

# **Aberdeenshire Council**

## **Assurance and Improvement Plan**

**2014–17**

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# Introduction

1. This Assurance and Improvement Plan (AIP) sets out the planned scrutiny activity in Aberdeenshire Council between April 2014 and March 2017. The AIP is based on a shared risk assessment undertaken by a local area network (LAN). There is a LAN for each council, comprising representatives of all the scrutiny bodies who engage with the council. The aim of the shared risk assessment process is to focus scrutiny activity where it is most needed and to determine the most proportionate scrutiny response over a three year period.
2. This is the fifth AIP for Aberdeenshire Council since the introduction of the shared risk assessment process.<sup>1</sup> It is the result of the shared risk assessment which began in October 2013. The process drew on evidence from a number of sources, including:
  - the annual report to the Controller of Audit and elected members for 2012/13 from the council's appointed external auditors
  - evidence gathered from Audit Scotland, Education Scotland, the Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Housing Regulator and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMICS), including published inspection reports and other supporting evidence
  - the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) and associated development plan for the council area
  - the council's own performance data and self-evaluation evidence
  - analysis of data from the SOLACE COSLA/Improvement Service Local Government Benchmarking Framework.<sup>2</sup>
3. The shared risk assessment process was reviewed in 2013, in the context of a significantly changed scrutiny landscape and the evolving public service reform agenda.<sup>3</sup> Based on the findings of the review, this year's shared risk assessment focused on identifying the council's current position in implementing the Scottish Government's reform agenda. It also placed more emphasis on scrutiny risk in relation to the council's improvement and transformation agenda. This change in approach is reflected in the structure of the AIP for 2014-17, which covers four areas:
  - local priorities and public service reform
  - corporate assessment
  - service performance
  - improving and transforming public services/public performance reporting.

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<sup>1</sup> Assurance and Improvement Plans for each council since 2010 are available on the Audit Scotland website: <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/work/scrutiny/aip.php>

<sup>2</sup> The indicators used in the framework can be found on the Improvement Service website: <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/>

<sup>3</sup> The review of the shared risk assessment process was one of four work streams taken forward by the Strategic Group for Local Government Scrutiny Co-ordination during 2013.

4. Scrutiny risk is assessed against the following criteria:
  - No scrutiny required - there are no significant concerns, so no scrutiny work is necessary.
  - Scrutiny required - there are concerns about performance, services or outcomes, resulting in the need for scrutiny work.
  - Further information required - there is insufficient information to reach a judgement about performance.
5. The National Scrutiny Plan for 2014/15 is available on the Audit Scotland website. It provides a summary of planned scrutiny activity across all councils in Scotland, based on the AIPs for each council.

# Summary

6. The Aberdeenshire SOA 2013-2023 aims to progress the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership's vision for the area. It outlines local outcomes for Aberdeenshire and explains how these contribute to national outcomes. The SOA defines a set of eight long-term outcomes (over ten years) to be delivered for local communities. For each of these high-level outcomes, the partnership has identified a range of supporting medium-term outcomes (over three years) and short-term outcomes (one year). Detailed action plans underpin the achievement of these outcomes.
7. The council is developing a strong senior management team that is improving strategic leadership. Senior managers have an inclusive and visible management style and promote good communication in the workplace. The council is consolidating its performance management arrangements, and has improved its approach to monitoring and reporting performance. Elected members now have a stronger focus in scrutinising the council's performance
8. Council finances are well managed, with improved budget monitoring processes noted during the last 12 months which ensured that spending was contained within budget. The scale of savings the council needs to achieve over the next five years presents a significant challenge. While indicative budgets are in place, and currently being updated, the annual audit report indicates that further work is required to ensure robust processes are in place across all transformation projects to ensure that efficiencies are realised to meet the predicted shortfall.
9. There is a comprehensive approach to people management through a workforce strategy and action plan. The council is aware of the challenges it faces in recruiting and retaining staff and in maintaining a skilled and resilient workforce. The council works well with staff and their representatives to address these challenges through a variety of initiatives.
10. The council is risk aware. Consideration of risk is well embedded in service planning. However, as reported in the last AIP, there continues to be a number of outstanding and challenging ICT issues, despite progress in some areas.
11. Targeted Best Value work completed in 2012/13 concluded that the council took a proactive approach to equalities, and had the structures and processes to deliver the equalities duties.
12. Education continues to perform well. Whilst findings from inspections reveal a positive and improving picture overall, scope for improvement is also evident, particularly at secondary level. Encouragingly, the education service has demonstrated a proactive approach in addressing these matters.
13. Registered care services provided by the council continue to demonstrate strong performance - most services continuing to receive 'good' or 'very good' grades in relation to the four quality themes - care and support, staffing, management and leadership and environment. The outcome of the pilot joint inspection of services for older people, conducted between August and October 2013, was unavailable to the LAN at time of writing (April 2014). The

effectiveness of the council's services for children and young people will be considered as part of a joint inspection of services scheduled for 2014/15.

