



**navca**

local focus national voice



# The third sector role in Comprehensive Area Assessment

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## Foreword by Kevin Curley, Chief Executive of NAVCA

NAVCA's work on local area agreements (LAAs) and third sector representation on public bodies is part of our continuing efforts to support our members. It is intended to equip them with the resources to strengthen the voices of disadvantaged and marginalised people in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. In many areas, local authorities and other public bodies are welcoming fuller engagement with their local third sector and working with us to deliver better outcomes for local people.

The effects of the economic downturn will continue to be felt in the lives of communities and individuals for the foreseeable future, as tough decisions have to be made to balance reduced human and financial resources against national and local demands for more efficient and effective local public services. It is essential that these decisions are informed by the unique knowledge, experience and expertise of local third sector bodies; they, in turn, must do everything they can to ensure that the voices of the vulnerable are heard.

Comprehensive area assessment (CAA) provides an opportunity to look at how well partnerships between local public, private and third sector bodies are performing, and offers the third sector an opportunity to showcase its contribution. Here at NAVCA we see plenty of good work



between local third sector infrastructure organisations, local authorities and their partners. We are committed to providing resources and support services that will help our members engage with their local authority. CAA offers an opportunity to celebrate what they have achieved together and reflect upon the challenges that lay ahead.

This guide is for all local third sector organisations that want to work with and influence local public bodies on behalf of their communities. It offers an overview of CAA and explains how important it is for you to get involved.

I should like to thank Helen Hughes and her colleagues at IDeA for their invaluable contributions to the production of this guide, and all those NAVCA members who have supplied information about partnership work in their local areas.

*Keri Hurley*

## Introduction

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) is the framework for independent assessment of public services in England. It is area-based and focuses on outcomes and how well public bodies work with each other, the private and third sectors and other organisations, and local communities. It is forward looking, assessing the prospects for future improvement. Individual inspection regimes will continue to provide assurance on the performance of services (e.g. inspections of care services by the Care Quality Commission, inspections of schools by Ofsted).

CAA will offer an independent assessment of how well local people are served by their public services. It will also consider the prospects for people's quality of life in the local area. Every year £200 billion are spent providing local public services; CAA is intended to ensure that local public bodies are held to account for the effective use of public money.

“Sutton has embraced the voluntary sector into [the CAA] process. As VCS rep I attend the quarterly CAA monitoring meetings with all partners and the Audit Commission and am required to report and comment on relevant issues. The Audit Commission officer has met with me individually and I have opportunity to comment editorially on written reports. At this stage it feels like a more comprehensive and flexible process that previously.”

Andy Wilson, Chief Executive, Sutton CVS

CAA came into effect in April 2009. It is very different from the previous means by which the performance of local public bodies has been assessed in the past. For instance, Comprehensive Performance Assessment was an assessment of a local authority's performance. CAA is a single, co-ordinated and better targeted assessment through which the joint inspectorates – the Audit Commission and its five partner inspectorates – will



review and report on how well local people are served by all the public services in their area.

CAA – what's new?	
<i>Comprehensive Performance Assessment</i>	Comprehensive Area Assessment
<i>Local government focus</i>	All sectors and partners
<i>Institution based</i>	Area based
<i>One size fits all</i>	Focus on local priorities
<i>Performance</i>	Outcomes and perceptions
<i>Collaboration between regulators</i>	Joint assessment
<i>Cyclical inspection</i>	Continuous assessment, proportionate inspection
<i>More backward looking</i>	More forward looking

CAA brings together the work of six inspectorates, formerly conducted separately:

- the Audit Commission
- the Care Quality Commission\*
- HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons
- HM Inspectorate of Probation
- the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)

\* N.B. Replaces the Commission for Social Care Inspection, Healthcare Commission and Mental Health Act Commission.

## CAA: putting local people first

The experience of local people is at the heart of CAA. It is intended to drive improvement in local public services and to reduce inequalities and address discrimination. CAA will report on how effectively partnerships are working across the public, private and third sectors, enhancing the role of local area agreements and sustainable community strategies, delivering improved outcomes for local people.

