

Introduction by Ofsted and the Audit Commission

When we decided, in 2004, to programme joint area reviews and corporate assessment to take place at the same time in local areas, we undertook to commission an independent external review to evaluate the manageability and effectiveness of the joint process.

The children's services inspectorates, led by Ofsted, and the Audit Commission subsequently commissioned KPMG to undertake this work. It looked at the experiences of the first three pilot corporate assessment/joint area reviews in summer 2005 and the first block of eight parallel assessments in the autumn.

KPMG has completed its report and we are publishing it in full as an attachment to this introduction. The report represents a fair assessment of the early linked corporate assessment and joint area review processes. During the period of the review, KPMG was able to report its emerging findings to an oversight panel comprising representatives of Ofsted, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Audit Commission, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Local Government Association (LGA). Its feedback, combined with our learning, has been very helpful in assisting us to adjust the management of both assessments. The report's commentary and recommendations accord with our own internal evaluations.

We have, as a result, already implemented a number of the recommendations relating to streamlining briefings for councils, improving team management and liaison, aligning document requests, slimming down key lines of enquiry and, in the case of the joint area review, developing grade criteria. Other issues that we are dealing with involve joint team leader briefings, shared risk assessments and integrated quality assurance processes.

The KPMG report, while not recommending separating corporate assessment and joint area reviews, expresses a view that there is merit in staggering the time that teams of inspectors spend on site. Our feedback from councils is not, on balance, in favour of this proposal. However, we have already made some adjustments to take account of local elections during the early part of the summer: this will involve some phasing of the assessments and we will look at this recommendation again in the autumn in the light of our experiences.

We are committed to review all the remaining recommendations in detail and to track their implementation as far as possible over the next few months. We have asked KPMG to undertake a follow-up review in autumn 2006 in order to report on progress.



Audit Commission

Ofsted

ODPM

DfES

LGA

CSCI

Evaluation of the
manageability of the joint
area review and corporate
assessment process
Final Report

KPMG LLP

9 February 2006

This report contains 43 Pages

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1 **Executive Summary**

1.1 **Overview**

KPMG LLP (UK), the UK member firm of KPMG International, were engaged by a panel representing the Audit Commission, OFSTED, DfES, ODPM, CSCI and the LGA to evaluate the manageability of the Joint Area Review (JAR) and Corporate Assessment (CA) processes. The evaluation covered the early joint pilots and the first tranche of JAR and CA in autumn 2005 and focused on the way in which JAR works together with CA and the manageability of the process for councils and their partners. In particular, the objectives of the evaluation focused on:

- the extent to which all reasonable arrangements were in place to minimise avoidable burdens to councils and other parties;
- the impact of the combined assessments on the effective working of the council compared with the potential impact of separate inspections programmed within a three year period; and
- future steps that the inspectorates may wish to consider to improve the manageability of the inspection process.

The key findings and recommendations of our evaluation are set out in the following sections. The main body of the report and appendices provide further detail.

1.2 **Key findings**

Both inspectors and councils have worked hard to make the best of this new process, and have been acknowledged by the other parties as having made this effort. It is a credit to those involved that councils on the whole have felt that the processes have been of comparable, or in some cases better quality, than previous inspections they have experienced. It is also clear that while these processes are new and still bedding down, it is evolving in the light of experience with improvements already incorporated from the evidence of the early pilots. Self assessment continued to be seen as a positive part of the process and councils felt that the current requirement for separate assessments is appropriate.

However, there are also some problems - there is some inconsistency of approach across CA and JAR, which is to be expected given the different methodologies, and there have been delays in getting information to councils and some expectations have not been clear.

Fundamentally it has felt to most of those involved as two separate inspection processes running at the same time rather than a joined up process and none of the councils involved in the evaluation have felt that it has contributed to a reduced inspection burden or that there was 'added value' in a joined up process. Inspectors were more positive about the potential to make it work as a joint process than

Councils, although this was not a uniform view across all inspection team leaders and joint inspectors.

