
ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN – update 2011-14

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Local Area Network of external scrutiny bodies has recently completed its annual Shared Risk Assessment review of the Council and updated the Assurance and Improvement Plan accordingly. The Plan outlines the current level of risk within the Council and sets out proposed external scrutiny for a rolling three year period.
- 1.2 The Local Area Network is positive about the Council's progress and notes both the significant improvements made and the challenges we continue to face.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Members note the annual Assurance and Improvement Plan update, and in particular the positive comments on the Council's improvement progress and reduction in risk
- 2.2 Members note that areas identified as risks or uncertainty will continue to be addressed through the Council's ongoing improvement agenda

3 DETAIL

- 3.1 The Council's first Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP) was published in July 2010, and presented to the Executive on 12 August. This plan was prepared by Argyll and Bute's Local Area Network (LAN), consisting of representatives of the key audit and inspection bodies responsible for monitoring the Council, utilising a shared risk assessment approach. Shared risk assessment is a joint approach using key information about the Council to plan scrutiny activity that is proportionate and based on risk.
- 3.2 Over the course of the past year, the LAN has reviewed the areas of risk identified within the original AIP in order to identify the Council's current position. This new approach to scrutiny, introduced in conjunction with the launch of Best Value 2 and increased self assessment, has been designed to reduce the burden of scrutiny on Local Authorities by avoiding duplication through sharing information and co-ordinating scrutiny activity. The approach also seeks to encourage Local Authorities to become more outcome focused.
- 3.3 The AIP highlights several areas of improvement:
- Key building blocks for improvement are in place, such as new management structure, planning and performance management framework, and the Transformation Programme

- Management structure now in place is providing strong leadership
- New Vision and Values provide clarity of direction
- Forward Together events and budget consultation process a positive approach to informing the budget process and engaging communities
- Improved outcomes for Social Work service users
- Improvement in early years provision and primary schools

3.4 The risk assessment also saw a significant reduction in the overall level of risk faced by the Council, with one area of significant risk around 'support for children leaving care' being removed from the plan altogether, and several others being downgraded from area of uncertainty to no significant risk.

2010 AIP	2011 AIP update
2 Significant Risks	1 Significant Risk
12 Areas of Uncertainty	7 Areas of Uncertainty

3.5 Both the 2010 AIP and 2011 update identified roads as a Significant Risk. Whilst the LAN recognises that the roads network is a priority for the Council, and notes the additional funding made available, it remains high risk as it is deemed too early to assess whether this additional funding will be enough to improve the network road condition indicator. A Roads Asset Management Plan is currently being prepared as a further means of addressing this issue.

3.6 Several areas of uncertainty were identified, and will be monitored by the LAN over the coming months:

- Management of the school estate - political and legislative risks that may influence the final outcome of the review
- Social change: ensuring services are directed to most vulnerable – despite notable improvement in performance some areas still remain below Scottish average
- Support of adults at home – proportion of older people receiving care at home has increased but remains below average. LAN deemed it too early to assess the effectiveness of planned changes in the delivery of older people's services
- Housing – significant reduction in RSL funding and commensurate reduction in house completion rates may impact upon current good progress on affordable social sector new builds
- Services for homeless people – good progress however 2012 targets of provision remain challenging
- Sustainability – due to significant funding reductions across the public sector, the Council will continue to go through a period of significant change

3.7 Efforts will continue towards addressing areas remaining as a risk or area of uncertainty through both ongoing improvement activity, including the

Corporate Improvement Plan, and Transformation Programme, and at a service level.

4 Summary of Scrutiny Activity

- 4.1 The focus of the AIP is strategic scrutiny activity focussed at a corporate or whole service level. Scrutiny level at unit level, including for example school and residential home inspections, and unannounced inspections for services such as care for vulnerable groups, will continue on an ongoing basis.
- 4.2 In addition to routine scrutiny activity, and ongoing monitoring by the LAN and our appointed external auditors, the following scrutiny activity will take place within the Council over the next year:
- Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS – formerly Care Commission and SWIA) will undertake scrutiny around Child Protection, and Adoption and Fostering
 - Housing Benefit audit – part of ongoing benefits performance audit work faced by all Local Authorities

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The overall picture of the Council continues to be an improving one with a significant reduction in the level of risk faced. However, we need to build on the positive improvements that have taken place to ensure that areas remaining as either a risk or area of uncertainty are addressed, and that we continue to provide best value services to our customers and improved outcomes for our communities.

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ATTACHMENT

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