

# Comprehensive Area Assessment

A guide for the NHS



‘CAA focuses on how well different public bodies work together to improve local quality of life. It’s based on the judgement of different inspectorates working in partnership. We are striving to make CAA the most user-friendly public service reporting system to date.’

**Steve Bundred, Chief Executive, Audit Commission**

‘By bringing together information from different sectors CAA will provide people with a better picture of how well important issues such as accessibility, dignity and respect, equality and diversity are being addressed.’

**Cynthia Bower, Chief Executive, Care Quality Commission**

‘CAA is an exciting vision for local public service improvement and accountability. CAA comes at a time of increasing understanding of the effect that housing, education, social care and other local public services have on health and well-being. The NHS Confederation welcomes any impetus for local public services to work together in order to support and promote healthy communities.’

**Steve Barnett, Chief Executive, NHS Confederation**

‘CAA marks a great step forward because it recognises that you can’t just look at health in isolation. It’s about asking different questions: like what does health bring to the social and economic environment; and equally how do services like the police and probation help the health agenda.’

**Richard Popplewell, Chief Executive, Stockport PCT**

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# What is Comprehensive Area Assessment?

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Comprehensive Area Assessment, or CAA, is a new way of assessing local public services in England. It examines how well councils and other public bodies work together to meet the needs of the people they serve.

For the first time, six independent inspectorates will collectively assess services. We are asking: what do you say you want; are you getting it; and what are the prospects for things to get better?

CAA will focus on what people, local leaders and service chiefs say are the priorities for particular places. They might include the quality of healthcare, the recession, affordable housing, children's well-being, crime and safety, achievement in schools or the quality of the local environment. If an area is getting exceptional results, or has prospects of doing very much better, we'll signal with a green flag that others could learn from it. We'll give red flags in those places where we have significant concerns about the prospects of improvement.

We'll offer you these assessments, online, in print and through other media. They will make for an evolving picture of local life. First results will be available on 10 December 2009 on a new website called Oneplace - [www.direct.gov.uk/oneplace](http://www.direct.gov.uk/oneplace)

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# Why is it important?

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CAA aims to offer benefits for everyone.

- **The public** have a right to know whether they are getting value for money, and whether promised improvements are being realised. CAA will give clear and impartial information. It will help people make decisions in their communities, for example about how they use public services.
- We are assessing **public bodies** on their own performance. As well as pointing out where things need to change, CAA will highlight achievements and innovation that public bodies in other places can learn from.
- CAA assures **government** that taxpayers' money is well spent and provides independent evidence about how well areas are progressing against national and local priorities.

## How is it different from what's gone before?

In the past we measured councils' performance by Comprehensive Performance Assessment and awarded them stars. Other local public services, such as health and children's services, were assessed only by their relevant inspectorates.

The new approach is very different.

**It's more wide-ranging:** CAA is not looking at councils alone but at how the police, health trusts and councils are working together – the joint goal being a better quality of life in the locality.

**It focuses on ends:** Rather than examining structures and processes, CAA looks at results. Are services making a difference; are they helping improve people's lives?

**It assesses local priorities:** CAA focuses on what's important to each local area – and that will vary. Do service providers understand what touches the lives of residents and what the people who live there say matters to them? How are councils, trusts and the police collaborating on the long-term problems of this or that place?

**It's forward-looking:** Instead of talking about how things were done, CAA reports on what's happening now and on what needs to alter if the lives of citizens are to improve in the future.

**It's a joint assessment:** Through CAA, inspectorates are pooling their knowledge of how well services deliver for their communities.

The new CAA framework is designed to rationalise inspection processes and aims to reduce the amount of regular inspection. There will be fewer programmes of intensive inspection. Instead, regular dialogue between the inspectorates and local organisations, together with an analysis of information that organisations already produce to manage their services, will form the basis of our assessments.

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# Who is involved?

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Six different inspectorates are coordinating an overview of public services in every area of England. They are the Audit Commission, the Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorates of Constabulary, Prisons and Probation, and Ofsted. They will draw on their own inspectors, of course, but also outside specialists and those who know an area well, including councillors.

## What do CAA assessments look like?

CAA has two parts: we are assessing the area while we also check and report on the organisations providing public services within it.

In the **area assessment** the inspectorates together judge how well public services are meeting the priorities that you have set locally – and whether improvement is likely to continue. The **organisational assessment** examines performance and value for money in councils and trusts, police and other bodies, and how well they are cooperating with one another. The Audit Commission will coordinate organisational assessments of councils and fire and rescue services. The other inspectorates will report separately – so for example the Care Quality Commission will continue to assess primary care trusts (PCTs). The Care Quality Commission will also collate commissioning information for PCTs and councils' social care services to include in the area assessment.

We'll measure how each area performs using national and local information that is already available. We'll look at local area agreements, sustainable communities strategies, the national indicators set by central government and, as a source of data on opinion and attitudes, the government's Place Survey. We'll also look at information produced by councils, PCTs and other local organisations to check their own performance.

By bringing together assessments of place and of organisations, we'll be able to make a judgement on how well public services are tackling an area's problems and priorities.

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# CAA and other healthcare assessments

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The new CAA sits alongside existing assessment systems for healthcare organisations.

## **The Care Quality Commission's assessment**

The Care Quality Commission will assess NHS trusts on:

- the quality of financial management;
- performance against national priorities and existing commitments; and
- performance against Standards for Better Health.

