETING BETWEEN YOURSELF AND THE COUNCIL

- Which members of your LAN attended the set up meeting? Did you feel this was appropriate?
- To what extent was the meeting useful? Why do you say that?
- And to what extent do you think the council found it useful? Why do you say that?
- How engaged did the council seem in the process at this stage? PROBE FOR:
  - General attitude towards SRA
  - How much they seemed to know about it
  - What specific concerns they had if any
- In terms of the evidence gathering, how easy or difficult was it to get the appropriate information from the councils. IF DIFFICULT: What were the main problems you encountered?
- How would you rate the quality of the information provided by councils? Why do you say that? PROBE FOR:
  - Amount of information/whether there were gaps
  - How up to date the information was
  - Whether it was the right type of information

ONCE YOU HAD GATHERED THE SELF-EVALUATION INFORMATION FROM THE COUNCIL AND PASSED THIS ON TO THE LAN, EACH LAN MEMBER WAS REQUIRED TO UNDERTAKE THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL RISK ASSESSMENTS, USING BOTH THEIR OWN INFORMATION AND THE SELF ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE.

- To what extent did you feel clear on what constituted ‘risk’ in the context of the SRA
- And to what extent would you say there was a shared understanding of 'risk' among the different scrutiny bodies? Why do you say that?
- What did you think of the risk assessment template? PROBE FOR: positives and negatives
- In terms of the RAGG scale the scrutiny bodies were asked to use in making their assessments, to what extent did you feel this was fit for purpose? Why do you say this? PROBE FOR:
THINKING ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL RISK ASSESSMENTS YOU RECEIVED FROM THE LANS:

- How would you rate the quality of these and the information upon which they were based? Why do you say that? PROBE FOR:
  - Amount of information/whether there were gaps
  - How up to date the information was
  - Whether it was the right type of information

- How would you rate the ability of LAN members to evaluate the evidence they collected? PROBE FOR:
  - Collating information
  - Aggregating different pieces of information to make whole service assessments
  - Analysing information

- How easy or difficult did you find it to analyse and synthesise the individual risk assessments? Why do you say this? PROBE FOR:
  - Time available - extent they were able to balance their LAN responsibilities with their other scrutiny work.
  - Guidance/support available - what, additional guidance/support, if any, would have been helpful at this stage?

- How much help did you receive from other LAN members in analysing and synthesising the individual risk assessment data?

Round table discussions

I’D NOW LIKE TO MOVE ON TO TALK ABOUT THE ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

- Firstly, just to provide some context, can you talk me through the first round table discussion to agree the shared risk assessment? What was the process? How was the meeting organised?

- How easy or difficult was it for the LAN to reach consensus on risk areas? Why do you say that? PROBE FOR:
  - Factors which facilitates/impeded consensus
  - IF APPROPRIATE: What were the main areas of disagreement
  - How were disagreements handled/resolved?

- Did LAN members contribute to discussions/decision making about areas not directly within their scrutiny remit?

- IF YES: How comfortable did they appear to be with doing this?

- Did you engage with the council on the outcomes of the first round table discussion?
• And what form did this engagement take?
• How was the risk assessment received by the council? IF NEGATIVE: And how did you respond to this?

TURNING TO THE SECOND ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION WHERE THE PROPORTIONATE SCRUTINY RESPONSE WAS AGREED…..

• To what extent did the council’s feedback inform and influence the discussion?
• Again, how easy or difficult was it for the LAN to reach consensus on the scrutiny response? Why do you say that? PROBE FOR:
  o Factors which facilitated/impeded consensus
  o IF APPROPRIATE: What were the main areas of disagreement
  o How were disagreements handled/resolved?
• To what extent did the LAN members have the authority to make decisions around the planning and scheduling of scrutiny activity?

Assurance and Improvement Plans/ Supporting improvement

MOVING ON TO TALK ABOUT THE AIPS…..