Third sector organisations (TSOs) and local infrastructure organisations (LIOs) have a key role to play. They need to ensure that the voices of the sector and its service users are heard in the design and delivery of local services.

CAA will look at how effectively local services are delivered by capturing people's perceptions and experience: Are the priorities right for the area? Are the services the right ones? Do they meet the needs of those most disadvantaged and excluded? Do local people get the chance to have their say?

It is vital that the sector's representatives on local partnerships are actively engaged in CAA. Equally, the sector needs to

*"I was the voluntary sector representative on the CAA development group from North Yorkshire which met for five afternoons. The process involved representatives from the statutory sector partners, LSPs and the voluntary sector. I was involved throughout and felt I was able to make an informed and useful contribution."*

Bob Curry, Partnerships Manager, North Yorkshire Forum for Voluntary Organisations



consider how it helps local people impact and influence the continuing process of public service design, delivery and review.

Local councils, primary care trusts, mental health trusts, police authorities, fire and rescue authorities, children's trusts and other public bodies will be required to account for the impact their actions have had on the wellbeing of local people and communities. They will be expected to demonstrate increasing partnership working to tackle local challenges in which many TSOs are major stakeholders, such as:

- access to services for disadvantaged communities
- health inequalities across local authority areas
- housing standards in deprived areas
- energy efficiency and fuel poverty
- citizens' influence on local public bodies.

Services that are inherently 'high risk', such as provision for vulnerable children and looked-after children, will continue to have national inspection programmes, and will be linked into the CAA framework. Similarly, services for which individual public bodies are solely responsible will be assessed by individual inspectorates; schools, colleges, social housing and residential care homes will continue to be inspected to ensure that they meet the required standards. These inspection regimes are being redeveloped alongside CAA in order to avoid duplication.

CAA is intended to reduce the burden of inspection on public bodies and to minimise government requests for information beyond that which public bodies use to manage their own

“I am a member of the Executive Delivery Board of the LSP, which receives reports from the CAA. I chair one of the LSP boards, the Inclusive York Forum. The CVS has just won council grants of £100k to progress work around the achievement of NI 6 & 7 within the York LAA.”

Colin Stroud, Chief Executive, York CVS

performance. The intention is that more time and resources should be redirected towards improved design and more effective delivery of local services. (By April 2009, the overall cost of public service inspection was expected to have reduced by one-third from the 2003/04 baseline.<sup>1</sup>) A main feature of CAA is that inspection will be more risk-based and tailored to local circumstances, but it will continue to

be used where necessary to provide assurance, diagnosis and accountability, and to promote improvement. LIOs and TSOs should be able to expect that their local authorities and other public bodies will adopt a similar culture of ‘light touch’ reporting requirements.

## CAA: the third sector role

*“A key principle of CAA is that it should be rooted in the needs and aspirations of local people in each place.”<sup>2</sup>*

*“The empowerment of citizens through engagement in the design and delivery of services... will provide impetus to improved service quality and citizen satisfaction.”<sup>3</sup>*

CAA is designed to ensure both that local services are addressing local needs and that local knowledge, experience and expertise are being employed in service design and delivery.



TSOs work directly with people in need, often those marginalised, excluded and vulnerable citizens who are most at risk from inequalities. Where changes in public spending are likely to affect marginalised or excluded communities or individuals, local authorities and all other public bodies are now required by Gender, Race and Disability law to undertake equality impact assessments (EIAs) on both new and existing policies and functions, including funding and service provision<sup>4</sup>. LIOs can provide accurate and detailed information about what local services are most needed and how to target and deliver them appropriately. Their evidence should be influential in assessing whether the ambitions expressed in LAAs, as well as sustainable communities and housing strategies, local development frameworks and joint strategic needs assessments, are on course to be fulfilled.

LIOs can help local authorities and other public bodies gain a better understanding of local need. They do this by supporting third sector representation, empowering local people to have their say about local priorities and targets and influencing the design of local services. LIOs can also help to co-ordinate third sector engagement with the CAA.