In terms of the main categories we used as our evaluation framework, the key findings were:

- Communications - were generally based on strong relationships between inspection team leaders and with council link officers, and strengths in regular daily briefings and some well planned joint set-up meetings, interviews and information requests. On the other hand some briefings raised expectations which were not met, joint set up meetings were not always effective, there was ongoing uncertainty over the criteria and scheduling proved very difficult when analysis week was close to the fieldwork and there were last minute changes to requests for meetings and information.
- Managing the process - was helped by the self assessments completed by councils and the use made of these, the role of the joint inspector and some common activity on familiarisation and analysis. On the other hand the logistics were difficult, particularly for small councils, some guidance was late and not practically focused, teams found insufficient time for planning, reflection and sharing and there were problems with administrative support and IT. Councils did not feel the inspection burden had been reduced.
- Coherence of approach - was achieved to some extent in that areas of overlap are generally clear, there is an appropriate balance between process and outcomes, most councils felt that account was taken of local circumstances and priorities and there was evidence of inspectors learning from each others methods and triangulating evidence. However, many people felt that the different methodologies do not support joining-up, there are different cultures, styles and approaches to guidance, formats for self assessment, evidence recording and processes for feedback - which were particularly variable across different councils. It was not clear that joint processes impacted positively on equalities, diversity and human rights and consistency of view in inspection teams.
- Consistency of outcomes - was the most difficult to judge because of the closeness of the evaluation to final reporting but people did feel there was consistency in key messages from CA and JAR, inspections/reviews were seen as at least comparable in quality to previous experiences and joint inspector attendance at both CA and JAR team meetings and feedback important in supporting coherence and consistency. QA processes were generally clear to inspectors and seen as timely and helpful. On the other hand there were some inconsistencies in draft reports pointed out by councils to inspectors, the different reporting styles and formats made joining-up more difficult and some councils and inspectors felt the inspections lacked depth and consistency of rigour particularly in the outcome areas. Links around common outcomes were felt to need developing and there needed to be more clarity on how the capacity for improvement judgement is reached.

1.3 **Recommendations**

Our recommendations fall broadly in to two categories:

- those improvements which are mainly administrative in nature, are adjustments or refinements to the current process without major policy implications and some of which can be achieved in a relatively short time span: and
- those which require a more fundamental review of the process to tackle some of the deeper-rooted problems.

We see some administrative improvements and process refinements being available in:

- enhancing the briefing materials for partners/councils to explain the links between the CA and JAR and to lay out the inspection timetable
- reviewing the content of the briefing sessions
- better co-ordination of document requests
- further developing the communications with council link officers for efficient 'project management'
- promoting more compatibility of IT systems across inspectorates
- joint administration support
- creating more time/opportunity for CA and JAR teams to meet pre-inspection to share self assessment analysis and plan activities
- reviewing the timing and content of guidance
- developing training for inspectors, particularly to support the joint inspector role and an understanding of each other's methodology
- managing overall inspection activity to understand the burden on councils
- developing greater consistency in the style and timetabling of feedback and a more unified reporting style
- working out an agreed approach to covering equalities, diversity and human rights issues
- making clear how the capacity for improvement judgement is reached - particularly how the CA findings are used to inform the JAR judgement
- working towards a common QA system - to ensure consistency of outcomes and reports and to minimise the duplication of activity.

At a slightly deeper level, we feel that the inspectorates need to consider:

- the timing of inspections/reviews - in particular whether JAR should be 'staggered' before CA on site or timed up to three months prior to CA in order to ensure that the logistics are more manageable while the linkages are still



maintained. On balance our view is that the inspections should be staggered but still joined up rather than totally 'decoupled.'

- resourcing the inspections at a greater level, particularly in relation to time allowed, in order to address some of the difficulties identified in maintaining the role of the joint inspector, additional administration support, a greater time on joint analysis and on-site for reflection and hypothesis testing.
- proportionality and focus - the degree to which inspections/reviews which are more tailored to the specific circumstances of an individual council and area and more attuned to an assessment of risk.
- a more comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to explaining the CA/JAR process in order to clarify expectations.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

A key objective of current inspection strategy is to ensure that the burden of regulation is reduced where possible and the impact and value for money of inspection in driving improvement is maximised. The Office of Public Services Reform 2003 report *Inspecting for Improvement* recommended inspectorates 'are charged with a duty to collaborate, and by working actively with the relevant departments and other inspectorates establish the conditions necessary for joint working and cross-cutting inspections'. The strategies of the individual inspectorates reflect this commitment to reducing the burden for example 'minimising the burden of regulation' is a key priority in the Audit Commission's strategic plan 2004-07.