• Was it clear to you what the purpose of the AIP was? Why do you say that?
• What was the process for drafting the AIP? PROBE FOR:
  o Whether needed additional evidence/information
  o Whether they were assisted by other LAN members
• How easy or difficult did you find it? Why do you say that? PROBE FOR:
  o Whether or not template was useful
  o Extent to which guidance was useful
  o Whether enough additional support was available
  o Time available - extent they were able to balance their LAN responsibilities with their other scrutiny work.
• What additional support/guidance, if any, would you have liked when drafting the AIP?
• How do you now feel about the draft AIP report you produced? PROBE FOR:
  o strengths and weaknesses
  o balance of focus between risks areas/scrutiny response and good practice
  o Whether would do anything differently
• At what point did you share the draft AIP with the Council. Do you feel this was the right point at which to do this? Why do you say that?
• What form did the engagement take? Do you feel this was adequate?
• And how was draft AIP received by the council? How did you respond to this?
• Do you have any comments about the quality and consistency review panel and its response to the draft AIP? PROBE FOR:
  o Level of challenge
Coverage of the discussion
Consistency between Quality Panels
Information and changes to content requested
Extent of follow through on revisions
Whether involvement of quality panel made for an improved product?

**National Scrutiny plan**
- Have you seen the national scrutiny plan?
- What did you think of this?

**National priorities**
- Have you seen the national risk priorities?
- IF YES: Do you think these:
  - Are valid?
  - Need to change? In what way?

**Looking to the future**
Thinking about the SRA process as a whole, what changes do you think should be introduced in the future?
Do you think having LAN leads from both Audit Scotland and the scrutiny bodies was successful? Why do you say that?
IF NOT ALREADY COVERED: And what additional support or guidance would you most like have received as LAN leader?
Would you take on the role of LAN lead again? Why/not?
Do you have any other views on future developments?
Evaluation of the Shared Risk Assessment process
Final topic guide for Local Area Network Members

Introduction
- Introduce self, Ipsos MORI and the research
- Explain the purpose of the workshop: WE HAVE BEEN COMMISSIONED BY AUDIT SCOTLAND TO CONDUCT THIS RESEARCH TO EVALUATE ASPECTS OF THE SHARED RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS
- Explain the workshop will last around 90 minutes
- Emphasise confidentiality, anonymity etc: BEFORE WE BEGIN, I'D LIKE TO REASSURE YOU THAT EVERYTHING YOU SAY WILL BE TREATED IN CONFIDENCE AND YOU WILL NOT BE NAMED IN ANY REPORTS THAT WE PRODUCE FOR AUDIT SCOTLAND
- Request permission to record and explain can be turned off at any point

Overall perceptions
I'D LIKE TO BEGIN BY TALKING VERY GENERALLY ABOUT YOUR VIEWS OF THE SRA PROCESS, BEFORE MOVING ON TO TALK ABOUT THE LAN AND SPECIFIC STAGES OF THE SRA PROCESS.
- So, now that the SRA process is complete, how effective would you say it was overall? PROBE FOR:
  o What worked well/less well
  o Timetable and organisation
  o Extent to which they were able to balance their LAN responsibilities with their other scrutiny work
  o Extent to which made for a more proportionate/risk based approach to scrutiny

The LANs
- How did you find being a LAN member? What did you enjoy most about it? What did you find most difficult/challenging?
- Was your individual role clearly defined in advance of the SRA? PROBE FOR:
  o Skills, experience, knowledge required
  o Tasks expected to undertake
  o Time commitment
- What additional information or guidance, if any, do you think should have been provided on your role?
- To what extent did you have the authority to perform the roles and make the decisions required of you?
- Do you have any comments about the composition of the LAN – were the right organisations represented?
• To what extent did you feel LAN members had a *clear* and *shared* understanding of:
  o The SRA process and their *collective* role in it?
  o Each others’ roles and remits?
• What additional information or guidance if any should the LAN have been given
• Were the timings and locations of the LAN meetings suitable for members? IF NO: What were the main difficulties encountered in this regard

**Evidence gathering and synthesis of initial risk assessment judgements**

ONE OF THE FIRST STAGES OF THE PROCESS WAS AN INITIAL SET UP MEETING BETWEEN THE LAN AND THE COUNCIL

• Which members of your LAN attended the set up meeting? Did you feel this was appropriate? Why/not?
• IF APPROPRIATE: To what extent was the meeting useful for you? Why do you say that?
• And to what extent do you think the council found it useful? Why do you say that?
• How engaged did the council seem in the process at this stage? PROBE FOR:
  o General attitude towards SRA
  o How much they seemed to know about it
  o What specific concerns they had if any

AFTER THE SET UP MEETING, THE LAN LEADS LIAISED WITH THE COUNCILS TO OBTAIN RELEVANT SELF EVALUATION AND OTHER EVIDENCE WHICH THEY THEN SHARED WITH THE LAN. EACH LAN MEMBER WAS THEN REQUIRED TO UNDERTAKE THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL RISK ASSESSMENTS, USING BOTH THEIR OWN INFORMATION AND THE SELF ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE.

