



THIRD SECTOR ASSEMBLY CHESHIRE WEST

BRIEFING PAPER 1 - Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

What is Comprehensive Area Assessment?

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) is a new (from 2009) independent assessment – carried out by the Audit Commission and other Inspectorates – of the performance of public services. The public face of CAA will be branded as ‘One Place’, as it will bring all the assessments of the public sector bodies (local authority, police, fire & rescue and local health services) of the area, alongside that of the LSP, into one easy to use website for the public to gain insight into how well all their local services are performing together.

CAA assesses and challenges how these bodies work together to deliver better outcomes and improved quality of life. It is this shift in emphasis away from public service processes to actual outcomes for the public that is the clearest new factor in CAA. This reflects the national policy of promoting partnership working in public service delivery and differs from the previous Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) which only looked at local authorities. It is a forward looking assessment – assessing future developments as well as current and past performance.

CAA consists of two types of assessment:

1. **Area Assessment** – a qualitative (not tick box) assessment of how well public services are addressing the issues that matter most to the local community - as evidenced by and measured against the priorities identified in strategies such as the Local Area Agreement (LAA), Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and other local strategies and plans as well as the national targets designated through the National Indicator Set (NIS). Area Assessment asks three basic questions:

- How well do the local priorities (LAAs, etc.) express community needs and aspirations?
- How well are the outcomes and improvements needed being delivered?
- What are the prospects for future improvements?

Alongside this process a **self assessment document, *The Area in Perspective***, is being produced on behalf of the Local Strategic Partnership. It draws together a comprehensive view of the services provided across Cheshire West and Chester by thematic area. The document will provide the evidence to answer the three key Area Assessment questions listed above.

2. **Organisational Assessment** – this assesses each of the public sector organisations on how well they deliver value for money based on their performance and use of resources. Currently only the local authority and fire & rescue service are being assessed

in this way, as the police and local health services (Primary Care Trusts) have a different organisational assessment. This assessment looks at 4 themes:

- Managing finances
- Governing the business
- Managing resources
- Managing performance

These themes are supported by detailed questions called Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs). This assessment is carried out by the Audit Commission and the CAA Lead and gives each organisation a score for its overall effectiveness.

A Shared Evidence File will be produced as part of the CAA process. This will include all the data from the National Indicator Set, as well as information from a range of local sources, including the third sector. Views of local people, the third sector and local businesses will be considered as evidence by the CAA as it makes its assessment.

Comprehensive Area Assessment will not give overall scores for an area assessment: instead it will mark successes as green flags and causes for concern as red flags. There's no pre-determined number of flags, so it is quite possible that an assessment might not give any red or green flags. However, the assessment will provide a brief summary of all the important issues in an area. If current performance is poor but there are sound plans to improve it, the report will say so. Where performance is good and improvements are on track, it will say this too.

A **Red flag** means that the inspectorates have jointly judged that something different or additional needs to happen to improve outcomes or improve future prospects for outcomes.

A **Green flag** highlights exceptional performance, outstanding improvement or innovative practice which others could learn from.

What Happens Next?

CAA assessments will be published annually on a public website called 'One Place'. It is expected that this year's results will go live on the 10th December. As this year (2009/10) is Year One, a shortened assessment began in April and was progressed throughout the summer with the Audit Commission and other Inspectorates agreeing a joint emerging picture with local partners and producing a draft area assessment report in October, leading towards its final publication in December.

The Partnership CAA Self Assessment is now available and being circulated widely for comment. You can access this through the link below:

http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/your_council/partnerships/caa_self_assessment.aspx

A brief Summary of this will be available shortly and will be circulated. Any comments should be sent to Jon Amos or Anne Lancaster – contact details at the end of this Briefing Paper

In parallel to this, the Audit Commission will be releasing a draft statement indicating how they currently view the performance of “West Cheshire Together” (the LSP). Partners will have the opportunity for further comment on this once it is published.

Why is CAA important for the third sector?

The third sector is an essential partner of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). This is the overarching partnership body which includes all the public sector bodies in the area, including those who will be assessed under CAA.

The third sector is recognised (by central and local government as well as other partners) to have key roles in local decision-making, in delivering services and in holding local government to account.

The Compact (between the local authority and its local third sector organisations) is an essential element of local partnership working and, as such, will be taken into account in the CAA.

