Locality Self Evaluation Guidance

**NOTE -CURRENTLY OUT TO CONSULTATION WITH TRIAL COUNCILS

Introduction

This guidance has been developed to assist partnerships in developing their own locality self evaluation. It is based on the learning from the second phase of testing of the approach, which is being undertaken from August to October 2008.

Locality Self Evaluation

Locality self evaluation within the context of CAA, moves away from the artificially scientific tick box approach to assessing past performance to one that is based on a locality's own assessment of its performance, ambition and risks to delivery. Its objective is to support the development of an informed view, adequately evidenced, of how an area is doing in its own terms and against its own ambitions and targets, and how progress will sustained in the future – balancing risks with available resources, and recognising the role of local political leadership and politically led dialogue with citizens and communities.

On this basis, the primary role of the locality self evaluation is to facilitate a shared assessment of the needs and issues in the area, progress against priorities and outstanding challenges still be addressed. It allows the partnership to take stock and take action where necessary to ensure it is on course to achieving outcomes for local citizens.

It will also provide a framework for external challenge by inspectorates to assess the risks to delivery and arrive at an overall judgement on the area on the basis of a shared understanding of how and why priorities have been set. More detail on the joint inspectorate proposals regarding the role of self evaluation in the context of CAA is outlined below.

It is essential the locality self evaluation process and finished document is sufficiently self challenging and based on robust evidence and dialogue. This will ensure that the self evaluation facilitates real improvement by the local partnership. Genuine openness and honesty between partners will be vital not only to agree on the real and outstanding issues within the area but also to work together towards addressing these issues. Also, within the context of CAA, the development of a robust and challenging self evaluation document for the area should enable the inspectorate role to be more proportionate.

Role of Self Evaluation within Joint Inspectorate Proposals for CAA

Self evaluation will have a key role within the CAA framework. The joint inspectorates' proposal for consultation, issued in summer 2008, notes that:

> *"Councils and their partners, and their representative bodies, are developing approaches to self-evaluation. While we are not making it a requirement of CAA, we do expect that each area will wish to complete an annual self-evaluation and we will take full account of it and any service level self-evaluation. We do not intend to repeat the work carried out already*

by the council or its partners. We will expect that any self-evaluation is based on verifiable evidence. The more robust the self-evaluation the more reliance we will be able to place on it.

CAA will draw as far as possible on the information used by the council and its partners to manage performance and deliver improvements set out in the Local Area Agreement and Sustainable Community Strategies. This approach will minimise the administrative burden imposed by CAA and will make optimum use of self-evaluation."

Focus of the Self Evaluation

This guidance note sets out the key elements to be included in a locality self evaluation. The result of the process should be a document which sets out a shared understanding across the partnership. The outcome of producing the self evaluation document should be stronger partnership working and a shared commitment towards achieving improved working towards priority outcomes in the area.

Self evaluation should look both forwards and backwards:

- *Forwards at the changing needs, expectations and aspirations of citizens, political priorities, planned actions, opportunities and risks*

- *Backwards at performance, what has/has not been delivered and the resulting impact on local citizens*

In addition to the Local Area Agreement (LAA), the self evaluation should draw on existing strategies. Key documents will be the Sustainable Community Strategy (or strategies), the Local Development Framework and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and other key council and partner strategies.

The self evaluation should outline the collective performance of the partnership in delivering key local, regional and national priorities and focus in the main on outcomes, focusing on the 'what' rather than the 'how' of achievement.

The self evaluation should identify areas of concern that may benefit from more detailed examination, for example through an in-depth scrutiny exercise, and inform planning – ultimately leading to improved performance.

Development of the Self Evaluation

The self evaluation process should be commissioned and signed off by the local strategic partnership for the area (including by the Cabinet of the local authority). The output of the process will be an agreed document, setting out key issues and how these will be addressed in the future.

Developing the self evaluation document should aid learning and common understanding between partners – its effectiveness will depend on the extent to which there is openness, honesty and trust between partners.

While it is expected that the partnership will carry out an annual self-evaluation, after the first year it may only require updating in line with new evidence and priorities. The annual self evaluation would become an integral part of the LSP's own annual strategic and performance management cycle, allowing the partnership the opportunity to reflect and take stock before each partner's own planning cycle begins, informed by the partnership's commitments.

Self Evaluation in a Two Tier Area

In a two tier area, it is essential that all tiers have signed up to the development of the self evaluation for the area. The focus of the self evaluation document should be on the outcomes for the area and the contribution that each tier and partnership is able to make towards meeting the outcomes. It should also highlight where there is need for more collective work to ensure that current gaps or issues are being addressed and the plans for doing this.

