



HEREFORDSHIRE COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT PREPARATION PROGRAMME

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE, CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

CABINET

21 FEBRUARY 2008

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To seek approval to the proposed action plan to ensure that the Council, with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and its other partners, is well-placed for the new system of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendations

THAT

- (a) the proposed action plan be approved;
- (b) it be agreed that it be finalised having regard to discussions with partners and consideration by Strategic Monitoring Committee (SMC); and
- (c) it be agreed that progress against the plan be reported to Cabinet and SMC in July and October 2008, and in January and April 2009.

Reasons

CAA is the new system under which, from April 2009, the performance and prospects of all local authorities, with their partner organisations, will be assessed by the Audit Commission and the other inspectorates. Good preparation is essential to the performance and reputation of the Council and its partners

Considerations

1. The intention to introduce the CAA, replacing the current system of

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Steve Martin, Corporate Policy and Research Manager on 01432 261877

Comprehensive Performance Assessment, was announced by the Government in the 2006 *Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper*. Those aspects requiring legislation were enacted in October 2007. Implementation is now being led by the Audit Commission, working with the other inspectorates.

2. A simple summary of the proposals for the new system published by the inspectorates is at **Appendix 1**.

3. The timetable for the introduction of CAA is as follows:

1 April 2008 – Audit Commission area leads appointed

- National mandatory local authority performance indicators come into effect

June 2008 – new-style Local Area Agreements agreed

Summer 2008 – Consultation on the detailed CAA arrangements

December 2008 – Corporate Assessment, Joint Area Review and Annual Performance Assessment come to an end

January/February 2009 – Final set of Comprehensive Performance Assessment results

- Final CAA arrangements confirmed

1 April 2009 – CAA arrangements come into effect

October/November 2009 – First round of CAA reports

4. National consultation has taken place on the principles of the new system. Officers have worked with the County Councils Network to press, in the spirit of the White Paper (which promised greater autonomy for authorities and a significantly lighter touch), for a simpler, less burdensome system than that being proposed. Fundamental aspects are whether there is a need for three separate forms of assessment, namely Direction of Travel, Use of Resources and area risk assessment; whether they should be annual or less frequently, at least for higher performing authorities/areas; and whether any or all of the assessments should be scored or, instead, only described.
5. Notwithstanding the uncertainties, which will not be fully resolved until only a few months before the CAA begins to operate, the drift is abundantly clear and there is an urgent need to press ahead with Herefordshire's preparations. In particular, CAA carries an expectation that the Council and its partners will have a good understanding of the needs of the county and of the different groups within it. There is a particular emphasis on understanding the needs and wishes of disadvantaged and vulnerable people, and of working with them to improve their lot.
6. This is buttressed by the coming into effect, from 1 April 2008, of the statutory duty placed on the Council and the PCT to carry out Joint Strategic Needs

Assessment (JSNA) in respect of health and social care. This requires an up-to-date understanding of the needs, perceptions and wishes of people, an appraisal of the effectiveness and efficiency of current measures to address these, and the putting into place of detailed commissioning plans to secure successful outcomes.

7. Although the statutory duty applies only to health and social care, the effect of the CAA is to require a similar approach across all aspects of people's life-chances and quality of life, including the economy and the environment. Developing an overall, prioritised programme is imperative to ensure that we and our partners use our collective capacity to focus on the right things, to fill the most important gaps (particularly as regards individual disadvantaged groups about which we currently know too little), and to avoid waste and duplication.
8. Across the whole framework is the expectation that the priorities for an area will be derived from needs assessment, that councils and their partners will have identified the main risks to the achievement of those priorities, and that they will have a good grip on how those are to be managed, together with the capacity to do so.
9. Although we already do all these things, including needs assessment, to varying degrees, and with varying degrees of thoroughness and success, CAA dictates the need for a major development programme for the Council, working with the PCT and the Herefordshire Partnership.
10. Success depends on widespread understanding and ownership, including by members, and on systematic programme management. Regular progress reports will need to be made to Cabinet, Strategic Monitoring Committee, and the Chief Executives Group and Performance Management Group of the Herefordshire Partnership.
11. The draft programme at **Appendix 2** has been drawn up with managers across the Council, taking into account the developing programmes for closer working with the PCT and partner organisations more generally. It has been considered by the Joint Council and PCT Management Board. There has not yet been detailed consultation with partners but that does now need to take place urgently.
12. Cabinet's attention is drawn particularly to the aspects concerning:
 - the objectives of the programme (on the first page of Appendix 2)
 - the elements of the programme (on page 2)
 - the new statutory duty to involve local people in decisions, which comes into effect from 1 April 2009 (section 2.1);
 - the relationship of the programme to the further strengthening of scrutiny arrangements (sections 4.12 and 4.13);
 - the proposed inclusion of CAA preparation in the *Member Development Programme* (section 4.18); and

- the proposal that some members (as well as senior managers) should gain experience through participation in peer reviews of other local authorities.
- 13. There are no immediately identifiable financial consequences from the programme, which will need to be delivered within the budgets determined for relevant services and programmes. This is likely to require some rationalisation and re-prioritisation of existing work, such as in respect of satisfaction surveys and research.
- 14. There is, however, a major concern that the arrangements put out to consultation by the inspectorates would lead to steep increases in auditors' fees. Reassurances in this regard have been sought by local authorities collectively. This danger should be reduced to the extent that the inspectorates heed local authorities' concern to see a light-touch system.

Risk Management

The proposed preparation programme is the means of minimising the risks – and maximising the opportunities – of the CAA.

Alternative Options

The Council has to prepare with its partners for CAA, so there are no alternative options.

Consultees

The Joint Council and PCT Management Board and Council managers.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – The inspectorates' easy-to-read guide to the CAA proposals

Appendix 2 – The proposed CAA preparation programme

Background Papers

None identified.