• Prior to carrying out your individual risk assessment, to what extent did you feel clear on what constituted ‘risk’ in the context of the SRA
• And to what extent would you say there was a shared understanding of ‘risk’ among the different scrutiny bodies in the LAN? Why do you say that?
• How easy or difficult did you find gathering evidence for your individual risk assessment? PROBE FOR:
  o Awareness of information
  o Availability of information
  o Whether there were any gaps in the information
  o Whether the information was up-to-date
• How easy or difficult did you find it to make your risk assessment? Why do you say this? PROBE AROUND:
  o Aggregating different pieces of information to create a whole service assessment
• Time available - extent they were able to balance their LAN responsibilities with their other scrutiny work.
• Guidance/support available

- What did you think of the risk assessment template? PROBE FOR: positives and negatives
- In terms of the RAGG scale you were asked to use in making your assessments, to what extent did you feel this was fit for purpose? Why do you say this? PROBE FOR:
  o strengths/weaknesses
  o whether LAN members had a clear/shared understanding of it
  o Whether there are alternative approaches that might be better

- What, additional guidance/support, if any, would have been helpful at this stage of the process?

AFTER THE SCRUTINY BODIES HAD PERFORMED THEIR INDIVIDUAL RISK ASSESSMENTS, THE LAN LEAD SYNTHESISED AND ANALYSED THIS INFORMATION FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION.

- Did you have any involvement in the synthesis and analysis of the individual risk assessments?
- IF YES:
  o What type of involvement did you have?
  o Were there any difficulties in aggregating data to create the overall risk assessment? PROBE FOR : Quality of information, time available, guidance available

Round table discussions

I’D NOW LIKE TO MOVE ON TO TALK ABOUT THE ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

- Firstly, just to provide some context, can you talk me through the first round table discussion to agree the shared risk assessment? What was the process? How was the meeting organised?
- Did the LAN engage with the council on the outcomes of the first round table discussion?
- And what form did this engagement take?
- How was the risk assessment received by the council? IF NEGATIVE: And how did the LAN respond to this?

TURNING TO THE SECOND ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION WHERE THE PROPORTIONATE SCRUTINY RESPONSE WAS AGREED…..

- To what extent did the council's feedback inform and influence the discussion?
- Again, how easy or difficult was it for the LAN to reach consensus on the scrutiny response? Why do you say that? PROBE FOR:
  o Factors which facilitated/impeded consensus
  o IF APPROPRIATE: What were the main areas of disagreement
  o How were disagreements handled/resolved?
• To what extent did you feel you had the authority able to make decisions on behalf of your organisation about the planning and scheduling of scrutiny activity?

Assurance and Improvement Plans/ Supporting improvement

MOVING ON TO TALK ABOUT THE AIPS…..

• Was it clear to you what the purpose of the AIP was? Why do you say that?
• To what extent were you involved in drafting the AIP?
• How do you now feel about the draft AIP report? PROBE FOR:
  o strengths and weaknesses
  o balance of focus between risks areas/scrutiny response and good practice
  o Whether would do anything differently
• At what point did the LAN share the draft AIP with the Council. Do you feel this was the right point at which to do this? Why do you say that?
• Were you involved in this stage of the process at all? IF YES: What role did you play
• What form did the engagement with the council take? Do you feel this was adequate?
• And how was draft AIP received by the council? How did you respond to this?
• Do you have any comments about the quality and consistency review panel and its response to the draft AIP? PROBE FOR:
  o Level of challenge
  o Coverage of the discussion
  o Information and changes to content requested
  o Extent of follow through on revisions
  o Whether involvement of quality panel made for an improved product?

National Scrutiny schedule

• Have you seen the national scrutiny plan?
• What did you think of this?

National priorities

• Have you seen the national risk priorities?
• IF YES: Do you think these:
  o Are valid?
  o Need to change? In what way?
Looking to the future

Thinking about the SRA process as a whole, what changes do you think should be introduced in the future?

IF NOT ALREADY COVERED: And what additional support or guidance would you most like to receive as a LAN member?

