

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

Summary

This report updates members on the latest developments on CAA and alerts members to potential issues around the publication of the final CPA results in February.

Recommendations

It is recommended that

- the report be noted;
- the final CPA results be discussed at the next LGA/AC Liaison meeting on 27 January 2009 and
- a report on the published CPA results is submitted to the next meeting of the Board on 24 March 2009.

Contact Officers: Nick Easton LGA, Phone No: 0207 664 3278, Email: nick.easton@lga.gov.uk and Mandy James IDeA, Phone No 0207 296 6834, Email: mandy.james@idea.gov.uk

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

Background

1. The Inspectorates' analysis of the responses to the July consultation paper on CAA will be published shortly. The analysis confirms that the LGA's response is consistent with feedback from Councils.
2. In summary the **analysis of responses** demonstrates:
 - Support for the principle of CAA, as set out in the consultation paper;
 - Desire for more detail about how CAA will work in practice – in particular around red and green flags;
 - Concern that the organisational assessment appears too similar to CPA and will be burdensome for councils;
 - Support for a single score for the organisational assessment;
 - A demand for further details about how the Inspectorates will ensure consistency of judgement and quality assurance nationally;
 - Support for the involvement of peers in the CAA process.
3. There were also a number of consistent themes running through the responses, including that CAA should be proportionate, that there should be stronger links to other performance frameworks and to ensure that all the inspectorates have the capacity to deliver the assessments.
4. The **final CAA framework** will be published in early February with final guidance likely to be published in March.
5. We have been working with the CAA trial sites to influence the content of the guidance and have met with them and the Commission on two occasions, with a further meeting planned. Key messages we are seeking to include in the guidance are:
 - The need for conversations between the Inspectorates and council/partners at regular points in the year – particularly in advance of the publication of the final reports in November;
 - The lighter touch approach should not stop engagement with members, particularly in two tier areas;
 - The inspectorates should see the scrutiny function as a valuable source of information and an audience for their reporting;
 - Inspectorate teams should take the local priorities as the starting point for the area assessment – and not apply a national template;
 - Red flags should only be awarded after discussion with the council/partners;
 - Evidence used in the assessment should be shared between the inspectorates, councils and local partners.
6. The LGA and IDeA have also been:

- promoting take up of the self evaluation tool, including developing a series of case studies from those already trialling the tool along with 'top tips' for promotion on the IDeA website;
- developing an approach to peer challenge of the self evaluation;
- pursuing the scope for peer engagement in CAA;
- developing resources and guidance available to councils on the IDeA knowledge website e.g. citizen insight guidance;
- with the support of Regional Associates in the north, developing a programme of support for members and senior management teams on responding to CAA and using it on their core agenda of improvement. This is being trialled in a number of partnerships in the northern region prior to further roll out;
- working with members, audit commission and RIEPs on raising awareness of CAA amongst members.

7. There will be a further LGA CAA Conference on 3 March 2009.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

8. The CPA harder test results for single tier and county councils will be published on 26 February 2009. This is the last time these results will be published before the transition to CAA. We are expecting a possible tail off in the previous rate of improvement due to the loss of protection for the corporate assessment and the recent annual performance assessment for children's services (APA) figures which reveal a drop in a number of council scores. This could have implications for the reputation of the sector and we will want to carefully manage the messages around the publication of the final CPA results.

Suggested action

9. A regular quarterly liaison meeting between the LGA Office Holders and the Audit Commission is scheduled for 27 January 2009. It is recommended that full opportunity is taken to use that meeting to seek assurances from the Commission that they will act on the feedback from CAA trial sites and respond fully to the issues expressed in the consultation. It is also recommended that the Commission is asked to explain what message it intends to put out alongside publication of the final CPA results.

Financial Implications

10. There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

Implications for Wales

11. There is a different approach to performance management in Wales.

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