14. The council's self-assessment of homelessness services, completed in April 2013, provided the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) with a reasonable level of assurance on how the council is dealing with housing options and the prevention of homelessness.
15. The Care Inspectorate, in partnership with the Association of Directors of Social Work and the Risk Management Authority, has been undertaking supported self-evaluation activity to assess the initial impact of the introduction of the assessment and case planning instrument LS/CMI across Scotland's criminal justice social work services. This activity started in June 2013 and will conclude with the publication of a national report by May 2014. Action plans arising from this activity will be implemented in 2014.

## Planned scrutiny activity

16. Following on from the previous year's shared risk assessment, and based on discussions held by the LAN in 2013/14, there are no specific areas of scrutiny work identified in Aberdeenshire during the year 2014/15.
17. However, a joint inspection of services for children, led by the Care Inspectorate, will take place in Aberdeenshire, focusing on services provided by the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) as a whole.
18. Education Scotland will be reviewing the quality of Careers Information Advice and Guidance services delivered by Skills Development Scotland across all council areas over the next three years.
19. There is some non-risk based scrutiny activity planned across councils in 2014/15, but where scrutiny bodies are yet to determine which specific council areas will be included. This includes the following:
  - The SHR recently carried out a thematic inquiry into the outcomes that councils are achieving by delivering housing options and prevention of homelessness services. A sample of councils were selected to take part in this as case studies. The findings from this work could potentially lead to further engagement with some councils. The SHR will carry out further thematic inquiries between 2014/15 and 2015/16. If a council is to be involved in a thematic inquiry the SHR will confirm this with the council and the appropriate LAN lead.
  - HMICS will be inspecting local policing across Scotland over the next three years. This will examine, amongst other things, local scrutiny and engagement between Police Scotland and councils. The geographic areas to be inspected during 2014-15 have yet to be determined.
  - Education Scotland will continue to engage with councils for the purpose of validated self-evaluation (VSE). The scheduling of VSEs will be arranged by negotiation between Education Scotland and individual councils.

- Education Scotland will be working in partnership with councils to carry out self-evaluation of education psychology services over a two year period beginning in 2014/15.
20. Audit Scotland will follow-up two national performance audits during 2014. This will involve targeted follow-up of 'Arm's-length external organisations (ALEOs): are you getting it right?' (June 2011) and 'Major capital investment in councils' (March 2013). Audit Scotland will also carry out a programme of performance audits during the period of this AIP that will involve work with councils. The performance audit programme for 2014/15 is available at <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/work/forwardwork.php?year=2014>.
21. 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 will continue as planned. The individual audit and inspection agencies will also continue to monitor developments in key areas of council activity and will provide support and challenge as appropriate. This will also help to inform future assessment of scrutiny risk.
22. A timetable for the planned audit and inspection activity in Aberdeenshire Council between April 2014 and March 2017 is at [Appendix 1](#).

# Local priorities and public service reform

23. Local councils are operating within a context of significant change as a result of the challenging financial environment and the public service reform agenda. The Scottish Government's reform agenda emphasises the importance of place, people, partnership, prevention and performance in public services. This year's shared risk assessment identified the council's current position in implementing the Scottish Government's reform agenda, specifically in relation to:
- community planning and new Single Outcome Agreements
  - police and fire oversight arrangements (following the introduction of new national police and fire services)
  - health and social care integration
  - welfare reform.

## Community planning and Single Outcome Agreements

24. In reviewing its SOA for 2012/13, the Aberdeenshire CPP carried out a strategic assessment and priority-setting exercise to determine five priorities: Alcohol and drugs; Children have the best start in life; Older people and community care; Supporting communities and volunteering; Transport.
25. At its meeting in November 2012, the CPP Board agreed to retain these priorities for inclusion in the updated SOA for the area. The SOA 2013-2023 aims to reflect progress in relation to the Aberdeenshire CPP vision for the area. It outlines local outcomes for Aberdeenshire and explains how these contribute to national outcomes. The SOA defines a set of eight long-term outcomes (over ten years) to be delivered for local communities. For each of these high-level outcomes, the partnership has identified a range of supporting medium-term outcomes (over three years) and short-term outcomes (one year). Detailed action plans underpin the achievement of these outcomes. Quality assurance carried out by the Scottish Government highlighted prevention as an area for development, recommending that the CPP adds plans for prevention to each of its priorities.
26. The CPP will check the delivery of the short, medium and long term outcomes. In past years, the CPP has published an annual report and corresponding public performance report, indicating overall progress. The 2012/13 annual report revealed around half of agreed actions achieved or on track.