CAA will examine the roles and responsibilities of public, private and third sector partners. This provides LIOs and TSOs with opportunities to demonstrate their uniquely valuable contributions to local service delivery and to the local economy through social enterprise and training initiatives. LIOs can also provide CAA with evidence about the strength of the local Compact and partnership working as well as the development of accountable local representative structures as described in the

“I’ve been impressed by the willingness of the Audit Commission staff that we’ve met to share their thinking and learn from the feedback given by members of the advisory panel so far.”

Brian Horner, Chief Executive, Voluntary Norfolk & member of the Audit Commission’s National Expert Advisory Panel

Principles of Representation<sup>5</sup>. It is important to bear in mind that the third sector can make contributions towards all the National Indicators, not just those selected as local priorities or local indicators for the LAA.

The local third sector can engage with CAA in a variety of ways, for instance:

- Ensure that they are thoroughly familiar with their LAA and Sustainable Community Strategy and the role the local third sector should play in defining local needs and delivering local services.
- Consider the responses and outcomes from the national survey of third sector organisations and the plans for improving performance on NI1, NI4, NI6, NI7 or NI8<sup>6</sup>. Ensure that the LIO takes time to understand these and involves the local third sector in developing implementation plans.
- Find out who represents the third sector on the LSP and how they connect to the LIO. Ensure that they are able to convey a wide range of views about whether the sector is ‘thriving’ (NI 7) and being empowered to play a full role in delivering better outcomes for the area.
- Work with the local authority to ensure that local practice is consistent with principles set out in the local Compact.
- Find out how to engage with self-assessment processes and take an active part in them.



- Respond to CAA leads when they visit local groups or ask for evidence.
- Share information about the opportunities offered to the sector by CAA and how to engage with the process.
- Provide a channel through which local people, especially those most marginalised and excluded, can make their voices heard.

Please contact NAVCA with your experience of how local public bodies engage with the third sector. You can email us at: [ilp@navca.org.uk](mailto:ilp@navca.org.uk)

## Two sides of CAA

There are two components to CAA:

### 1. Area assessment

This is the joint judgement by the inspectorates on outcomes in a local area. It is not a direct inspection report on the local authority, the local strategic partnership or any other body. It is intended to fulfil CAA's aim of assessing outcomes for local people and their quality of life, rather than the provision of any particular services. It will judge the likelihood of targeted improvements being achieved and potential barriers to these. This will provide a tool to help local strategic partnerships and their constituent bodies focus their plans for future improvement.

Area assessment will focus on three main questions:

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

## 2. Organisational (or institutional) assessment

This will offer a combined assessment of the way local councils and fire and rescue services manage their performance and use their resources, assessed against the performance and delivery priorities for the local area. Other local public bodies will have other forms of organisational assessment.

CAA should provide:

- a catalyst for better local outcomes, more effective partnership working, more responsive services and better value for money
- a source of independent assurance for citizens, service users and taxpayers

“As the third sector rep on the Public Service Board in Northants., I’ve been involved in the CAA preparation meetings within the task and finish group for the Chief Executive’s group for public services within the County. I have been representing the contribution that the sector makes to the area, as well as pointing out any issues that need to be addressed.”