Format of the Self Evaluation Document
Issues to be covered

The locality self evaluation document should have three main headings:

1. *Understanding local needs and translation into local priorities*
2. *The delivery of improvements and outcomes in the area*
3. *Gap analysis and planning for the future*

These headings can be cross referred to the questions covered within the area assessment within CAA, which looks at how well local public services are delivering better results for local people and looks to the future prospects for the area. However, the self evaluation headings will also enable the partnership to work through and be able to demonstrate that it is sufficiently self aware of key issues and that there are effective plans in place to address any concerns. This is vital for both facilitating improvement towards meeting local priorities and also to ensure inspection is proportionate, within the context of CAA.

Outlined below are the key elements that together constitute the proposed self evaluation's narrative, with the partnership providing a jointly agreed overview of the position in relation to each element.

1. Understanding local needs and translation into local priorities

This section of a self assessment should look at the partnership's understanding of local needs and aspirations and ensure that this knowledge has been used in the development of local priorities. It also needs to recognise the role played by the political leadership of the area in balancing aspirations, risks and available resources in developing local priorities. The purpose of this section is to ensure that there are clear priorities based on understanding of need and that there is a shared commitment to the achievement of these priorities. This section can refer to documents already in place to assess this information rather than duplicate what is already in existence.

The questions below are prompts to consider.

- *What is the vision that the elected councilors have for their area, particularly the leadership of the council?*

- *What are the arrangements for community engagement to provide an accurate understanding of the diverse needs and interests of all sections of the community, including those at risk of disadvantage or social exclusion?*

- *How are citizens, from all parts of the community, encouraged and supported to feed in their views into priority-setting, decision making, service development and evaluation within and across the partnership organisations? Do they know what has changed as a result of their input?*

- *Is the local intelligence robust enough to provide a solid base for future plans and accurately identify opportunities, risks and threats for the future well-being of the community? Is local intelligence shared amongst the partnership?*

- *Have councillors facilitated the dialogue and participation to ensure the views of local people are heard in the decision making process? How have they taken account of equality, community cohesion and sustainable development issues?*

- *How has this intelligence been translated into priorities for the area?*

- *What are the local priorities and are those outcomes reflected in the Sustainable Community Strategy and the LAA targets? Taken together do they focus on what really matters for the local area? Were citizens involved in the setting of priorities for their area?*

- *Has the partnership got a good knowledge of the diversity profile of their communities - including disabled people, minority ethnic groups, older and younger people, gay people, lesbians and people of transgender, women and men, those who hold religious or other belief systems and other vulnerable groups? Is there evidence of (equality gaps or unequal outcomes) relating to any of these communities?*

- *What are the priorities for tackling inequality and disadvantage within the area?*

2.   The Delivery of Improvements and Outcomes in the Area

This section of the self evaluation should focus on the extent to which the partnership is already delivering improvements and priorities.   Priorities should be those highlighted within key overarching strategies such as the Sustainable Community Strategy, LAA, Local Development Framework, Children and Young People's Plan and Joint Needs Assessment and other thematic-specific shared strategies e.g. relating to crime and disorder, economic development.   This section can refer to documents already in place to assess this information rather than duplicate what is already in existence.

The questions below are prompts to consider.

- *To what extent is the partnership successfully delivering against the priorities for the local area?*

- *How is this being measured and is the performance data robust?*

- *To what extent is life improving for local citizens, including improved community cohesion and empowerment?*

- *To what extent is the partnership addressing its sustainable development responsibilities?*

- *Have engagement activities resulted in the needs of citizens being known more fully and acted on?*

- *To what extent is the partnership tackling inequality and disadvantage in the area?*

- *To what extent is the partnership working together to safeguard vulnerable people in the area?*

- *Are the vision and priorities for the area translated into operational plans by the council and its partners?*

- *Is there a robust performance management framework which enables the partnership to monitor progress in the delivery of the priorities for the local area?*

- *Is information on performance in delivering the priorities for the local area easily accessible by the public?*

3.   Gap analysis and planning for the future

The purpose is to demonstrate that the partnership is aware of where there are gaps in performance that need to be addressed or where more focused attention is needed to ensure that the partnership will deliver its outcomes.   It will also highlight where action plans are in place to address these issues. This section is the most important in driving self improvement and to improve partnership working. It is vital in ensuring self awareness and the partnerships ability to really deliver on improvements.

The questions below are prompts to consider.

- *In working towards achieving local priorities, are there any areas that require more focused attention e.g. where progress is at a slower place or where needs are changing, or new issues emerging? If so, what are the areas?*

- *How robust are plans in place to improve the situation? To what extent is progress being delivered and how well are they being implemented?*

- *Are partners able to hold each other to account? Can differences and difficulties be overcome? Do local public service providers and other partners support the council's scrutiny function e.g. provide evidence, and respond to the findings?*

- *Are the governance arrangements fit for the purpose of achieving the outcomes in the area?*

- *What action has been taken previously to address underperformance in key priorities?*

- *Are local people are kept well informed of key issues regarding their area, with communication being coordinated between partners?*

- *How will the partnership effectively manage the reputation of the area and of the partner organisations?*