## Police and fire

27. The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 sought to place local communities at the heart of the provision of police and fire and rescue services. The three key elements of this are:
  - the designation of a Local Police Commander (LPC) and, for the fire and rescue service, a Local Senior Officer (LSO) with a statutory requirement on LPCs and LSOs to include information on community planning in their respective local plans
  - production of a local policing plan and a fire and rescue plan for each council area approved by the council
  - the creation of formal relationships between the council and the two services.
28. In Aberdeenshire, scrutiny of both police and fire plans takes place in the Policy and Resources Committee. On a quarterly basis the committee receives updates on three standing agenda items from the services namely an operational update; a performance update and the establishment of resources. Within Aberdeenshire there are six area committees covering 19 wards, 96 community councils and 68 elected members. Each has their own locally identified priorities (through a strategic assessment process) and it is through these committees where community engagement takes place.
29. HMICS conducted a thematic inspection of the new arrangements for local scrutiny in 2013 and believe that the new arrangements for local scrutiny and engagement (LSE) require more time to bed in and that it is therefore too early to assess the effectiveness of these arrangements.
30. In relation to the wider issue of the delivery of community safety, HMICS has seen no significant changes to partnership arrangements since the creation of a single police service model for Scotland. HMICS is considering community safety as a possible area of focus within its 2014-17 work plan.
31. Fire reform is also still at an early stage and HM Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) has not as yet undertaken any detailed examination of the way in which community safety and engagement activities are delivered across local authority areas in Scotland. HMFSI published *An Overview of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS)* in 2013. In its report, HMFSI highlighted that LSOs, who have responsibility for overseeing partnership working with local authorities in the delivery of community safety and engagement, are clearly sighted on their responsibilities and are keen to make local partnerships work in an effort to optimise community outcomes.
32. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) is consulting on a suite of local fire and rescue plans. HMFSI is not currently proposing any specific scrutiny on local planning and consultation processes, but may consider this in its future inspection plans.

## Health and social care integration

33. An integrated joint board ('body corporate') of Aberdeenshire Council and NHS Grampian is the preferred model to manage the integrated health and social care service in Aberdeenshire, as agreed in September 2013. A transitional leadership group is overseeing the process towards integration, co-chaired by the chair of Aberdeenshire Council's Social Work and Housing Committee and a non-executive director of NHS Grampian and chair of Aberdeenshire Community Health Partnership. It includes five councillors and five members of the NHS Grampian board as well as representatives from key stakeholders.
34. Authority has been delegated to the transitional leadership group. The group is tasked with progressing the transition to an integrated joint board by developing the necessary draft integration plan and all associated measures. This is subject to significant decision making on the finalised documentation, legal agreements and budgetary allocation being referred to the council and NHS Grampian board prior to implementation.
35. The remit of the transitional leadership group is to:
  - Lead the transition to a health and social care integrated service within Aberdeenshire.
  - Consider the Scottish Government legislation and guidance as it progresses.
  - Provide guidance to officers in the council and NHS.
  - Make recommendations on the design and model of integration.
  - Oversee the required integration plan.
  - Regularly communicate with all key stakeholders.
36. The transitional leadership group has established four working groups to take forward initiatives. These relate to governance; engagement and involvement; integrated care pathways; and resources.
37. The scope of functions to be delegated to an integrated joint board in Aberdeenshire will be adult and older people's health and social care functions. The Chief Officer for the new integrated service started work in March 2014. An integration project manager has also been appointed, in order to coordinate and drive forward the necessary integration measures.

## Welfare reform

38. In January 2012, the council set up a cross-service working group, chaired by the benefits manager as lead officer for welfare reform. The group remit is to prepare for the impact of the changes in welfare provision, and to identify what action the council and its partners could take to minimise any adverse impact on individual households and communities. The group has prepared and subsequently reviewed a mitigation action plan, and has established separate subgroups: a universal credit housing implementation group which includes tenant representation and the voluntary sector; a social work implementation group; a group to deal with communications and media issues, and a group to develop a revised procedure and "scoring matrix" for discretionary housing payments.

39. The benefits manager has provided briefings to both the CPP executive and board and has worked closely with the team leader for tackling poverty and financial inclusion.
40. The council has also provided a comprehensive range of information to the public in the form of newsletters and web pages on the council website.
41. In 2013-14, the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) surveyed social landlords and published findings on the early impact of welfare reform on rent arrears. It will continue to gather information on rent and arrears through the annual return on the Scottish Social Housing Charter in order to monitor the impact of welfare reform on social landlords and their tenants.

