

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 2 April 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Corporate & Policy

SUBJECT: Preparation for Comprehensive Area Assessment
– CAA

WARD(S) Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To inform Executive Board of the key features of the new CAA framework that takes effect on 1st April 2009.

Annex 1 of this report provides, or signposts to, specific information on the following aspects of CAA;

- a) The scope and architecture of CAA
- b) The Area Assessment
- c) The Organisational Assessment
- d) Timeline for assessment
- e) Actions being taken to prepare for CAA

A version of this report will be circulated to all members of the Halton Strategic Partnership Board, Specialist Strategic Partnerships and Sector Based Partnerships in the near future.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) The Board approves the initial actions to prepare for the Comprehensive Area Assessment set out in section e) of Annex 1 to this report; and**
- (2) The Board supports and engages with activities to prepare for CAA, across relevant areas of the Council, and the Halton Strategic Partnership.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

- 3.1 A number of publications are available that provide more detailed information on all aspects of CAA. Web-links are provided in the report where appropriate.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None identified at this stage

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None identified at this stage

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 As the report outlines, CAA has been designed to evaluate the impact of wider local public service delivery across the Borough of Halton. CAA will therefore provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the Council's priorities, and the contribution that they make to the community at large, along with a longer term steer around how those priorities should evolve to continue to meet community needs and aspirations.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 CAA is now the primary assessment framework for local public services. Failure to adequately prepare for the assessment (at both Council and LSP levels) could result in an annual report that does not truly reflect quality of life in the Borough of Halton.

7.2 An adverse report on the area could foster a negative influence on the decisions of potential residents, businesses and visitors to move into, invest in, or visit Halton.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There are no specific Equality & Diversity issues associated with this report, however it should be noted that the CAA framework seeks to ensure that satisfactory outcomes for are being delivered to vulnerable people in the area.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

9.1 Not applicable

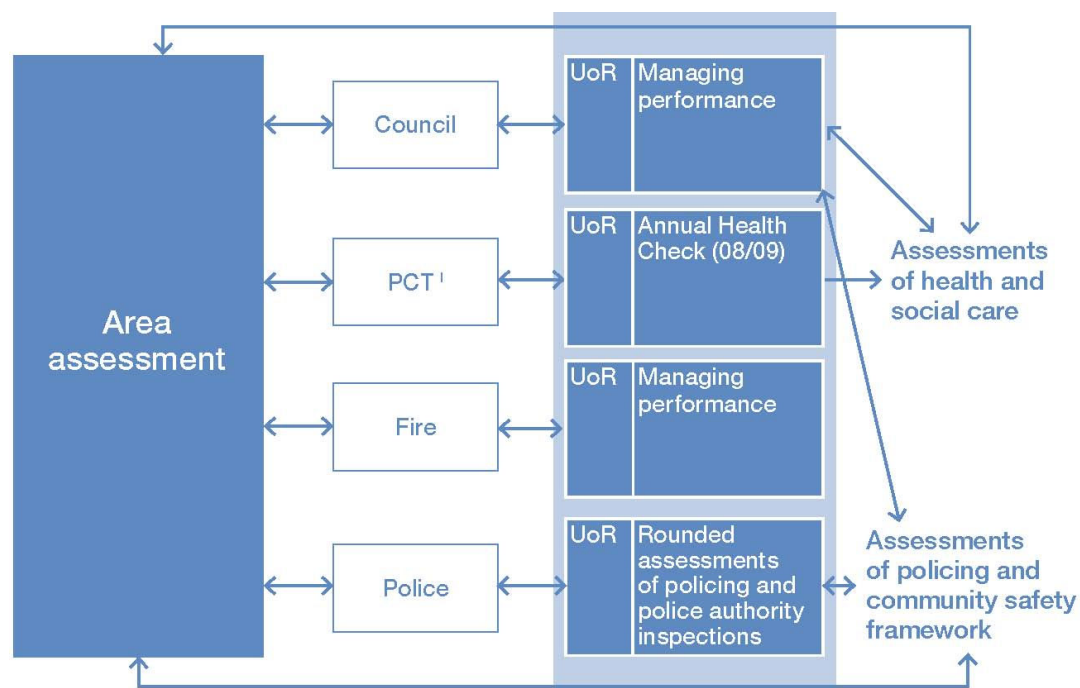
a) THE SCOPE AND ARCHITECTURE OF CAA

Local Government is no stranger to audit and inspection however, having driven the implementation of the first Community Strategies, LPSA's, LAA's, Sustainable Community Strategies, Local Development Frameworks, and more recently MAA's, the Government has implemented a new assessment regime that will take an all encompassing view of public service delivery in a given area, rather than the tight organisational view that CPA provided.

CAA is designed to provide an independent assessment of how well people are being served by their local public services. It focuses on how well service providers are achieving improvement and moving towards the achievement of long term goals through partnership working. This assessment will be provided by an 'Area Assessment', which is described in further detail below. The Audit Commission will lead the assessment, but will be supported by other relevant inspectorates, such as OFSTED and CQC, who will have detailed input to the assessment process.