In order to reduce the burden of regulation and the extent of duplication of assessment, it was decided by the inspectorates that Joint Area Reviews (JARs) and Corporate Assessments (CAs) were to be delivered at the same time wherever possible. The new CA process reports, as one of its five achievement themes, on the contribution of the council to the quality of outcomes for children and young people. The content for this part of the assessment is provided from the JAR. In turn the JAR uses the findings of the CA in terms of the leadership and management of services. The potential benefits of this approach identified by the inspectorates were:

- rationalisation for the council in preparing for inspection, providing documentation and involvement in interviews;
- the ability to share expertise, perspectives and evidence across inspection teams; and
- the opportunity to present findings on a wide range of the council's work in a coherent form so that the agenda for improvement is clear and well ordered.

An Oversight Panel representing the Audit Commission, OFSTED, DfES, ODPM, CSCI and the LGA made a commitment to build in evaluation of this joint working from the outset. To fulfil this they engaged KPMG to provide an independent evaluation of the manageability of the JAR and CA process that would identify:

- the extent to which all reasonable arrangements are in place to minimise avoidable burdens to councils;
- the impact of the combined assessments on the effective working of the Council compared with the potential impact of separate inspections programmed within a three year period; and
- future steps that the inspectorates may wish to consider to improve the manageability of the inspection process.

The evaluation KPMG have conducted provides an independent judgement about the extent to which the process has supported the achievement of the overarching

principles of reducing the burden, and particularly from the perspective of Councils as well as other stakeholders.

Importantly the focus of this evaluation was aimed primarily at the degree to which CA and JAR work together as joined up processes, and not on the separate inspection methodologies. Inevitably however in reviewing the extent to which the processes were joined up, messages emerged about the individual methodologies and processes for CA and JAR which we feel it would be valuable for the inspectorates to hear. In recognition that this was not the focus of the evaluation we have included these as separate findings in Appendices 4 and 5.

2.2 Approach

Our evaluation covered the three early joint inspections and the first tranche of eight inspections which started in September 2005. The approach involved a mixture of retrospective evaluation of inspections that had already been completed at the time of evaluation and real-time evaluation of the live inspection processes during the first tranche. The process we followed is summarised in diagram 1 on the following page.

In order to provide a clear focus for our evaluation we developed a set of criteria which were agreed with the Oversight Panel before the evaluation commenced. An initial review was then conducted of the three pilot inspections in West Sussex, Sutton and Rochdale. This initial review was used to form early hypotheses for further testing with the eight councils in tranche one, and to test our evaluation criteria. Our early findings were fed back to the Oversight Panel and the criteria were refined for the evaluation of tranche one.

The evaluation criteria used to evaluate the councils in tranche one are set out in full in Appendix 1. The criteria focused on four key aspects of the process:

- **Clear communications:** *Arrangements for the JAR/CA processes were communicated effectively so that the rationale and approach were clear to the Council and partner organisations. Requests for information and ongoing engagement with the council and its partners were effective and well co-ordinated.*
- **Managing the process:** *Internal processes ensured that JAR and CA inspectors effectively plan the inspection and share ongoing findings for example in terms of self-assessments, information requests and recording of evidence, in order to minimise the burden on the council and its partners and optimise the inspectoral input.*
- **Coherence of approach:** *JAR and CA processes are complementary and standardised where possible and common criteria are used for judging overlapping areas such as leadership and service management.*

- Consistency of outcomes:** *Inspection reports are consistent with each other in terms of messages and gradings, based on secure evidence and provide a clearer focus for improvement than would have been the case as a result of two separate inspections.*

Diagram 1: Summary of KPMG’s evaluation process



The eight tranche one authorities were split into two groups. The first group of four councils received lighter-touch evaluations which involved largely desk-based research, including telephone interviews. The four lighter-touch evaluations were carried out with the following councils: Slough, Stoke, Wirral and Herefordshire. The second group of four councils were involved in a more in-depth approach which involved some on-site interviews and observation. The four councils involved in the more in-depth approach were: Bournemouth, Staffordshire, Enfield and Calderdale.

For all eight councils we interviewed the lead inspectors for both CA and JAR, joint inspectors and council link officer(s) prior to, and post, the on-site fieldwork. At the in-depth authorities we also attended at least one of the final feedback sessions given by the inspection teams, and interviewed other key officers involved in the inspection process such as the Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services, and partner representatives.