Do you have any other views on future developments?
Evaluation of the Shared Risk Assessment process
Final topic guide for National Stakeholders

Introduction
- Introduce self, Ipsos MORI and the research
- Explain the purpose of the interviews: WE HAVE BEEN COMMISSIONED BY AUDIT SCOTLAND TO CONDUCT THIS RESEARCH TO REVIEW ASPECTS OF THE SHARED RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS
- Explain the interview will take around 45 minutes
- Emphasise confidentiality, anonymity etc: BEFORE WE BEGIN, I'D LIKE TO REASSURE YOU THAT EVERYTHING YOU SAY WILL BE TREATED IN CONFIDENCE AND YOU WILL NOT BE NAMED IN ANY REPORTS THAT WE PRODUCE FOR AUDIT SCOTLAND
- Request permission to record and explain can be turned off at any point

WE HAVE DESIGNED THIS GUIDE FOR A SERIES OF DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS. IT MAY COVER TOPICS OF WHICH YOU DO NOT HAVE DETAILED KNOWLEDGE. IF YOU FEEL UNABLE TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS FOR THIS REASON JUST LET ME KNOW AND WE WILL MOVE ON

Background
- To provide some context for your comments, I'd like to begin by asking you if you could briefly describe your organisation's involvement in the SRA process
- What did you think the SRA was trying to achieve?
- Did you buy in to these objectives?
- In advance of the SRA process what did you think of the proposed approach?
- Did it present any particular challenges for you organisation?

Overall perceptions
I'D NOW JUST LIKE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT YOUR OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF THE SRA PROCESS, AS IT HAPPENED, BEFORE GOING ON TO FOCUS IN ON SOME SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF IT
- So, now that the SRA process is complete, what is your view of the approach overall? Why do you say that? PROBE FOR:
  - Strengths/weaknesses
  - Extent to which made for a more proportionate and risk based approach to scrutiny
- To what extent did you feel clear on what constituted ‘risk’ in the context of the SRA
- As far as you were aware, to what extent did the SRA seem like a collaborative effort between scrutiny bodies?
• While there were many scrutiny bodies involved, Audit Scotland organised and co-ordinated the SRA process. How appropriate did you think this was?

Local Area Networks (LAN)
MOVING ON TO TALK ABOUT SOME SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE SRA:
• What were your views of the Local Area Network approach?
• Do you have any comments regarding the LANs? PROBE FOR:
  o Strengths/Weaknesses
  o Composition – did they include the right members?
  o Skills, experience and knowledge of members
  o Consistency

Risk Assessment
LAN MEMBERS FROM EACH OF THE DIFFERENT SCRUTINY BODIES CARRIED OUT AN INDIVIDUAL RISK ASSESSMENT WHICH THEY SUBMITTED TO THE LAN LEAD. THE LAN LEAD THEN SYNTHESISED THESE RISK ASSESSMENTS BEFORE THE LAN AS A WHOLE AGREED THE SHARED RISK ASSESSMENT
• Do you have any views on this approach?
RISK WAS ASSESSED BASED ON A COLOUR CODED SCALE (THE RAGG SCALE).
• Are you familiar with the scale?
• IF NO: DESCRIBE THE SCALE AS FOLLOWS
  o RED – WHERE THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS WHICH WOULD INDICATE THAT SOME SCRUTINY ACTIVITY WOULD NEED TO BE UNDERTAKEN IN ORDER TO PROVIDE PUBLIC ASSURANCE
  o AMBER – WHERE THERE ARE AREAS OF UNCERTAINTY OR GAPS IN THE INFORMATION HELD BY SCRUTINY BODIES TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT THEY NEED TO UNDERTAKE SOME SCRUTINY ACTIVITY
  o GREEN – WHERE THERE ARE NO SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS
  o GOLD – WHERE THERE ARE EXAMPLES OF EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCE AND GOOD PRACTICE
• Do you have any comments about this approach? PROBE FOR:
  o Strengths/weaknesses
  o Whether there are alternative approaches that might be better

