



# HAMBLETON LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Comprehensive Area Assessment



A District LSP Approach  
to CAA in a two-tier area

(A Learning Tool)

**HAMBLETON**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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improving the **quality of life** for  
**local people...**

## What is CAA

CAA (Comprehensive Area Assessment) is the new performance management framework for the Public Sector. It aims to provide the public with clear and impartial information on how well they are being served by their local public services, how that compares with elsewhere in the country, and what the prospects are for the quality of life in their area. It focuses on people and on place.

This framework will hold partners to account for their performance and use of public sector resources. It will bring together the work of Public Sector Inspectorates to provide an overview of how all public sector organisations are working together to improve the priorities for the local areas. These Inspectorates include the Audit Commission, Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation and Ofsted.

Joining up the inspection regimes across public services aims to be:

- a catalyst for better local outcomes, more responsive services and better value for money
- a source of independent information and assurance for citizens, service users and taxpayers
- an independent evidence base for central government on progress against national priorities
- a means of rationalising and co-ordinating inspection

The CAA framework is in two parts – the evidence of performance against the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and National Indicators (NI's) will be used for both parts:

- Area Assessment – the quality of delivery against the local priorities
- Organisational Assessment – emphasising performance and value for money

## Area Assessment

The area's Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA – which highlight the locally agreed priorities – will be the starting point for the Area Assessment. Other evidence will include findings from audit and inspection; performance against local indicators; information from scrutiny; briefings from other agencies such as Strategic Health Authorities, the Tenants Services Authority and Homes and Communities Agency; and views from community, business and third sector organisations.

The Area Assessment concentrates on three key areas:

- how well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations
- how well are outcomes and improvements needed being delivered
- what are the prospects for future improvements

Underpinning these questions are themes around sustainability, inequality, vulnerability and value for money.

The Area Assessment is not a scored assessment, but will be reported as a narrative and may incorporate 'flags' – red flags for areas of significant concern and green for areas of exceptional performance or improvement.

## Organisational Assessment

The Organisational Assessment will combine a judgement on the use of resources and on managing performance to report a score on a scale of 1 to 4 – one being the lowest, four the highest:

- 1 – an organisation that does not meet minimum requirements – performs poorly
- 2 – an organisation that meets only minimum requirements – performs adequately
- 3 – an organisation that exceeds minimum requirements – performs well
- 4 – an organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements – performs excellently

The Council, PCT, Fire and Police organisations will all have a Use of Resources assessment. The PCT and the Council will also have a 'Managing Performance' assessment while the Fire Service will have an 'Annual Health Check' and the Police Service will have an assessment based on inspections. Housing Associations and Probation Boards and Trusts are subject to inspection and assessment, but do not currently receive a Use of Resources assessment.

The focus within this assessment is:

- managing finances
- governing the business
- managing resources

## The Role of the Local Strategic Partnership

In two tier areas the Area Assessment is undertaken at County level. In North Yorkshire the starting point for the Area Assessment is the North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership (NYSP) Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA which highlight the locally agreed priorities. The NYSP will be held to account in relation to the Area Assessment in North Yorkshire. The NYSP has to be the strategic driver of improvements in outcomes for the community as a result of strong and effective partnership working, but it cannot exercise this role without coordination and partnership with the district based LSPs. Although not a statutory requirement it is important that each district LSP has a sense of its own area assessment to be able to provide a more detailed local dimension to the wider assessment and as a means of effecting partnership improvement at the local level. The three key areas of the area assessment will not be answered without this input.

There will be an ongoing dialogue with CAA leads in Inspectorates during the year, with results published in November 2009.

## How to get CAA ready

While reflecting on the development of the Hambleton LSP and its future plans some form of Peer Challenge was already being considered following discussions on what CAA might look like. The IDeA pilots looked like the right opportunity to front a Peer Challenge with a methodology for self assessment – so Hambleton applied to be one of the pilots. Initially this was not picked up as the focus was on Counties and unitary/metropolitan authorities.

One outcome of the initial pilot work was that in large county areas the County level approach will not be able to adequately tell the story of people and place. Hambleton District Council had been expressing similar concerns – within the design of the CAA Area Assessment – that the district dimension might not be picked up in a purposeful way to reflect local strategic needs. Equally District Councils contribute significantly to local quality of life outcomes and the value of this role was being underplayed in the approach.

