

COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT – JOINT INSPECTORATE PROPOSALS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR HEREFORDSHIRE'S PREPARATIONS

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

CABINET

2 OCTOBER 2008

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To inform Cabinet of the detailed proposals for the new system of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and seek agreement to how Herefordshire's preparations should be taken forward.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendations

THAT:

- (i) the development and re-launching of the CAA preparation programme so that all energies are focused on the delivery of the improvement programmes of the Council with the PCT and the wider Herefordshire Partnership, tested against the proposed CAA key questions and lines of enquiry be agreed;**
- (ii) this be buttressed by a rolling programme of self-evaluations against the key questions for the area assessment and the key lines of enquiry for the Council's organisational assessment, updated quarterly, the first cut of which to be produced by November and finalised before the end of December;**
- (iii) the Council's response to the inspectorates' proposals be developed and submitted within the County Councils' Network; and**
- (iv) the final report on the out-going CAA preparation programme be noted.**

Reasons

The Council and its partners must be well-prepared for the new system of CAA.

Considerations

1. The joint inspectorates consulted over the winter months on their initial and outline proposals for CAA. In the light of responses, they published revised and detailed proposals at the end of July. The full July consultation document is at **Appendix 1**. There is a short summary at **Appendix 2**. The consultation runs until 20 October.
2. The arrangements will be confirmed early in 2009 and in operation from 1 April, with the first published assessments in November of that year.
3. The revised proposals respond to the spirit, and a good deal of the letter, of local authorities' and others' responses to the initial consultation. In particular:
 - simplifying the arrangements so that that there will be just two, complementary forms of assessment – area assessment and organisational assessment - rather than four (see figures 1 and 2 on page 11 of Appendix 1);
 - the organisational assessment of the Council will comprise two elements: managing performance and the use of resources (similar use of resources assessments will be carried out on the PCT and some other key public service partners);
 - having a shared evidence base for the area assessment and the organisational assessment;
 - using the National Indicator Set (NIS) as a key source of evidence, but far from the only one, for both the area and organisational assessments, and publishing performance against the 198 indicators without a separate narrative report;
 - no longer referring to the area assessments as “risk assessments”, in view of the negative connotations and the risk that local partnerships could be unwilling to set challenging targets; and
 - promising a proportionate approach, once the baseline assessments are in place under the new system, by concentrating in subsequent years on what has changed.
4. Potentially controversial areas that remain less clear (and are likely to remain so until the new system is in operation) include:
 - acknowledging that the LAA and its delivery is the starting point for the assessments, but also making it clear that the inspectorates will assess whether it really does address the most important

challenges for the area; and also looking beyond the LAA in assessing whether the needs and aspirations of disadvantaged and vulnerable people are being addressed adequately;

- the tension between political choices and “objective” means to determine priorities; and
- the basis for undertaking inspections (the document confirms that the only currently planned regular inspections, perhaps every three years, will be in respect of children in care and young offenders, but with only very general criteria as to when others could be launched, essentially leaving this at the discretion of the inspectorates’ and Ministers).

5. Having said all this, the basic thrust of the proposals hasn’t changed. Thus the key remains the operation of a planning and performance management cycle in which the Council, the PCT and their partners:

- understand the needs of the area and the diverse communities, businesses and groups within it;
- engage with those communities, businesses and groups to understand their aspirations;
- evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of existing services and interventions in the light of these needs and aspirations;
- commission value for money services and interventions to ensure that they meet prioritised needs and aspirations;
- secure the desired outcomes for people and communities in terms of better life-chances and quality of life; and
- do all of this with particular regard to meeting the needs and aspirations of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and individuals.

6. Unless we begin to take action now to have available more up-to-date information, most of the baseline for the first year of CAA, which will operate from April 2009, will be provided by the judgements made about us in the current, final year of CPA (in respect of which most of the performance data relates to 2007-08). The proposals say that the inspectorates will expect to draw on additional evidence quarterly.

7. Success under CAA will depend on high quality self-evaluations for both the area assessment and the Council’s organisational assessment, as well as on decisive action to address the weaknesses they expose. *Whatever the inspectorates’ requirements, the discipline of quarterly updating will be valuable to us in its own right. Rather than as something separate and driven by CAA, we should embrace it as the core of performance management and reporting for the Council, public service arrangements with the PCT and the Herefordshire Partnership.*

8. For the first time, we now have a fairly precise description of what the requirements will be for the two forms of assessment. Although details may change in the light of the consultation and the action learning in ten pilot areas, the underlying substance is unlikely to alter. Moreover, we can't afford to wait until early 2009 when the detailed arrangements are finally confirmed. The present CAA preparation programme was put in place before we had the proposed key questions for the area assessment (pages 42-44 of Appendix 1) and the key lines of enquiry for the organisational assessment (pages 45-49 of Appendix 1). Proceeding on the basis of the present preparation programme would meet only part of these proposed tests and distract us from the single-minded focus on performance improvement that is required.
9. Our intention is to have, by early November, a first cut of the fuller self-evaluations (i.e. in respect of the area assessment and the Council organisational assessment) proposed in paragraph 8 above. These would be finalised before the end of the year and, thereafter, maintained and updated quarterly.
10. Progress in implementing the out-going CAA preparation programme is at **Appendix 3**. There are no red-flagged actions, although a number are flagged **amber** because they have yet to be completed. These will be taken into account in the proposed self-evaluations and associated improvement planning.
11. We are continuing and intensifying the programme of CAA preparation seminars for members, non-executives and officers of the Council, the PCT and partner organisations. The immediate objective has to be to ensure that all with a part to play understand the proposed requirements. But, even more important, we need to ensure that they will be able to contribute effectively to meeting those requirements. This latter depends not on the precise processes of CAA but on the delivery of sustainable improvements, based on a sound understanding of community needs and aspirations.
12. Most of the time at the seminars is therefore to be devoted to presentations, by managers of the Council, the PCT and other partner organisations, about how they are addressing these matters, and to discussion and shared learning. This will complement and reinforce the rolling programme of self-evaluations proposed above. The seminar programme is at **Appendix 4**.
13. The seminars are only one element of a much wider process of working across the Council and with partner organisations to ensure that we secure the necessary understanding, improvements to services and outcomes and the evidence to prove what we have achieved.
14. It is proposed that we should develop our response to the proposals within the County Councils Network. This proved effective in responding to the initial proposals. We couldn't expect to have same clout responding from Herefordshire alone.

Risk Management

The risks are that we will be ill-prepared for CAA, that our record of sustainable improvement will not be all that it needs to be, and that the Council's and partners'

reputations will suffer when we are judged publicly. The proposals in this paper are designed to enable us to manage these risks successfully.

Alternative Options

Not applicable.

Consultees

These proposals have been considered by the Joint Management Team, which commends them. They will be considered by the Herefordshire Partnership Chief Executive Group on 26 September.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Comprehensive Area Assessment: Joint Inspectorate Proposals for Consultation – Summer 2008

Appendix 2 – Summary of the proposals

Appendix 3 – Progress in implementing the out-going CAA preparation programme

Appendix 4 - The programme of CAA preparation seminars

Background Papers

None identified.