# Corporate assessment

42. The following table provides an assessment of scrutiny risk relating to the council's management arrangements (including how it is meeting its Best Value obligations).<sup>4</sup>

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
<p><b>Leadership and direction</b></p> <p>How the council's vision is designed around its knowledge of its local communities and how this is translated throughout all the council's plans and strategies.</p>	No scrutiny required	<p>The targeted Best Value work completed during 2012/13 concluded that the council is developing a strong senior management team that is improving strategic leadership. Senior managers have an inclusive and visible management style and promote good communication in the workplace.</p> <p>The council plan reflects administration priorities as well as those contained in the SOA. The council is currently consulting on its 'Vision 2050', which will provide a basis for future strategic planning. This has been subject to consultation at community engagement events, community groups, area committees and via the council website.</p> <p>There is alignment between partnership priorities and the current council priorities. The SOA and local community plans form part of the council's strategic planning framework, and the monitoring reports will be incorporated into the public performance reporting calendar.</p>	No specific scrutiny required

<sup>4</sup> The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. Best Value Guidance, Scottish Executive, 2004.

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
<p><b>Governance and accountability</b></p> <p>Whether governance arrangements are working effectively and whether good governance underpins council decisions and supports performance improvement.</p>	<p>No scrutiny required</p>	<p>The council's political culture and decision making arrangements remain stable and currently do not pose any areas of specific concern for scrutiny. The Aberdeenshire Alliance, a partnership between the Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Independent groups, continues to lead the council following the local government elections in May 2012. The decision making structure includes four policy committees supported by six area committees. The Scrutiny and Audit Committee provides an example of effective oversight by elected members, offering effective scrutiny and challenge. No specific issues about the function and effectiveness of these governance and accountability arrangements have been identified in 2013/14.</p> <p>The council's 2012/13 governance statement noted that, based on the chief internal auditor's evaluation of the control environment, reasonable assurance can be placed on the adequacy and effectiveness of the council's control system in the year to 31 March 2013. Internal audit reports have highlighted areas where improvements can be made, and these areas are being reviewed by the council in order that best practice can be achieved in all areas of activity. Positive steps have been taken over the last year to improve and communicate the council's financial governance arrangements through a review of financial regulations and the introduction of a new monitoring scheme which includes end year</p>	<p>No specific scrutiny required</p>

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
		flexibility guidance. This is consistent with the findings of the external auditors.	
<p><b>Community engagement and empowerment</b></p> <p>Whether the council is giving local people a greater say in local budget decisions and giving communities a right to challenge local public service delivery.</p>	No scrutiny required	<p>The council identified in its 2012 self-assessment an area of improvement around community engagement and agree to continue to identify opportunities for supporting creativity within communities and supporting community capacity building and enabling co-production. The community engagement strategy, approved by the council later that year, sets out the overarching framework for all engagement activity across the council.</p> <p>Community planning officers coordinate activity locally, taking into account engagement activity with a range of partners such as NHS, police and fire. Corporately, teams continue to pilot and trial new ways of engaging with residents, whether this is on the Local Development Plan, budget setting, or new leisure facility provision within a town. The latest developments are to undertake a community planning approach to engagement, where the senior officers of all partners go into communities to discuss 'place' and how local services can support communities better. In the autumn of 2013, the council carried out a programme of public engagement throughout Aberdeenshire, providing an opportunity for residents to influence budget priorities for the new financial year and subsequent periods.</p> <p>In the 2013 self-assessment update, the council stated that supporting communities to become resilient and ensuring people</p>	No specific scrutiny required

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
		<p>have their say in what happens within their communities continues to be a key role for area managers and area committees. Programmes such as community asset transfer and the area initiatives budget as well as ward forums, community councils and community engagement events are examples of approaches being taken.</p> <p>Local community plans for each area have been approved and developed using strategic assessments and input from community groups and representatives.</p>	
<p><b>Financial management</b></p> <p>How effectively the council is planning and managing its budgets.</p>	<p>Further information required</p>	<p>In response to an underspend that emerged during 2011/12, the council has put more stringent arrangements in place for monitoring the revenue budget savings and in particular the levels of any underspend. For 2013/14, the most recent monitoring report from the April 2014 policy and resources committee is indicating a small projected underspend (£3 million) against a budget of £520m.</p> <p>The council manages its finances well, with improved budget monitoring processes noted during the last 12 months which ensured that spending was contained within budget.</p> <p>The scale of savings the council needs to achieve over the next five years is substantial. While indicative budgets are in place, and currently being updated, the annual audit report indicates that further work is required to ensure robust processes are in place across all transformation projects to ensure that efficiencies are</p>	<p>No specific scrutiny required</p>

