

Midlothian Council

Local Scrutiny Plan 2016/17

Introduction

1. This local scrutiny plan sets out the planned scrutiny activity in Midlothian Council during 2016/17. The plan is based on a shared risk assessment undertaken by a local area network (LAN), comprising representatives of all the scrutiny bodies who engage with the council. The shared risk assessment process draws on a range of evidence with the aim of determining any scrutiny activity required and focusing this in the most proportionate way.
2. This plan does not identify or address all risks in the council. It covers only those risk areas that the LAN has identified as requiring scrutiny, or where scrutiny is planned as part of a national programme. Planned scrutiny activity across all councils in Scotland informs the National Scrutiny Plan for 2016/17, which is available on the Audit Scotland website.

Scrutiny risks

3. Last year's local scrutiny plan covering the period 2015-16, highlighted the difficult decisions that needed to be taken regarding the level and priority of services Midlothian Council could deliver. The LAN did not identify any specific areas where scrutiny was required, but noted that it would continue to monitor the outcomes of the transformation programme and the improvements to performance reporting through the work of the council's appointed auditor's (Grant Thornton). In addition, the Scottish Housing Regulators would monitor aspects of the performance of the council's housing and homelessness services.
4. The council, and its community planning partners, have integrated the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA), Midlothian Community Plan and Midlothian Council Corporate Strategy into a single document: the Single Midlothian Plan. The plan sets out national and local priorities, as well as three approaches to delivering improved outcomes, based on preventative intervention, changing access, capacity building and co-production. The Plan also identifies key geographies within Midlothian where outcomes have historically been lower than the rest of Scotland and the area.
5. The Midlothian Partnership has established an Integration Joint Board and appointed a joint chief officer who oversees adult care, criminal justice services as well as local health care services (former community health partnership services). The joint chief officer also has oversight of other service areas including housing. Integration plans are progressing well, with an integration scheme published in 2015 and draft joint strategic

commissioning plan consulted upon in late 2015. A joint performance framework is in preparation based around the nine national integration outcomes and the Single Midlothian Plan. The LAN notes that the draft joint strategic commissioning plan was high level, broad and descriptive. It is anticipated that the final plan due by April 2016 shall be 'SMART' with a detailed implementation plan and associated resource commitments and disinvestments.

6. The council again delivered a significant underspend against budget in 2015-16. In June 2015, the council approved the next stage in delivering financial stability. The Delivering Excellence framework aims to reposition services to have a greater emphasis on the priorities and outcomes within the Single Midlothian Plan. Based on the assumptions set out within the updated Financial Strategy, the projected budget gap over the period is estimated at £23 million. To achieve financial sustainability in the context of the projections requires the repositioning of services and a focus on priorities. The council's recent record of financial management has delivered service improvement and development. However, making required savings of £23 million and the hard choices that entails will be challenging for both elected members and officers. It is too early to assess the impact of the revised approach but the LAN notes that, in recent years, the council has delivered lower than anticipated savings through the Business Transformation scheme and rigour and transparency is therefore required in order to help bridge the projected gap.
7. The council has worked effectively towards improving its scrutiny functions and strengthening its approaches to self-evaluation. There continues to be scope to strengthen the impact of performance reporting and the LAN notes that, while the council continues to develop its approach to self-evaluation, the Midlothian Excellence Framework has not yet been rolled out across services consistently, and outcomes have not yet been reported to the Council or Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee. Risk management arrangements have improved in recent years but still need a high profile and better strategic focus.
8. The LAN notes that the council and its partners are making progress towards improving the health and social work outcomes for service users. The Health and Social Care Partnership's services and services for children and young people are performing well in some areas, at above Scottish average levels. However, there are still important areas where performance is below Scottish average levels. Midlothian Council and its partners are steadily improving their performance delivery. The overall assessment is that Midlothian Council is incrementally improving the delivery of local services. While there are still areas for improvement across all services, there are no significant risks identified for Midlothian from the evidence available.
9. In preparation for the implementation of the Community Empowerment Act, the council and its community planning partners have a clear policy on the management of arrangements for dealing with the transfer of assets to community groups at all levels. Some familiarisation work has been carried out by officers with elected members.

Working through the Community Planning Partnership, a plan is being developed to identify needs and build capacity across the council.

