

Culture and Sport

Preparing for Comprehensive Area Assessment



**Cultural Improvement Partnership
East Midlands**

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Culture and Sport - Preparing for CAA

Executive summary

This document from the Cultural Improvement Partnership East Midlands (CIPEM) focuses on preparations and engagement with the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) regime. Our aim is to put you, as culture and sport sector managers, on the front foot and maximise the scope of the sector to enhance services for the benefit of your communities.

We'll set out a series of themes and concerns that you should be considering now in engaging with, and contributing to the CAA regime.

There are four sections:

- Introduction
- Why is CAA important for culture and sport?
- What does the sector need to do to prepare itself for CAA?
- Key considerations in preparing for CAA

Introduction

This is the third in a suite of documents that supports a response to some of the key developments facing the cultural sector – in particular local government and wider partners.

We have directed a lot of attention towards Local Area Agreements (LAAs) with our first two advice documents published in December 2007 and May 2008. They both directed the sector's attention towards securing cultural content within LAAs, through designated culture or sport indicators and a broader alignment of cultural themes to other delivery areas.

We should now be looking at this previous advice within the context of the new regime facing local strategic partnerships as reflected in the CAA methodology.

As an improvement partnership, we saw the significance of CAA early and dedicated a whole CIPEM best practice event to this subject in May this year. Many of the event's outcomes have been used to inform this guidance.

It might be a good idea, before reading this document, to take a few minutes to make an objective judgment on the following:

How well placed are you around CAA?

Do you know how your corporate centre is co-ordinating activity in meeting CAA and have they engaged you as part of the corporate effort?

What evidence do you have of your impact on your residents?

Are you engaged with other organisations delivering local services?

How are you contributing to cross-cutting themes and agendas?

How to use this guidance

This material demonstrates how important CAA is to CIPEM – especially in securing a strong engagement from our local authority colleagues. We would encourage you to use this guidance in tandem with the range of support available from the Audit Commission, much of which we have set out below in The basics – what is CAA?

As before, this is informal rather than statutory advice. Feedback we received on our previous material suggests you appreciate thoughts and ideas that are sector specific, rather than a static interpretation or summary of the statutory guidance.

We hope that this material, which includes our thoughts on the opportunities and threats the sector faces will give you and your partners a means to checkpoint your preparations for CAA before the first assessments are released later in 2009.

You will also find some questions that should act as prompts to develop and advance your thoughts around CAA, but also bear in mind the latest thinking within your authority.

Please discuss this material in your county-based groups and networks and work with your CIPEM secondee who can offer you more support in this area.

The basics – what is CAA?

Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) is a new way of assessing local public services in England. It examines how well councils are working together with other public bodies to meet the needs of the people they serve.

It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities.

CAA is area based and focused on outcomes delivered by councils, either by the council on its own or in partnership. It will not only look at how councils perform, but also look more widely across local public services and focus on how well people are being served by their local public services working together – not just how individual bodies perform. CAA will focus on outcomes now and in the future, not just current or past performance.

CAA looks at a number of things, including the strength of local economies and labour markets, affordable housing, children's wellbeing, crime and safety, support for individuals to improve their health, provision for the vulnerable, and the quality of the local environment.

For more detail, have a look at the Audit Commission website. Along with the CAA framework document, you'll find a useful Q and A section, a video showing some testimonies from CAA trials (including an East Midlands authority) and a prototype CAA report reflecting a virtual area – Barshire. You'll be able to see what an assessment will look like and the ground it will cover. Search under CAA and navigate through from the left hand side:

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Why is CAA important for culture and sport?

In recent years much has been achieved to raise the profile of culture, media and sport in the local arena, most notably through the effort to secure strong content within LAAs, as well as a range of other measures to improve service delivery.

In the same way we see CAA as being an important vehicle to gain further recognition of culture and sport and to use it as an opportunity to demonstrate its impact on local outcomes. Given the pressure on discretionary spend, it is vital that the sector has the profile it needs and is seen as a priority for multiple local partners.

The Audit Commission, in explaining CAA, has clearly signalled that the new regime is a catalyst for continuous self-improvement and it is critical that the sector continues to drive self-improvement and engage positively with the various CAA mechanisms. It would be unwise to let culture and sport services remain passive while the CAA process goes forward, as final assessments would inevitably focus elsewhere.

CAA will be a central vehicle for communicating information about how well services are delivered locally. We know that culture and sport are highly valued services when delivered effectively and responsively to community need. Therefore it is critical to ensure that the sector features as a credible concern within CAA in describing the needs of residents and also how outcomes are being secured locally through the focused use of culture and sport.

