

DRAFT IDEA/LGA SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR CAA

It is clear from the joint inspectorates' proposals for Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) that self assessment has a role to play at the heart of the new performance regime. Work will commence shortly between the Local Government Association (LGA), Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), the inspectorates and councils and their partners in the four CAA trial site areas to test a self assessment tool. This document will provide the basis for that trial activity.

It is also important, however, that self assessment continues to be a valued tool aiding self-improvement outside of the CAA process. To this end, developmental work will also be taking place with a range of councils and their partners outside the CAA trial site areas to ensure the development of a tool suitable for use in a wider context. Again, this document will provide the basis for such activity, with an acknowledgement that, whilst they have a common base as a starting point, the CAA-related tool and the one for use more widely may diverge over the coming months – although it is anticipated they will reflect a significant degree of synergy.

In overall terms, the intention is to establish self assessment as a key performance management tool that aids and enhances the work and delivery of the council and its partners, rather than representing an additional burden, and enhances accountability. It is intended to achieve these ambitions by adopting the following approaches and principles:

- Self assessment will only be required to reflect information, including performance data, that is already in existence – with the use of high quality performance data being fundamental in achieving the tool's objectives
- This self assessment tool will be developed in a way aimed to dispense with as many requirements for other self assessment documents as possible
- Self assessment should look both forwards and backwards:
 - Forwards at the changing needs, expectations and aspirations of citizens, planned actions, opportunities and risks
 - Backwards at performance, what has/has not been delivered and the resulting impact on local citizens
- Self assessment should recognise achievement as much as it does areas for improvement
- The self assessment should be commissioned and signed off by the local strategic partnership
- The tool should outline the collective performance of the council and its partners in delivering key local, regional and national priorities and focus in the main on outcomes, looking at the 'what' rather than the 'how' of achievement
- The self assessment should identify areas of concern that may benefit from more detailed examination, for example through an in-depth scrutiny exercise,

and inform improvement planning - ultimately leading to improved performance

- The tool should aid learning and common understanding between partners – its effectiveness will depend on the extent to which there is openness, honesty and trust between partners
- Self assessment should be internally and externally challenged through, for example, involvement of staff at different levels, local people, overview and scrutiny and peer challenge
- There should be public reporting of the findings to citizens and service users in a meaningful and accessible way

SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL

A guidance note for the undertaking of self assessment will be developed in due course but at this stage the focus is on the areas that self assessment will cover. Essentially the self assessment will cover four main areas:

Understanding the local area and its communities

Community leadership and place-shaping

Working together to improve the local area and make life better for people

Evaluating progress and identifying areas for improvement

Outlined below are the key elements that together constitute these areas and which it is proposed form the basis of the self assessment's narrative, with the council and its partners providing a jointly agreed overview of their position in relation to each element:

UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL AREA AND ITS COMMUNITIES

Understanding local needs

Assess the extent to which:

- There are arrangements for community engagement which provide an accurate understanding of the diverse needs and interests of all sections of the community, including those at risk of disadvantage or social exclusion
- The council and its partners actively seek to build the capacity of local communities to enable their engagement
- The input of local people genuinely informs and influences decision-making
- Local intelligence is gathered and shared in a co-ordinated way by the council and its partners

- Local intelligence is robust enough to provide a solid base for future plans and accurately identify opportunities, risks and threats for the future well-being of the community

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND PLACE SHAPING

Community leadership, community involvement and political choice

Assess the extent to which:

- There is an ambitious and shared long term vision for the area which reflects the diverse needs and interests of the community
- There are clear and jointly agreed short and medium term priorities for the area
- Local citizens, including those at risk of disadvantage or exclusion, elected members and other stakeholders are able to contribute to the priority-setting process in a meaningful way
- It is clear how and why the identified priorities have been decided upon, how the views of different stakeholders have been taken into account and how competing interests have been resolved
- The Local Area Agreement targets contribute to the fulfilment of the vision and priorities for the area
- The sustainable community strategy and other local and regional plans have regard to one another
- All councillors play an active role in their communities, acting as a key channel of communication, facilitating dialogue and participation and ensuring the views of local people are heard in the decision-making process
- Decision-making structures and processes are transparent and contain effective checks and balances
- The council and its partners take difficult decisions for the greater or longer term good of the community whenever it is necessary and stand up to external pressures which go against the interests of local people
- Difficult decisions, once taken, are stuck to unless the case for revision is compelling
- Local people are kept well informed of key issues, with communication being co-ordinated between partners wherever this is beneficial
- The council and its partners effectively manage the area's reputation and those of their organisations
- The council and its partners, in seeking to meet the needs and interests of local people, endeavour to influence thinking and activities sub-regionally, regionally, nationally and potentially even globally

WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE THE LOCAL AREA AND MAKE LIFE BETTER FOR PEOPLE

Working together as partners

Assess the extent to which:

- The council and its partners are recognised as working effectively together to address the needs and advance the interests of the local community
- The vision and priorities for the area are translated into operational plans by the council and its partners
- The culture is such that partners are able to hold each other to account and differences and difficulties can be overcome, with this being underpinned by formal governance arrangements
- Partners respect the constraints and demands placed on one another as a consequence of their different responsibilities and accountabilities
- The council's scrutiny function is able to call on local public service providers for evidence and to respond to the authority
- Partnerships that duplicate each other or are not seen to be adding value are rationalised
- Services are delivered by a variety of agencies, including public, private and voluntary sectors
- Local people are encouraged and enabled to play an active role in their communities and to take action to improve their area and quality of life

Managing performance

Assess the extent to which:

- Tangible outcomes for communities, reflecting the identified priorities of the area, represent the key success measures
- The council and its partners reflect the importance they attach to meeting community needs by setting themselves stretching targets and timescales for delivery
- There is a robust performance management framework which enables partners to monitor progress in the delivery of the priorities for the local area
- Performance management activity leads to improved outcomes reflecting the area's priorities
- Information on performance in delivering the priorities for the local area is easily accessible by the public
- Action is taken to address under-performance

- The authority and its partners are moving towards a real-time performance monitoring system that is common between them
- There is a shared commitment between the council and its partners to data quality

Use of resources

Assess the extent to which:

- The resources of the council and its partners are aligned with the agreed priorities of the area
- The council and its partners maximise the benefit secured from their resources and ensure value for money
- There are collaborative approaches between partners wherever working together will provide greater value than organisations working separately
- The opportunities for shared services and joint procurement are maximised by the council and its partners
- Practices and policies relating to the use of resources have regard to issues of sustainability
- The council and its partners are developing markets and building the capacity of local organisations to capitalise on the resulting opportunities wherever appropriate
- The organisational policies, practices and cultures of the council and its partners support high quality performance, good people management and joined-up working
- The council and its partners' HR practices and change activities are subject to rigorous equality impact assessment
- Within the council, there are constructive working relationships between elected members and officers and clearly defined respective roles and responsibilities

EVALUATING PROGRESS AND IDENTIFYING AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Delivering outcomes

Assess the extent to which:

- The council and its partners are successfully delivering the priorities for the local area
- Life is improving for local citizens
- The council and its partners are reducing inequalities and discriminatory outcomes for all members of the community

Risk to delivering agreed priorities

Assess the extent to which:

- Risks to fulfilling the priorities and vision for the local area are identified, understood and managed effectively
- Barriers to the achievement of the agreed priorities and/or improvement in organisational functioning and delivery are understood and being addressed