Although CAA is primarily focussed on partnership achievement in the local area, there remain elements of organisational audit and inspection in the new regime. The Organisational Assessment will be comprised of two blocks – 'Use of Resources' and 'Managing Performance' and will relate specifically to the Council. This is described in further detail below. It should also be noted that the PCT, Police and Fire and Rescue services will also be subject to Organisational Assessment, with the findings feeding into an overall assessment of the area.

The diagram below illustrates the framework, and the linkages between the different components and organisations involved.



Other local organisations such as housing associations and probation boards and trusts are also subject to inspection and assessment but do not receive use of resources assessments.

The full CAA guidance document is available on the Audit Commission website and can be viewed by clicking [here](#).

b) THE AREA ASSESSMENT

Using the LAA and Sustainable Community Strategy as a starting point, this will be an assessment of achievement against priorities across the local area, as well as a view on whether those priorities are the right ones for the area. The Area Assessment will also encompass the statutory education and attainment targets that sit in the LAA.

The assessment is framed around three key questions;

- **How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?**
A view will be taken about how well local partners understand their community, and to what extent engagement with local people, including children and vulnerable groups, has been used to form priorities.
- **How well are outcomes and improvements needed being delivered?**
The approach to this question will be around performance, and the extent to which outcomes are being delivered, and whether the meeting of targets is having a tangible impact on the community.

There will be a focus in this question on the disaggregation of data to highlight the differences between neighbourhoods and to make sure that an overall indicator return is not masking under-achievement in deprived areas.

It is important to note that the assessment will not be contained specifically to outcome areas covered by the Sustainable Community Strategy and the LAA.
- **What are the prospects for future improvement?**
CAA is a forward looking regime, and this question reflects the main purpose of the Area Assessment. Reporting and judgements will be based mainly on prospects to improve.

Underpinning the three questions are four themes that will be considered at all stages of the area assessment, with the focus being on whether the themes are embedded across the public service delivery arrangements, rather than being specific criteria that are measured in isolation;

- **Sustainability;**
A broad theme which is set out in the guidance to seek long-term social and economic benefit, to build a strong healthy and just society, whilst respecting environmental limits
- **Inequality;**
A focus on partners knowing and understanding the nature and extent of inequalities and disadvantage within their community, along with demonstrable evidence of tackling inequalities within and between communities (namely age, disability, race, gender, religion or belief, sexual orientation, but may also include efforts to reduce child poverty or other inequalities)

- **People whose circumstances make them vulnerable;**
There is a recognition that inspectorates have specific responsibilities in relation to people whose circumstances make them vulnerable, for example those suffering from illness, homelessness, those requiring care or support, or persons who are at risk of harm, marginalised or discriminated against. Inspectorates will ensure that as part of CAA, the needs of vulnerable people are being considered and met, and report accordingly.
- **Value for Money (VfM);**
This is an inherent part of the Organisational Assessment through the Use of Resources component that will be applied to the council, PCT, Police and Fire & Rescue Service. This broad view across key delivery agents will enable a view to be formed across the area. The guidance states that where there are significant issues relating to the wider use of resources that may impact on the delivery of outcomes, these will be highlighted in the Area Assessment report.

How will the Area Assessment take place?

The Audit Commission will prepare assessments using evidence from their own inspection work and information that is available both nationally and locally. This will include performance information from the National Indicator set and local performance frameworks, findings from inspection and audit, briefings from other public agencies, and the views of local people, businesses and third sector organisations.

There is an assurance given that any information or evidence that exists in the inspection domain will not be the subject of a new request.

There will be two stages of analysis, the first being undertaken by individual inspectorates, with the second being a cross cutting analysis that brings all the inspectorate views together. At both stages, inspectors will jointly assess evidence against national and local priorities using the themes below;

- How safe is the area?
- How healthy and well supported are people?
- How well is adult social care meeting people's needs and choices?
- How well kept is the area?
- How environmentally sustainable is the area?
- How strong is the local economy?
- How strong and cohesive are local communities?
- How well is housing need met?
- How well are families supported?
- How good is the well being of children and young people?

All of these themes feature in Halton's LAA however, as stated above, the inspectors will draw evidence from a wide evidence base across the whole range of themes.

As a start to this process, the Commission have recently provided a document containing 'background notes' that is essentially a contextual summary of life in Halton. This has been widely circulated and it has been noted that there are some inaccuracies along with some out of date statements within the notes. A response to this document will be collated and passed back to the CAA lead in due course.

There will not be an on-site inspection approach as there was with CPA, instead the approach will be one of opening up a dialogue when necessary to plug gaps, or validate information being used.

There is the potential for the Area Assessment process to be much quieter and less concentrated than CPA was, however the Area Assessment is not a one off event. Although it will be reported only in November, the Commission will revisit the assessment every quarter and will have an ongoing dialogue with the LSP to monitor progress against outcomes, as well as flexing and responding to prevailing conditions and influencing factors within the area.

Reporting the Area Assessment;

The Area Assessment will be reported annually in November. The assessment is not scored, but a 'flag' convention will be used as follows;

- Red Flag – indicates significant concerns about future improvement.
- Green Flag – highlights exceptional performance or improvement.

