


CPA to be abolished – new proposals for assessing performance in your area

LGA lead members urge all councillors to get to grips with the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)





Dear Councillor,

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is to be abolished and a new approach to assessment is to be introduced from April '09. Making the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) a success for you, your council and local government as a whole depends on you. This short leaflet explains what you need to know. Please take a look and make sure your voice is heard at this crucial stage of development.

Cllrs David Parsons (Con), David Williams (Lib Dem), Sally Powell (Lab) and Ray Frost (Ind), lead members of the LGA Improvement Board.

The local services inspectorates (the Audit Commission, Commission for Social Care Inspection, Healthcare Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation and Ofsted) have recently published their proposals for the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). This leaflet explains what CAA is all about.

What is CAA? CAA is a new approach to assessing the performance of local public services in an area. CAA will look at how well councils and other local partners are delivering better outcomes and improving the quality of life for local people.

Why now? CPA has helped councils improve, so much so that most councils are now highly performing and don't really need an intensive inspection to tell them. With so much of what councils do now done in partnership with others however, it makes sense to assess their activity collectively and provide challenge around whether those organisations are actually making lives better.

So what is involved? CAA involves two types of assessment:

- The Area Assessment – rather than a tick box criteria and score, this is a qualitative assessment of how well public services are addressing the issues that matter most, as expressed in the local area agreement and other local strategies, and whether things are likely to improve.
- The organisational assessment – for all councils and fire and rescue authorities bringing together two elements: Managing performance and Use of Resources, and giving a score for each organisation. Other local public service bodies (such as police and PCTs) will have different forms of organisational assessment.

How is CAA different to CPA?

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)	Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)
assesses the council	assesses the way the council and local partners work together in the area
assesses councils against hundreds of standard performance indicators	looks at performance against the 198 national indicators
assess councils on the same thing in every place	focuses on what matters most in each area – do you know what local people need/want, including those most vulnerable and do your priorities reflect this?
focuses on how the organisation performs	focuses on what the organisations achieve – are peoples' lives getting better?
focuses on past performance	forward looking focus – how likely is it that priorities for the area will be achieved?
an Audit Commission assessment	a joint inspectorate assessment
involves regular programmes of inspection	reduction in programmed inspection – in future inspection will be 'triggered' by concerns identified through CAA
characterised by an inspection event	a more on-going relationship between inspectorates and local organisations

Does this mean more inspection? It should mean less. Some inspection will stop. CAA will replace the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), Children's services Joint Area Reviews, Annual Performance Assessment of services for children and young people and Social Services star ratings for adult social care. But inspection arrangements for specific services (eg schools, colleges, police, probation and health and social care) will continue.

Isn't this just going to consume a lot of officer time and resource that could be better spent? A good question – the jury is out. But if it works properly CAA should involve less resources because the Inspectorates will start with the performance data you use to manage your own performance (as long as its good enough) and only undertake inspection activity where necessary. And of course some assessments are stopping altogether.

The public didn't seem to take much notice of CPA, why will CAA be any different? It's true that very few people know their councils CPA score. But CAA aims to be different. It will make straightforward independent information available to people, in a way that is easy for people to find and understand, about their local services, helping them make informed choices and influence decisions. Take a look at the prototype web tool at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/consultation.asp

This all sounds very well but doesn't it just mean that the council will get blamed for everything? It shouldn't work like that. If the inspectorates have a concern about something they will use a red flag in the area assessment, say why they are concerned and who is responsible (the inspectorates say use of red flags will be limited). This will link through to the relevant organisational assessment (which all organisations will have – not just councils) and could affect the assessment score. There will be green flags to highlight exceptional practice that other areas can learn from.

I quite liked the CPA scores – it told you how well you were doing in comparison to your neighbours. Will this still be possible under CAA?

Yes. The two elements of the organisational assessment will still be scored and no doubt somebody will be producing league tables. And you will also be able to compare your performance against all the indicators in the national set. The way they propose to report CAA should also help you identify good practice from elsewhere that you might be able to learn from.

I can see that CAA makes sense for cities and metropolitan areas – but what about in shire areas? Well it will be a bit more complex but will still work in the same way. County and district councils will each be subject to their own organisational assessment. The area assessment will take the priorities for the area identified in the LAA and county and district council sustainable community strategies as its starting point and will look at the contribution that all partners make to achieving them. So if shire districts are in the lead, or making a contribution to some of the LAA priorities, then CAA will assess the prospects for achieving them.

So it's all sorted then? No, not quite! CAA will be a huge challenge for all involved. The inspectorates will have to be much more joined up, only collect information where they really need it and develop the skills and capacity to make forward (not backward) looking assessments. Government Offices will have to learn to rely on CAA for monitoring the LAA, and not conduct their own assessments. And it will also have implications for councils.



What should we be doing in my council? Well we are still at the consultation stage so:

- make sure your council is talking about this with your local partners and that you all understand how big a change CAA is;
- respond to the consultation – there is still a chance to influence this;
- make sure you are on track to deliver the priorities in your LAA and sustainable community strategy. Consider using the IDeA/LGA self evaluation tool to check your progress;
- make sure that you have got good performance systems in place across your local partnerships – the better your data then the less intrusive CAA will be for you; and
- make sure your council develops a good relationship with your CAA lead and that they fully understand the important role of councillors in shaping the priorities for the area. They have been appointed by the Audit Commission to co-ordinate joint inspectorate activity in your area and they will be key to the success of CAA.

What does the LGA say about all this? External challenge is useful to help us and our local partners to learn and improve. Whilst we think the proposals are ambitious and reflect what the sector has been calling for – a streamlined assessment, a move away from rigid scoring, a focus on what matters locally – time will tell whether the principles that underpin CAA can be turned into practice. We also want to be assured that the role of elected members is fully recognised and the burden of inspection is reduced.

What happens next?

Now to mid October	Consultation period plus testing the proposals in ten trial areas
October/November	Analysis of consultation responses and trials
February '09	Final CAA methodology published
April '09	CAA starts
November '09	First round of CAA assessments published.



Where can I find out more?

- Go to the LGA website and take a look at our 'On the Day Briefing' www.lga.gov.uk
- For access to support for CAA go to IDeA Knowledge www.idea.gov.uk/caa
- For more detailed information have a look at the Audit Commission website www.audit-commission.gov.uk
- And consider signing up to receive the Commission's electronic CAA newsletter



Local Government Association

The Local Government Association is the national voice for more than 450 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and five partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.



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