

Comprehensive Area Assessment

A briefing for members of the Oxfordshire Partnership and the Oxfordshire District Local Strategic Partnerships

Summary

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) is a new way of assessing how public services are working together in local areas to improve the quality of life of residents. It was introduced on 1 April and replaced Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). All local strategic partnerships (LSPs), those at district level as well as the Oxfordshire Partnership, have an important role to play in CAA and this briefing aims to explain the process and timetable.

An Area Assessment will be produced for the whole of the Oxfordshire area setting out how we are jointly tackling the issues of importance to local people and what we have achieved so far. This will involve all partners, including the voluntary and business sectors. LSPs will be able to contribute to the preparation of the assessment. The Audit Commission will assess how well we are doing and publish their report in November.

Background

CAA will move beyond a narrow scrutiny of a council or PCT, to look at quality of life at large, bringing into the picture local issues such as carbon emissions and sustainability, life expectancy, teenage pregnancy and other indicators of well-being. CAA will enable us to examine how effectively local agencies are working together to tackle their local problems.

CAA will focus on outcomes, not just organisations and look at the prospects for sustainable improvement, rather than past performance. The Audit Commission intends that it should provide:

- a catalyst for improvement;
- an independent assessment of how well people are being served by their local public services;
- an independent evidence base for central government on progress with national priorities and improving local services;
- a means of focusing, rationalising and coordinating inspection.

Six independent inspectorates will be working together to gather information and make the joint assessments. The inspectorates are the Audit Commission, the new Care Quality Commission (which replaces the former Commission for Social Care Inspection and Healthcare Commission), HM Inspectorates of Constabulary, Prisons and Probation and Ofsted.

There are two elements of the CAA – the area assessment and organisational assessments, which will inform each other.

Area assessment

The area assessment will look at how well public services in Oxfordshire are delivering better results for local people through local priorities, such as health, economic prospects and community safety, and how likely they are to improve in the future. The area assessment will take priorities in our Local Area Agreement and the County's Sustainable Community Strategy as its starting point.

The area assessment focuses on three key questions:

1. How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?
(the county is the community for the purposes of CAA; the question asks how well councils and their partners know and engage with their communities, the extent to which they have been involved in setting priorities, coordination of involvement between partners).
2. How well are the outcomes and improvements needed being delivered?
(assessment of current and recent performance and how this is monitored).
3. What are the prospects for future improvements?
(draws conclusions from 1 and 2 and is the focus of the assessment).

There are also four important ‘underpinning themes’ which will cut across all aspects of the area assessment:

- sustainability
- inequality
- vulnerable people
- value for money

The Audit Commission framework also states that there are ten key questions to be answered:

1. How safe is the area?
2. How healthy and well supported are people?
3. How well is adult social care meeting people's needs and choices?
4. How well kept is the area?
5. How environmentally sustainable is the area?
6. How strong is the local economy?
7. How strong and cohesive are local communities?
8. How well is housing need met?
9. How well are families supported?
10. How good is the wellbeing of children and young people?

The Area Assessment will not be scored. However, green and red flags will be used to highlight good or poor performance.

Organisational assessments

The County Council and the five District Councils will have separate organisational assessments. Each council will be assessed on:

- Financial Management - looking at how effectively the organisation manages its finances to deliver value for money.
- Governance - covering how well it governs itself and commissions services to deliver better outcomes for local people.
- Resource Management - considering how well the organisation manages its natural resources, physical assets and people to meet current and future needs and deliver value for money.
- Performance Management - looking at how well it is delivering services, outcomes and sustainable improvements to achieve priorities that are important locally.

The first three elements form the Use of Resources assessment. The Managing Performance element will be separately assessed. This part of CAA will be scored from 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest). An example of reporting can be found at:

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caademo/>

CAA in a two tier area

The Audit commission recognises that in areas where there are county and district councils, partnership arrangements are more complex, including separate local strategic partnerships. They will take into account these complexities and will want to see how they are being managed and overcome to improve working between district and county councils. The role of district LSPs is also vital to achieve the wider outcomes of the area. It is important that all LSP members, not just those from public sector organisations, understand the part that their partnership plays in delivering joint outcomes in a planned way across the county.

