

Comprehensive Area Assessment

BRIEFING NOTE

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) is a new way of assessing local public services in England. It examines how well councils and other public bodies work together to meet the needs of the people they serve.

From 10 December 2009, the first results of these assessments will be available on a new oneplace website.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is CAA?

In a sentence, CAA examines how effectively local public services are performing, and how well they are working together, to meet the needs of the people they serve.

It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. Assessments will be made publicly available, in print and online, and provide an annual snapshot of quality of life in the area.

CAA looks at a number of things, including the strength of local economies and labour markets, affordable housing, children's well-being, crime and safety, support for individuals to improve their health, provision for people whose circumstances make them vulnerable, and the quality of the local environment.

What is CAA for?

The Audit Commission describe CAA as a 'Catalyst for improvement.' It will give people information about how well services are delivered locally, and help them make decisions in their communities, in their own use of services, or perhaps where they live.

For those delivering public services it helps encourage improvement by shining a spotlight on those things which need to be improved, and shares practices that are achieving exceptional success.

For government, CAA provides reassurance that public money is being well spent, and assesses how well local services are improving.

What's new?

CAA is about how well places are doing, on the back of local services working together to tackle issues like the causes of ill health, community safety and environmental sustainability. No one organisation can be entirely responsible for these, and that means a joined-up means of assessing how well they're doing - CAA.

This means it is much more wide-ranging than comprehensive performance assessment (CPA), overseen by the Audit Commission since 2002. Through CAA all local service inspectorates will work together to judge how well public services are serving their communities and in particular, how likely they are to tackle major issues in the future. The focus will be on real world outcomes for local people, and not just on the internal workings of individual services.

Who's running it?

The inspectorates are:

- Audit Commission
- Care Quality Commission
- HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons
- HM Inspectorate of Probation
- The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).

Together they hold local services collectively to account. In April 2009, the Care Quality Commission took over from the Commission for Social Care Inspection, Healthcare Commission and Mental Health Act Commission.

What's the point?

The intention is to give citizens, service users and tax payers a clear story about the places they live in. This will help them see if they are being well-served by their local public services, are receiving good value for money, and what the prospects for future improvements are.

For those working in public services it aims to identify barriers to improvement, and where others are doing better and why. It will also offer independent evidence to central government on progress against national priorities.

How is CAA different from the old CPA (Comprehensive Performance Assessment) inspection?

CPA focused on the performance of the council and fire and rescue authority.

CAA is about all local services where you live.

CPA was interested in how councils and fire and rescue authorities performed. CAA takes a much wider look across local public services, including Primary Care Trusts (Torbay Care Trust) police and probation bodies.

CAA also focuses on how well people are being served by their local public services working together, not just how individual bodies perform.

CAA is about areas as much as organisations, future rather than past performance, outcomes rather than ways of working, and local priorities as much as national targets. Its span is broader than CPA and what individual inspectorates had been assessing.

It is an assessment of those things that contribute to quality of life in an area, including the quality of healthcare, levels of affordable housing, crime and fear of crime, educational achievement, attracting investment or an area's carbon footprint. These issues are neither the preserve of any one public body, nor for the state alone. Issues assessed in each area reflect local priorities.

How is CAA different from what the service inspectorates have been doing?

The aim is to reduce administration with some inspections ceasing while others will change and be incorporated into CAA.

Children's Services Joint Area Reviews now cease, and CPA, including the programme of corporate assessments of councils, is ending.

Health and policing services will continue to be assessed by their respective inspectorates; while Ofsted inspections (including early years' settings, schools, colleges, adult learning, children's homes, fostering and adoption services) and, CQC (for social care and residential care homes) will continue to check that they meet required standards.

Why change?

CPA and other assessments have helped drive improvement in local government, and the aim is for CAA to build on its success. The assessments needed to change as councils and their partners work together to tackle the major issues in their areas, such as economic development, responding to the needs of older people, improving environmental sustainability, climate change, crime or inequality.

As CAA is ongoing, rather than a 'one-off' inspection, it will enable issues to be discussed throughout the year, to help agencies to work together to tackle them.

