

## **Comprehensive Area Assessment - early findings**

### **Summary**

Nick Collins, Head of Fire at the Audit Commission will address the Committee on the early CAA outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- note the presentation and identify any action they would like the LGA to take
- give views on the 'Freedom to Lead' proposals

### **Action**

As determined by members

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## **Comprehensive Area Assessment - early findings**

### **Background**

1. Comprehensive Area Assessment, or CAA, is a new way of assessing local public services in England. It examines how well councils and other public bodies work together to meet the needs of the people they serve. For the first time, six independent inspectorates will collectively assess services considering what people say they want and need, the extent to which they get it and the prospects for improvement. Results will be published on 10 December 2009 on the oneplace website - [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/oneplace](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/oneplace)
2. CAA replaces Comprehensive Performance Assessments. The new joint approach is more wide-ranging, focuses on results, assesses local priorities and is forward-looking; it also hopes to cut inspection burdens. In this way CAA will focus on what residents and local leaders identify as priorities. If an area is getting exceptional results or has improved in a way that others can learn from, it will be highlighted with a green flag. In places where there are significant concerns about the likelihood of improvement in agreed local priorities, red flags will be given.
3. CAA has two parts: an assessment of the area and of the individual organisations providing public services within it. In the area assessment the inspectorates together judge how well public services are meeting local priorities and whether improvement is likely to continue. The organisational assessment examines the performance and value for money of councils and trusts, schools and other bodies, and how well they are working with one another. The Audit Commission coordinates organisational assessments of councils and fire and rescue services. The other inspectorates report separately, the Care Quality Commission will do organisational assessments of PCTs, for example.

### **Fire and Rescue Authorities and CAA**

4. In October the Audit Commission sent draft assessments to FRAs. This allows time before publication for review and to resolve disagreements about red flags or organisational assessment scores. In terms of the national picture we understand that the majority of FRAs are in the middle range of scoring, with a few outliers, for the organisational, managing performance and use of resources assessments.
5. Some FRAs have told us that they found the CAA experience quite time consuming and burdensome, particularly when set against the lack of prominence of fire services in the resulting area assessment. In relation to the operational aspect of the organisational assessment, there was some concern

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about the relative status of operational self assessment, sector-led peer review and the peer element of the Audit Commission assessment, as the Audit Commission position was not always consistent with the expectation that the assessment process would not duplicate the self assessment or sector-led peer reviews.

## **Proposals for a new accountability framework**

6. The LGA Group is thinking about the longer term future of inspection and assessment, beyond CAA year 2 and recently launched a major debate about how councils and their partners can be given greater freedom to respond to local priorities setting out a new framework of accountability that liberates local public sector partners to work together more effectively whilst at the same time ensures they are driven by and responsive to, the needs of their communities. "Freedom to Lead" (attached at Appendix 1) sets out some of the key issues we will be considering and invites councillors, chief officers, fire and rescue authorities and councils to contribute by 30 November at [jointhedebate@lga.gov.uk](mailto:jointhedebate@lga.gov.uk)

## **Financial Implications**

7. None identified

## **Implications for Wales**

8. The CAA only applies in England so none identified.

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