We know from the regional commentary process in 2006-07 and from other feedback that there are compelling testimonies and evidence out there of how culture and sport are securing outcomes in areas beyond the direct provision of these services. It is legitimate that the sector positively seeks to present evidence for the CAA process, where it exists, to reflect the value added by these service areas.

The final assessment documents will not be able to reflect all the evidence and it is possible that solid culture-based evidence will not feature. Due consideration will need to be given across the major delivery challenges and CAA will inevitably need to cover a considerable area of overall performance. The documents will focus on the quality and safety of key services such as health, adult social care and children's services. Factors such as climate change, transport, housing and economic regeneration are also likely to feature strongly.

This should not be a discouragement, as a positive contribution from culture and sport partners will maintain the profile and show good levels of leadership in being able to evidence the contribution of the sector within this important arena.

The Audit Commission through CAA is committed to develop a fuller picture for each area over time and to report more on localised issues. So the opportunity for the sector should be to incrementally increase its engagement and influence with CAA.

What does the sector need to do to prepare itself for CAA?

We understand that the sector's appreciation of CAA so far has been shown to be relatively low. This was highlighted nationally through the trial phase for CAA and at the CIPEM CAA event in May – when asked few in the audience could testify to directly preparing for CAA in their areas.

It is timely for us, as the region's cultural improvement partnership to present some thoughts as to where and how the sector

should be positioning itself against CAA. Although there has been consideration that CAA as a vehicle may not exist in the next couple of years the emphasis on performance management and a mechanism for holding local authorities and other bodies to account will undoubtedly continue.

In terms of preparing for CAA, we foresee there being a few key areas where you should focus your attention.

Key considerations in preparing for CAA

1. Positioning yourself within corporate CAA activity

Within all upper tier authorities (and those in the first tier) there are identified individuals tasked with taking forward the corporate effort of the authority to engage with CAA and to act as the point of contact with the Audit Commission and other watchdogs. We would encourage you as a first step to explore how your authority has configured resources and expertise to lead on engaging with the CAA mechanisms.

Secondly you should endeavour to ascertain the timetable and approach for providing the Audit Commission and other inspectorates with evidence to go forward for consideration for the ultimate assessments and gauge where your efforts would provide most value.

Without you proactively making the case for culture and sport, there may be few opportunities presented to do so. We must seek to place culture and sport as a priority.

Thirdly, we would suggest introducing this as an active line of investigation within senior management teams, staff meetings and for cross-authority working within and between the sub-regions.

Finally, by making this an ongoing cyclical update you will be best placed and ready to join in with what the Audit Commission has called an 'ongoing conversation'.

2. Self-assessments

The Audit Commission is not asking directly for self-assessments to be conducted to inform CAA, however they have stated how an honest self-assessment can play an important part of an effective performance management system. Moreover where a self-assessment has been undertaken and validated, the Audit Commission and sister regulators will not ask for that detail to be provided again.

We understand that there are examples of local areas undertaking some form of self assessment activity to inform CAA and we

would strongly advise you to engage with this effort where it is taking place.

Many of you will have already sought to drive up understanding and improvement by using an improvement tool. Some are engaging with the Culture and Sport Single Improvement Tool (CSIT) or have plans to do so either individually or as a family of authorities.

This self-improvement material and the insight it offers will be useful in terms of engaging with CAA and in informing the stories, case studies and other evidence.

3. Understanding your communities

We see this as a territory for culture and sport as so much has been put into this area in recent times; more so than many other service areas. It should therefore make up a strong part of your overall story to inform CAA.

The CAA guidance makes it clear that a central theme of the first question in an area assessment is how well partners understand their communities and listen to local people, including children.

Community involvement and engagement was an area examined within the 2006-07 regional commentary process and at that time there was much evidence of how culture and sport teams across the region's authorities were placing the views of users at the heart of their approach to planning and delivering services.

We know of exemplary work in this region both in terms of the participation of young people in shaping and delivering provision and how libraries have been reconfigured and rebuilt as facilities with an emphasis on community involvement. We also know of arts teams working collaboratively and creatively with local organisations to allow them to deliver cultural programmes and events of their own. These and other examples should form part of your overall story.

Sport has a wealth of data, for example, the Active People survey which looks at participation (based on at least three thirty-minute sessions of moderate intensity sport and active recreation per week). This, alongside other data and resources means that sport has an established, detailed profile which can contribute to the picture of place and service provision.