CAA will also make it easier for residents to understand how well their public services are tackling local challenges, and the results they achieve.

Finally, the intention is that CAA will also make sure that government can better understand how national, as well as local, priorities are being tackled.

What do CAA assessments look like?

CAA is made up of two main elements:

- An area assessment, which is a joint inspectorate judgement about how well public services are tackling local priorities both now and in the future
- An assessment of each individual public service in the area, including councils, fire and rescue bodies and PCTs, for example.

Feeding into both these assessments is an analysis of the performance of local public services against 189 'national indicators', as well as other sources of relevant information. By bringing together the assessment of place, and the organisation assessments, inspectorate staff will be able to give a judgement on the prospect of local public services tackling the key issues in the areas.

What are the 189 national indicators?

This is the National Indicator Set which measures the performance of local public services. How organisations and the results of their joint work measure up against these indicators will feed in to both the organisational and area assessments.

In addition to the national indicator set, the inspectors will also use the views of service users and residents, third sector organisations and local businesses.

They will also use available self-assessment and local performance management information including monitoring of local priorities; inspection, regulation and audit findings - including relevant evidence from other performance frameworks; and other intelligence, briefings or evidence from other agencies such as the government offices, strategic health authorities and regional development agencies.

What do organisational assessments measure?

Organisational assessments will measure the performance of individual councils and fire and rescue authorities. Other public services, like PCTs and the police, are assessed by inspectors like the Care Quality Commission and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, who will contribute their findings to CAA. At each public body the Audit Commission will assess their use of resources. Through this, the Commission will assess how effectively public bodies manage their finances, govern their business and manage their resources.

How do area assessments work?

The area assessment asks how well an area is performing against the questions below:

- How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?
- How well are the outcomes and improvements needed being delivered?
- What are the prospects for future improvements?

Answers to the first two questions will help provide the inspectors with an answer to the third question, which is key to CAA and on which the area assessment will report.

Issues identified through the area assessment will be 'flagged' - either where something new or different needs to be done to achieve the improvement, or where there is exceptional success that others can learn from.

Do red and green flags replace the old star rating system?

CAA aims to be different from what has gone before, so flags are not the same as the scores or star ratings on the old assessments.

Rather than giving a static score using stars, CAA paints a picture of how well local services are doing over time.

What does a red flag mean?

We will report a red flag where there are significant concerns about an issue and future prospects for improvement, which are not being tackled adequately. A red flag means that inspectorates have jointly judged that something different or additional needs to happen to improve.

What does a green flag indicate?

Green flags represent exceptional performance or outstanding improvement which results in proven delivery of better outcomes for local people that are sustainable and which the inspectors consider others could learn from.

Good or very good practice is not sufficient. Nor is rapid improvement that we are not confident can be sustained. We will also use green flags to highlight innovative practice.

Will every area have red and green flags?

The Audit Commission will not be specifying a pre-determined number of flags. However, the assessment will provide a brief summary of what inspectors have found in connection with all the important issues in an area. How much is said will depend on how important the issue is locally.

If organisations disagree with the assessments, what can they do about it?

They can challenge the decision to report a red flag or their organisational assessment score through a formal procedure.

How can CAA make public bodies more accountable and comparable when there are no longer star ratings to make this clear?

CAA will be setting out for the public how effectively their local public services are tackling the issues facing their area. The use of green and red flags will give indications of exceptional success or areas where further or different action is needed. Individual organisations will still be scored, with councils and fire and rescue authorities given a rating of; performs excellently, performs well, performs adequately or performs poorly.

CAA timetable

10 December 2009 - Launch of oneplace website. First set of CAA reports published.

Early 2010 – The Audit Commission will publish a number of themed reports on learning from the first round of CAA.

Where to find out more

Go to the Audit Commission website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa

From the 10 December you will be able to access information online at www.auditcommission.gov.uk/oneplace

Information about the other inspections can be found at;

Care Quality Commission www.cqc.org.uk

HM Inspectorates of Constabulary www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk

Ofsted www.ofsted.gov.uk