

Abolishment of Comprehensive Area Assessment

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Paul Raymond, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Steve Worrall, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260204

1 Purpose of Report

This report informs Members of recent national developments that indicate the termination of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) regime.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is recommended to note the contents of this report.

3 Background

The 2006 Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' set out proposals for a new local performance framework, including CAA, which represents a fundamental change in the approach of the public service inspectorates. CAA came into force on 1 April 2009, replacing the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) regime and was the new way of putting information in the hands of taxpayers, service users and citizens.

Local results arising from CAA have been extremely positive in reflecting the excellent performance of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority. In summary, the Commission has stated that the Fire Authority – **'performs well (Overall Score – 3).'**

The Organisational Assessment reviewed five areas, with the following scores being awarded for 2009/10:

Managing performance	3 out of 4
Use of resources	3 out of 4
Managing finances	3 out of 4
Governing the business	3 out of 4
Managing resources	3 out of 4

4 CAA – The future

The new Coalition Government recently published the document:

The Coalition: our programme for government in which they state:

‘We will cut local government inspection and abolish the Comprehensive Area Assessment.’ (Section 4, page 11)

Subsequent to this announcement the appended correspondence confirms the Commission’s intention to cease CAA for fire and rescue services with immediate effect.

Notwithstanding this, the Commission will continue its statutory work to audit the Authority’s financial accounts. As of yet there is no clarity on what shape a future performance assessment regime will take, if indeed there is one.

5 Financial Implications

There are likely to be some financial implications arising from the cessation of CAA, which may result in a reduction in current audit fees. No further details are available at this time.

6 Legal Comment

The Audit Commission Act 1998 places statutory responsibilities upon the Audit Commission to undertake assessments of local government bodies.

Local government bodies, including fire and rescue authorities, are required through the Local Government Act 1999 to participate in the assessments undertaken by the Audit Commission.

The legal implications arising from Government’s decision to end CAA are not fully known at this time.

7 Equality Impact Assessment

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have determined that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

8 Further Information

Full details regarding CAA may be obtained from the Audit Commission's website at:

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/framework.asp>

The Government document – *The Coalition: our programme for government* may be viewed at:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_187876.pdf

9 Appendix

Letter from Audit Commission to all Chief Fire Officers and English Fire and Rescue Authorities (dated 28 May 2010)

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk); the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	*
Comprehensive Area Assessment	*	Operational Assurance	*
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial	*	Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	
Integrated Risk Management Planning			



28 May 2010

Chief Fire Officers
All English Fire & Rescue Authorities

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Dear Colleague,

I am writing to let you know how we propose to bring work on CAA to a conclusion in the light of the new government's recent announcement.

All work on updating the area assessment and organisational assessment will cease with immediate effect. These assessments on the Oneplace website will not now be updated. We will not be reporting new red or green flags in the area assessment nor updating the text around existing flags.

We will not be issuing new scores for the use of resources assessments, the managing performance assessments or the overall organisational assessments. We are talking to CLG about how we discharge our role assuring the implementation of the fire and rescue service National Framework. This may involve some limited further work in some authorities this year. We will write to you again as soon as it is agreed how we will be proceeding.

Your appointed auditor will continue to deliver the audit in line with the statutory Code of Audit Practice under which they are required to give a value for money conclusion alongside their opinion on the financial statements. Auditors will need to complete such work as they consider necessary to enable them to give this conclusion, but in practice we envisage they will be able to discharge this responsibility using work completed to date for the use of resources assessment. Your auditor will report any significant findings in the annual audit letter but will not be reporting a score for the use of resources.

We have already announced that we are reviewing the approach that auditors will take in future to the value for money conclusion from 2010/11.

We are in discussions with the government, the LGA and other representative bodies about the future approach to inspection.

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Your CAA Lead and appointed auditor will of course be available to discuss the practical implications of these changes. You can also phone our helpline on 08450 522616. I would like to thank you for your cooperation with our staff over the short life of CAA. We will of course consult you about the future approach to audit and inspection.

Yours sincerely



Gareth Davies
*Managing Director, Local Government, Housing & Community Safety
Audit Commission*