

WIRRAL LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP EXECUTIVE BOARD

WEDNESDAY 1st APRIL 2009

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE / DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This paper outlines requirements work to date in preparation for Comprehensive Area Assessment, in particular in developing a self-assessment and proposes an approach to supporting the self evaluation process.

2. CAA OVERVIEW

- 2.1. Audit Commission's broad approach is to assess the future prospects in the area for achieving better outcomes by looking at the impact that local service organisations are collectively having on improving priority outcomes. Their assessment will therefore focus on the third of the three key questions. The first two questions will provide underlying evidence and understanding to support their judgements on the third question.

1. *How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?*
2. *How well are outcomes and improvements needed being delivered?*
3. *What are the prospects for future improvement?*

- 2.2. Underpinning the three key questions are themes that thread through the area assessment:

- *Sustainability (integrated outcomes, long term socio economic benefits)*
- *Inequality (within and between communities, for disadvantaged groups, for groups vulnerable to discrimination, child poverty)*
- *People whose circumstances make them vulnerable (through illness, need for support, homelessness, harmful/ risky behaviours, marginalisation, being care leavers, learning disabled, in receipt of mental health services)*
- *Value for money*

- 2.3. The CAA framework indicates several areas that would point towards a weakness or would prompt Audit Commission to instigate further investigation:

- *Important local issues not reflected in priorities*
- *Priorities not reviewed to reflect significant changes in circumstances (e.g. economic downturn)*
- *Poor prospects for improvements*
- *Local needs not well enough understood to drive the right improvements*
- *Understanding of local needs through engagement not comprehensive or coordinated enough*
- *Local needs and aspirations not properly taken account of by decision makers*
- *Delivery of outcomes and improvements poor/ not on track/ unequal/ inequality or variations not identified or addressed*

- *Partnership working not likely to achieve agreed local priority outcomes*

3. WIRRAL'S INVOLVEMENT IN I&DeA STUDY ON AREA SELF ASSESSMENT APPROACHES

- 3.1. As part of the new CAA regime, there is an expectation that local strategic partnerships will be expected to conduct a self-assessment of the areas strengths and weaknesses. Provided the Audit Commission believes this evaluation to be honest and self-aware (i.e. recognises weaknesses and key challenges) and is backed up by clear evidence, then they will rely strongly on the conclusions it makes to form judgements for the CAA area assessment. The more confident Audit Commission is in the partnership's ability to self-evaluate, then the more they will rely on it.
- 3.2. I&DeA ran a study to test and develop approaches to locality self evaluation and Wirral participated in this trial in October 2008. The study was designed to test the honesty and robustness of self-evaluation, as the feedback from earlier parts of the study had found that self-assessments being produced were heavily focused on the positive outcomes and did not properly acknowledge the areas of weakness or key challenges facing areas.
- 3.3. The purpose of participating in the I&DeA study was to test the self evaluation process, not evaluate Wirral's performance. The self-assessment produced as part of the I&DeA study was not published, although it was shared with LSP partners as part of its development. LAA Development group was instrumental in providing evidence and information to develop the self assessment narrative. This activity was viewed as a 'dry run' for self-evaluation, which is taking place now and is part of an ongoing process. Although the output produced was still not fully reflective of all the challenges facing the area and the weaknesses of the partnership, it has provided a good starting point for further development. There is no specific requirement within the CAA framework to produce a self assessment; however it is viewed as good practice, provides an opportunity to influence our own assessment outcomes and is vital to ensuring the continued development of partnership working arrangements in Wirral.

4. WIRRAL NEXT STEPS

- 4.1. The model adopted to collate evidence for the IDeA study through LAA Development Group was effective and efficient. Key partner agencies are present on this group and strong links exist between this group and the Strategic Partnership Executive, Strategic Partnership Assembly and the Management Group that will enable the continued development of a critical self evaluation. It is therefore proposed that the area assessment work programme continues to be coordinated by Corporate Policy with support from LAA Development Group and regular reports to Strategic Partnership Executive.
- 4.2. The Corporate Policy team has completed an initial draft of an information gathering matrix, cross referencing evidence against the SCS themes and the three key area assessment questions (as above) in the CAA framework. This matrix has been populated as far as possible with evidence sources.
- 4.3. The next step will be to work with LAA Development Group to develop the self assessment and highlight potential red flags and areas for concern. It is

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anticipated that where there are gaps in the matrix and areas that are not supported by additional evidence around the underpinning themes (sustainability, inequality, vulnerable people, value for money), this will highlight areas that may not be being fully addressed and could be potential areas of concern. The partnership will then need to take a view as to whether these highlighted areas represent issues that are not being addressed and require development of more robust plans to address this, or whether they are simply issues that are not a priority for Wirral that require action or intervention at this time.

4.4. Audit Commission intends to present its 'emerging picture' of the area to Strategic Partnership Executive in April.

4.5. In summary, key tasks in relation to the area assessment will be:

- *Further development of our area self assessment, highlighting potential red flags or areas of concern*
- *Communicating key messages about CAA and the Audit Commission's 'emerging picture' of the area to partners*
- *Ongoing evidence gathering to inform the assessment process.*

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Strategic Partnership Executive members are requested to note the progress made to date on area self assessment and agree that its further development is supported by LAA Development Group with further regular reports to Strategic Partnership Executive.

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