

By: Leyland Ridings, Cabinet Member for Children Families and Educational Achievement

To: Children Families and Education Policy Overview Committee

27th March 2009

Subject: Comprehensive Area Assessment

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides Members with summary information about the new inspection process, Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), as it affects children's services. The CAA replaces the CPA (Comprehensive Performance Assessment) from April 2009.

Introduction

1. (1) The CAA replaces the CPA (Comprehensive Performance Assessment), which has been the inspection and assessment framework for local authorities since 2002.

(2) The new CAA framework is designed to connect inspection and assessment activity across local government and key partners. The assessment has two elements, *area* assessment and *organisational* assessment. Children's services will contribute to both of these elements and in addition have a LAC/Safeguarding inspection process (see below).

Area assessment

2. (1) The area assessment is reported as a narrative accompanied by green and red flags.

- Green flags represent exceptional performance or outstanding improvement; they will also be awarded to highlight innovative practice.
- Red flags will be reported where there are significant concerns. This could be a range of issues, from poor performance to insufficient account being taken of inequality or people at risk.

(2) There is no overall score for the area assessment. This part of the assessment focuses on three questions:

- How well do local priorities express community needs and aspiration?
- How well are outcomes and improvements being delivered?
- What are the prospects for improvement?

(3) It is the third question that is the primary focus. The first two questions are designed to provide underlying evidence and understanding to support judgements on the third question.

(4) Four themes are threaded through the area assessment. These are:

- Sustainability - This is not just about the environment, but about long-term social and economic benefit.
- Tackling inequality, disadvantage and discrimination - This is about understanding how this affects your area, as well as what will be done to address it.
- People whose circumstances make them vulnerable - This will focus particularly on people in circumstances where there is a risk to themselves or others.
- Value for money - This will allow the inspectorates to take a broader view of resource use across and between organisations.

Organisational assessment

3. (1) This is an expanded 'Use of Resources' assessment, which was part of CPA. It will be used to measure individual partner organisations as well as councils. It will be scored, and scores will be affected by relevant green and red flags in the area assessment.

It is based on key lines of enquiry assessed across four themes. These are based on the old 'Use of Resources' assessment, with the added element of Managing Performance:

- Managing finances
- Governing the business
- Managing resources
- Managing performance.

(2) For councils with responsibility for children's services and social care, the inspectorates will jointly agree the managing performance and overall organisational assessment score.

Process for organisational assessment

4. (1) Organisational assessments will be scored. For two-tier authorities, it will take into account how effective partnership working is between counties and districts.

- (2) Gathering evidence: The inspectorates will gather evidence from:
- LAA, community strategy and any other local targets
 - National Indicator Set and any other available data
 - inspection findings
 - local performance information, including self-evaluations and scrutiny
 - briefings or evidence from other national organisations
 - views of local people, businesses and third sector organisations

(3) Timescales: Every year will have a regular cycle. The inspectorates will do an update in January, March and June each year. This will not involve a written report,

just a feedback to partnerships. In September/October there will be a formal update in writing with public reporting.

(4) The first ratings for Children's Services will be published in November 2009 alongside the joint inspectorate CAA organisational assessments.

Children's Services element of CAA

5. (1) Ofsted outlines the new framework for inspection in "Comprehensive Area Assessment: assessing children's services and adult learning" (Feb 2009). One intention of the CAA and Ofsted's new framework is to remove the perspective of inspection as an 'event' with the ability to 'prepare'. As a result, maintaining sound performance management frameworks (organisational and partnership) with robust evidence are key; indeed, the inspections will be seeking evidence of effective performance management as well as improved outcomes.

(2) The need for self-assessment will mostly be covered by the annual CYPP Review (& updated ECM Needs Assessment) already underway. The inspection focus on LAC and Safeguarding suggests more may be needed for these areas.

(3) From June 2009, Ofsted will provide a new performance profile of outcomes and services for children and young people in each local authority area, which will be reviewed/updated quarterly and accessed through Ofsted's website. It will draw together evidence from Ofsted's inspection and regulation and set it alongside relevant Every Child Matters indicators from the new NIS. (More details on the profile will be available on 31 March 2009).

(4) Ofsted will use the performance profile to:

- Assist in making CAA joint inspectorate area and organisational assessments, including by drawing on shared evidence from across inspectorates
- Provide an overall rating of the performance of children's services.

(5) As before, Ofsted will apply a number of considerations before arriving at the overall effectiveness judgement for Children's Services of the local authority. These include:

- Overall effectiveness is unlikely to be more than inadequate if either enjoying and achieving or staying safe is judged inadequate by inspectors
- Overall effectiveness is unlikely to be good if either enjoying and achieving or staying safe is less than good (enjoying and achieving is unlikely to be good if children and young people are not judged by inspectors to be making good or better educational progress).

LAC/Safeguarding

6. (1) Much of this new framework for children's services focuses on the programme of inspection for safeguarding and services for looked after children. This part of the CAA will begin on 1 April 2009. There are two main elements:

- Annual, unannounced inspection of local authority contact, assessment and referral centres for children's social care

- Full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children in each local authority area at least once every three years.
- (2) Ofsted plans to use a number of new surveys, including two for LAC and Care Leavers, one for social workers, and one for the third sector to inform the inspection process on an annual basis.

Annual Unannounced Inspection

7. (1) Ofsted will undertake annual, unannounced inspections of each local authority's contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children and young people from 1 April 2009.

(2) The purpose of these inspections is to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of arrangements for contact, referrals and assessment in relation to children's social care and their impact on minimising the incidence of child abuse and neglect.

(3) Given the number of "contact, referral and assessment centres" in Kent, inspectors will visit at least two of these, and undertake scrutiny of case files, speak to staff and managers and report findings by letter within 10 working days.

(4) Inspectors will evaluate the:

- Quality and timeliness of assessments, including the extent and quality of multi-agency involvement, the involvement of children and their families and the quality of case-file recording
- Quality of management oversight and decision-making, including case allocation and caseload, quality of supervision and support, and arrangements for informing and involving senior managers in decision making
- Application of thresholds, their clarity and consistency
- Impact of strategy discussions and investigations in protecting children and young people following a duty to investigate
- Effectiveness of communication/liaison and joint working between agencies
- Arrangements for out-of-hours provision, including accident and emergency health services
- Effectiveness of the service in meeting the needs of children from particular groups
- Roles and responsibilities of support staff, level of training and support received
- Effectiveness of social workers and unqualified staff, including family support and social work assistants.

Full 3 yearly inspection of LAC/Safeguarding

8. (1) The full inspections of safeguarding take a comprehensive view of:

- The effectiveness of existing safeguarding systems and frameworks

- The wider safeguarding role of public services
- How well vulnerable groups of children and young people are safeguarded, including asylum-seeking children, children in secure settings, looked after children and children treated by health services
- How well the relevant agencies deal with child protection concerns.

(2) Findings from all inspections of safeguarding and services for looked after children will help determine Ofsted's annual performance rating of council services for children and young people and will make an important contribution to CAA area and organisational assessments.

Other Inspection

9. (1) The only rolling programmes of inspection that have been agreed are for safeguarding children and youth offending, which will be on a 3-year cycle.

(2) Other inspections can be triggered by a range of criteria, from poor performance to direction from the Secretary of State.

Recommendations

Members of the Children Families and Education Policy Overview Committee are asked to note the contents of this report.

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Background Documents: *'Comprehensive Area Assessment: assessing children's services and adult learning' February 2009*

Other useful information: *None*