



meeting **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

date **16 March 2009**

agenda item number

Report of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny

Comprehensive Area Assessment

Purpose of report

1. To provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) with an opportunity to receive a briefing on the new assessment process for local authorities and their partners and to consider future involvement with this process.

Background

2. The Local Government White Paper: Strong and Prosperous Communities as enacted in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 committed to a smaller more focussed set of priorities and a reduction in the number of national indicators for local authorities and their partners.
3. The new national indicator set for local authorities and local authority partnerships was announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review announcement on 9 October 2007. The new national indicators are intended to be the only means of measuring national priorities that have been agreed by Government.
4. The number of national indicators has been reduced, from approximately 1200 to approximately 189. The new indicators aim to strengthen the incentives for closer partnership working to deliver joined-up outcomes because they will apply (where relevant) to other local partners.
5. The Local Government White Paper set out the Government's view that the Local Area Agreement (LAA) should be the 'delivery plan' for the sustainable community strategy which is the 'strategic vision' for an area. The LAA is to be focused on a relatively small number of priorities for improvement and forms a partnership between national and local government.
6. Through consultation and engagement with their communities, local authorities and their partners in the Local Strategic Partnership are expected to identify up to 35 key issues which need to be addressed to improve the social and economic wellbeing of their areas. The 35 key

indicators have to be agreed with the regional Government Office (Go-EM).

Audit and Inspection

7. The County Council's performance is currently assessed through the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), which has recently judged Nottinghamshire to be four star Authority.
8. From April 2009 the national measuring of performance will be carried out by a collaboration of inspectorates led by the Audit Commission through the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).
9. The Joint Inspectorates state that

“CAA examines how effectively local public services are performing, and how well they are working together, to meet the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. Assessments will be made publicly available, in print and online, and provide an annual snapshot of quality of life in the area.

CAA looks at a number of things, including the strength of local economies and labour markets, affordable housing, children's well-being, crime and safety, support for individuals to improve their health, provision for people whose circumstances make them vulnerable, and the quality of the local environment.”

10. The Comprehensive Area Assessment will consist of two assessments: area assessment and organisational assessment.
11. The Area assessment will assess the extent to which councils and their partners are delivering improvements on the issues that matter to people within the local area. It will consider whether the priorities set in the area reflect those of the people who live there. Area assessment will also look at how effectively the improvements are being delivered and will assess the future prospects for improvement.
12. The Organisational assessment will focus on the individual public bodies within an area, to make sure they are accountable for quality and impact. It will involve two assessments:
 - managing performance
 - use of resources, consisting of three themes: managing finances, governing the business and managing resources.

Self Evaluation

13. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are being encouraged, but not required to complete a self evaluation as part of the CAA. Guidance provided by the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) is included as an appendix to the report.
14. The I&DeA's proposed model of self evaluation suggest that three main issues should be included:
 - Understanding local needs and translation into local priorities
 - The delivery of improvements and outcomes in the area
 - Gap analysis and planning for the future
15. Members may wish to discuss whether Nottinghamshire will be using the self evaluation process.

Trial Assessment 2008

16. The development of the CAA has included the Joint Inspectorates undertaking a number of trial assessments during June – October 2008. Nottinghamshire took part in a trial of the CAA during this period and Members may wish to consider the outcomes of this process.

Issues

17. The CAA is expected to be co-ordinated by a local lead officer on behalf of the Audit Commission who develops a knowledge and understanding of the area. It has been suggested that the representative could link into Overview and Scrutiny processes.
18. On 16 May 2008 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to receive an introduction to the Comprehensive Area Assessment and that the local lead officer for the Audit Commission be invited to a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
19. Stephen Barnett, Comprehensive Area Assessment Lead - Nottinghamshire County and Nottingham City for the Audit Commission and Peter Elderton, Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance have been invited to the meeting to
 - introduce Members to the Comprehensive Area Assessment and
 - provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with details of the trial that took place in Nottinghamshire.

Role of Overview and Scrutiny

20. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will also wish to consider its future role in the CAA.
21. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is invited to comment on the declarations of NHS Trusts as part of their self assessment for the Annual Health Check Process.
22. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee commentary for the Annual Health Checks is compiled from an evidence base of scrutiny work involving the Trust during the year of the assessment. Members opt not to comment on the Trust's statement but provide details of experiences that may be of use to the inspectorate providing both positive and negative examples. Members may wish to consider a similar role as part of the CAA.
23. The self evaluation process is expected to evaluate where there are gaps in performance that need to be addressed or where more focused action is required to ensure the delivery of outcomes. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider whether it should offer comment on the self evaluation, in particular with reference to the following possible 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? Do local public service providers and other partners support the council's **scrutiny** function e.g. provide evidence, and respond to the findings?
 - What action has been taken previously to address **underperformance** in key priorities? Were these successful? What was the learning and based on this, what more needs to be done?
 - Are local people kept **well informed** of key issues regarding their area, with communication being coordinated between partners? “
24. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to receive a copy of any self evaluation as a tool for identifying possible topics for future scrutiny reviews.

Recommendations

25. It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- i. consider the introduction of the CAA and any potential issues for the County Council
 - ii. agree to comment on the self evaluation should one be undertaken
 - iii. receive a copy of any self evaluation and the County's organisational assessment on an annual basis

Councillor E D W Llewellyn-Jones
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny

Background papers:

Comprehensive Area Assessment - Framework Document - Audit
Commission February 2009