All the indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS) will be taken into account in the assessment process - though there will be an emphasis on looking at the ones which are most relevant to each local area. Importantly for the third sector, this includes NI6 (participation in volunteering) and NI7 (the environment for a thriving third sector) as well as other indicators which will be of interest to individual organisations with specific roles and interests.

The CAA aims to provide clear and impartial information about how well local public services are performing. For the third sector this will provide information on:

- whether progress is being made on developing the environment for a thriving third sector
- whether third sector expertise feeds into decision-making
- whether the third sector is able to play a full role in delivering services for the whole community – including vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

The KLOEs in the Organisational Assessment include key issues for the third sector:

- KLOE 1.1 is about engaging local communities, including third sector organisations, in the financial planning process. It states that local authorities will need to be innovative in how they approach this, particularly in reaching diverse communities, and that they will also need to develop and keep under review an understanding of the third sector operating in their local area.
- KLOE2.3 looks at the involvement of the third sector in commissioning practice. It states that supporting the third sector in its service provider role will be an important aspect of developing the market and that consideration should be given as to whether there is appropriate use of grants, as well as contracts, to achieve the required local outcomes.

Public sector bodies now have a duty to involve local people, and the organisations that represent them, in decision-making. Evidence from the National Survey of Third Sector Organisations and the Place Survey will be taken into account by the CAA, which will also

consider how well local partners engage local people in decision -making to assess how well this duty is being carried out.

It is important therefore that the third sector engages with the CAA locally to provide a considered and coherent contribution to the assessment process.

How does the third sector participate in CAA?

There are no individual periods of inspection under CAA. The Audit Commission will continue the process of close dialogue with the LSP as the picture of the collective strengths and weaknesses emerge over the coming months. This progress will be reported regularly by the LSP through its regular partnership meetings and briefings, as well as those of its individual partner agencies.

When the key messages are published through LSP and partner channels over the coming months, any issues that involve the third sector will be raised by the Third Sector Assembly. If there are any issues that individual third sector organisations wish to raise, this can also be done through the Third Sector Assembly.

GLOSSARY

Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

Local Strategic partnerships (LSPs) exist in almost all local authority areas in England & Wales. An LSP is a single, non-statutory, multi-agency body which matches its local authority boundary and aims to bring together, at a local level, the different parts of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to improve the quality of life of that area. The LSP for Cheshire West and Chester – West Chester Together – is responsible for the areas Local Area Agreement (LAA) and for developing the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).

Local Area Agreement (LAA)

A Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a “deal” between local partners (public sector - local authority, police, health, fire & rescue service, the business sector and the third sector) and national government, under which the government offers simplified funding and accountability arrangements and the potential for new freedoms and flexibilities in how funding is used – in return for enhanced partnership and interagency working to deliver and agreed set of outcomes. These outcomes reflect both national and local priorities. The objectives of LAAS are to:

- improve outcomes offered by public services
- make better use of funding
- develop innovative service delivery models.

Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS)

The SCS is a key, long term planning document for improving the quality of life and delivery of services in a local area. It sets the overall strategic direction and long term vision for the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of a local area (typically for a period of 10 – 15 years). The SCS tells the “story of place” – the distinctive vision and ambition of the area – backed by clear evidence and analysis. It also acts as an overarching strategy for all the other strategies that may be developed for the area, e.g.

the Local Development Framework.

National Indicator Set (NIS)

A single set of 198 National Indicators (the National Indicator Set or NIS) was announced by government on October 2007 following the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007. Effective from 1st April 2008, the NIS is the only set of indicators on which central government will performance manage local government. The NIS covers the services delivered by local authorities alone, and those delivered in partnership with other agencies, such as health and the police. The NIS replaces all other previous indicators including Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) and the Performance Assessment Framework (PAF). Performance against each of the national indicators will be published annually by the Audit commission as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).

Audit Commission

The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for people. It works across local government, health, community safety, and fire and rescue services, promoting value for money for taxpayers and auditing the money spent by local authorities.

Other Inspectorates

The Quality Care Commission, Ofsted, HM Inspectors of Constabulary, Prisons and Probation are also involved in the CAA process.

CAA Lead

The CAA Lead is an officer appointed by the Audit Commission to lead the assessment process in a local area

FURTHER INFORMATION

www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa - information on the CAA and its progress

www.nsto.com - information on the National Survey of Third Sector Organisations

<http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/c/843393/home.do> - Third Sector Indicators Community of Practice – to discuss CAA framework and how this is working in your area

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/placesurvey2008> - Place Survey 2008 – Headline Results

CONTACTS

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