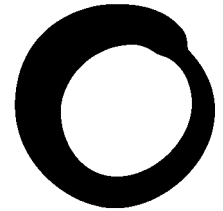


December 2009



**Friends of
the Earth**

Briefing

Comprehensive Area Assessments

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Comprehensive Area Assessments

Introduction

Local authorities are responsible and accountable to their electorate for their performance. But how do you find out about how your local council is doing on specific issues?

The Audit Commission is responsible for assessing the performance of local authorities and their partners in delivering on their local priorities.

On 9 December, they will produce a report for each local authority area called the **Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)**. Where Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have prioritised addressing climate change (either through their Sustainable Community Strategy or through their Local Area Agreement), the report will identify how they are doing in meeting their targets. All CAAs should include a “Key Line of Enquiry” (KLOE in local government speak) report on “use of natural resources” which might include CO2 emissions.

The reports will appear in a range of formats:

- A full report (about 60 pages) with fine detail about the local authority’s performance and areas of excellence or failure.
- The Audit Commission’s [oneplace](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/audit/CAA/pages/oneplace.aspx) website (<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/audit/CAA/pages/oneplace.aspx>) summarising the report in jargon-free language.
- A media pack including a press release.

The reports will use green or red flags (for exceptional, innovative performance or for poor performance respectively). Flags of either colour may be few and far between for climate change however, so will not be a useful yardstick for most areas.

Where a local authority has been awarded a green flag, details about what they have done to achieve this will be given – in some cases, this will identify the very best local authority practice and innovation that can be implemented by other local authorities.

Where a local authority has been given a red flag, the report and the website will detail where the local authority is failing to meet its own targets, the agreed improvement actions and where responsibility rests for delivering these.

The report will also give details about how the local area is performing against the Government’s set of National Indicators including the following climate change-related measurements:

- NI185 – reducing emissions from the council’s own estate
- NI186 – reducing emissions from the whole local area
- NI188 – adapting to climate change

Local authorities and, more widely, Local Strategic Partnerships will be very interested in the reports and the improvement actions recommended by the Audit Commission. There may be some media interest as they directly affect local people.

CAA and climate change

Where reducing greenhouse gas emissions has been identified as a key local priority, either through the Local Area Agreement (e.g. by adopting NI185 or NI186)

or through the Sustainable Community Strategy, the Comprehensive Area Assessment will address this area in some detail.

The CAA also looks at progress under the key climate change-related national indicators, i.e. NI 185, 186, 188, even if they have not been adopted by the Local Strategic Partnership. It is important to bear in mind that, since the quantitative data (http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/statistics/climate_change/climate_change.aspx) from central Government on emissions is only available up to 2007, this information relating to NI186 will be about two years out of date.

The CAA will not just look at the figures for NI186, however. It will make a much more rounded, qualitative assessment of how the local authority and its partners are geared up to tackle climate change.

The Audit Commission will have used evidence from a range of sources including performance against the relevant national indicators, self-evaluation by the local strategic partners and the views of some individual residents and organisations.

They will then use this evidence to assess how well these local priorities are being addressed. It will report on the following areas:

- What progress has been made to date on addressing climate change? They may be awarded green or red flags at this point.
- It will identify areas for improvement and where capacity and resource constraints are affecting performance.
- It will look at how effectively the council is managing performance on climate change including analysing the strength of the council's Climate Change Action Plan.
- It will assess whether or not the council is providing the necessary leadership, both internally and externally, to reduce emissions.
- It may suggest that climate change needs to be established as a priority area where it has not been in the past.

This information has a clear and direct relevance to local groups working on Get Serious about CO₂. The local group may be able to use the Comprehensive Area Assessment in discussions with councillors and officers. You can also use the [oneplace](#) website to find out more about areas of best practice from different local areas.

How to use the Comprehensive Area Assessment in your Get Serious About CO₂ campaign

The CAA might be a very useful tool to use in your work with your council on Get Serious about CO₂. It could provide some evidence about how the local authority and its partners are performing on addressing climate change, recommend improvements, and identify the best practice ideas from across the country. You might be able to use this information in lobbying meetings with councillors and officers, to respond to the media and also to publicise the campaign.

How to find out about your council's Comprehensive Area Assessment:

After its release on 9 December, go to the [oneplace](#) website and see what the Audit Commission says about your local area and its performance on climate change. The

Comprehensive Area Assessments

basic level of information will be on the website or you will be able to download the full report. You should be able to see what it says about progress to date, future improvement opportunities and the extra resources and capacity needed to deliver emission cuts. You should bear in mind the fact that any recent actions and decisions by your council may not be fully captured by the assessment.

Examples of ways in which you can use the CAA:

You could use the findings in your council's CAA to boost your local Get Serious campaigning. Here are a few suggestions:

- Take any relevant information about areas highlighted for improvement, or best practice examples from other areas, to lobbying meetings with your local council. If it's not clear to you how you can best link the CAA with Get Serious, contact your Regional and Local Campaigner (RLC) for advice.
- Use the information in the CAA to respond to any local press enquiries relating to the performance of your local council. Don't forget to mention the Get Serious About CO₂ campaign in any press work you do. If you have time you could either press release the report yourselves or write to your local paper with an opinion about how your council has performed. For help and support with press work please contact your RLC.

Further information

For more on CAA and the workings of your local council contact your RLC.

You may also find it helpful to read the series of *Power shift* briefings which cover different aspects of how your local council works and current developments in local government powers and duties.

[Briefing 1: England's power shift: Sustainable economic growth?](#)

[Briefing 2: England's power shift: Meet your new lords and masters](#)

[Briefing 3: England's power shift: Local control rules okay!](#)

For more on Sustainable Community Strategies & Local Strategic Partnerships see http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/guides/2_1_community_strategies.pdf