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1. INTRODUCTION

This Service Plan sets out the priorities of the Legal and Democratic Service for the next 3 years and the context which we work within.

Our Service Plan supports the objectives of the Community Planning Partnership's 10 year plan, Moray 2023 A Plan for the Future and the Council's Corporate plan.

2. REVIEW OF THE PAST YEAR

The past year has seen a lot of change for Legal and Democratic Services. This change has been led by our Service Plan as outlined below.

We monitor compliance with our Service Plan actions, along with performance indicators, quarterly through using the 'covalent' spreadsheet and report twice yearly to committee.

The following paragraphs detail both the successful actions from our Service Plan/Performance Reports over the past year as well as actions which we have not been able to complete.

Achievements / things we did well:

Legal Services/Licensing

- Came out in the second best quartile across a range of national benchmarking indicators for cost and efficiency. Our ranking was slightly better than last year. This benchmarking is worthwhile as it gives a good general comparison of our efficiency compared with other local authority legal and licensing functions.
- Updated information about our services on the internet and the intranet.
- Had all staff trained in the use of plain English in response to customer feedback and developed induction and leaving checklists for staff.
- Reviewed how we use Sharepoint following its implementation, as part of DBS, in 2014. We will continue to review how we use Sharepoint to find improvements and efficiencies and have included this in our service plan.
- Assisted with the transition of health and social care functions to the Integration Joint Board. This work is ongoing and will remain in our service plan.
- Assisted in taking forward a number of strategic Council projects including affordable housing, new schools, school re-zoning, energy from waste, harbour developments, roads infrastructure and flooding infrastructure.
- Completed checklists to ensure consistency in checking committee papers.
- Went live with a public access licensing system and brought in automatic email and sms text reminders for licence renewals.

Administration Team

- Reviewed the merger of Members Support and Admin teams. In response to feedback, the Members Support Team was relocated back to the office adjacent to the elected members' rooms.

Committee Services/Elections/Registrars

- Reduced circulation costs of committee papers by stopping posting out copies to the press. These are available online.
- Introduced a checklist process for consistency in checking committee reports.
- Improved resilience in the elections function with shared responsibility and dedicated admin support.
- Introduced new registration responsibilities required by the Death Certification Act.

Customer Services, Taxation and Benefits

- Completed Service merger and reduced overall service cost by £152k per annum.
- Maintained/improved service performance during transition period and with less resources. In particular our Council Tax collection rates saw a 1.2% increase from 94.4% to 95.6% reversing a recent downward trend.
- Reduced costs by outsourcing production of annual billing and Benefit notifications.
- Managed the smooth introduction of Universal Credit.
- Created efficiencies through increased use of bank transfers and e forms for Benefits administration.
- Maintained high performance levels in administration of Scottish Welfare Fund
- The DWP certify our benefit subsidy processes every year. This service continues to receive an unqualified certificate in times of significant change to benefit legislation.

Incomplete actions/things we could improve on:

Legal Services/Licensing

- We said we would review the way our clients contact us through a standard instruction form. This wasn't as simple as anticipated. A "one size fits all" was not found to be appropriate. We have included a wider review of instruction processes in this year's plan.
- Income from licencing fees was down this year due to a lower number of applicants. The licencing budget is ring fenced and appropriate adjustments will be made to next year's charges.

Administration Team

- The team which was formed in 2013 and workload capacity issues continue to crop up. These issues have been made worse by reduced staffing numbers

through long term illness. The team will shortly be up to normal capacity and measures are being put in place to improve joint working arrangements within the team. This will be closely monitored.

Committee Services/Elections/Registrars

- Digitisation of burial records should have completed by April 2015. The Contractor underestimated the resources required to complete this project and the completion deadline has slipped by a year. We are confident that the project will reach a successful conclusion within the next 4 months and progress is being closely monitored.
- We said we would promote the marriage service as an action last year (with a view to generating more income) but this hasn't been achieved due to competing priorities. This action remains in the service plan with a revised completion date.

Customer Services, Taxation and Benefits

- We said we would introduce digital forms for Taxation and some Benefit processes as part of the Customer Services/ Revenues/ Benefits merger, This work is behind schedule. We intend to introduce a customer user account in early 2016/17 to enable this.
- We received a good external audit report on our Benefits Service however we are in the bottom 25% for speed of processing claims. We need to work on measuring and improving our service delivery times.
- Our PI's show that our Council Tax collection rates were below the national average. These have improved during 2015/16 and we need to maintain this progress.
- We recognise that our customer focus could improve. We would like to provide council tax and non domestic rates customers with information about how we are performing against standards set out in our customer charter. We have also picked up from Feedback/complaints that our written communication could be improved.
- Our call answer rate and speed of answering of calls within the contact centre. are still below target. They are improving however and we intend to keep the targets the same.