The County wide Sustainable Community Strategy and the LAA have reflected as far as possible the district based Local Strategic Partnership Community Plans and examples will be used in the Area Assessment to illustrate outcomes. However Hambleton District Council felt that the production of district based LSP ‘chapters’ would enhance the substance of the Area Assessment by providing greater focus on issues of strategic relevance to each LSP – which may not be possible to convey in a single summarised countywide self-assessment. This will improve the context of place and not lead to impressions that areas are similar across the wider partnership area or that specific local needs are relevant to widely differing communities. The Hambleton LSP took this up and agreed that a local Area Assessment in the context of two tier working would be a valuable contribution in telling the more localised story of what it is like to live ‘here’. This approach has now been incorporated into the overall approach to the Area Assessment and each district based LSP will, over time, assess its own gaps and generate an improvement plan.

For its own development needs and wanting to contribute purposefully to the Area Assessment the Hambleton LSP became part of the national pilot work. This was enthusiastically supported throughout the partnership coupled with a Peer Review.

### Self Evaluation

Irrespective of CAA, self awareness and external challenge remain key ingredients of continuous improvement. Self Evaluation is a good tool to use to capture the LSP’s journey since inception or through phases of its development. It provides a framework against which the LSP can evaluate itself. It is a chance to celebrate and promote successes, but also to reflect on areas which need improving.

The Hambleton LSP did not want to wait to be inspected or assessed – however that is to happen – but took action to learn and then develop and deliver against its own Improvement Plan.

Done well, it provides a challenge – based on evidence – in an open and transparent manner, with the ultimate aim to learn and improve. The Assessment was owned by the whole partnership.

## Improvement Planning

From the Self Evaluation, gaps against the framework were identified and then developed into a SMART Improvement Plan. In fact the improvement plan was in the making prior to the self assessment approach but it gave this far more focus. The improvement plan focused on outcomes so that the LSP vision for success is clear, along with what this will look like when achieved.

This Improvement Plan, like the Assessment, was a joint plan of all partners forming the LSP Board.

## Peer Challenge

A Peer Challenge was being considered by the LSP irrespective but as ever with Peer Challenges it is an option for an external assessment of the robustness of the challenge within the Self Evaluation. It is also a learning opportunity from other peer professionals in your field including Chief Executives and Members.

The benefits of a peer challenge was to ensure the self evaluation is evidence based – not a PR opportunity – and that the improvement plan will give you and your communities, the desired improved services in the future. An 'external eye looking in' ensures objectivity and focuses on the partnership agenda – and not on the agenda of any one partner. It also provides tangible evidence for the 'assessors' to be able to rely on without repeating work.



# Self Evaluation

The IDeA (Improvement and Development Agency) with the LGA (Local Government Association) developed a methodology for Self Evaluation. This has been piloted in a range of areas across the country including, Kirklees, London Borough of Westminster, North Tyneside, Salford, Trafford and Wirral. The Hambleton LSP and Malvern Hills, are the only LSPs within the pilot at district level. The Hambleton LSP has been the only district based LSP to have a peer challenge.

The Self Evaluation is a challenging process aimed at facilitating a shared assessment of the needs and issues in the area, progress against priorities and outstanding challenges still to be addressed. It allows your partnership to take stock and take action where necessary to ensure it is on course to achieving outcomes for local citizens.

It identifies how good the partnership and partners are in delivering against local priorities. It tells the area 'story'. It should be about the value added by the LSP and not what happens through usual partnership working or what the constituent partners do anyway.

The Self Evaluation framework has three key areas – with sub 'lines of enquiry' below them. These are:

- **Understanding the local needs and translation into local priorities**
  - What are the arrangements for community engagement to provide an accurate understanding of the diverse needs and interests of all sections of the community, including those at risk of disadvantage or social exclusion?
  - How are citizens, from all parts of the community, engaged and supported to feed their views into priority setting, decision making, service development and evaluation within and across the partnership organisations?
  - Is the local intelligence robust enough to provide a solid base for future plans and accurately identify opportunities, risks and threats for the future well-being of the community? Is local intelligence shared amongst the partnership?
  - Have councillors facilitated the dialogue and participation to ensure the views of local people are heard in the decision making process? How have they taken account of equality and community cohesion issues?
  - How has the intelligence been translated into local priorities?
  - What are the local priorities and are those outcomes reflected in the Sustainable Community Strategy and the LAA targets? Taken together do they focus on what really matters for the local area? Were citizens involved in the setting of priorities for their area?
  - Has the partnership got good knowledge of the diversity profile of its communities – including disabled people, minority ethnic groups, older and younger people, gay lesbians and people of transgender, women and men, those who hold religious or other belief systems and other vulnerable groups? Is there evidence of equality gaps or unequal outcomes relating to any of these communities?
  - What are the priorities for tackling inequality and disadvantage within the area?