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
		<p>realised to meet the predicted shortfall. Whilst 2013/14 and 2014/15 show a balanced position, significant shortfalls are projected in future years (£50m savings, required over a four-year period 2015/16 –2018/19, compare with annual overall budget expenditure of £520m). This is based on expected funding levels and increasing demand pressures in future years.</p> <p>In response, the council is adopting a policy led budget approach for 2015 and beyond. The four core outcomes as set out in the Council Plan (lifelong learning; strong and sustainable communities; caring for communities; and public service excellence), and the 20 priorities which support the four core outcomes will be the framework upon which the budget will be constructed. Groups of elected members, reflecting the four core outcomes, will take matters forward, considering budget proposals and service implications.</p>	<p>This work is currently at a very early stage and is an area that will be considered as part of external audit work.</p>
<p><b>People management</b> The effectiveness of the council's workforce planning and management arrangements.</p>	<p>No scrutiny required</p>	<p>The council has a comprehensive approach to people management through a workforce strategy and action plan. It is aware of the challenges it faces in recruiting and retaining staff and in maintaining a skilled and resilient workforce. The council works well with staff and their representatives to address these challenges through a variety of initiatives and can demonstrate progress in reducing sickness absence among staff.</p> <p>It has a workforce planning toolkit (recognised as good practice and taken up by other Scottish councils) that includes data on staff</p>	<p>No specific scrutiny required</p>

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
		<p>numbers and age profile which assists in the profiling and planning for its workforce strategy. The strategy is linked through its planning framework to service planning and service reviews.</p> <p>A key element of the strategy is the recruitment, retention and development of staff. The council shows a good understanding of the challenges it faces, particularly around its ability to recruit and retain staff in a competitive environment. It uses a range of approaches to manage, retain and realise the potential of staff through re-skilling, secondments in other business areas, attracting workers to specific posts, a 'growing your own' approach and a review of roles and responsibilities as well as extending opportunities for modern apprenticeships and the implementation of a 'Future Leaders' programme. These, along with its workforce planning toolkit, aim to identify and address future gaps. These initiatives have been effective in managing and retaining its workforce. In 2012/12 turnover rate is lightly higher than in previous years, however retention rates continue to improve.</p> <p>The council is undertaking a range of activities to help it minimise the impact of the reduction of its workforce. These include improving its understanding of the workforce profile and training opportunities, such as the provision of more targeted learning and development opportunities that meet individual's needs as well as support the business of the council.</p> <p>A major consultation exercise to gain feedback from staff on</p>	

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
		<p>updated proposals to change pay and conditions of service has recently been completed. Consultation with staff and the Trade Unions ended in November 2013 and the proposed changes were accepted, meaning that the new pay rates, terms and conditions and employee benefits will be introduced from April 2014.</p> <p>The council engages well with its staff and involves a range of staff at all levels in its improvement activity. The council's intranet provides staff with good information on developments within the council. Senior staff engage in 'back to floor exercises' to engage with staff and the chief executive's blog provides for a two way dialogue on key issues affecting staff.</p>	
<p><b>Asset management</b> The council's arrangements for managing assets and how this key resource is used to support effective service delivery.</p>	<p>No scrutiny required</p>	<p>The council continues to work to the Corporate Asset Management Plan 2010 - 2015. However an updated Corporate Asset Management Plan has been prepared and is to be presented to committee in early 2014 to accompany the updated Capital Plan 2013 - 2027. An operational property performance report will also accompany the updated Corporate Asset Management Plan, with this indicating a steady improvement in the condition and suitability of the operational portfolio. Whilst there is improvement in these two elements, performance remains below the Scottish average, and as such assessment criteria is to be reviewed and benchmarked through Scottish Best Value benchmarking group to ensure parity of both methodology and bandings.</p> <p>Since 2011, the WorkSpace initiative has achieved a number of efficiencies, including the release of 14 office premises, resulting</p>	<p>No specific scrutiny required</p>