The national indicators introduced in April 2009 concerning museums, galleries, libraries and the arts are now better at highlighting need and recent developments have added district-level data and diagnostic tools, which increase the capacity to evidence community need even further. Other national surveys provide valuable insights into your communities and their satisfaction with culture and sport services; for example the Place survey, which you can find here:

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/placesurvey2008

The Tell Us survey is a national survey which gathers the views of children and young people on their life, school and local area:

www.tellussurvey.org.uk/Default.aspx

All of this suggests that you should have a credible story to tell about the understanding you have about your residents and how it helps you to shape services to best meet their needs.

4. The significance of red and green flags

The area assessments ask how well an area is performing against community needs and aspirations; the delivery of outcomes and improvements and future prospects.

Inspectors will identify issues with a flag system that will highlight areas of concern or success that others can learn from. Red flags will show significant concerns which are not being tackled adequately and green flags will represent exceptional performance, or outstanding and sustainable improvement.

At the time of writing, we don't see any immediate red flag concerns for culture and sport services. Encouragingly, some potential green flag cases have been put forward already and are being championed by culture and sport figures within the authority. But... securing those green flags won't be easy. Good or very good practice, or even rapid improvement alone aren't enough – you need to be able to prove to the Audit Commission that what you've got is sustainable.

The overall number of green flags you secure is not an indication of a score and won't offer a comparison between areas (as was the case with the Comprehensive Performance Assessment). For more information, have a look at the CAA framework document, where value for money and the use of resources are also key considerations. Your CAA lead will be able to give you more of an idea of possible red and green flags in your area. It's worth noting that red flags in other service areas could highlight opportunities for culture and leisure services to be redirected to what will be high level corporate priorities for the area.

5. Performance management

Performance and evidence

CAA is about good performance management and a demonstration of a clear direction for local services.

The assessments will give you a useful analysis of local public services' performance against 198 national indicators, as well as self-assessment material and the views of residents, third sector organisations and local businesses. It's critical to keep on top of your data to make sure you can give the most accurate and up-to-date picture.

Culture and sport – evidence and data

Generally this is a difficult area for culture and sport, we might have the data, but we need to be able to actually use that data to inform policy decisions and to influence calls on resources.

As you might remember from the CIPEM conference in May, we told you about a group of authorities in Nottinghamshire who have led the way with their Cultural Entitlement indicator. Many authorities present indicated that they saw the merit in replicating this approach and the work is now informing national developments through IDeA. You can find more on this by speaking to a CIPEM secondee, or on our website,

www.cipem.org.uk

Similarly in Leicester and Leicestershire there's a Communities and Local Government (CLG) beacon-funded project underway to gather evidence of culture's impact on the city, county and districts. We'll share the outcome of this work with you later in the year.

We're aware that it can be difficult to show how well your area is performing when your data only gives an annual picture. It'll help if you can show that you're either making good progress, or that you're aware of any problems and have measures in place for improvement.

Any data you collect should reflect the role of the local authority. If raising levels of volunteering in sport is a local priority, for example, it's more important to put the spotlight on things like the number of coaching courses supported, the number of new clubs developed or the number of clubs supported to reach National Governing Body (NGB) standards than just asking clubs for member figures.

Your data can complement information gathered from other linked priority areas, such as community cohesion or health. Again, the important factors are to focus on the sector's contribution and ensure the data source is robust. For example, in Nottinghamshire there's an indicator that uses Active People survey data to illustrate the levels of active participation in arts, sports and heritage. This links directly to national indicators: NI 1 – the percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together, and NI 2 – the percentage of people who feel they belong to their neighbourhood.

LAA delivery

Audit Commission assessors will be looking for a clear picture of delivery against designated targets in your respective LAAs – you could risk a red flag if you fail to deliver.

We have seen area profiles adopted by partners in Lincolnshire linked to a proposed delivery against the NI 8 indicator (adult sport and physical activity) that have caught the eye of Audit Commission inspectors. This reflects how a range of delivery partners are equipped to better understand the particular challenges facing them to develop the right kind of service response.

We're working hard to make sure we can offer cohesive programmes that put the sector on the front foot. One of the cultural agencies' main priorities is helping their partners to achieve their LAA targets. So, as well as the agencies' own sector-specific work programmes, they are continuing to work collaboratively to achieve better outcomes.

Key questions to ask yourself

- **How are you delivering against your LAA targets?**
- **Do you have a well-formed delivery plan in place?**
- **What is performance information telling you about progress?**
- **How do you know your plans will secure the outcomes you're looking for?**
- **What data do you have to inform you that you are on the right track?**

6. Partnership working

Partnership working is central to the CAA philosophy. You can see many examples of culture and sport services bridging gaps and seeing communities working together – and not only are they adding value, they're doing so sustainably. Things like: creative learning in schools, library services supporting new arrivals, arts organisations working with young people at risk, vivid festival programmes bringing communities together and developing a sense of place, and leisure provision tailored for older people are just a few areas where the sector can stand tall.