Dominic McClean, Chief Executive, Northampton Volunteering Centre



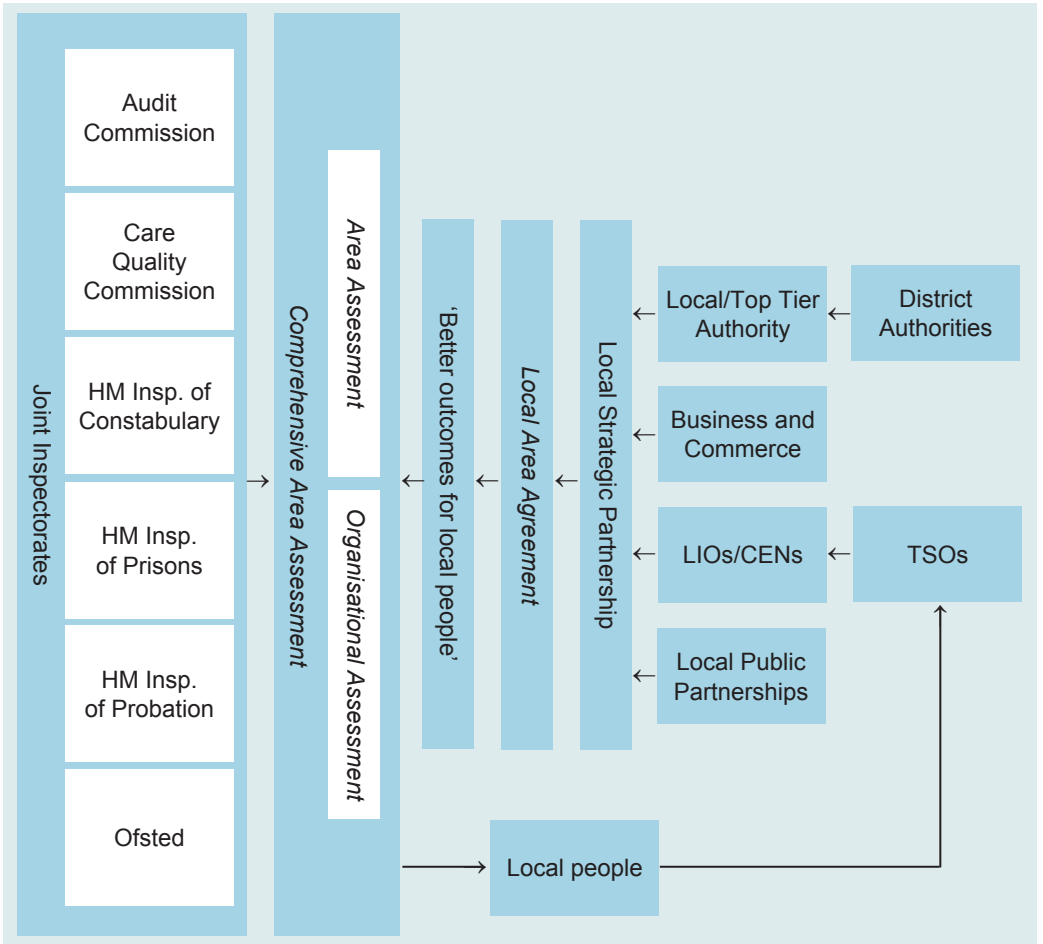
- an independent evidence base for central government on progress against national priorities
- a means of focusing, rationalising and co-ordinating inspection.

CAA will provide a valuable resource for local people, elected councillors, the LSP, local organisations, national government and others with an interest in the area. The findings will be published from 10 December 2009 onward on a new website called 'oneplace', and in a range of other ways, to ensure that it is readily available to everyone who wants to use it. CAA will use a straightforward system of green flags to indicate exceptional or innovative achievements, especially where other service providers might learn from these. Red flags will indicate concerns about poor local performance or prospects that need to be addressed. There is a formal procedure for the Chair/Vice-Chair of the LSP to ask for a review of a red flag in the area assessment. Public bodies may also ask for a review of their organisational assessment.

It is important that the published CAA data is used to empower local people. It should help them hold elected representatives and public bodies to account and enable them to make more fully informed contributions to local decision making. All this should lead to improved services for local people.

*"I have been involved in CAA self-evaluation in my role as voluntary and community sector rep on the county LSP executive."*

Jess Mace, Manager, Gloucestershire Assembly Team



The CAA Process



## Multi-tier authorities and multi-area agreements

Not all priorities are set in LAAs.

In multi-tier authority areas, CAA will take the top-tier LAA area as its starting point, but also assess local districts where these have their own varying priorities and outcomes, such as those represented by district-level crime and disorder partnerships.

Conversely, where outcomes are influenced at sub-regional level, such as those concerning transport and planning, and expressed in multi-area agreements (MAAs), CAA will assess progress towards the fulfilment of these commitments too.

“In the London Borough of Camden, the Community Empowerment Network [CEN] and voluntary sector have been involved in the CAA development process through the LSP and related forums. The VCS have a place on the council’s Extended Planning and Performance Group where the CAA has been discussed and developed over the past six months before regular reports have gone to LSP meetings. The CEN also hosted a seminar for local groups to discuss the CAA with the Audit Commission.”