Assurance and Improvement Plans
ONCE THE LANS HAD COMPLETED THE RISK ASSESSMENT AND DRAWN UP A SCRUTINY RESPONSE THEY DRAFTED ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLANS FOR THEIR COUNCIL.
• Have you seen any of these documents?
• IF YES What did you think of the AIP documents? PROBE FOR:
  o Strengths/weaknesses
  o Content: balance between risk/scrutiny response and good practice
  o Tone
  o Structure/length
• How clear were the links between the risk assessment outcomes and the scrutiny responses?
• To what extent did the plans offer more proportionate and risk based approach to scrutiny?
• How consistent was the quality of the different AIPs? PROBE FOR:
  o Examples of good /poor practice

Quality and Consistency Review Panel
BEFORE PUBLICATION, THE ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLANS WERE REVIEWED BY A QUALITY AND CONSISTENCY REVIEW PANEL.
• Can I just check, did you sit on one of these panels?
IF YES:
• What were your views on the presentation given by the LAN lead to the review panel?
• How did you find the role of panel member? What did you enjoy the most? What was most challenging?
• Was this role clearly defined in advance of the SRA process?
  o Tasks expected to be undertaken
  o Time commitment
• What additional information or guidance, if any, do you think should have been provided for the role?
• Were the timings and locations of the QCRP meeting suitable for members? IF NO: What were the main difficulties encountered in this regard?

National Scrutiny Plan
IF WE NOW MOVE ON TO THE NATIONAL SCRUTINY PLAN THAT WAS PRODUCED BY AUDIT SCOTLAND
• Have you seen the plan?
• What did you think of this?
• How useful is this document to your organisation?

National risk priorities
• Have you seen the national risk priorities?
• IF YES: Do you think these:
  o Are valid?
Looking to the future

- Thinking about the SRA process as a whole, what changes do you think should be introduced in the future?
- What do you think will be the long term consequences of the SRA process?
  - Joint working between scrutiny bodies
  - Extent to which there will be more proportionate and efficient scrutiny
  - Drawbacks
- Do you have any other views on future developments?
Evaluation of the SRA process

Final Questionnaire for Chief Executives

Thank you for agreeing to complete the short survey on the Shared Risk Assessment process. The survey focuses on your views of the process and should take around 5 minutes to complete. All the information collected will be kept in the strictest confidence, and used for research purposes only. It will not be possible to identify any particular individual or organisation in the results.

Q1 Overall how effective would you say SRA process is as a way of planning scrutiny activity? SINGLE CODE
   Very effective
   Fairly effective
   Neither effective nor ineffective
   Fairly ineffective
   Very ineffective
   Don't know

IF DK AT Q1 GO TO Q3

Q2 Why do you say that? WRITE IN

Q3 How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the level of contact between the LAN lead and your council? SINGLE CODE
   Very satisfied
   Fairly satisfied
   Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
   Fairly dissatisfied
   Very dissatisfied
   Don't know

Q4 How would you rate the LAN lead’s knowledge of your council and the issues you face? Would you say it was… SINGLE CODE
   Very good
   Fairly good
   Neither good nor poor
   Fairly poor
   Very poor
   Don't know
Q5  To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements about the initial risk assessment undertaken by the LAN:

- The process was transparent
- My council had enough opportunity to submit evidence
- The LAN’s analysis of evidence was thorough
- The LAN’s assessment of risk was accurate
- My council’s self assessment was considered fully

SINGLE CODE FOR EACH ROW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Tend to agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Tend to disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Q6  And to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your council’s Assurance and Improvement Plan:

- It was of high quality
- It was useful
- It reflected the evidence presented by my council
- There is a clear link between the level of risk identified and the planned scrutiny activity
- The planned scrutiny activity is proportionate

SINGLE CODE FOR EACH ROW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Tend to agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Tend to disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Q7  Do you have any observation concerning the timing of the SRA process? WRITE IN

Q8  Finally, what aspects of the SRA process, if any, do you feel worked well? WRITE IN

Q9  And what aspects of the process, if any, do you feel most need improved upon? WRITE IN
Q10 Has your council taken part in any scrutiny activity since you have received your Assurance and Improvement Plan?

SINGLE CODE

Yes

No

IF YES TO Q10 GO TO Q11

Q11 To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements about any changes in scrutiny activity carried out at your council since you received your Assurance and Improvement Plan?

- It required less preparation and input
- It was more proportionate
- It was more focused
- There was a greater focus on risk areas
- There was a greater level of joint working between scrutiny bodies
- There was a greater focus on supporting improvement

SINGLE CODE EACH ROW

Strongly agree

Tend to agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Tend to disagree

Strongly disagree

Don’t know