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Councillor Peter Evans
Cabinet Member for Public Protection
West Sussex County Council
Cabinet Office
West Wing
County Hall
Chichester
PO19 1RQ

- 2 JUN 2008

Dear Councillor Evans,

Thank you for your letter dated 6 May.

Government remains committed to reducing the overall cost and impact of inspection. The Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (published October 2006) set out proposals for a new performance framework - of which Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) is a core element.

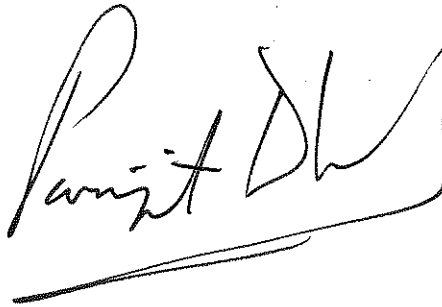
Unlike the current Comprehensive Performance Assessment of councils and Fire & Rescue Authorities (FRAs), CAA will be focussed more on delivery of outcomes for communities rather than the performance of individual institutions. It also places more emphasis on citizens' experiences and perspectives. CAA supports the Government's commitment to reduce the amount of inspection and to rationalise the number of inspectorates. It will reduce duplication and enable better co-ordination, planning and prioritisation within larger institutions. The majority of existing rolling programmes of inspection will therefore cease during 2008-09, prior to the commencement of CAA from April 2009.

CAA provides the means to assess local government services performance against LAA outcomes and the wider set of the 198 National Indicators. Where other assessment frameworks also cover these outcomes (that is, where they apply to one or more of the other partners), they will be tailored so that there is a single assessment experience for local authorities. For the Fire and Rescue Service, the individual performance contribution of each FRA to the LAAs in which it participates will be assessed through the further development of the current Use of Resources and Direction of Travel judgements. The Audit Commission's current thinking on this is that each FRA will be subject to only one performance assessment process regardless of the number of LAAs it is working with. The process will be further tailored so that strong performing FRAs will be subject to less assessment.

The Area Assessment element of CAA will be undertaken jointly by all the public service inspectorates; it will be co-ordinated by the Audit Commission and will consider all the available information. It will not only identify where risks exist to the delivery of outcomes, but determine whether those risks are recognised and how well they are being managed. This assessment will be the primary source of determining future inspection programmes allowing a better targeted, more proportionate approach.

Finally, the Audit Commission's second consultation for finalising the format of CAA is scheduled to commence late July. I understand that a worked example of an Area Assessment will be included for respondents to comment on.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Parmjit Dhanda', with a long horizontal line underneath.

PARMJIT DHANDA MP