10. The LAN has identified no scrutiny risks in relation to the education service. The education service has a very clear vision for Midlothian's children and young people and benefits from strong leadership and direction. There are effective processes in place to monitor and improve the performance of the service and there has been steady improvement in a number of key measures of attainment over recent years. The service recognises that there continues to be scope to improve educational attainment and, in line with the Scottish Attainment Challenge, the service is using data to help to improve the attainment of groups of learners living in areas of multiple deprivation.
11. To assess the risk to social landlord services SHR has reviewed and compared the performance of all Scottish social landlords to identify the weakest performing landlords. We found that Midlothian Council is in the bottom quartile for all social landlords in relation to percentage of tenants satisfied with the overall service provided; percentage of tenants satisfied with opportunities given to them to participate in their landlord's decision-making; percentage of complaints dealt with within Scottish Public Services Ombudsman timescales; percentage of rent due collected; and percentage of gross rent arrears as a percentage of rent due; and, with regard to homelessness, the length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation has increased. SHR will therefore engage with the council about these areas during 2016/17. Council officials have assured SHR that they are aware of areas of weaker performance and have a number of plans in place to improve future performance; some of these are already showing encouraging outcomes. SHR is also aware of an unique housing situation which the council has been dealing with over the past two years which had the potential to impact on several areas of housing and homelessness services.

Planned scrutiny activity

12. As shown in [Appendix 1](#), the council will be subject to a range of risk-based based and nationally driven scrutiny activity during 2015/16. For some of their scrutiny activity in 2015/16, scrutiny bodies are still to determine their work programmes which specific council areas they will cover. Where a council is to be involved, the relevant scrutiny body will confirm this with the council and the appropriate LAN lead.
13. The Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Improvement Scotland have been asked by the Scottish Government to undertake a joint review across Alcohol and Drug Partnerships to support the validation of Alcohol and Drug Partnerships and services' self-assessment of performance and progress of implementing the Quality Principles: Standard Expectations of Care and Support in Drug and Alcohol Services, within the Quality Improvement Framework. This work is planned to take place across all Alcohol and Drug Partnerships in Scotland during late 2016/17. The purpose of this work will be to assess and support the effective implementation of the Quality Principles across Alcohol and Drug Partnerships and services.

14. The Care Inspectorate will work together with partner regulatory agencies to continue to deliver a co-ordinated programme of joint scrutiny of community planning partnerships and integration joint boards. Partner agencies are reviewing the methodology for joint inspections of Adults' services. As well as joint strategic scrutiny programmes, the Care Inspectorate will also be reviewing its approach to strategic commissioning and undertaking a variety of thematic programmes of work.
15. In relation to its housing services, SHR will engage with Midlothian Council to monitor its progress in addressing the weaknesses identified. SHR will review the council's quarterly performance management reports and will meet council officials if considered necessary.
16. HMICS will continue to inspect local policing across Scotland during 2016/17 as part of its rolling work programme. These inspections will examine, amongst other things, local scrutiny and engagement between Police Scotland and councils. HMICS will identify and notify LANs and the local Policing Divisions to be inspected approximately three months prior to inspection.
17. In addition to specific work shown in [Appendix 1](#), routine, scheduled audit and inspection work will take place through the annual audit process and the ongoing inspection of school and care establishments by Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate respectively. Audit Scotland will carry out a programme of [performance audits](#) during 2016/17 and individual audit and inspection agencies will continue to monitor developments in key areas of council activity and will provide support and challenge as appropriate. This will help to inform future assessment of scrutiny risk.

Appendix 1: Scrutiny plan

Scrutiny body	Scrutiny activity	Date
Audit Scotland		
Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Improvement Scotland	Joint review of Alcohol and Drug Partnership to support validation of Alcohol and Drug Partnerships and services' self-assessment of performance and progress of implementing the <i>Quality Principles: Standard Expectations of Care and Support in Drug and Alcohol Services</i> , within the Quality Improvement Framework.	To be confirmed
Education Scotland	Review of the quality of Careers Information Advice and Guidance services delivered by Skills Development Scotland to be carried out over the next two years.	To be confirmed
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMICS)	No specific work planned at present.	
Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI)	No specific work planned at present.	
Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)	<p>The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) will monitor the council's progress in addressing the weaknesses identified. It will review the council's quarterly performance management reports and meet council officials as necessary.</p> <p>SHR will publish the findings of its thematic inquiry work completed during 2015-16. It will carry out further thematic inquiries during 2016-17.</p> <p>SHR will review the Charter data submitted by landlords and carry out data accuracy visits during quarter 2.</p> <p>If the council is to be involved in a thematic inquiry or a data accuracy visit, SHR will confirm this directly with the council and the LAN lead.</p>	<p>Quarterly</p> <p>To be confirmed</p> <p>Quarter 2</p>