Inspections

The Audit Commission states there will be three types of inspections:

- Triggered inspections
- Rolling inspections
- Routine regular inspections.

Triggered inspections could happen where performance or improvement is unsatisfactory, declining or deemed not to be improving sufficiently quickly, where something is deemed to be subject to significant risk, where performance is satisfactory but declining substantially or rapidly or where there is an indication of unsatisfactory performance but insufficient evidence as to why

At the moment the only continuing rolling programmes of inspection that affect councils that have been agreed by government are in relation to safeguarding children and looked after children and youth offending.

Routine regular inspections will continue as before and where appropriate, for example, Ofsted early years' settings, schools, colleges, adult learning, children's homes, fostering and adoption services. These also include the previous unannounced annual inspections of frontline social care services.

How CAA will be reported

Every year, the inspectorates will publish a joint report of the annual area assessment for Oxfordshire as a concise summary report, with a more detailed report with links to the underlying information and evidence, or information on how this can be obtained.

The report will provide an overview of priorities identified by the area and whether they address the needs of local people, and progress made in implementing them.

The Audit Commission have also developed a CAA reporting tool on the internet allowing people to see a summary of the assessment and what action we intend to take on it.

The report will also highlight:

Red flags – where there are significant concerns about outcomes, performance or future prospects not being adequately addressed.

Green flags - where there are exceptional success and innovation from which others may learn.

The Process in Oxfordshire

The Audit Commission CAA Lead for Oxfordshire is Robert Hathaway. He has been working with officers in each local authority to explain the process. He will have a small team of Audit Commission staff to support him and will liaise closely with staff from the other inspectorates and the Government Office for the South East, who will also contribute to our assessment particularly because of their role in monitoring progress on our LAA.

The county council, district councils, Oxfordshire PCT and Thames Valley Police are working together to prepare for CAA. We have agreed to prepare a joint self assessment to provide evidence to answer the three key questions asked as part of CAA and to look at ways in which we may improve our partnership working. It is not a requirement to produce this document, but we have agreed that it would be helpful to have this information summarised in one place and to ensure we all agree and support its content. The Improvement and Development Agency have produced guidance to draft the self assessment which is being widely used in other areas and this will help us to structure our document.

It is important that the Oxfordshire Partnership and the District LSPs are able to contribute to the self assessment and support its conclusions. However, it needs to be completed and submitted to the Audit Commission by the end of May and it will not therefore be possible for the LSPs to consider the draft at formal meetings. We will however ensure that LSP chairs are able to contribute. This is also an iterative process and we will be able to continue to feed commentary to the Audit Commission into the summer.

Robert Hathaway will attend meetings of the Public Service Board and Oxfordshire Partnership in June to set out the inspectorates’ assessment at that time of where we are and to discuss whether this accords with our view. The subsequent timeline is summarised below.

Timeline

April/May	Inspectorates gather evidence End May Oxfordshire Self Assessment submitted
June	Joint emerging picture shared with partners at PSB and Oxfordshire Partnership meetings. Seek to reach agreement on non-contentious issues and continue to work on potential flags
July	Quality assurance Follow up issues
September	Early in September a joint inspectorate review will take place of the latest information available including summer educational attainment

	<p>Draft Use of Resources scores Focussed work on ‘managing performance’ component By the end of September 2009a draft report which will include red and green flags and reporting against the National Indicators</p>
October	<p>Organisational assessments completed Final adjustments to area assessments Discussions of action on red flags Inspectorates consider any challenges</p>
November	<p>Results published The Audit Commission advises that once a report is published it is unlikely to be amended until the following annual reporting round.</p>

We will keep you informed through further briefings and reports to your LSP meetings.
 For further information please contact:

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