Donna Turnbull, Camden CEN Strategy and Policy Officer

## Public involvement

The views and experience of local people are a key part of the evidence used in CAA. It draws on the findings of the place survey, the national survey of third sector organisations and the annual business survey. It also takes into account areas' own evidence about users' views of local services, including:

- the views of children and young people
- those who may experience disadvantage in accessing services
- groups and individuals whose views are seldom heard and people whose circumstances make them vulnerable
- the third sector.

Where it is available, other evidence provided by local citizens and service user groups will be considered.\*

In area assessment, CAA reviews the evidence of how well local partners understand and have listened to their communities and responded to them, and how well the duty to involve is being implemented. In doing this, CAA may consider the quality of engagement in various ways. Where necessary there may be visits to neighbourhood forums and citizens' panels, and evidence from third sector partners on LSPs may be used.

\* These groups and organisations include LINKs, Citizens Advice, National Tenant Voice, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, Members of Parliament, the local business community, Commission for the Compact, the Local Government Ombudsman and the Standards Board for England.



## The duty to consult and the duty to involve

Under the Local Government Act 1999, local authorities and all other public bodies have a duty to consult their stakeholders, including council tax-payers, service users, likely service users and partners. The Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended in 2005 also place a duty on local authorities and all other public bodies to consult on the potential impacts of proposed policies, and to publish the results of those consultations.

The duty to involve is defined for strategic health authorities in the National Health Service Act 2006 for local councils, and in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 for all other public bodies; it is extended to all partner bodies delivering public services in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill 2008. It seeks to ensure that local people have greater opportunities to have their say.

These duties are the starting point for ensuring a strong voice for local people. CAA will assess how well the duties are carried out, by considering how well local partners engage local people.

## Notes

1. *Implementing the Comprehensive Area Assessment*, HM Treasury, November 2008: [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/speech\\_xst\\_111108.htm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/speech_xst_111108.htm)

2. *Comprehensive Area Assessment, Joint Inspectorate Proposals for Consultation*, Audit Commission, July 2008: [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Downloads/CAAConsultation08.pdf](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Downloads/CAAConsultation08.pdf)

See also NAVCA's response to the consultation:  
[www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank/ilpunews/caaconsultationresponse.htm](http://www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank/ilpunews/caaconsultationresponse.htm)

3. *An introduction to the local performance framework – delivering better outcomes for local people*, Local Government Association, November 2007: [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/doc/760308.doc](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/doc/760308.doc)

4. *Equality Impact Assessment guidance*, IDEA:  
<http://digbig.com/5badya> and <http://digbig.com/5badyb>

5. *Principles of Representation*, NAVCA, Department for Communities and Local Government & Office of the Third Sector, August 2008: [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/principleofrepresentation](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/principleofrepresentation)



6. *National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships*, Department for Communities and Local Government, [www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/nationalindicators/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/nationalindicators/)

See also the Office of the Third Sector briefing *Making the most of the Comprehensive Area Assessment* [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third\\_sector/news/news\\_stories/090522\\_caa.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/news/news_stories/090522_caa.aspx)

For more information see:  
[www.navca.org.uk](http://www.navca.org.uk)  
[www.idea.gov.uk](http://www.idea.gov.uk)

“[The] third sector’s representatives on the five thematic/statutory partnerships have had the opportunity to contribute to – and in the case of Stronger Communities, to prepare – the area self-assessment reports. These were scrutinised by the LSP’s Strategic Implementation Group, which was responsible for co-ordinating the whole process, on which were two third sector representatives.”

John Gelder, Director, Voluntary and Community Action, Central Bedfordshire





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NAVCA is the national voice of local third sector infrastructure in England. We aim to ensure communities are well served by the local third sector by supporting our members and their work with over 160,000 local groups and organisations. NAVCA believes that local voluntary and community action is vital for healthy and inclusive communities.

The NAVCA Improving Local Partnerships Unit aims to provide local infrastructure organisations with the skills, knowledge and understanding to be confident, inclusive and effective representatives of the local third sector in local area agreement and other public partnerships.

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