

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL RESPONSE TO
COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT OCTOBER 2008

South Cambridgeshire District Council wishes to make the following comments to the CAA consultation dated 08 Oct 08. The Consultation questions for CAA are listed below in italic script. Our comments are included in plain script

1. Do you broadly agree with our proposals for the overall CAA framework?

There are various aspects of the new framework that the Council supports – such as the focus on outcomes; the principle of sustainable development; and the emphasis on the needs of vulnerable people. However, it is difficult to assess from the published paper the nature of the impact on district councils – particularly in relation to the area assessment element. It is therefore difficult to draw an overall assessment of the proposals.

Also the Council has concerns that a county-wide area level assessment could be seen as remote from local people and will cover different areas with widely different needs and aspirations.

2. Are the area assessment and the organisational assessment, as the two key elements of the framework, clearly explained?

Again it is difficult to assess in practical and realistic terms how area assessment activities will impact on district councils, which account for relatively low spending levels in comparison with other partners. The organisational assessment is clearer because a significant element, Use of Resources, is already in operation.

3. Is the link between these two assessments clear?

The use of red and green flags at area level as a means of highlighting issues to be taken up at organisational level is reasonably clear. However, it is less clear how issues not covered by red or green flags are to be dealt with. There is also a reasonably clear link between the Performance Management element of organisational assessment and the achievement of targets at area assessment level. However, there are some problems here in that it may be difficult to establish clearly the link between actions at district council level and the achievement of area wide outcome targets. Overall, greater clarity is required between the two assessments, particularly in relation to district councils.

4. Do you agree that the three questions and supporting issues (see Appendix 1) proposed for the area assessment are the right ones? If not, please suggest alternative questions and/or issues.

The inspection regime appears to be more directed towards unitary authorities than two tier ones. There are many issues, which are not within a district Council's sphere of power or influence.

5. Do you agree that we should use the green and red flag approach for reporting the area assessment? If not, please suggest an alternative approach.

Generally, the red and green flag approach is supported, provided that in reporting the outcomes of area assessments the purpose of the flags and the fact that they are highlight or exception based is made clear and that an overall balanced picture emerges.

6. Do you agree that we should have one overall organisational effectiveness judgment, drawn from integrating the managing performance theme and the use of resources themes?

No. Reporting the two elements of the organisational assessment gives a fuller and more balanced picture of the council concerned. Moreover, the use of resources element is now a well established measure and retaining separate assessment will give some measure of continuity.

7. Do you agree with our proposals for the key questions and focus for the managing performance theme of the organisational assessment for:

a) councils?

b) fire and rescue services?

If not, please suggest alternative questions and/or focus.

We support the proposals in paragraphs 80 and 81. We are pleased to note the reference to differing types of organizations and assume this also refers to the difference between single and multi tier local government.

8. Which of the three options for scoring the organisational assessment should we adopt? If you disagree with all the options, please propose an alternative approach to scoring.

Option three is supported for the reasons outlined in the response to Q6

9. Do the proposals provide for an appropriate focus to be given to people in vulnerable circumstances?

Yes, we welcome this focus.

10. Do you agree that CAA should evolve over time?

Yes. As part of continuous improvement in a changing environment this should be a given.

11. Do you broadly agree with the way we are proposing to use the National Indicator Set within the CAA framework?

Yes, but we have concerns about the loss of comparability data provided by BVPIs.

*12. Do you support our proposals to report the assessments as set out in our **prototype CAA reporting tool** ? If not, please suggest alternative proposals for reporting.*

The proposed reporting tool appears to be easy to use and contains relevant information. The content and format are supported

13. Do you agree with our proposals for peer involvement? If you have other suggestions about this, please outline your ideas.

Peer review is supported as it gives consistency and lends credibility to the process.

14. Do you agree with our approach to self-evaluation?

Yes

15. Do you agree with our approach to gather relevant information from sources such as Citizen's Advice Bureaux and Regional Business Forums? Are there any other sources we should consider?

There is a wide range of organisations, which will vary from area to area. Emphasis should be given to those with either a democratic mandate or an active membership base. In particular Parish/Town councils should be consulted.