

Comprehensive Area Assessment

Feedback from regional consultation event

5 February 2008

The Local Government White Paper and subsequent Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill set out proposals for improving local services. These include giving people more influence over the way services are run, strengthening the way councils provide leadership and encouraging local service providers to work more effectively together. A new performance assessment framework, Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), is a key part of these proposals.

On 5 February I attended a CAA regional consultation roadshow in Birmingham. The event was well attended, with delegates from local authorities, fire services and Primary Care Trusts across the West Midlands. This paper provides an update on the development and roll out of CAA and summarises some of the issues raised by delegates at the event.

▪ The principles

Michael Scott, the Regional Director of the Audit Commission, described CAA as a completely different, 'lighter touch', approach to improvement. **Graham Smith**, the Audit Commission's Head of Local Government Information reminded us about the principles of CAA. The emphasis will be on **place** and **outcomes for local people**, rather than individual organisations and processes, although elements of organisational accountability will be retained. CAA will focus on the delivery of outcomes that are the responsibility of councils either working alone or in partnership with others, particularly through the LSP, Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

CAA will contain a **forward-looking risk assessment** on the prospects for the local area and the quality of life for people living and working there. It will give people a snapshot of life in their local area each year and an independent view of whether people are getting value for money from their local services.

CAA is being developed and implemented jointly by all the key inspectorates. There will be joint assessment judgements by inspectorates and joint planning and targeting of inspection. At the event, representatives from Ofsted and the Healthcare Commission expressed their commitment to CAA.

▪ The key components

The key components of the annual CAA will include:

- **Joint inspectorate area risk assessment.** The priorities identified in the Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA will form the starting point. The results of the risk assessment, which will identify the prospects for an area and the quality of life for local people, will be reported to the LSP as well as its constituent organisations.
- **Performance on the new national indicator set** - analysis and comparative reporting.
- **Joint inspectorate annual direction of travel assessment** for each council and fire and rescue authority. For the first time district councils will get a scored judgement.
- **Annual use of resources assessments** for councils, police authorities, primary care trusts and fire and rescue services.

The Audit Commission is currently working through action learning sets with four areas (Hampshire, Thurrock, Tees Valley Partnership and Barking and Dagenham) to develop the approach further. It has commissioned Ipsos MORI to set up a Citizens' Panel to ensure CAA is designed and reported in a way that's meaningful to local people. And there's an ongoing dialogue on CAA proposals with senior officers from key sectors.

▪ **Key issues and questions**

The second half of the event consisted of facilitated table discussions. The Audit Commission emphasised that it was still in 'listening mode' and was keen to get views on the CAA proposals. Key issues and questions arising during the discussions included:

- Accountability and leadership of the partnership/LSP. Can you hold a partnership to account?
- The challenges of competing demands/priorities in any CAA area, particularly where partners don't have coterminous boundaries.
- An expectation that the LSP will produce a self-assessment based on the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- Will the process/risk assessment be the same each year? Some issues will take several years to resolve.
- Can the Audit Commission deliver 'lighter touch'?
- How to communicate the results and are people really interested?
- Discomfort with the risk assessment terminology and scoring.
- Tension between reporting relative positions on the 198 national indicators and performance on the 35 contained in the Local Area Agreement.
- One size doesn't fit all – not all areas are the same.

Having attended a CAA forum last summer, it feels that little progress has been made in resolving many of the issues about CAA delivery, including how it will work in two tier areas and clarity about the role and accountability of LSPs against that of individual councils and their partners.

▪ **Timetable**

The current round of consultation closes on 15 February. There will be further consultation in the summer and a second round of action learning sets. The timetable is:

February 2008:	First joint CAA consultation closes
April 2008:	Audit Commission CAA Leads appointed (to replace Relationship Managers)
June 2008:	New style Local Area Agreements agreed
Summer 2008:	Further joint consultation on CAA published and second round of action learning sets
Late 2008/early 2009:	CAA framework published
April 2009:	CAA regime begins
Jan/Feb 2009:	Final set of CPA results
Oct/Nov 2009:	First round of CAA reporting

For more information about CAA visit www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/index.asp. The presentation slides from the event are available from me or online at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/newsandevents/events-where_ac.asp?title=Where_you_can_see_us

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