

## **Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) update**

### **Summary**

This report updates members on the implementation of the Comprehensive Area Assessment, provides an opportunity for members to shape LGA messages around publication of the CAA results on 10 December and invites members to agree key messages about how we expect CAA to work in year 2.

### **Recommendations**

That the report be noted.

That members agree key LGA group messages around publication of the CAA results on 10 December.

That members agree LGA group messages about how we expect CAA to work in year 2.

### **Action**

In the light of members' comments, develop a media plan for publication of the CAA results on 10 December.

Develop proposals for CAA year 2 in the light of members' views and feed into the sector evaluation report.

## Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

### Background

1. This report updates members on the implementation of the Comprehensive Area Assessment since the last report to the Board on this issue in July.
2. **“CAA Watch”**
  - 2.1 Over the summer the LGA invited feedback on the implementation of CAA from leaders and surveyed all councils. The feedback has been analysed and the results summarised in “CAA: how is it measuring up so far?” which has been circulated to members and is available on the LGA website.
  - 2.2 In summary the early feedback from the sector indicates that whilst there are some positives - Inspectorates seem to be focusing on the highest priorities for the area, and council engagement with the CAA lead has generally been productive – significant concerns still exist:
    - only one in ten think it is reducing the overall burden;
    - seven in ten say CAA is not being effectively coordinated between inspectorates;
    - just under two thirds believe it is not sufficiently focused on *future* outcomes.
  - 2.3 As a result Cllr Parsons wrote to Audit Commission Chairman, Michael O’Higgins, calling on the Commission to ensure that the Inspectorates deliver on the ambition for CAA by working together more effectively at local level and delivering the promised reduction in the burden of assessment.
  - 2.4 In his response Michael O’Higgins acknowledged that “...we and our partner inspectorates have to do more to demonstrate a fully joined up approach locally – one that genuinely reduces the burden on local services.”
  - 2.5 With regard to the Use of Resources assessment, Michael O’Higgins acknowledged that “... it seems clear from this and other feedback that our attempt to focus use of resources on outcomes rather than process is not perceived to have delivered the more streamlined assessment we intended. As part of our wider CAA evaluation we are particularly examining what immediate action we can take to address this for next year, alongside a more fundamental review of use of resources”.

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2.6 As the CAA assessment process draws to a close, we have, as previously agreed, repeated this exercise – inviting council leaders for their views and surveying councils – and these results will inform our evaluation of the first year of CAA to be published at a Conference on CAA and the future of inspection, on 26 January 2010.

### **3. CAA and member Peers**

3.1 The Inspectorates have sought to involve peers and “experts by experience” in the CAA process – providing expert advice on a call off basis and in the quality assurance process. In addition the Inspectorates agreed to a proposal to “pair” CAA leads with a member peer – to help ensure that CAA leads understood the political dynamics in their areas, etc.

3.2 IDeA has reviewed member peers’ experience and it is clear that, generally speaking, those peers appointed to support the CAA leads feel they have had little opportunity to get involved and contribute. This may be partly explained by the fact they were appointed part way through the process. The Commission has acknowledged this and that there is more to be done to ensure member peers will be able to make a meaningful contribution in year 2.

### **4. CAA results**

4.1 The first round of assessments is now drawing to a close. Localities have had the opportunity to comment on their pre-publication reports and to request a review of flags and scores. The CAA results will be published on 10 December.

4.2 The second CAA watch exercise is designed to gather information about flags and scores and early feedback should be available to report to the Board. Members will also be aware of the flags and scores for their own area/council and the Board meeting will provide a timely opportunity to review the situation and begin to consider some of the key messages the LGA should promote around publication of the results. A detailed media plan can then be prepared to ensure any agreed messages are promoted consistently across the LGA Group.

### **5. CAA and year 2**

5.1 At this stage there are no signs that the Inspectorates plan to revise substantially the CAA framework for Year 2. However they will be looking to revise the more detailed guidance to inspectorate staff, drawing on feedback from the sector and the results of the Inspectorates’ evaluation of CAA.

5.2 In order to influence this process we are we are preparing a sector evaluation of the first year of CAA, drawing on the feedback from leaders and councils, and

setting out headline proposals for year 2. In terms of overall messages for year 2 the following are suggested, at this stage

- we continue to support the ambition for a comprehensive assessment of outcomes delivered in local areas, the CAA area assessment begins to take us in this direction but more work needs to be done to realise the ambition;
- the first year results set a “baseline” for the future. We do not expect the Inspectorates to undertake a full re-run of the area and organisational assessments in each area;
- rather in year 2 the Inspectorates should focus on what has changed or on particular issues identified in year 1. The focus of the assessments in year 2 should be discussed and agreed with localities;
- in addition we expect to see clear evidence that the intensity of the assessment is proportionate to risk/performance. High performing areas/organisations should receive a demonstrably lighter touch assessment;
- greater weight should be given to council/partners own assessment of their performance with the Inspectorates only undertaking further activity where necessary;
- the general approach outlined above should apply equally to the Use of Resources assessment, and in addition the Commission should address the overlap that arises from the outcomes focus in both the Use of Resources assessment and the area assessment so that duplication is avoided in year 2;
- inspectorate activity needs to be properly joined up and the Inspectorates should clearly articulate how they propose to achieve this going forward;
- member peers need to be involved more fully from the start.

5.3 Thinking about the longer term future of inspection and assessment, beyond CAA year 2, is being taken forward under the “Freedom to Lead” banner.

## **Financial Implications**

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

## **Implications for Wales**

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