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
		<p>in savings from reduced running costs, as well as £200k capital receipt from the sale of one property.</p> <p>The proportion of the council's houses that meet the Scottish Quality Housing Standard is higher than the Scottish average, with 79 per cent currently meeting the required standard.</p> <p>Capital investment is robustly managed, with projects generally completed on time and in budget.</p>	
<p><b>Procurement</b> How effectively corporate procurement contributes to the council maximising value for money in the goods and services it uses to deliver its services.</p>	No scrutiny required	<p>The council operates a central procurement unit (CPU) in partnership with Aberdeen City Council. Compared against other local authorities, the CPU has been efficient in terms of unit cost of operation, and savings targets have been exceeded.</p> <p>The two councils are proposing to implement a change programme that enhances the coverage, governance and value of the CPU to the wider organisation. A report to Policy and Resources Committee in February 2014 will set out proposed changes to the Corporate Procurement Strategy, as well as changes to the structure and operation of the CPU.</p>	No specific scrutiny required
<p><b>Risk management</b> The effectiveness of the council's arrangements for identifying, managing and mitigating risks and how</p>	No scrutiny required	<p>The council is risk aware. Consideration of risk is well embedded in service planning. Departmental risk registers were last updated at 30 June 2013 and were signed off by directors at the end September 2013. A full review of risk registers is currently under way with director sign off due by 31 March 2014. As part of this review, services are being asked to consider a list of new or</p>	No specific scrutiny required

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
its management of risk contributes to the successful delivery of public services.		emerging risks, including risks related to the use of social media, the increasing prevalence of “cyber-crime” , and health and social care integration	
<b>Information management</b> The effectiveness of the council’s arrangements for managing information as a key resource in delivering services.	Further information required	As reported last year, external audit had revealed a number of ICT issues, including capacity planning, security and data protection. Recommendations identified in the external audit report in relation to ICT capacity, information handling and security and back up are said to have been either resolved or well under way to be resolved as part of the overall ICT review and improvement.	No specific scrutiny required. However, as some of this work is still to be completed, this is an area that will continue to be considered as part of external audit work.
<b>Joint working</b> Progress with any significant shared services initiatives, in particular in relation to governance or pace of implementation.	No scrutiny required	<p>The council continues in its role of lead partner for the CPP, working together with private and voluntary organisations, other public bodies and local communities to deliver better services and improve outcomes for people of Aberdeenshire.</p> <p>The Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Futures partnership was recently re-launched. The Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan, together with the local plans for Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, form the development plan for the North East.</p> <p>Good progress is being made towards the establishment of integrated health and social care in Aberdeenshire - the council demonstrating effective partnership working with NHS Grampian. Partnership working across the CPP in delivering children's</p>	No specific scrutiny required

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
		<p>services will form a central theme of the joint inspection of services for children in Aberdeenshire, planned for 2014/15.</p> <p>At a service level, the partnership with Aberdeen City Council in operating a joint central procurement unit (CPU) has proved to be highly effective.</p>	
<p><b>Efficiency</b></p> <p>How effectively the council is improving its efficiency in response to the budget challenges being faced.</p>	<p>No scrutiny required</p>	<p>As stated above, indicative budgets are in place for the next five years, which are currently being updated. Whilst 2013/14 and 2014/15 show a balanced position, significant shortfalls are projected in future years (£50m savings, required over a four-year period 2015/16 –2018/19, compare with annual overall budget expenditure of £520m). This is based on expected funding levels and increasing demand pressures in future years. The council has set out the process by which it will examine options for achieving these savings, in keeping with its four core outcomes. At a special meeting of Policy and Budget Steering Group in January 2014, it was agreed that groups would be formed under each of the Core Outcomes - ie Lifelong Learning; Strong and Sustainable Communities; Caring for Communities and Public Service Excellence - in order to focus on specific areas of the budget. These Groups will feedback into PBSG with their deliberations and suggestions for service delivery and budget proposals.</p>	<p>No specific scrutiny required</p>
<p><b>Equalities</b></p> <p>Whether the council is providing effective leadership of equalities</p>	<p>No scrutiny required</p>	<p>In April 2011, the Equality Act 2010 introduced a new public sector general duty which encourages equality to be mainstreamed into public bodies' core work so that it is not a marginal activity but part and parcel of how public bodies operate. In response to this, the</p>	<p>No specific scrutiny required</p>

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
and is meeting its statutory obligations.		<p>council's equality outcomes and mainstreaming report sets out the council's approach to mainstreaming equality. It provides details of six quality outcomes which span the period to 2017, designed to '...eliminate discrimination, harassment and discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.'</p> <p>Targeted Best Value work completed in 2012/13 concluded that the council took a proactive approach to equalities, and had the structures and processes to deliver its equalities duties. However, there needed to be more engagement from elected members and staff at all levels. It had robust plans in place to identify the main equality issues for the council and its communities and to raise awareness of elected members and staff on equalities issues.</p> <p>As a result, progress has been made in a number of important areas, including the development of an equality impact assessment tool together with guidance. This has been supported by a number of briefings tailored for members and employees alike. The council has appointed four elected member equality champions who have a clear role in promoting and supporting equalities activity. They are engaged in the work taking place across the council and three also sit as directors on the Grampian Regional Equality Council. In addition, approximately sixty service champions have been nominated. Their role is to support the mainstreaming of equalities by assisting employees when completing equality impact assessments and responding to equalities-related queries.</p>	

# Service performance

43. The following table provides an assessment of scrutiny risk relating to the performance of the council's main inspected public services (education, social care services and housing) and non-inspected services (eg corporate services, culture and leisure services, environmental services).

