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Extracts from Ipsos MORI report - Engaging the public in the development of Comprehensive Area Assessment

Citizen and user reference groups (5) - Research Study Conducted for The Audit Commission April 2008

As part of a large programme of consultation on the proposed CAA framework, Ipsos MORI, on behalf of the Audit Commission and its partners, established ten reference groups in five locations across the country with the purpose of engaging the public in the development of CAA. The reference groups form part *Engaging the public in the development of Comprehensive Area Assessment for the Audit Commission* of an on-going qualitative research programme with the public, which will last throughout the period of the development of CAA.

Quality of life

Issues for developing CAA:

- Whilst discussions on quality of life emphasised the importance of focusing on local areas, they also raised the question of how public services begin to balance the differences in opinion across local areas, and subsequently how inspectors would begin to judge how public services chose to prioritise need in light of this.

The role of local services in the quality of local areas

Issues for developing CAA:

- This element of the research raised an important question of how the relationship between the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) and local statutory services can begin to be measured, whilst not auditing or inspecting CVS organisations themselves.
- In this context, a key question in the development of CAA, becomes how CAA would include the perspective of vulnerable groups in the judgements made about local level partnership working; more specifically, what evidence could be used to do this when public knowledge and experience is so varied?

The importance of inspections and trust in official judgements of local services

Issues for developing CAA:

- The research highlights that communication messages need to tackle the fact people generally do not use inspection reports as they stand currently. The more complex task may be how the development of CAA can begin to build trust in official assessments and make judgements more meaningful to local people.
- A key challenge in communicating messages about CAA is conveying, not only how it is an authentic and reliable framework, but also how it can be made useful on a real and practical level for individuals and communities.

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Involving citizens in Comprehensive Area Assessment and communicating CAA

Issues for developing CAA:

- The depth and range of suggestions made clearly suggested that citizen involvement would provide a positive means to bridge the gap between current perceptions of official assessments and CAA as a useful and trustworthy tool.
- The research clearly showed that whether people will actually access the findings of CAA, however they may be communicated, will be dependent on overcoming the barriers previously identified that CAA needs to be presented as a trustworthy, reliable and useful tool that can ultimately be used to hold local services accountable.

Extracts from the Audit Commission's consultation on CAA

Overall conclusions from consultation activity

These four major strands of work have reinforced the general principles we have set out for CAA. There was strong support for the vision set out in our previous consultation that CAA should be:

- relevant to the quality of life of local people;
- area and outcome focused;
- constructive and forward-looking; and
- joint and participative.

These remain our guiding principles. Alongside these, there was also strong support for **CAA being citizen-focused**, delivered proportionate to risk and simpler and easier to understand. The principle that local services should hold prime responsibility for managing their own performance, individually and collectively, was also agreed widely.

It was apparent that we have not yet made sufficiently clear how a model that takes the local area agreement (LAA) and sustainable community strategy (SCS) as its starting points will work in areas with county and district councils, or in relation to issues that span large cities and sub-regions. There were concerns that the proposals might result in an assessment framework that was more, not less, demanding of time and resources.

There was some scepticism that the inspectorates, along with their sponsoring government departments, government offices for the regions and other bodies, could be genuinely joined-up and eradicate duplication.

We do not underestimate these challenges, but we are confident that together we can deliver a model for CAA that delivers these principles and tackles the main concerns raised and the practical challenges highlighted by the action learning. We believe it is more important to get this right than to try to implement everything at once. So our forthcoming proposals are likely to set out an evolving approach, establishing the framework and key elements in the first year, and building year on year as the new national indicator set is bedded down and the expectations of joint outcomes, agreed and delivered in partnership, increase.

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Note: The Audit Commission will publish the last stage of consultation on its proposals for CAA at the end of July. Following the consultation response and evaluation of the trialing during the autumn, the final CAA framework will be published early in 2009, to take effect from April 2009.

'Use of Resources 2008/09'

The document, 'Use of resources 2008/09' published by the Audit Commission, sets out the Commission's approach to auditors' use of resources work from 2008/09. It outlines the key features of use of resources judgements for the purposes of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). It also describes how the specified key lines of enquiry (KLOE) form the basis of the auditor's value for money conclusion under the *Code of Audit Practice* 2005.

The approach to use of resources for CAA

Each year, the Audit Commission will publish scored judgements about value for money in the use of resources in respect of local authorities, fire and rescue authorities, police authorities and primary care trusts (PCTs). The use of resources assessment forms part of CAA from 2009 and will also feed into other relevant performance assessment frameworks as appropriate.

The use of resources assessment considers how well organisations are managing and using their resources to deliver value for money and better and sustainable outcomes for local people. It is structured into three themes that focus on the importance of sound and strategic financial management, strategic commissioning and good governance, and the effective management of natural resources, assets and people.

Key Lines of Enquiry

One of the key questions under the theme of 'Governing the business' is 'How well does the organisation govern itself and commission services that provide value for money and deliver better outcomes for local people?'

The KLOE will focus on how the organisation seeks to improve the customer experience, quality and value for money of services through service redesign, making effective use of IT.