

The New Inspection Regime

Case Study from a Local Authority Perspective

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The “Old” Regime

- Angus Council subject to two BFI Inspections
- First inspection in September 1999
- Follow up inspection in 2002

The Audit Process – Early Stages

- An audit not an inspection
- Audit Scotland advise LA they have been selected for audit and ask for a contact person to be nominated
- Followed by a letter from Audit Scotland giving 2 weeks for submission of self assessment.
- LA Prepare and submit Self Assessment

The Self Assessment – Our Approach

- Who prepared the self assessment ?
 - Choosing the correct people is important
 - In Angus only 2 Senior Managers involved. Council Tax and Benefits Manager for all HB administration issues and Senior Auditor for fraud related issues. Close liaison required to ensure all aspects of the service were fully covered and a consistent presentation of the information delivered.

The Self Assessment – What is Covered

- Community and User Needs
- National priorities
- Wider Corporate ambitions, strategies etc.
- Narrative:
 - Stating our service aims and highlighting links to Corporate and National Priorities
- Evidence:
 - Corporate Strategy
 - Community Strategy
 - Benefits Strategic Plan

The Self Assessment – What is Covered

- Claims Administration
 - Speed, security and accuracy
 - Landlord liaison
 - Management and recovery of overpayments

The Self Assessment – What is Covered

➤ Security

- Reporting of changes
- Minimising Error
- Identifying and reporting fraud
- Counter fraud activities

The Self Assessment – What is Covered

➤ User Focus

- Meeting the needs of the community
- Effective partnerships with stakeholders
- Reconsiderations, appeals and complaints

The Self Assessment – What is Covered

- Resource Management
 - Performance monitoring
 - Training
 - Value for Money
 - Assurance to members and senior management

The Self Assessment – Our Approach

- For each service area we addressed each of the individual elements detailed in the template
- We created a section for each of these individual elements with 3 parts – a general narrative, an assessment of our performance and a statement showing how we aimed to deliver continuous improvement

The Self Assessment – Our Approach

- Each item of supporting evidence listed under the relevant service area on the template
- Evidence included **relevant** policies, strategies, procedures, action plans and management reports
- Positive feedback from Audit Scotland on our layout and approach to completion of the self assessment

The Self Assessment – Some General Advice

- Visit Audit Scotland's website and download the LA Guide and self assessment template (http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2008/hb_audit_guide.pdf)
- Do a draft self assessment and keep up to date to reflect major changes
- Gather together evidence you will need to support your self assessment

The Self Assessment – Some General Advice

- Be positive – we don't often get the chance to write our assessment of how our service is performing
- Be honest – and take the opportunity to emphasise service improvements already delivered and those planned for delivery in the future
- Ensure that all of the headline areas in the assessment template are clearly and comprehensively addressed
- A well prepared self assessment will reduce the time needed at the on site interview stage

The Audit Process – Review of Self Assessment

- Audit Scotland will review your self assessment and identify the issues they want to explore further at the interview stage
- Decide on the best people to attend the on site interviews. The fewer people you need to involve the less time this stage should take

On site interview stage – our experience

- Interview with Council Tax and Benefits Manager lasting several hours
- Interview with senior auditor on fraud related issues
- Challenging but professional approach throughout from the benefits auditor

Emerging Findings Meeting – Our Experience

- Discussion of findings from risk assessment and interviews
- Auditor's Focus On:
 - Service aims
 - Meeting the needs of users and the community
 - Delivering outcomes
 - Providing Value For Money

The Audit Process – Final Stages

- Draft report Issued for factual accuracy check – No Surprises – Mirrored Emerging Findings
- Fair and positive report – only 2 relatively minor risks identified
- Minimal changes required to draft report
- Final report issued with identified risks to continuous improvement along with request for LA proposals

The Audit Process – Final Stages

- Response to report and action plan prepared outlining how risks to be addressed
- Used Action Plan Template provided by Audit Scotland to detail tasks to be delivered to address risks
- Audit Scotland acknowledged response and accepted proposals. No need for focused audit

What Next?

- HB Audit report and action plan submitted to the Council's Audit Sub Committee for information
- Action plan will be implemented and progress monitored – to be followed up by Audit Scotland in next round of Risk Assessments in approx. 18 months time
- Risk assessment will be reviewed and updated at least annually to keep fit for purpose

The Audit Process – Conclusion

- Preparation of first self assessment quite time consuming but should reduce for subsequent audits
- HB Auditor displayed awareness of business issues and recognition of challenges faced by LA
- All in all - experience of the process better than anticipated