

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Northstowe Portfolio Holder 11 March 2010
AUTHOR/S: Corporate Manager (Community and Customer Services)

CAA – NEXT STEPS (CAA FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE)

Purpose

- 1.1. To invite the Portfolio Holder to comment on and note the approach to improvement planning (as set out in para 3.2.) following the recent CAA inspection report.
- 1.2. To invite the Portfolio Holder to comment on and note the proposed CAA Framework (set out in paras 3.3. – 3.11.) for implementation across the authority.

Background

- 2.1. The Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) was introduced in April 2009, replacing the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) that had been in place since 2002.
- 2.2. CAA comprises of 2 main elements, namely;
 - (i) **Area Assessment** – looking at how well local public services are delivering better results for people across the whole area, focusing on agreed priorities such as health, economic prospects and community safety, and how likely they are to improve in the future
 - (ii) **Organisational Assessment** – combining the external auditors assessment of value for money/use of resources with a joint inspectorate assessment of council service performance

Both assessments lead to the publication of an annual report.

- 2.3. The first CAA report, covering area and organisational assessments, was published on 9th December 2009, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. It is vital that we demonstrate that we, as an authority, have taken this assessment on board and that we are able to evidence improvements that have been made to services with demonstrable outcomes, as a result of it.

Considerations

- 3.1. In light of 2.3. above, it is vital that South Cambridgeshire District Council does two things;
 - (i) address areas for improvements highlighted in the CAA report and provide a substantial evidence base supporting this, and
 - (ii) build a sustainable CAA framework for the authority moving forward.
- 3.2. In terms of (i), an action/improvement plan template has been constructed to cover areas of improvement highlighted in both the Use of Resources assessment and the wider CAA organisational assessment. The format of this follows the best practice

example circulated by Improvement East/CIPFA as part of their publication, *How to improve Use of Resources under comprehensive area assessment*. An example of this format is attached as Appendix A. As with any improvement plan, it is essential that this is seen as a council wide responsibility and closely monitored to maintain progress and ensure compliance. With this in mind, it is recommended that it is monitored on a quarterly basis to maintain focus and allow corrective action to be taken if necessary.

- 3.3. Following on from improvement planning in response to the latest CAA report, it is vital that the authority puts in place a comprehensive and sustainable CAA framework for the future. With this in mind it is proposed that the framework set out in Figure 1 below is adopted.

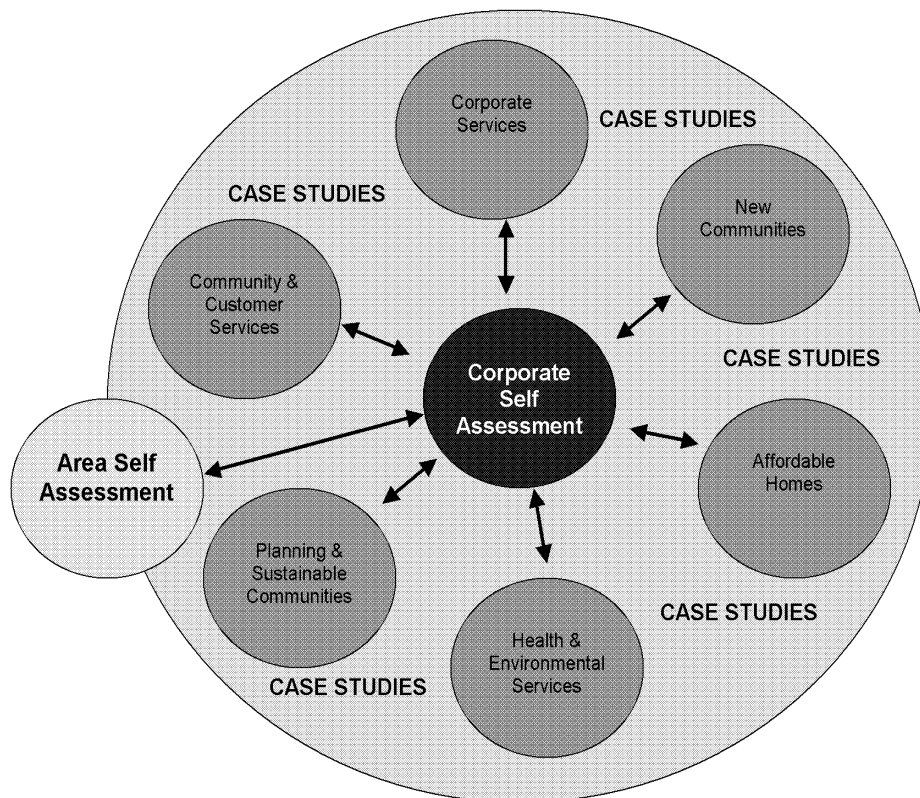


Figure 1 : Proposed SCDC CAA Framework

- 3.4. As can be seen from the diagram above, the framework is based on a system of self-assessment. This should be linked to published CAA guidance and Key Lines of Enquiry (KLoE's) and cover all aspects of the authority. It is assumed for the purposes of this framework that the area self-assessment will continue to be led by Cambridgeshire Together and that SCDC will input into the development of this through the usual channels.
- 3.5. Although under CAA guidance there is no **requirement** from the Audit Commission to prepare a self-assessment for CAA, it is implicitly recommended. It is also noticeable that a large number of authorities did complete one in the first year of CAA and achieved, on the whole, higher scores for their organisational assessment than those that didn't. There are risks and benefits associated with doing so, which are summarised in the table below.

