AGENDA ITEM NO. 7

TITLE: COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Committee: External Partnerships Review Committee

Date: 23rd April, 2009

Author: Head of Policy and Performance

1.0 ISSUE

1.1 To consider the work to be undertaken by the Council and partners, in preparation for the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That Members note the self-assessment methodology to be employed, together with the associated timetable.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 Comprehensive Area Assessment replaces Comprehensive Performance Assessment as the standard inspection methodology for local government from April 2009.

3.2 After its meeting of 9th February, this Committee received an informal presentation from Nigel Smith, Audit Commission CAA lead for Cambridgeshire, outlining the rationale and approaches of CAA.

3.3 The focus of the new methodology is areas (1st tier), rather than organisations, using the Local Area Agreement as the starting point for understanding both the needs of the area and the effectiveness of partners in addressing these needs.

3.4 For the purposes of this paper, CAA comprises two main areas of work for the inspectorates:

- Area Assessment – examining how well public services are delivering better results for local people across the whole area, focusing on agreed priorities (as identified in the Local Area Agreement) and prospects for future improvement.
- Organisational Assessment – for individual Councils, combining the Use of Resources Assessment, Performance Management assessment and a joint inspectorate examination of service performance, based on the national indicators.

For Local Government, the Audit Commission carries out the assessment work, and co-ordinates the inspectorates that will be delivering CAA in other public sector organisations.
3.5 In order to ensure that a full assessment is made, there is “feedback” between the Area and Organisational assessments. This operates in the following way:

- If the Area Assessment identifies exceptional performance (whether good or bad) for a specific partner, this will be explored in more depth in the Organisational Assessment and may impact the resultant scores.
- Likewise, if an issue is identified through the Organisational Assessment, this will be identified in the area assessment if there could be an impact on the whole area.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 At its meeting of 17th March, Management Team concluded that it would be beneficial for the Council to complete an organisational self-assessment ahead of the CAA process.

4.2 The main benefit of completing a self-assessment relates to influencing the judgements of areas highlighted through the “feedback” between area and organisational assessment, as shown in 3.5. Naturally, the self-assessment exercise must be supported by evidence.

4.3 The organisational assessment will be based on the Use of Resources judgement (UoR), additional work on Performance Management (PM) and an assessment of performance using the National Indicators. The basis of our self-assessment are the “KLOE” (Key Lines of Enquiry) used by the Audit Commission when examining our performance.

4.4 This is a technique that the Council has used on a regular basis: evidence is gathered to support an assessment of our performance against the KLOE and a narrative is developed, addressing any significant achievements or areas of under-performance. There is a strong focus through the KLOE on whether the Council is planning adequately to address areas of weakness.

4.5 Initial evidence gathering will be carried out by the Head of Policy and Performance and the Head of Finance, while narrative input will be provided by Heads of Service and Management Team. Final sign-off by Management Team has been scheduled for 28th April.

4.6 The County Council is developing an “area” self-assessment with partners. This work is being co-ordinated through the officer group supporting Cambridgeshire Together (the Local Area Agreement Reference Group, or LAARG) and the (ECDC) Head of Policy and Performance is part of the editing group convened for this purpose.

5.0 TIMETABLE
5.1 The timetable attached as Appendix 1 shows the preparation of both the Council’s organisational self-assessment and the County level area self-assessment.

5.2 Following the self-assessment exercise, the information and evidence will be used by the Audit Commission to inform their CAA judgement. The Audit Commission have indicated that “emerging judgements” will be shared with Cambridgeshire Together partners through August, with a draft judgement provided in September. The final CAA judgements will be published in November, following dialogue with Cambridgeshire Together partners and the Audit Commission’s own moderation process.

6.0 APPENDICES

6.1 Appendix 1 – CAA Self Assessment Timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Background Documents</strong></th>
<th><strong>Location</strong></th>
<th><strong>Contact Officer</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| CAA Framework Document, Audit Commission,       | Room FF103, The Grange, Ely | Ste Thornley
CAA Organisational Assessment, Report to Management Team, 17/03/2009 | Head of Policy and Performance
Comprehensive Area Assessment, Report to LAA Reference Group, 06/04/2009 | (01353) 616374
| | | E-mail: ste.thornley@eastcambs.gov.uk |
### Appendix 1 – CAA Self Assessment Timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>ECDC Activity</th>
<th>County Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Gathering evidence – UoR and PM LAA Strategic Partnerships tasked to gather evidence against LAA priorities.</td>
<td>LAA Strategic Partnerships tasked to gather evidence against LAA priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Auditor visit – initial feedback on UoR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrative contributions to self-assessment document</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final Draft self-assessment submitted to Management Team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Self Assessment shared with County</td>
<td>Audit Commission shares initial findings of “desktop” assessment from existing evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audit Commission complete Use of Resources assessment of ECDC</td>
<td>LAARG develops area self-assessment document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>“Challenge” event – testing the self-assessment for robustness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>