- **The delivery of improvements and outcomes in the area**
  - To what extent is the partnership successfully delivering against the priorities for the local area?
  - How is this being measured and is the performance data robust?
  - To what extent is life improving for local citizens – including improved community cohesion and empowerment?
  - Have engagement activities resulted in the needs of citizens being known more fully and acted upon?
  - To what extent is the partnership tackling inequality and disadvantage?
  - To what extent is the partnership working together to safeguard vulnerable people?
  - Are the vision and priorities for the area translated into operational plans by partners?
  - Is there a robust performance management framework which enables the partnership to monitor progress in the delivery of the priorities?
  - Is information on performance in delivering the priorities easily accessible by the public?
- **Gap analysis and planning for the future**
  - In working towards achieving local priorities are there any areas that require more focused attention such as where progress is at a slower pace or where needs are changing, or new issues emerging? If so, what are the areas?
  - How robust are plans in place to improve the situation? To what extent is progress being delivered and how well are the plans being implemented?
  - Are partners able to hold each other to account? Can differences and difficulties be overcome? Do local public service providers and other partners support the council's scrutiny function – provide evidence and respond to the findings?
  - Are the governance arrangements fit for purpose of achieving the outcomes in the area?
  - What action has previously been taken to address under performance in key priorities?
  - Are local people kept well informed of key issues regarding their area, with communication being co-ordinated between partners?
  - Does the partnership effectively manage the reputation of the area and of the partner organisations?

## Carrying out a Self Evaluation

The time taken on behalf of all partners must not be underestimated if the partnership is to carry out a robust Self Evaluation.

Learning from the Hambleton Self Evaluation pilot showed that commitment by partners to this – as a learning and development exercise – is crucial. It will 'make or break' the quality of the Self Evaluation – and hence the quality, commitment to and deliverability of subsequent improvements. It needs to be an inclusive approach and capture the honest views of partners engaged with the LSP.

# The Hambleton LSP Experience

Hambleton's Self Evaluation is an example of a successful process – as a result of several key factors:

- a dedicated resource was identified to lead, co-ordinate and challenge the process
- LSP Board 'champions' were identified from all partners. The role of the 'champions' was to:
  - provide their views on how well the LSP delivered against the Self Evaluation process
  - provide the evidence to back this up
  - be committed and deliver to the agreed deadlines
- the process was open and transparent – it was fully supported as a learning and improving tool
- the Self Evaluation was about the added value provided through the LSP – and not just about examples of partnership working that is already happening through current roles and responsibilities of the partner organisations

The dedicated resource to lead the drafting of the assessment was provided by YC Change Consultants Ltd. At the time the company was also being used by Hambleton District Council for other capacity support – which this work became part of. However drafting the assessment in this way was of benefit to the partnership for four main reasons:

- it got the job done in a relatively short timescale and on the basis that if 'you can't tell the story now you never will be able to'
- the independence of the approach contributed to partner's 'buy in' as it was not seen as a District Council assessment of the partnership or somehow an edited document by one of the partners
- challenge was accepted in a way that would not necessarily have been possible if this was just challenge within the partnership itself led by the District Council
- YC Change has consultants who are significantly experienced in assessment and inspection and can provide robust challenge having been on 'both sides of the fence' of inspection and are able to look 'beyond' what people and documents say

The turnaround for this Self Evaluation had to be six weeks in order to meet the National Pilot deadlines – due to the fact that the IDeA/LGA had to approve a District joining the pilot. This was extremely challenging, but as a result of the commitment of the 'champions' it was achieved. As mentioned above this also had its plus side.

However, it was recognised that the process could have been more inclusive. The Board were the ones engaged along with key officers within the 'champion' organisations. Engagement of members and partner boards outside those involved with the Board, could have been improved – as could the involvement of the Theme and Area Groups of the LSP. This will be built on as the Improvement Plan is developed and delivered.

## Improvement Planning

The third section of the Self Evaluation is Gap Analysis and planning for the future – to identify areas for improvement to support the LSP in moving forward.

The Self Evaluation incorporated the start of an improvement plan by identifying the gaps and the actions for improvement.

The key to success is immediate commitment, driven by the Board, on the actions required.

The Hambleton LSP Board tasked the Executive Group with recommending how the actions were going to be implemented and who was accountable to lead. As a result, lead partners from the Theme Groups are responsible in developing recommended approaches for improvement and also its delivery. Progress will be reported to the Board on a quarterly basis.