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
<b>Education</b> The quality of local education services and the resulting outcomes (including early years).	No scrutiny required	<p>Education continues to perform well. In 2013, whilst in some cases the authority is still ahead of the national average, and broadly in line with the average of performance across the comparator authorities in half of the attainment measures, there are a small number of measures where performance has fallen noticeably behind performance in comparator authorities.</p> <p>Within the early years of secondary education, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has remained stable, or has shown a small decrease. In the majority (9 out of 15) of Scottish Qualifications Authority examinations, levels of attainment are consistently above the national average.</p> <p>Whilst findings from inspections reveal a positive and improving picture overall, scope for improvement is also evident, particularly at secondary level. Encouragingly, the education service has demonstrated a proactive approach in these matters. Under performance and poor leadership in some schools is being addressed. Steps are being put in place to address the issues identified, working</p>	Joint inspection of services for children

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
		closely with Education Scotland.	
<p><b>Social care services</b></p> <p>The quality of local social work and care services and the resulting outcomes (including adult care, older people's services, learning disability services, criminal justice services, mental health services, children and families).</p>	No scrutiny required	<p>Care services provided by the council continue to demonstrate strong performance - most services continuing to receive 'good' or 'very good' grades in relation to the four quality themes - care and support, staffing, management and leadership and environment. Again, no council provided services have attracted a 'weak' or 'unsatisfactory' grade. When compared with all other registered care services in Scotland, those provided by Aberdeenshire Council performed at least as well as, or better than average. Latest figures (2010/11) show improved performance in relation to outcomes for care leavers - 38 per cent of care leavers in employment, education or training, compared to a Scottish average of 22 per cent.</p>	Joint inspection of services for children
<p><b>Housing and homelessness</b></p> <p>The quality of housing and homeless services and the resulting outcomes.</p>	No scrutiny required	<p>Aberdeenshire is an active member of a housing better value network and is good on benchmarking for performance improvement. It has improved its tenancy sustainment figure - up from 83.9 per cent to 86.6 per cent. This contrasts with an overall downward national trend. Performance in re-letting empty houses has also improved, and it continues to be a top performer when it comes to dealing with rent arrears. The council is also above the national average when it comes to housing stock meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.</p> <p>However repair response times have fallen slightly. The council is aware of this, and SHR will monitor performance in this area.</p> <p>The council self-assessment of homelessness services, completed in April 2013, provided the SHR with an account of how the council is</p>	No specific scrutiny required

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
		dealing with housing options and the prevention of homelessness.	
<p><b>Non-regulated services</b></p> <p>Particular strengths and challenges in the range of non-regulated services provided by the council, and any significant changes to performance.</p>	No scrutiny required	<p>The council performs better than the Scottish average in relation to parks and open spaces - both in terms of cost (per 1,000 population) and satisfaction levels. Performance in relation to provision of libraries and museums shows some improvement. Improvement is also apparent in attendances at pools, indoor sports and leisure facilities.</p> <p>Performance in relation to roads is also relatively positive - both in terms of condition and cost. Aberdeenshire's streets are cleaner than average - again, a condition achieved at relatively low cost. On the other hand, a continuing need for further improvement in relation to waste management and recycling is reflected in relatively lower satisfaction rates regarding refuse collection.</p>	No specific scrutiny required

# Improving and transforming public services/public performance reporting

44. The following table provides an assessment of scrutiny risk relating to how the council is improving and/or transforming public services, and the extent to which it is meeting its public performance reporting obligations under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003.