For the first time PCTs will be assessed separately on their commissioning functions.

## **The Audit Commission's Use of Resources assessment**

For PCTs, the new Use of Resources assessment replaces the previous Auditors' Local Evaluation. It will focus on outcomes much more than the Auditors' Local Evaluation. It asks questions not just about the processes in place but whether they are effective and what their impact has been. There is also a stronger emphasis on achieving value for money and on working in partnership. The Care Quality Commission will use the Audit Commission's judgement in the Managing Finances theme of the Use of Resources assessment to make its assessment of the quality of financial management.

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# Your questions answered

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## How will CAA contribute to the health agenda?

CAA has been developed to reflect changes in how local services are delivered. Local services are encouraged to deliver more responsive and personalised services – that is, services that are built around the needs of individuals, families and communities, not around institutional boundaries. So CAA recognises that health issues cannot be addressed by healthcare organisations working alone and looks at health and well-being issues in a much wider social context.

Coordinated local action is essential if we are to successfully promote public health and tackle health inequalities. CAA aims to ensure the needs of the local population are met through agencies working seamlessly together to deliver improved outcomes.

The area assessment of CAA will publicly shine a spotlight on how well local partners are working together to tackle local priorities. Our judgements and public reporting will help PCTs and other public bodies, as well as local people, understand more clearly what is working well – and what isn't. And our green flag reporting will help to share innovation between partnerships, across England, in a range of priority areas.

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# Your questions answered

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## **How does CAA fit with World Class Commissioning?**

World Class Commissioning has a natural fit with CAA, as both programmes emphasise reducing health inequalities, working in partnership with the community and a drive for improved quality. We have been working closely with the Department of Health and the Care Quality Commission to ensure that we align the different assessments and do not duplicate information requests.

Relevant information from World Class Commissioning has been taken into account in the 2008/09 Use of Resources assessments, and we are aiming for further alignment in the 2009/10 assessments that are now underway.

## **Can we afford CAA, given the country is in recession?**

In time CAA should save money. Organisations that work more closely together duplicate less and so should cut costs. With local public services costing over £200 billion a year, CAA will cast light on where the money is well – or not so well – spent. And with government requiring 3 per cent efficiency savings a year, the search for value is more critical than ever. By joining forces we reduce the administrative impact of our assessments, allowing councils, trusts and schools to concentrate on service priorities.

## **Do red and green flags replace the old star rating system for councils?**

CAA aims to be very different to what has gone before. Rather than giving a static score using stars or another rating system, we will paint a picture of how well local public services are doing over time. Area assessments will be reported as a narrative, or story, telling you about what you have said are the most important issues.

If we are worried about whether a local priority is improving we will give it a red flag. A green flag shows exceptional performance, or perhaps innovative ideas that other areas could learn from. There is no set number of flags so it is possible that you might see no red or green flags in your area. Flags are not the same as the scores or star ratings in the old assessments.

## **Why will it matter to the public?**

Increasingly citizens expect direct access to information about services. CAA information will be both readily available and independent. It will strengthen citizens' capacity to challenge and to influence services. Because CAA looks at what matters most to people in their area, reports should have a ready-made audience.

We will write assessments in straightforward, jargon-free language. Online reporting will make it easy to find data about the local area – and we'll provide alternatives for citizens not online.

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# Your questions answered

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## **CAA in practice**

### **A scenario – tackling childhood obesity**

Halting the rise in childhood obesity is a major national target because it is a risk factor for heart disease, diabetes and cancer in later life. The measurement of obesity in year 6 (NI 56) has been chosen by two-thirds of local areas for inclusion in their local area agreement.

What influences this indicator and what is likely to make it shift?

Exercise and healthy eating are the two obvious areas to look at so things such as PE, leisure facilities, safety of open spaces, school meals and programmes to promote healthy eating and availability of healthy food are all relevant. There are also associations with child poverty, breast feeding and mental health.

In order to make sensible judgements, especially on prospects for the future, area assessments will need to look at how these influences are being handled locally and whether local partnerships are using evidence of interventions that are known to work, for example from NICE or IDeA.

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# CAA timetable

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**Summer 2009:** CAA leads and other inspectorate staff worked with local partnerships to identify how effectively you're meeting local priorities.

**September/October 2009:** CAA final assessments for 2009 shared with local partners. There will be a period of review before publication where significant disagreements about red flags or organisational assessment scored judgements will be resolved.

**Early November:** Resolve any remaining reviews.

**10 December:** Launch of public Oneplace website. First set of CAA reports published.

**Early 2010:** We will publish themed reports on what we have learned from the first round of CAA.

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# Where to find out more

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Go to the Audit Commission website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa) to find out more about CAA. You can view an example area assessment and see how members of the public will be able to access information online about their local area.

A briefing on CAA is available from the NHS Confederation. Copies can be downloaded at [www.nhsconfed.org/publications](http://www.nhsconfed.org/publications)

**Information about the other partner inspectorates can be found at:**

**Care Quality Commission**

[www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk)

**HM Inspectorates of Constabulary**

[www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic](http://www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic)

**HM Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation**

[www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk)

**Ofsted**

[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



for an independent overview  
of local public services

From 10 December 2009 you will find  
the results of Comprehensive Area  
Assessment on the Oneplace website -  
[www.direct.gov.uk/oneplace](http://www.direct.gov.uk/oneplace)

For more information now, go to  
[www.audit-commission.gov.uk/oneplace](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/oneplace)

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