The Area Assessment will be published on-line. An example is available by clicking [here](#).

c) THE ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The Organisational Assessment will be made up of two components – a 'Use of Resources' assessment and a 'Managing Performance' assessment. These are specific to the Council.

Use of Resources

Use of Resources remains an assessment against published Key Lines of Enquiry. As under CPA, it will attract a score on a scale of 1 to 4, however the requirements are now generally more stringent and in the first year or so scores are anticipated to be lower.

At the end of 2008, an evaluation of Halton Council's position was made against the Key Lines of Enquiry, an action plan is in place, and is being progressed. An active dialog is in place with local Audit Commission representatives around this assessment.

Managing Performance

Although a new component introduced with CAA, this assessment has some similarity to parts of the CPA Corporate Assessment.

The Managing Performance assessment will be scored on a scale of 1 to 4. It will look at how the Council supports the achievement of community outcomes, assessing how effective it is at;

- Identifying and delivering priority services, outcomes and improvements
- Improving the services and outcomes for which it is responsible
- Contributing to improving wider community outcomes, including those set out in formal agreements such as LAA's or MAA's
- Tackling inequality and improving outcomes for people whose circumstances make them vulnerable; and,
- Providing the leadership, capacity and capability it needs to deliver future improvements.

The Managing Performance Assessment will contain an explicit statement on the performance of key Council services, for example services for children & young people and adult social care.

OfSTED and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) will continue to have responsibility for assessing the performance of services for children & young people and adult social care. Findings will feed into CAA, but more detailed findings will be published separately.

As was the case in CPA, should an OfSTED or CQC rating be low, this will have a significant effect on the overall managing performance score, but this effect is not rules based – it will be determined by local context and the significance of findings.

Reporting the Organisational Assessment

The Organisational Assessment score will be derived from the Use of Resources and Managing Performance scores, will be on a scale of 1 to 4, and published alongside the area assessment in November each year.

d) **TIMELINE FOR ASSESSMENT**

Each January, March & June

- Stage 1** Individual Inspectorates to review outcomes,
Initial identification of possible flags for Area Assessment
- Stage 2** Joint inspectorate analysis of outcomes in relation to local and
national priorities,
Joint consideration of flags and evidence for Organisational
Assessment
- Stage 3** Draft findings agreed and shared with area (LSP) and GONW
Peer Quality Assurance in June

September

Stages 1 - 3 as above

Stage 4 Draft report shared

Stage 5 Final quality assurance

Stage 6 Share report with area (LSP) and GONW

November

Stage 7 Final Report published

e) ACTIONS BEING TAKEN BY THE COUNCIL AND THE HALTON STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

An analysis of the guidance, along with feedback from authorities involved in the CAA trials, and dialog with colleagues in the North West region, has indicated that it would be useful for the Council and the Halton Strategic Partnership to take the following actions in the immediate term;

- i. Work with the Audit Commission CAA Lead to ensure that the evidence used in the assessment reflects the true position of the area of Halton.
- ii. Ensure that robust delivery plans are in place for each of the LAA outcomes, and that regular monitoring of progress is undertaken to establish impact (including the monitoring of proxy measures, and risk)
- iii. Compile a position statement that details the current audit and inspection ratings of all public services in the Halton area. This is not only an awareness raising exercise, but may also serve as a signpost to areas of good practice that may be shared, or conversely to poor performance that may need wider improvement support.
- iv. Compile an area evidence base to demonstrate impact, achievement and programmed remedial actions, across the Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA Outcomes Framework, with the full cooperation of all partners.
- v. Identify and capture disaggregated data to ensure that an awareness and appreciation of the gap between neighbourhoods can be demonstrated.
- vi. Develop a communications strategy to ensure that the CAA framework is effectively communicated across all stakeholder groups in order to engender a full understanding of the assessment. (management, staff, members and all levels of the partnership).

f) CONCLUSION

It is very clear that CAA is not a rework of CPA, although elements of CPA have been carried over and remain key features of the Organisational Assessment, and the Council will need to retain a focus on this.

The Audit Commission have designed a framework that is not rigid, and as such can be relaxed or strengthened as required, to evaluate and drive improvement against priorities in a given area.

There will be a need to coordinate and resource activity in response to the CAA framework once in operation, but at this stage it is too early to say exactly what form that response will take.

It is clear that the flexible approach to this overall assessment has been designed to respond to, and move with, prevailing conditions. This is demonstrated in the following extract from the guidance, where the Audit Commission acknowledge that the current economic conditions will have an effect on local public service delivery,

but maintain that they will seek evidence to show that the challenges are being addressed;

CAA will come into effect at a difficult time for the global and national economy and the effects are already being felt in local areas across England. With its emphasis on sustainable development, CAA has been designed to be flexible and adapt to such changes. We will judge how well councils and their partners understand the local impact of the recession and how well they are responding using the tools and influence available to them to mitigate the impact on their communities and prepare for the upturn. We will highlight examples of effective partnership working on the local economy as a source of learning for others, as well as highlight areas where inadequate action is being taken.