We also collated information from councils, lead inspectors and members of the CA and JAR inspection teams via an electronic questionnaire. This was issued after the draft reporting stage of the inspection with the aim of capturing views of the end stages of the process.

We asked all interviewees and questionnaire respondents to score each of the four areas of our evaluation on a scale of 1 to 5 where:

1 = very poor

2 = poor

3 = satisfactory

4 = good

5 = excellent

The aim of the scoring was to provide a snapshot of overall views and the extent to which they differed between councils and inspectors. The results are set out in Appendix 2.

The emerging findings from our work were then explored at a seminar in December attended by representatives from many of the pilot and tranche one authorities, JAR and CA lead inspectors and team members, and representatives of the Oversight Panel. The objectives for the workshop were to:

- Provide the opportunity for stakeholders to understand and confirm our evaluation findings; and
- Collect ideas about how the process might be improved for the future.

Appendix 3 gives details of the agenda for the workshop and summarises the key messages. This report incorporates the workshop findings.

3 Key findings

3.1 Introduction

This section sets out the headlines from our evaluation followed by key findings under each of the four main evaluation headings. For each main heading we have included a bullet point summary of strengths and areas for improvement followed by more detailed explanatory text which includes by way of illustration some quotes of things we typically heard during our evaluation. Section 4 then builds on these findings in terms of recommendations for the future.

All councils and inspectors engaged positively in the evaluation process. Whilst our findings do not always represent a universal view from all councils and inspectors, there has generally been a high degree of consistency in terms of the main messages. The emerging conclusions workshop enabled us to further test the general consensus in terms of the key findings and this section represents the output of our evaluation refined as appropriate in light of the workshop feedback.

3.2 Key headlines

A key message overall is that all parties, inspectors and councils, have worked hard to make the best of the process, and it is a credit to those involved that councils on the whole have felt that the processes have been of comparable, or in some cases better quality, than previous inspections they have experienced.

Fundamentally it has felt to most of those involved as two separate inspection processes running at the same time rather than a joined up process. None of the councils involved in the evaluation have felt at this point in the process that it has contributed to a reduced inspection burden, and from their perception many felt the burden has increased. The comparative burden is difficult to judge accurately given that there has been no equivalent to the JAR in terms of previous inspection processes and therefore perception is the main determinant. For many councils they felt that running CA and JAR as two separate processes would have led to the same conclusions and at this point in time found it difficult to identify the 'added value' of a joined up process. Although some councils were of the view that at least having them at the same time got it out of the way. Others felt that a joined up approach may better assist improvement planning in terms of providing a clear agenda for action, but this is too early to test in terms of this evaluation. Inspectors were more positive about the potential to make it work as a joint process than Councils, although this is not a uniform view across all inspection team leaders and joint inspectors.

Not surprisingly effective relationships between team leaders have been a critical success factor in making the processes work as well as they have. It was very evident from the evaluation that at present there is a lack of standardisation of approach across CA and JAR which is not unexpected given the newness of the processes.

There have been three main factors which have made the joining up of the process more difficult:

- newness of the inspection processes both of which are yet to be fully embedded;
- methodological differences between JAR and CA; and
- practical difficulties in terms of approach and processes.

The following sections set out the findings in more detail.

3.3 Clear communications

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications generally well-managed • Regular daily briefings • Joint set-up meetings set the right tone • Joint interviews and information request by some - where these were planned well in advance • Examples of clear purpose for activities in advance • Councils felt they had the opportunity to work with inspectors on the best way to gather information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefing sessions - raising expectations, tensions between inspectorates, limited coverage, limited for partners • Joint set up meetings - not always effective • Roles and expectations of other regulators not always clear • Uncertainty over the criteria • Scheduling - different approaches and timing, late changes and additions, analysis week late on, late and duplicate additional information requests • Rationale for interviews not always clear • Councils unclear about QA process/purpose and reporting arrangements

Communications between inspectors and councils have generally been very well managed and many councils were positive about this aspect.

“Communications on the ground were good such that there was a ‘no surprises’ approach” (Council Chief Executive)

“Inspectors were looking to support our improvement agenda rather than trying to trip us up” (Council link officer)

Regular daily briefings between the Council and inspectors during the on-site work aided clear communications although very few of these were held jointly between CA and JAR. Joint set-up meetings had set the right tone in terms of promoting a joined up approach and these took place at most councils. Joint set-up meetings in

themselves were not sufficient to explain both processes fully and lead inspectors still spent time in other briefing meetings to explain the individual processes. The early national briefings were varied in terms of helping councils understand the process and many reported on the clear tensions between inspectorates and inconsistent answers they received to specific questions at these briefings.

