

## REPORT TO CABINET

### PREPARATION FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT

Date: 23 October 2008

Member Reporting: Councillor Burbage

Contact Officer: Eleanor Fox, Policy & Performance Manager (01628 796635)

Wards affected: All wards

#### 1. SUMMARY

1.1 The Audit Commission recently published detailed proposals for the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), the new assessment framework for councils and local public services, which replaces the current Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) regime.

1.2 Key elements of the new system are:

- 1) An area assessment which will assess effectiveness of local services, delivered by the Council and its partners, in achieving improved outcomes for the community.
- 2) An organisational assessment for councils, covering 'use of resources' and 'managing performance'.
- 3) The National Indicator Set which will be used as a key evidence source for both the area and organisational assessments.

1.3 Initial analysis is being undertaken to ensure that the Royal Borough and its partners are fully prepared for the new framework; effective planning will minimise the resource implications.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATION

**That the introduction of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment framework be noted.**

What will be different for residents as a result of this decision?
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The Council is committed to working in partnership to achieve improved outcomes for the local community; the CAA framework will help to monitor progress and ensure an ongoing focus upon service improvement.
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#### 3. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

##### 3.1 Background

3.1.1 The 2006 White Paper, '*Strong and Prosperous Communities*', set out proposals for a new performance framework for local services. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 put the legal framework for many of these proposals in place, including the new CAA framework. All inspectorates have worked together to develop the new framework, which will replace CPA, Children's services JARs, APA for services for children and young people and social services star ratings. Performance frameworks for specific services (e.g. schools, police and health and social care) will continue.

- 3.1.2 The CAA framework is outcome-based, focussing upon the delivery of shared priorities by both the Council and its partners. It recognises the importance of effective local partnership working and the role of Councils in leading and shaping the communities they service. Thus, it will be vital for the Council to continue to value and build positive relationships with partner organisations across all sectors.
- 3.1.3 The introduction of CAA will bring about a fundamental change in the assessment process, with the focus now upon continuous assessment through ongoing relationships with the Audit Commission and Government Office rather than on-site inspections. The new framework will be in place from April 2009 with the first CAA reports to be published in November 2009
- 3.1.4 The Audit Commission recently consulted on the detailed proposals for the new framework. The Royal Borough submitted a response highlighting pertinent issues, including the importance of the assessment process being fully transparent and evidence-gathering being kept to a minimum in order to limit the resource implications.
- 3.1.5 As a result of feedback to earlier consultations, a simpler framework is now proposed which consists of an area assessment; and organisational assessments for councils (and fire and rescue services), which will combine the use of resources themes with a managing performance theme. The National Indicator Set will be used as a key evidence source for both the area and organisational assessments. Other evidence used for the assessment will include key documents, such as the Local Area Agreement and the Community Strategy and the views of service users.

## **3.2 Area assessment**

- 3.2.1 The Area Assessment is a qualitative assessment considering whether local services are delivering improved outcomes for the community and in particular looking at the prospects for future improvement. The assessment will focus around 3 overarching headings:
- How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?
  - How well are the outcomes and improvements needed being delivered?
  - What are the prospects for future improvement? (This is the main focus of the area assessment)
- 3.2.2 Sustainability considerations will be integral to the three main questions; as well as environmental concerns, this is about the local economy, promoting healthy lifestyles etc. Another major area of focus will be upon assessing how well the Council and its partners understand and deliver services to meet the needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- 3.2.3 The area assessment will not be given an overall score; instead, after initial assessments about an area are made, a flag system will be used to indicate concern or satisfaction. A 'red flag' will indicate that significant concerns about outcomes, performance or future prospects are not being adequately addressed and a 'green flag' will indicate where others may learn from innovative or exceptional success in the area. (In many cases there may be neither a red or green flag assigned.)

## **3.3 Organisational assessment**

- 3.3.1 There will be a single, scored, organisational assessment for all councils and fire and rescue services. It will consist of 2 elements: managing performance, which replaces the proposed direction of travel assessment, and use of resources, with the methodology for the latter published earlier this year. The assessment will be presented in a single short report at the same time as the area assessment.

### **3.4 Preparation for CAA**

3.4.1 Under the new CAA framework, assessments will be based largely upon existing evidence, and consequently, the resource implications should hopefully be limited. The Royal Borough intends to focus upon developing and embedding sound monitoring systems to ensure that the Council and its partners are delivering services to meet the needs and aspirations of local people. To facilitate this, work is underway to restructure the Community Partnership and introduce new performance monitoring arrangements. A particular area of focus will be upon ensuring that the Council and its partners are effectively meeting the needs of vulnerable groups. Work is also planned to review key documents including the Community Strategy, with the aim of clearly presenting a long-term vision for the borough, which aligns with other key documents such as the Local Development Framework. Thus, the existing planned work programme should dovetail well the new CAA framework.

## **4. OPTIONS AVAILABLE AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

### **4.1 Options**

4.1.1 The report is for information only.

### **4.2 Risk assessment**

4.2.1 There are some risks associated with the introduction of the new performance framework; it is vital that full details of the process and requirements for evidence etc. are issued by the Government with sufficient clarity and time to allow for preparation and to minimise the resource impact.

4.2.2 The CAA will consider the effectiveness of local services delivered by the Council and its partners. It is therefore important that the borough maintains its strong basis of partnership-working, but equally that the new framework is effectively presented to partners and used as a driver to further improve joint working, particularly in areas such as addressing the needs of vulnerable groups.

## **5. CONSULTATIONS CARRIED OUT**

5.1 All directorates have contributed to the contents of the report.

## **6. COMMENTS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

6.1 Following consultation with the Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny, it was decided that the report did not need to be considered by the Panel as it was for information purposes only.

## **7. IMPLICATIONS**

7.1.1 The following implications have been addressed where indicated below.

<b>Financial</b>	<b>Legal</b>	<b>Human Rights Act</b>	<b>Planning</b>	<b>Sustainable Development</b>	<b>Diversity &amp; Equality</b>
✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓

Background Papers:

Comprehensive Area Assessment: Audit Commission proposals;

National Indicator Set