

## **Audit Commission Consultation Exercise: Transition to Comprehensive Area Assessment**

### **Report of the Chief Fire Officer**

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### **1 Purpose of Report**

In 2009 the current Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) arrangements for auditing of local public sectors services will be superseded by Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA). CAA will develop a shared view about the challenges facing an area, such as crime, community cohesion, a sustainable environment or public health issues, and will also create a more joined-up and proportionate approach to public service regulation.

This report informs Members of the Audit Commission's consultation proposals regarding the transition from CPA to CAA and of a proposed response prepared on behalf of the Fire Authority.

### **2 Recommendations**

Members are requested to respond to the consultation exercise by commenting that the general principals of CAA are supported but further information, particularly in respect of fire-related performance indicators, together with the full impact upon fire and rescue authorities is sought.

### **3 Background**

The Local Government White Paper and the subsequent Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill (the Bill) set out a new performance framework for local services. The White Paper signalled a new stage in reforming local services with a new performance framework, including Comprehensive Area Assessment at its heart. CAA will focus on place rather than the individual bodies responsible for local services. It will look across local government, housing, health, education and community safety.



The Audit Commission have recently (4 April 2007) published consultation proposals for how they intend to manage the transition from Comprehensive Performance Assessment of local government to the new Comprehensive Area Assessment framework. The CAA framework is proposed to be in place from April 2009, and will cover all local public services, including fire and rescue authorities (FRA).

The proposals can be viewed in full at:

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/cpatransition.asp](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/cpatransition.asp)

It should be noted that the introduction of CAA is, of course, dependent on the aforesaid Bill being approved by Parliament, and the Commission's proposals, out of necessity, assume that it will receive Royal Assent and the main provisions will be enacted.

It is essential that the transition is carefully managed over the next few years to maintain and accelerate improvement in public services. The Commission's proposals do not seek to address all of the issues, which this raises but to signal some of the key factors to be considered and some of the main steps necessary to achieve this aim.

There are three key stages to the transition:

- 1 Short-term updating of the CPA framework to apply for single tier and county councils for reporting in February 2008 (this will not affect this FRA)
- 2 The transitional year of 2008/09, the final year of CPA, while the new arrangements are being put in place
- 3 Implementing the new performance framework including CAA

There are a number of other changes to the landscape of local government that will need to be considered in the transition from CPA to CAA. In particular, the impact of any changes to local government structures in two-tier areas will need to be carefully considered, both as part of the transition and the development of a new framework. Furthermore, CAA represents a fundamentally different approach to assessment that is area-based, risk-focused and more forward-looking than current assessment activity. The new framework will need to take account of how services are delivered across areas and focus clearly on outcomes.

The Commission's consultation proposals provide a starting point for widespread discussion over the coming months. Further consultation on the detail of the assessment framework will be carried out jointly with other public sector regulators later in the year.



## 4 Consultation Exercise

The Commission is seeking views on a range of questions set out within their consultation document. **The closing date for responses is 14 June 2007.**

## 5 Evaluation of Proposals

The consultation document is specifically targeted at County Councils and single-tier authorities and seeks views, firstly on the proposed minor changes to CPA, including Use of Resources (UOR), Operational Service Assessments and Direction of Travel (DOT). This element of the consultation has been considered by officers, who conclude that there will be no impact on fire and rescue authorities.

Proposals for Fire CPA re- categorisation and the Performance Assessment Framework 2007/08 were published in November 2006, to which the Fire Authority responded (a copy of the response was presented to the Fire Authority meeting on 14 February 2007).

The second element of the consultation is the proposal for CAA, which will seek to drive a more effective delivery of improvements in local public services for citizens. The Audit Commission will consider four overarching themes:

- The quality of life of local people;
- Area and outcome focused;
- Constructive and forward-looking; and
- Joint and participative.

CAA will replace CPA, resulting in the reporting of performance indicators for localities, the delivery of a scorecard, which assesses each local authority in driving continuous improvement and target inspection activity on the basis of a risk assessment.

Each Council will negotiate with their regional government office 35 targets that represent both national and local priorities from a suite of 200 indicators. At this stage it is unclear as to which indicators will affect Fire and Rescue Authorities.

Within the consultation document the Audit Commission has listed 85 indicators, to which local authorities are currently subject. Of those listed indicators it appears that only two would potentially involve input from Fire and Rescue Authorities, namely:

- Reducing killed and seriously injured (KSI) road casualties; and
- Reducing slightly injured road casualties.

At this time it is uncertain what the remaining indicators are likely to be and to what degree the transition to CAA will impact on fire and rescue authorities.



To this end officers will endeavour to bring Members more information, as and when the picture becomes clearer.

It is, therefore, recommended that the Fire Authority respond to the consultation exercise by commenting that the general principals of CAA are supported but further information, particularly in respect of fire-related performance indicators, together with the full impact upon fire and rescue authorities is sought.

## **6 Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any consequential financial implications arising from the Audit Commission's proposals will be the subject of a separate report.

## **7 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 FRAs, are required through the Local Government Act 1999 to participate in the assessments undertaken by the Audit Commission.

## **8 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. It is, however, fully recognised that the proposed arrangements set out within this report to prepare and publish a revised performance plan will be subject to Equality Impact Assessments, as deemed applicable at the appropriate times.

## **9 Appendices**

There are no appendices attached to this report.

## **10 Background Papers**

Audit Commission (2007). The transition from CPA to CAA, including consultation on CPA – the harder test framework proposals for 2007 April 2007



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.

Balance Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	*
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance 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	*