One of the expectations of councils in terms of the joined up approach was that interviews and information requests would be managed jointly to reduce the burden and avoid duplication. This had been a clear expectation raised by the initial briefings. There were instances of successful joint interviews and co-ordinated information requests where there had been investment in good upfront planning. For many councils, scheduling proved to be very difficult and time-consuming, and the extent of joint interviews was much more limited in practice than they had expected. Some joint interviews were planned and then had to be unpicked when teams realised that it was not going to give them what they needed. For interviewees, the joint interview process was challenging given that JAR wanted the detail and CA wanted the strategic view.

One of the main difficulties in terms of joint interviewing arises from the different emphasis of the methodologies. In practice JAR starts in week one of the on-site fieldwork with the on-the-ground work including case file reviews and the neighbourhood study and progresses to a more strategic level in week two. CA works from the strategic level down, and CA teams were often on-site for less time than the JAR team. The opportunities therefore for joining up of interviews during the two week fieldwork period were limited. Some teams worked around this for example by making the JAR team leader and joint inspector available for strategic level interviews with the CA team in week one.

Many councils experienced late changes and additions to scheduling which were logistically hard to manage and particularly where it involved partner organisations. The close proximity of the analysis week to the fieldwork weeks added to this problem in that it did not allow adequate time for adjustments to the schedule.

“It gave a bad impression of us to our partners when we were asking for interview slots at very short notice. There was a danger that they saw this as our fault rather than something we could not control” (Council link officer)

In more than one authority there were particular problems relating to duplication of interviews with health partners because of different levels of understanding of the approach and tensions between inspectorates. There were also examples of poor co-ordination of information requests with duplicate requests for information between CA and JAR teams.

Some teams communicated the purpose of activities very clearly in advance but this was not a universal experience and the rationale for interviews including joint interviews, was not always clear. There tended to be a reliance on the Council to explain the process to partner organisations which added to the burden in terms of

communications, for example the initial briefings did not include a focus on partner organisations.

Despite the scheduling difficulties, most councils felt that they had the opportunity for both JAR and CA, to work with the inspectors on the best way to gather information and evidence.

There were other areas where communications could be improved including the role of other regulators (external audit, Relationship Manager, CSCI Business Link Inspector) and expectations in terms of their attendance at meetings. Councils also felt unclear about the quality assurance processes and their purpose across CA and JAR, and were not always clear how JAR and CA reports would be linked and cross-referenced. The uncertainty relating to the criteria for both CA and JAR as a result of the newness of the processes, did not help Councils in preparing for and managing the process or understanding how they joined together.

3.4 Managing the process

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-assessments - advantages of separate assessments, clear references by teams • Liaison between inspectors - joint inspector role, team leaders joining-up, close proximity on and off site helped informal liaison and analysis week, some on specific themes but limited by time and capacity • Use of common baseline information by teams • Inspectors generally clear about roles, responsibilities and assigned tasks • Joint tours (where done) helped familiarisation • Flexibility by some teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistics difficult for (small) councils • Guidance and toolkit - late, lengthy, not practically focused • Roles and training - quality of auditor/RM briefings variable, training seen as inadequate by inspectors, peer inspectors not well-briefed, joint inspectors balancing time between teams • Time and capacity - viewed as insufficient for planning, joint meetings, reflection and sharing information, some timescales for JAR/CA different, delays in processing ROEs • Admin support and IT - on-site admin support variable and incompatibility of IT systems • No council felt that inspection burden had reduced and other inspections/ assessments taking place in close proximity although no control group to accurately compare the burden • For some interviews - duplication, planned joint ones changed, tensions between JAR/CA coverage • Is the overall process sustainable?

Councils were asked whether the CA and JAR self-assessments should have been joined but most felt that separate assessments were appropriate and more manageable due to the differing level of detail and focus between JAR and CA. In many cases it was felt that references were made across the teams to both the self-assessments. Use of common baseline information across the CA and JAR teams was seen as useful in supporting a joined up approach, ensuring that both teams had the same understanding of local context. Joint tours of the local area by both the CA and JAR teams (where these were done) also helped in terms of familiarisation, team-building and a common understanding of local context.