3. SERVICE DRIVERS, TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

The structure diagram at Appendix 2 shows the different services within Legal and Democratic Services. It details what each service does and the running costs. The following paragraphs detail the influences and demands on each service to give a context for our service plan objectives in Section 4.

Legal Services (including Licensing)

The Licensing function directly contributes to the 10 Year Plan objective of Healthier Citizens and economic development. The bulk of Legal Services do not make any direct contribution but provide vital support to other services to achieve the outcomes of the 10 Year Plan.

About 55% of the work the Service does is process driven, by statutory requirement. The remainder is driven by service demands, a mixture of transactional work and more general advice.

We are staffed to deal with the existing workload. Variations in workload demands are dealt with through prioritisation, outsourcing and exceptionally through changes in staffing establishment.

We are a relatively small Local Authority Legal Service. We try to offer as broad a Legal Service as we can whilst retaining some specialism. A very small proportion of Legal Services budget (generally specialist advice) is outsourced to an external legal firm on a competitive tendered rate. This amount increase from 3% in 2014/15 to 7% in 2015/16 due to a number of contentious planning issues.

Service trends and challenges:

- More legislation from Scottish Parliament requiring implementation. Recent examples are the Community Empowerment act and Air Weapons licensing
- Increasing involvement in larger corporate and strategic infrastructure projects and external relationships.
- Balancing peaks and increases in demand against a reducing resource.
- Changing ways of working including flexible working and Sharepoint.

Committee Services and Elections

Do not make any direct contribution to the 10 Year Plan but support other Services, and the corporate core to achieve the outcomes of the Plan.

The service is staffed to service the existing committee structure. Variations in workload demands are dealt with through prioritisation.

Service trends and challenges:

- Increasing the use of digital technology.
- Increasing complexity of elections process including postal vote verification and increasing audit requirements.
- Changing ways of working including flexible working and Sharepoint.

Registrars Service

Is driven largely by statutory requirements and does not make any direct contribution to the 10 Year Plan. Costs are mostly recovered through statutory licensing fees.

The service is staffed to meet the existing registration demand.

Service trends and challenges:

- Increasing digitising of records.
- Predicted increase in population.
- Workforce Planning issues: demographic profile of staff.

Administration Team (including Members Support)

Do not make any direct contribution to the 10 Year Plan but support other services, and the corporate core to achieve the outcomes of the plan.

The service is staffed to meet the demands of other Services within Legal and Democratic Services. Member's Support have recently been incorporated into this team. Variations in workload demands are dealt with through prioritisation.

Service trends and challenges:

- Consolidating the new working arrangements of the Team incorporating Members Support.
- Changing ways of working including flexible working and Sharepoint.

Customer Services (including Contact Centre, Mailroom and Access Points), Taxation and Benefits

Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits Services do not make any direct contribution to the 10 Year Plan but support other services, and the corporate core to achieve the outcomes of the plan.

Taxation and Benefits Services are driven largely by statutory requirements. They both work closely with other agencies who influence strategy.

Service trends and challenges:

- Centralisation of frontline contact for the Council through the Contact Centre.
- Digitisation of processes.

- Uncertainty of future welfare and benefits reform.
- Improving/maintaining Council tax collection rates at a time when household budgets are tight.

4. SERVICE PLAN OBJECTIVES

To concentrate our efforts on improving the Corporate outcomes in the 10 year plan.

Most of the services with L&DS don't directly deliver the outcomes in the Council's 10 year plan. For the Council to deliver these outcomes it needs an **effective**, **efficient** and **responsive** central support service. For example:

- More revenue from Council tax collection means more resources will be available for front line services
- The more effectively legal risks are controlled, the more likely it is that services will achieve their goals within budget
- Better corporate governance will help involve the public in decisions which affect them and will increase their confidence in the decision making process
- The more efficiently we handle statutory processes and interaction with the public the more resources will be available for front line services.

The Council's budget has reduced in recent years and further reductions in its annual spend need to be identified. At the same time there has been organisational change and new ways of working through the DBS programme. Both of these initiatives have put pressure on our services resulting in:

- Reduced staff resources/increased workload on existing staff
- Harder to maintain standards/ increased risk
- Less development and improvement work

Against this background we have tried to be realistic about what we can reasonably achieve within our Service Plan.

