

Highlight document on:

Audit Commission CAA Framework document effective from 1 April 2009

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) is the new basis of independent assessment of local public services in England. It adds to the existing method of assessment of best value performance indicators to give new indicators that reflect on the performance of an area, rather than on individual public authorities. All services will have to demonstrate how working together across authorities produces improvement and progress towards long term goals.

The Audit Commission will produce area assessments with a view to the short, medium and long term prospects for better results for local people. This will be linked to assessments of performance and value for money provided by the individual public bodies serving the area.

CAA will cover:

- Progress towards Sustainable Communities Strategy
- Achievement in local area agreements (LAA)
- National Indicator Set which covers both indicators for the public authority and for services delivered in partnership
- Focus on outcomes and how well public bodies work together to deliver, including with the private and third sector, town and parish councils, and local communities
- Flexible approach to assessment to reflect how public authorities understand and adapt to deal with the recession, and preparing for economic upturn

CAA will have two main elements, and Area Assessment and an Organisational Assessment.

Area Assessment

- Focus on agreed priorities
- Evidence gathering will begin from the LAA, Sustainable Community Strategy, and the Place Survey results. Evidence on the capability of partners and of any innovative working will also be sought
- Three key questions
 - How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?
 - How well are outcomes and improvements needed, being delivered?
 - What are the prospects for future improvement?
- Assessment will be reported as narrative, not as numerical score or rating, but may be awarded a green or red flag
 - Green flag indicates exceptional performance or outstanding improvement and/or innovation
 - Red flag indicates significant concern about outcomes or prospects of outcomes, that something different or additional needs to happen
 - Good or very good practice is not sufficient for a green flag.

Organisational Assessment

- Council service performance broken down into key lines of enquiry
- Use of resources assessment
 - Managing finances – value for money
 - Governing the business – commission services that provide value for money and better outcomes
 - Managing resources – managing people, resources and assets to meet current and future needs and deliver value for money
- Managing performance – organising and managing to bring about improvement to services and contribute to wider community issues

- Assessment is scored on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 being “performs poorly”; 2 being “performs adequately”; 3 being “performs well”; 4 being “performs excellently”

For areas where County and District Councils are in place, the Audit Commission has recognised in their framework that they will take account of the additional complexities that this brings about in also having to work with other public bodies such as the Police, Health and Probation as examples. They will pay particular attention on the relationship between County and District, quoting that “the organisational assessments of district and county councils will be on the same footing for the first time, proportionate in scale and range to their relative functions”.

Any scrutiny carried out on a particular theme or service by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees will also count as evidence towards CAA. Other evidence is likely to include the Council’s key strategies and policies, the Community Safety Partnership Plan, and reports to, and minutes of, the Local Strategic Partnership and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Consideration will also be given to any reports by the Local Government Ombudsman and the Standards Board.

Both the summary and the full Comprehensive Area Assessment Framework documents can be accessed at:

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/audit/CAA/Pages/caaframeworkdocuments.aspx>

Illustrations of how the CAA reports will look are given on the Audit Commission demonstration web site, found at <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/subwebs/caa/caademo/index.html>