



SOUTH WEST
FORUM
BRIEFING
No3

COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT



INTRODUCTION

The Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process looks at how well local services are working together to improve the quality of life for local people. It will make straightforward independent information available to people about their local services, helping them make informed choices and influence decisions.

For the first time, local public services will be held collectively to account for their impact on better outcomes. This means that the CAA will look across councils, health bodies, police forces, fire and rescue services and others responsible for local public services. These bodies are increasingly expected to work in partnership to tackle the challenges facing their communities.

CAA examines a whole area and how well local bodies are working in partnership to deliver agreed priorities such

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- ✓ It is about **people and place**
 - ✓ It will give people a **snapshot** of life in their local area each year
 - ✓ It will help local service providers **improve quality** of life in their area
 - ✓ It will help people understand if they are getting **value for money** from their local services.

as those set out in Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements including the National Indicator Set.

The CAA will contribute to knowing whether an environment for a thriving third sector is being built; whether third sector expertise feeds into decision-making and whether the third sector is able to play its full role in delivering services for the whole community.

Most importantly it provides a real opportunity for the third sector in holding local government to account. It will be essential that the sector takes a coordinated approach to engaging with their local Comprehensive Area Assessment process so that its contribution is heard.

There are two different elements that make up the CAA

AREA ASSESSMENT

This will be a narrative report looking at prospects for future improvement against local priorities. Two initial questions will be used to provide underlying evidence and support the judgement on a third question.

QUESTION 1

How well do local priorities express local needs and aspirations?

QUESTION 2

How well the outcomes and improvements needed are being delivered?

QUESTION 3

What are the prospects for further improvement?

Question one is very much third sector territory and inspectors will be looking for evidence of robust decision-making across local partners. They will explore how well local partnerships engage with, involve and empower local people, including through the third sector.

ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Local public services are assessed by different inspectorates depending on the context. The Audit Commission assesses value for money through a Use of Resources Judgement, this then contributes to the organisational assessment for local authorities, PCT's police and fire and rescue authorities.

The **Use of Resources Judgement** covers how well the organisation manages under three different themes:

- Finance
- The Business
- Resources

These three themes are then supported by detailed questions called **Key Lines of Enquiry** based on three main questions

- 1. How effectively does the organisation manage its finances and deliver value for money?**
- 2. How well does the organisation govern itself and commission services that provide value for money and deliver outcomes for local people?**
- 3. How well does the organisation manage its natural resources, physical assets and people to meet current and future needs and deliver value for money?**

The Key Lines of Enquiry questions will look at different aspects of the organisation and detailed guidance for assessors reflects third sector roles and issues. For example Key Line of Enquiry 2.3. looks at the involvement of the third sector in commissioning practice. It highlights the role of the third sector as a provider and consideration will be given as to whether there is an appropriate use of grants as well as contracts to achieve local outcomes

For local authorities and fire and rescue authorities the Organisational Assessment also includes a managing performance theme that looks at how the organisation improves services and contributes to wider community outcomes. The Area Assessment and Organisational Assessment will not happen in isolation but will be used to inform each other.

It will be essential that the third sector takes a coordinated approach to engaging with their local Comprehensive Area Assessment process so that its contribution is heard

Who leads on the CAA?

There will be CAA leads in each local area working for the Audit Commission and they are responsible for coordinating the contributions of the joint inspectorates and providing a focal point for the CAA process. They will be working with area support teams to get to know the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP's) partners in their areas, including the third sector. Details of the lead for your area can be found in the table at the end of this briefing.

Evidence

A 'shared evidence file' will be kept locally and will include all the data from the National Indicator Set. Information from local people, third sector organisations and local businesses will all be considered as part of this shared evidence. The National Survey of Third Sector Organisations which measures performance against NI7 – a thriving third sector – and the Place Survey which measure performance against NI6 – regular volunteering – (and other indicators) will both provide data which will be included in the evidence file.

TIMELINE FOR COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENTS

- April and May 2009 inspectorates engage with stakeholders
- Summer 2009 – inspectorates agree a joint emerging picture with local partners
- Mid autumn 2009 – inspectorates and CAA Leads will make their final adjustments to CAA reports, engage further with local partners prior to publication of joint assessments in December.
- December 2009 will also see the launch of a dedicated website with information on CAA.



Local Audit Commission Leads for CAA/OnePlace
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It has recently been announced that from the end of June 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessments will be rebranded as Oneplace. Gareth Davies Audit Commission Managing Director said that while CAA would not be “ditched” entirely, the concept would be sold to the public as Oneplace.

SWF Briefings are also available on

■ Social Purpose Workforce ■ Total Place ■ Third Sector Survey ■ Place Survey

If you would like further information please contact Georgie Constable, Regional Infrastructure Coordinator on 01392 823758 or email Georgie@southwestforum.org.uk

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