So our service plan objectives in Appendix 1 aim to:

- **Concentrate on the quality and efficiency of our services**
- **Prioritise projects which directly contribute to the 10 year plan**

5. HOW WE DEMONSTRATE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The Council's continuous improvement framework will help us identify where we can be more effective, efficient and responsive. The table in Appendix 3 details the various management tools which the Council has in place to help demonstrate continuous improvement and how our services use them.

There is some variation in practise amongst the various teams in the uptake and frequency of review of these management tools. It is hoped that the table will:

- Act as a checklist for the various management tools for future
- Help us identify gaps and standardise practise where appropriate.

Actions from some elements of the table have been pulled out for inclusion in LDS Service Plan where they have major service efficiency or improvement potential. For example developing benchmarking information.

Staff ideas and feedback from section meetings are used to help identify our service plan goals. For example staff feedback established that a “one size fits all” standard instruction form was not workable in practice.

We also use feedback from customers to shape our service plan goals. For example we noticed a recurring theme in Council Tax complaints that customers weren’t clear on how calculations had been made. We have an action to improve the level of information we give out at the initial stage.

LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – SERVICE PLAN ACTIONS

Legal Services

- Indicates action carried forward from previous Service Plan
- Indicates new action

Service Plan Action	Reason for doing this. Links to other plans and policies.	Impacts/Outcomes	Actioned by	Target Date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing review of Sharepoint to ensure best practice and review paper file records. 	DBS programme.	Ensure that efficient use is made of the system and minimise risk of inadequate records.	LSM	December 2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop benchmark information nationally. Include analysis in our performance reporting to committee 	Service efficiency: continuous improvement.	Provides comparative data on how efficient our Service is.	HoS	Revised annually Last revised Dec 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with support for newly formed Integration Joint Board. 	Required by statute. Assists 10 year plan health objectives.	Ensure that sound governance arrangements are in place.	LSM/HoS	December 2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise resources on corporate projects and strategic infrastructure projects identified in the 4 year plan eg harbour developments, Bogton Road development, schools improvements. 	4 year plan.	Give these projects the best possible chance of success.	LSM/HoS	March 2017 Review success of projects.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and react to areas of significant increased activity (e.g. work for Integration Joint Board, education placing appeals, rezonings, new licensing requirements, Community Empowerment, Land Reform and Land Registration) and potential decreased activity (e.g. Council house sales and Complaints Review Committee). 	Service efficiency: to ensure we have appropriate staffing in place.	Limited resources are used as efficiently as possible.	LSM	Annual, next March 2017