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
<p><b>Improving and transforming public services</b></p> <p>The council's arrangements for continuing to deliver services with reducing resources and growing demand, and what impact this is having on service outcomes.</p>	No scrutiny required	<p>The council is set to make significant savings over the next four years, despite facing increasing demand on services in the corresponding period. The council is beginning to examine options for achieving these savings.</p> <p>In order to gauge the impact on service delivery and outcomes, the council is consolidating its performance management arrangements, and has improved its approach to monitoring and reporting performance. A performance management framework - Aberdeenshire Performs - is in place. This framework enables the council to have a direct link to team plans, business plans, service plans and performance reporting.</p> <p>During 2012/13 the council began to incorporate all council improvement activity, identified through either self-evaluation or external scrutiny, into this framework. The aim is to ensure improvement activity supports relevant council or service key objectives and that it is appropriately resourced and prioritised. In addition, the council continues to seek ways to improve how it reports its performance information to allow more</p>	No specific scrutiny activity

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
		<p>effective scrutiny. The aim is to ensure improvement activity supports relevant council or service key objectives and that it is appropriately resourced and prioritised. In addition, the council continues to seek ways to improve how it reports its performance information to allow more effective scrutiny.</p> <p>The council has a number of on-going transformation projects such as WorkSmart, InfoSmart and iCE<sup>5</sup>, which are being driven by the need to improve services and make significant savings over the next few years.</p> <p>The council has set out to improve the governance of the above by amalgamating the programme boards into a single business transformation programme board, which now oversees the work of the nine project teams. Improvements in the way benchmarking is used and reported are also underway.</p>	
<p><b>Public performance reporting (PPR)</b></p> <p>The progress that is being made by councils in meeting their PPR obligations.</p>	<p>No scrutiny required</p>	<p>In June 2013, Audit Scotland reported the findings of its review of Public Performance Reporting (PPR) across Scottish local authorities in 2011/12. Aberdeenshire was reported as having 34.5% fully compliant, 55.2% partially compliant and 10.3% not compliant. The results of this work were discussed with the council and changes have been reflected in the revised PPR arrangements being introduced for 2013/14.</p> <p>For example, a revised set of public performance arrangements are being</p>	<p>No specific scrutiny required</p>

<sup>5</sup> WorkSmart:: changes to working practices and using technology to achieve greater efficiency and improved customer service;  
 InfoSmart: improvements to information management, collaboration, governance and storage;  
 ICE (Improving the Customer Experience): improvements to the Aberdeenshire website and service delivery processes.

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
		<p>introduced for 2013/14. The revised approach will incorporate publication of a performance calendar, detailing the availability of all publicly reported performance information, a description of the information, how the information can be accessed (including hyperlinks) and the date of publication.</p> <p>In addition, there will be an annual report by the chief executive, prepared by the performance manager in partnership with services, providing a narrative review of progress, examples of actions (case studies) delivering the priority outcomes and performance improvement, performance based on statutory and local indicators including the local government benchmarking framework indicators and other relevant benchmarking clubs. The review of progress would reflect the outcomes of external scrutiny, self-assessment and evaluation and customer satisfaction as well as performance of service plans and other key plans and strategies (eg economic development strategy, local housing strategy, integrated children’s service plan, health and social care integration plan). Performance information will include performance over time and against targets and comparison with others, where available.</p> <p>On an annual basis, the September meeting of Aberdeenshire Council is intended to become predominantly focused on reviewing the performance of the council. Elected members will receive presentations from the chief executive and directors about performance relating to the Council Plan including any proposed performance improvement activity; consider external scrutiny findings, the annual report from Scrutiny and Audit Committee and the council’s own self-assessment and evaluation</p>	<p>As part of the annual audit process, the external auditor will assess the arrangements in place for collecting and publishing the data in accordance with the new requirements.</p>

Area	Risk assessment	Current position	What we plan to do
		<p>enabling them to 'compare and contrast how others see us and how we see ourselves'; and have an opportunity for a question and answer session or general discussion relating to performance. The annual report will require to be approved at this meeting of the council.</p>	

# Appendix 1: Scrutiny plan

## ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

2014/15

Scrutiny activity year 1	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Joint inspection of services for children										X	X	
<b>National or supported self-evaluation work year 1</b>												
External audit: targeted audit of performance audit report <i>Arms-length organisations: are we getting it right?</i>		X										
External audit: targeted audit of performance audit report <i>Major capital investments in councils.</i>			X									

## ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

2015/16

Scrutiny activity year 2	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL		2016/17	
Indicative scrutiny activity for third year		Potential scrutiny bodies involved	

**Note:** The focus of the AIP is strategic scrutiny activity - that is, scrutiny activity which is focused at a corporate or whole-service level. However, there will also be baseline scrutiny activity ongoing at a unit level throughout the period of the AIP, for example, school and residential home inspections. Scrutiny bodies also reserve the right to make unannounced scrutiny visits. These will generally be made in relation to care services for vulnerable client groups. The annual audit of local government also comprises part of the baseline activity for all councils and this includes work necessary to complete the audit of housing benefit and council tax benefit arrangements. Education Scotland, through the Area Lead Officer, will continue to support and challenge education services regularly and as appropriate. The Care Inspectorate will continue to regulate care services and inspect social work services in accordance their responsibilities under the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010.