Benefits	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes a clear baseline for the authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be a resource intensive and laborious process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sets and manages internal and external expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of engagement from operational staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tells the 'story' for the authority and helps supporting evidence to hang together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to give the inspectors what they need leads to wasted effort
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can help to identify the 'big picture' outcomes that cross over more than one KLoE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some officers are used to writing about processes rather than outcomes and may continue to do so

- 3.5. On balance it is recommended that a self-assessment should be completed as part of the framework, particularly in light of the current self-assessments that are being completed for both Customer Service Excellence accreditation and the Equality Framework across the authority. It is envisaged that the CAA self assessment can substantially be drafted by reference to this already collected body of information with minimal new data needed to address any gaps in answering CAA specific KLoE's. A suggested template for the self-assessment is attached as Appendix B.
- 3.6. The CAA framework should also make good use of Value for Money (VfM) reviews across the authority and it is proposed that a programme of these reviews should be put in place for 2010/11. The programme of reviews will be informed by performance data and unit cost information, but not solely driven by these. Aspects such as user satisfaction rates, external funding secured and awards/accreditations will also be included. A suggested template is currently being developed and is attached as Appendix C. The ambition should be for a review cycle that ensures that every part of the council's operation is subject to periodic scrutiny. Such reviews should be in line with the authorities overall value-for-money strategy.
- 3.7. There is also a need to ensure that a comprehensive evidence base of information supports any self-assessment. This should primarily comprise of a series of case studies representing all service areas in the authority and highlighting notable practice, demonstrable outcomes etc. These case studies should be brief in nature (1-2 sides of A4) and illustrate (as far as possible) all areas covered under the KLoE's. It is envisaged that there may potentially be up to 45 or 50 such case studies. The evidence base should also contain all key policies, plans and strategies of the authority, as well as other key documents and evidence of benchmarking carried out across service areas. It is assumed that the Policy and Performance team will maintain a co-ordination role in pulling this evidence base together.
- 3.8. It should be noted that the proposed CAA framework and completion of a self-assessment have obvious links to the recently agreed Performance Improvement Strategy. This helps set a clear direction for future work and it is important that the two are aligned to each other.
- 3.9. It is important that any self-assessment demonstrates that the authority is 'self aware'. It presents a valuable opportunity for the authority to highlight good practice and sell ourselves in terms of the undoubted good work that is occurring across many service areas. The authority needs to become better at this and the CAA process gives us a clear opportunity to do this.

- 3.10. A number of things will need to be put in place to maximise the value we can get from the CAA framework.
- 3.10.1. We need to build on the already good relationship with our CAAL to ensure that we get feedback at all stages of the process, enabling us to present the best self-assessment we can.
- 3.10.2. It is also important that Community & Customer Services are seen to be the 'information hub' of the authority. At present we are unsure, as an authority, what information is available across service areas. For example, there is no central co-ordination of consultation or community intelligence activity. It will be a key role in this process for Community & Customer Services to draw in information relating to consultations, complaints, community intelligence, project management etc and use this information both for CAA purposes and also to feed it back out to service areas in an analysed form to inform management decisions and demonstrate learning across the authority.
- 3.10.3. We also need to develop a clear timetable for the whole CAA process within South Cambridgeshire District Council. A first draft will be developed following discussions with external audit and our CAAL.
- 3.10.4. The Council should also develop a "solution centre" approach, so that the Council – and partners, where appropriate – can use community intelligence and targeted research to understand why PIs may be failing to improve/deteriorating and put in place effectively designed interventions to address the issues.
- 3.11. It is the intention that by following the above framework we will, as an authority, present to the Audit Commission the following documents (subject to specific discussions with our CAAL around timescales);
- (i) **Improvement Plan** - highlighting actions taken in response to the previous CAA inspection,
 - (ii) **Self Assessment** – linking all service areas and addressing the KIoE's and fully referenced to
 - (iii) **Evidence Base** – comprising of case studies, key plans, policies and strategies etc.

Implications

4.1.

Financial	None specific
Legal	None specific
Staffing	There are no staffing implications, although a full staffing complement will need to be maintained in Community & Customer Services to deliver the framework effectively as well as fully engaged staff in service areas.
Risk Management	If a sustainable framework is not put in place then the authority risks receiving a poor CAA judgement in future years.
Equal Opportunities	None specific

Consultations

- 5.1. SMT and staff have been consulted. An outline of the proposed framework was delivered in a presentation on 12/01/10 to officers re: CAA findings. No adverse comments were received.

Effect on Strategic Aims

6.1.

Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.
By putting in place a comprehensive and sustainable CAA framework, the authority will be in a better position to drive efficiencies through service areas, identify areas in need of improvement and demonstrate existing high levels of performance to the public and inspection bodies.
Commitment to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for all.
See above
Commitment to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live.
See above
Commitment to assisting provision for local jobs for all.
See above
Commitment to providing a voice for rural life.
See above

Conclusions

- 7.1. As outlined throughout the report, it is vital that the authority responds positively to the recent CAA inspection and puts in place a sustainable framework for the future. It is felt that the framework suggested fulfils this need.

Recommendations

- 8.1. The Portfolio Holder is invited to comment on and note the approach to improvement planning (as set out in para 3.2.) following the recent CAA inspection report.
- 8.2. The Portfolio Holder is invited to comment on and endorse the proposed CAA Framework (set out in paras 3.3 – 3.11.) for implementation across the authority.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Audit Commission (& other inspectorates) – CAA Framework Document

Audit Commission – Use of Resources Framework (Overall approach and key lines of enquiry)

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