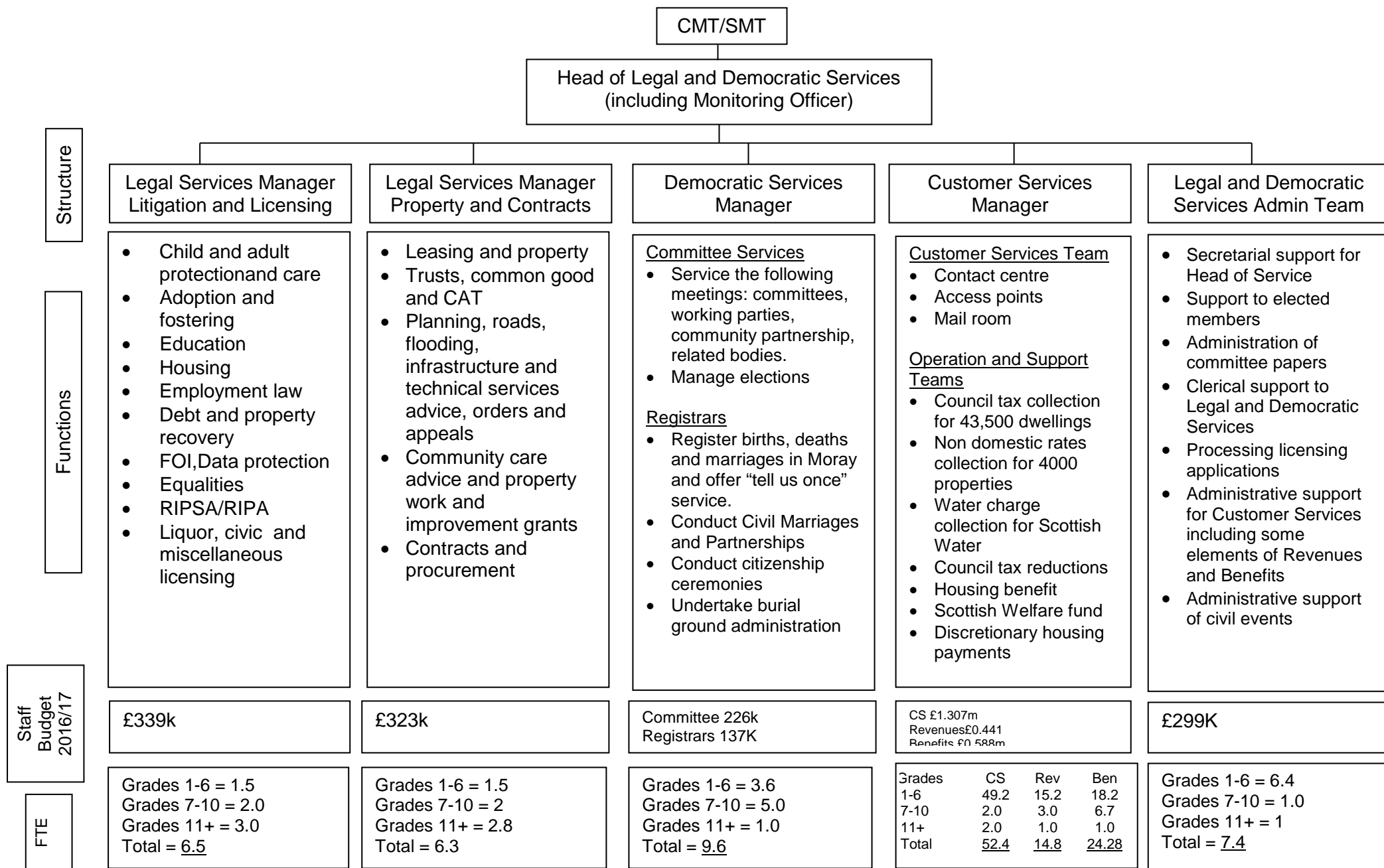
Committee/Registrars/Elections

Service Plan Action	Why are we doing this? Links to other plans and policies.	Impacts/Outcomes	Actioned by	Target Date
○ Investigate use of committee management system	Improve efficiency	Save resources	DSM	October 2016
○ Investigate possible efficiencies from paperless meetings	Improve efficiency	Save resources	DSM	December 2016
○ Review arrangements for elected members training and any induction required for May 2017 local government elections	Improve service quality	Improved governance	DSM	February 2017
○ Index all Committee guidance and protocols in one easily accessible place	Improve service quality	Improved governance	DSM	October 2016
Registrars • Finalised digitisation of burial ground records.	Identified through DBS.	Improved efficiency.	DSM	August 2016
Investigate promotion of the marriage service	Improve service quality	Increased revenue	DSM	Nov 2016

Customer Services/Taxation/Benefits

Service Plan Action	Why are we doing this? Links to other plans and policies.	Impacts/Outcomes	Actioned by	Target Date
• Customer Services team to contribute to the promotion and implementation of Digital services for Council wide services	Digital Project lead by ICT	Promote, implement and measure channel shift, reduce costs	CSM	March 2017
• Contribute to the development of service specific digital processes for Council tax, NDR and Benefits	Digital Project lead by ICT	Channel shift from telephone/face to face contact to self- service, provide 24/7 service option, reduce costs	CSM	March 2017
• Contribute towards integrating free school meal application process as part of Benefit application process.	DBS/Education Services initiative	Minimises duplication of means testing within the Council	CSM	August 2016
• Plan for on-going Welfare reform changes, in particular as a consequence of new powers devolved to Scotland as part of the Smith Commission, the NHS/Social Care Integration programme, Poverty and Social Inclusion initiatives	To assist in developing a growing, diverse and sustainable economy and improving the social wellbeing and happiness of residents	Provision of an easy to access, joined up and cost effective service	CSM	March 2017

and future expansion of Universal Credit.				
• Plan for adjustments to the Council Tax systems for 2017/18	Meet Legislative changes proposed	Ability to bill and collect on new basis from 1 April 2017.	CSM	March 2017
• Undertake additional activity to maximise Council tax income	To maximise Council tax income	Increased income	CSM	March 2017
• Develop measures to set customer expectation levels and monitor satisfaction levels	Customer Focus Initiatives, Digital Programme	Setting realistic expectations will minimise avoidable contact and satisfaction will improve		March 2017
• Non Domestic Rates revaluation 2016/17	Meet Legislative changes proposed	Implementaiton of adjustments to rateable values and any associated transition schemes as required	CSM	March 2017



LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES - How we demonstrate continuous improvement																		
	Legal Services			Committee Services			Registrars			Customer Services			Revenues			Benefits		
	Report to Committee	Date of last review	Date of next review	Report to Committee	Date of last review	Date of next review	Report to Committee	Date of last review	Date of next review	Report to Committee	Date of last review	Date of next review	Report to Committee	Date of last review	Date of next review	Report to Committee	Date of last review	Date of next review
How we engage with our customers																		
Customer service excellence review	Yes		2016/17	Yes		2016/17	Yes		2016/17	Yes	2016/17		Yes		2016/17			2016/17
Customer satisfaction survey	Yes	Jun-14	Jun-16	Yes	Jul-13	Jul-15	Yes	Jul-14	Jul-16	Yes	Mar-15	Mar-17	No	N/A	Mar-17	No	N/A	Mar-17
Regular client/customer meetings	No	quarterly		N/A			No	Feb-14	Feb-15	No	ongoing		No	ongoing		No	ongoing	
How we demonstrate good governance																		
Annual budget review meetings	No	Feb-16	Feb-17	No	Feb-16	Feb-17	No	Feb-16	Feb-17	No	Feb-16	Feb-17	No	Feb-16	Feb-17	No	Feb-16	Feb-17
Regular reporting budget to Committee	Yes	quarterly		Yes	quarterly		Yes	quarterly		Yes	quarterly		Yes	quarterly		Yes	quarterly	
Departmental procurement action plan	No	Feb-16	Feb-17	No	Feb-16	Feb-17	No	Feb-16	Feb-17	No	Feb-16	Feb-17	No	Feb-16	Feb-17	No	Feb-16	Feb-17
Team Plan	No	Jan-15	Jan-16	No	Mar-14	Mar-15	No	Mar-14	Mar-14	No	Mar-15	May-16	No	Mar-15	May-16	No	Mar-15	May-16
How we measure performance																		
Corporate (SOLACE) benchmarking	Yes	Dec-15	Dec-16	Yes	Dec-15	Dec-16	No	N/A	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	No	N/A	N/A
Service benchmarking	Yes	Dec-15	Dec-16	No	ongoing		yes	NRS annual		Yes	Nov-15	Nov-16	?	info sharing		No	?	
Performance Indicators	Yes	quarterly		Yes	quarterly		Yes	quarterly		Yes	quarterly		Yes	quarterly		Yes	quarterly	
How we demonstrate service improvement																		
PSIF review	No	Dec-13	Jun-16	No	Dec-13	Sep-16		Jan-14	Sep-16		Dec-13	Dec-16	Yes		Dec-16	Yes		Dec-16
Audit Scotland Inspection	N/A			N/A			N/A			N/A			N/A			yes	biennially	
How we engage with and develop our staff																		
Staff survey (corporate)	Yes	Jun-15	Jun-17	Yes	Jun-15	Jun-17	Yes	Jun-15	Jun-17	Yes	Jun-15	Jun-17	Yes	Jun-15	Jun-17	Yes	Jun-15	Jun-17
ERDP	No	Oct-14	Oct-15	No	Sep-15	Sep-16	No	Jan-16	Jan-17	No		May-16	No		May-16	No		May-16
Personal Development Plans/CPD	No	Oct-14	Oct-15	No	N/A		No	N/A		No	N/A		No	N/A		No	N/A	
Workforce planning	No	Jan-16	Jan-17	No	Jan-16	Jan-17	No	Jan-16	Jan-17	No	Jan-16	Jan-17	No	Jan-16	Jan-17	No	Jan-16	Jan-17
Regular team meetings	No	monthly		No	monthly		No	quarterly		No	monthly		No	monthly		No	monthly	
How we manage risk																		
Operational risk register	No	Mar-16	Mar-17	No	Mar-16	Mar-17	No	Mar-16	Mar-17	No	Mar-16	Mar-17	No	Mar-16	Mar-17	No	Mar-16	Mar-17
Business Continuity Plan	No	Mar-16	Mar-17	No	Mar-16	Mar-17	No	Mar-16	Mar-17	No		Jul-16	No		Jul-16	No		Jul-16
Health and Safety Risk Assessment	No	Feb-15	Jan-16		Apr-16	Apr-17	No		Sep-16	No		Jul-16	No		Jul-16	No		Jul-16