Key questions to ask yourself

- **What are your most compelling examples of partnership working?**
- **How are you recording these testimonies and how well are they evidenced?**
- **Do they reflect an improvement in services or just in the quality of the partnership working?**
- **Who is looking after this information and how easily can it be accessed?**

7. Tackling inequality, disadvantage and discrimination

This is another strong area for the sector. Culture and sport have an enviable track record of examples and have consistently risen to the challenge of community engagement. CAA guidance places particular emphasis on targeting effort where improvement is most needed so that inequality and disadvantage can be tackled head on.

The Audit Commission's explanatory material for CAA states that for public services to improve there needs to be good quality, timely information about their performance. This is fundamental to their ability to pinpoint, understand and remove inequality.

A strong focus on equality and diversity encourages continual improvement to public services and makes sure that they're meeting the needs of diverse communities and providing fair access for everyone. Our reach into communities is unique, because culture and sport engage people.

Both Leicester City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council have been awarded beacon status for their work with hard-to-reach groups. Lincolnshire County Council has been recognised nationally for its outreach library service for migrant workers.

We shouldn't underestimate the fact that cultural and sporting activities engage people from many different groups. We should capitalise on this and extend our services so that they meet the needs of people who might otherwise be marginalised.

It would be worth having a look at the Equality Impact Assessments methodology which underpins CAA (as well as being adopted by various inspection bodies). You can find out more at the Audit Commission website:

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

8. Economic recovery

The Audit Commission's CAA feedback states that economic recovery will be a key theme. You should bear this in mind if there are economic components to any of your services, when you're preparing for CAA. We know, for example, that libraries are being flexible to allow for business support, debt advice, job search services and even the means to make benefit claims in library settings.

Other examples include: East Midlands organisations bidding for new jobs as part of the Government's Future Jobs grants scheme; arts services working on creative uses of unused shop spaces and joint investment and partnership working between city, county and district councils in Nottinghamshire to support development at Trent Bridge cricket ground which is increasing visitor figures.

What's more, the sector is a considerable employer and we know that careers in sport and the creative and cultural industries are increasingly popular options for young people. There are many other areas that are having a positive impact, so we'll leave you think about your own economic recovery-based case studies and how you could link them to your CAA.

If you'd like to see how the Government is refocusing culture, media and sport to play a full part in helping the country come through difficult times, please look at the Lifting People, Lifting Places document on the DCMS website:

www.culture.gov.uk

Key questions to ask yourself

- **How are your services actively seeking to contribute to economic recovery?**
- **Can you demonstrate how your service is willing to challenge perceived wisdom and take a positive view on supporting innovation from the front line?**
- **Can you articulate a clear picture of the numbers, skill levels and qualifications of your employees?**
- **Can you evidence how you have secured better value for money in the pursuit of better services for communities?**

9. Bringing it all together – telling the story of the place

This document should point you in the right direction, so that you can start to engage with your CAA arrangements locally, if you haven't already. We're not offering a detailed checklist of activities as we feel that you should be able to form your own action plans based on local knowledge and need.

In our guidance material on influencing LAAs (December 2007), we called for those in the sector charged with making the case for culture to use arguments that were better informed, presented more strategically and backed up with solid evidence. The need for intelligent influencing still very much pervades as we turn our attention to CAA.

Clearly, engagement with CAA calls for some resource commitment, but if you already have methods in place for managing performance, quality assurance, and recording outcomes it's not likely to cause too many problems.

Our ability to construct clear causal links between culture and sport and crime or educational achievement will always present difficulties; but we believe CAA still provides an opportunity for local partners to recognise the contribution they're making to achieve the most important targets.

It also provides the opportunity to identify the path of future or continuous improvement. In both cases we'll need to make this work for culture and sport. We have some real advantages as a sector but unless we engage it is unlikely our voices will be heard.

Summary

In summary then, there are several approaches to preparing for CAA. We hope this document will help you to think about where you are now and how you could develop an action plan based on some of our suggestions.

- There is much to be gained by engaging with the CAA process
- We need active and considered engagement from the sector with the corporate processes of CAA
- CAA will be key vehicle for communicating information about how well your services are being delivered locally
- Good performance management is essential
- There are many great examples of culture and sport partnerships adding value
- Understanding the needs of communities is a proven strength of the sector

Through our network of CIPEM secondees we'll be watching with interest the progress and positioning the sector achieves in CAA. We'll be able to assess how we can add further value to assist the sector to achieve a strong foothold in what is an integral and important part of the National Performance Framework.

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