

Agenda Item	12
Report No	HC/17/15

**External scrutiny: Local Scrutiny Plan Update 2015-16**  
Report by the Chief Executive

**Summary**

The annual Local Scrutiny Plan (LSP) 2015-16 for Highland Council has been produced by the Local Area Network (LAN). The plan produced by the LAN is based on a shared risk assessment undertaken by representatives of all the scrutiny bodies who engage with the Council. The LSP shows no additional scrutiny is required of the Council during 2015/16.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Audit Scotland coordinates a Local Scrutiny Plan (LSP) for every council in Scotland. The plan is based on a shared risk assessment undertaken by a local area network (LAN), comprising representatives of scrutiny bodies who engage with the Council. This year's process has been streamlined to provide a clearer focus on the key areas of audit, inspection and regulatory interest. These changes are intended to create a better targeted and more user friendly risk assessment process. The LAN has also moved from a three year Assurance and Improvement Plan to a one year LSP.
- 1.2 The six scrutiny bodies involved are: Audit Scotland; Education Scotland; the Care Inspectorate; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland; Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate and the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR). They draw on evidence from:
- the annual report to the Controller of Audit and elected members;
  - Single Outcome Agreement and associated development plan;
  - Council performance data and self-evaluation evidence;
  - SOLACE/Improvement Service, Local Government Benchmarking Framework
  - Evidence from the external scrutiny bodies and their work in Highland.
- 1.3 The Council's programme 'Working Together for the Highlands' has a commitment that we will: 'continue to measure our progress openly, report on it publicly and listen to communities, to ensure we are delivering services that provide best value for Council Taxpayers'. The LSP contributes to this commitment by forming part of our performance management and performance reporting arrangements.

**2. The Local Scrutiny Plan – assessment of risk and consequential scrutiny activity**

- 2.1 The shared risk assessment process draws on a range of evidence with the aim of determining any scrutiny activity required of the Council in terms of it achieving its strategic priorities and demonstrating good corporate performance. It also takes into account any scrutiny needs arising from risks identified at the national level. The LSP 2015-16 for Highland Council is attached as appendix 1 of this report. All 32 local authority LSPs were published by Audit Scotland on 31 March 2015 along with the national scrutiny plan. The Highland plan identifies no areas where additional scrutiny is required. This is the same assessment since 2010 when the process was introduced.

- 2.2 While no further scrutiny is required, there are some areas identified as requiring on-going monitoring by the relevant scrutiny body. These relate to:
- Integrated Care (Adult Services): Joint inspection of Adult services in Highland, undertaken January to March 2015.
  - Self-evaluation in primary and secondary schools: the overall quality of self-evaluation is improving but remains a concern in some schools.
  - Education (leadership and governance): monitor impact of Service restructure on education leadership (new).
  - Use of resources: recognising the level of budget savings the council is required to find (new).

2.3 Positively the LSP notes that:

- Integrated Care (Children's Services): The 2014 inspection of children's services evaluated the service positively and highlighted a number of areas of strengths.
- Criminal Justice Services: the successful self-evaluation and joint assessment with Northern Criminal Justice Authority (NCJA) with an action plan to sustain what is already working well.
- Community Learning and Development: community planning partners have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within the Council's learning communities.

2.4 Planned external scrutiny:

A scrutiny plan is part of the LSP and on pages 5-7 of the attached appendix the following areas of scheduled audit and inspection activity have been identified contributing to national audit reports:

- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) (June 2015)
- Education – Validated Self-Evaluation (VSE) psychology services (over next 2 years)
- Local Policing (including scrutiny & engagement) (over next 3 years)
- Local Fire & Rescue (including scrutiny & engagement) (over next 5 years)
- Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) thematic inquiries 2015/16 – possible involvement, to be confirmed

In addition there are three Audit Scotland national performance audits on social care; health and social care integration and roads maintenance (follow up).

### **3. The usefulness of the LSP**

3.1 The LSP seeks to demonstrate that external scrutiny is becoming streamlined, risk based, proportionate and that it avoids duplication. External scrutiny should reduce overall as internal scrutiny and self-evaluation improves.

3.2 While the LSP shows limited scheduled external scrutiny, the full range of external audit and inspection activity includes inspections of schools and care establishments and activity from other regulators, notably the Equality and Human Rights Commission and SEPA.

### **4. Implications**

4.1 **Resources:** Reducing external scrutiny requires better internal scrutiny and there are costs associated with new processes of self-evaluation in terms of training, materials and staff time. These costs are included within current budgets.

4.2 **Legal:** External scrutiny operates within a legal framework which places duties on

the Council. Legal issues could arise with non-compliance with these duties, but as the LSP does not identify any additional scrutiny, there are no legal implications in considering the action resulting from this report.

- 4.3 **Equalities:** Audit Scotland through the LSP will continue to monitor if the council is providing effective leadership of equalities and is meeting its statutory obligations. A set of equalities outcomes have been published as part of the Council's compliance with publishing reports and these support building equality into all areas of council work.
- 4.4 **Climate Change/Carbon Clever:** SEPA now regulates the Council's progress with the carbon reduction commitment. It is noted above that SEPA is not part of the shared risk assessment process which produces the LSP.
- 4.5 **Risk:** The LSP identifies no additional scrutiny required of the Council.
- 4.6 **Gaelic/Rurality:** As outlined at 1.2 above the LSP takes account of Council performance data and this includes progress on delivering the Council Programme. The Programme contains a cross-cutting commitment to the 'principle of equal respect for the Gaelic and English languages'. There are a number of commitments which support rural communities including benefitting from renewable energy, service delivery to remote and rural communities, fuel poverty, fairly fuel prices and community transport. The annual performance report covers a number of relevant key actions and measures relating to these commitments.

## 5. Recommendations

Members are asked to note:

- 5.1 The Local Scrutiny Plan (LSP) attached at Appendix 1 which highlights that no additional scrutiny of the Council is required for 2015-16.
- 5.2 The positive comments made about the Council's Integrated Care (Children's Services), Criminal Justice Service and Community Learning and Development.
- 5.3 The areas where monitoring is planned (Integrated Care (Adult Services), self-evaluation in primary and secondary schools, education leadership and use of resources).
- 5.4 There are five areas of scheduled audit and inspection activity identified contributing to national audit reports and three national performance audits planned as outlined at 2.4 above.

Designation: Chief Executive

Author: Evelyn Johnston, Corporate Performance Manager, Tel (01463) 702671  
Date: 13.4.15