## Being SMART

One source of learning from the Peer Challenge is to ensure that the Improvement Plan in place for all partners is SMART (specific, measureable, attributable, resourced and time bound) to provide a key focus on outcomes. An example of a template which could be used is attached at Appendix A – this is only meant to be a demonstration as it also includes other key aspects of good practice to take into account while planning the approach to improvement.

## Equality Impact Assessment

An area for consideration, as recommended by the Peer Team, is to carry out an Equalities Impact Assessment of partnership membership, structures and outcomes. This will identify how well local public services, working in partnership, are addressing the needs of the areas diverse communities. This Equality Impact Assessment will ensure a strong focus on equality and diversity in meeting challenges faced by communities and providing fair access for all.



## External Review

The purpose of an External Review – or inviting external/Peer support, to challenge and critique the Self Evaluation and provide a reality check on the partnership – is to ensure that evaluation process has been robust and challenging and has the evidence to support your findings.

The Hambleton Self Evaluation peer challenge, led by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), focused on three areas:

- Engaging businesses and response to the economic downturn
- Active participation in health activities, especially for young and older people
- Affordable Housing and homelessness, especially for younger people

This choice of review areas was the LSPs, informed by its highest priorities.

The Peer Team consisted of a member and officers, suitably skilled for these priorities. Activity took place – interviews and a tour – on site for three days, with a final feedback session at the end of the third day. The feedback focused on the three key questions in the Self Evaluation Framework. This external challenge was found to be invaluable – and has resulted in a SMARTER, outcome focused improvement plan for the LSP.

YC Change Consultants Ltd again supported the LSP in the planning and the on-site management of the Peer Challenge. This ensured that all partners put their best foot forward and promoted successes while being open and honest about the areas for improvement. This is a key ingredient to a successful review.

Feedback sessions with interviewees and the focus groups ensured that additional documentation and further information provided within interviews could be managed immediately. This support took pressure away from existing staff to try and manage this amongst current workload. It provided the Peer Team with a professional experience on and off site.

The process is intense for both the partnership/organisations being reviewed and the Peer Team, but the strengths and the areas for improvement are established within a short space of time. It is an engaging process, and often in itself, provides a trigger for change and a renewed energy and focus.

## Positive Practice

As emphasised throughout this 'toolkit' approach the reason for any of this is to provide a learning experience for the LSP and its individual partners so that you can improve and also ensure that you are 'CAA ready'.

Any good organisation or partnership looks outside to pursue good practice nationally. The Audit Commission has just released some good practice guidance – 'Working better together? Managing Local Strategic Partnerships', 'LSP Scrutiny', 'LSP self assessment', 'LSP Governance' and 'LSP delivery chain analysis tool: Removing obstacles to local joint working' – go to [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk) for details.

The IDeA has also recently produced a paper – 'Moving Forward Together: Joining up workforce strategies' – which promotes asset sharing across partnerships – people, resources, physical assets and intelligence.

LSPs which have been commended as good practice include Calderdale Forward, Leeds and North Tyneside. Reciprocal visits to organisations/partnerships to identify areas of good practice which can be translated into your LSP are effective ways of learning what to do to improve and how.

YC Change Consultants Ltd is an established company that has carried out inspections, healthchecks, reality checks and/or reviews for organisations which want to ensure that their improvement journey is based on real groundings. Our review methodology has key stages:

- agreement of the scope of review/assessment
- document review to provide context and evidence to back up the Self Evaluation
- on site reality checking and interviewing with partners, Members and the community
- feedback focusing on strengths and areas for improvement
- tailored, follow up support as required

## Appendix A – SMART Improvement Plan

SPECIFIC	MEASURABLE	ATTRIBUTABLE	RESOURCED	TIMEBOUND	RISK	EFFICIENCY	GOOD PRACTICE REFERENCES
Why	What Action/ Outcome/ Target	Who	With	When	Control	Value for money impact	Examples of positive practice
Link to high level objectives/aims – should show clear evidence of customer benefits and outcomes	The operational measures that need to be taken to achieve the outcomes. Be clear what the outcomes are and set your target realistically, but providing a challenge	The named accountable officer (be specific to provide clarity of accountability)	Estimate resource issues – time/costs etc.	Deadlines or milestones – never 'ongoing' Break down into quick wins, medium term and long term improvements	Internal/external Impact Probability – align with your own risk management process	Estimate level of impact/likely gains	Examples of innovation and positive solutions achieved elsewhere
QUICK WINS							
MEDIUM TERM IMPROVEMENTS							
LONGER TERM IMPROVEMENTS							



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