CA and JAR team leaders worked hard to join up the processes although it was less evident below this in terms of liaison between team members. There was a reliance on the joint inspector to undertake much of this liaison role, and they found it hard to balance their time appropriately between teams. A strong message from councils in the evaluation related to the critical role of the joint inspector in supporting the joining up between CA and JAR. Many councils commented on the hard work and commitment of these individuals but all stakeholders questioned whether this was sustainable and suggested greater liaison between other team members would help.

Inspectors largely felt clear about their roles and responsibilities and there was evidence in some instances of liaison between CA and JAR teams on specific themes but this was often limited due to logistics, capacity and time. Accommodation of the CA and JAR teams in the same hotel and in close proximity on-site provided more opportunities for informal liaison between teams, although these opportunities were not always maximised and sometimes tensions between inspectorates got in the way of this. Inspectors felt strongly that there was insufficient time for team-building in the preparatory stages which did not help in terms of joint planning or time for reflection and sharing of information between teams.

“We were still introducing inspectors to each other at the end of the fieldwork”
(council link officer)

“The first time we met each other was in the Council car park” (JAR Inspector)

The difficulties in terms of effective liaison between teams were compounded by practical difficulties in terms of administrative support and IT systems. CA teams had on-site administrative support which inspectors and councils recognised as useful in supporting scheduling and information requests, but JAR did not have this support. This put extra pressure on council staff and also delayed the analysis and sharing of information.

“It felt like I became the administrative support for the JAR team” (Council link officer)

IT systems were incompatible between CA and JAR, and the teams used different approaches to evidence recording with the collation of JAR evidence being done off site at a central location which created further delays in information sharing. This

made the Joint Inspector role more difficult by having to transfer information between different systems and completing different types of records of evidence.

For councils the logistics of managing so many inspectors on site at one time were difficult especially for the smaller councils, for example in terms of finding suitable accommodation. The process was not helped for councils or inspectors by the late issuing of some guidance and criteria. Toolkits and guidance were not felt to be sufficiently practically focused and were not as accessible as they could be in terms of length and style.

Some councils welcomed the fact that teams were prepared to be flexible and adopt a partnership approach to managing the inspection between the council and inspectors, which helped alleviate some of the tensions.

“The inspection team felt they were not making adequate progress, so they took stock, sat down with officers and worked out a plan with us about how to move forward”
(council link officer)

Inspectors experienced varying quality in terms of the briefings and inputs provided from auditors, relationship managers and others which were not always appropriately focused and had sometimes excluded key evidence for example in county areas the CPA findings for the relevant district councils. The training provided to inspectors was not seen as adequate in terms of understanding the joining up of the processes and the areas of commonality in terms of criteria.

Overall the practical difficulties were significant in terms of their impact on the input required from councils and teams to make the processes work and this led to the view that the inspection burden had not reduced and the sustainability of the process was questioned. This was further heightened for some councils who had other inspections / assessments taking place in close proximity to the JAR/CA process, including for example the external auditors Use of Resources assessment.

3.5 Coherence of approach

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria for judgement and areas of overlap generally clear • Appropriate balance between process and outcomes • No competing priorities between focus of the inspections • Most councils felt that account was taken of local circumstances and priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different methodologies do not support joining-up • Inspection approach - lack of consistency and standardisation, different approaches to evidence recording, different cultures, styles, terminology and approaches apparent • Different approaches to feedback sessions - not all joint, some councils not consulted on timing and format, variation in attendance, some councils felt that feedback did not use the other inspection

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspectors learning from each others methods, benefit of joint inspection on triangulation of evidence and wider examples for corroboration 	findings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear how joint processes impact on equalities, diversity and human rights and consistency of view in inspection teams • Differences in JAR/CA guidance and format for self-assessment • Inspection teams familiarity with each other’s criteria, sharing of evidence and examples, alignment of JAR and CA criteria in some

A fundamental issue which hindered the joining up of CA and JAR are the fundamental differences in the methodologies with CA focusing on the strategic level downwards, and JAR working bottom up. This made it hard to practically align and join the processes as noted earlier.

“We worked hard to join things up but it felt like working with something that didn’t naturally fit together” (inspection team leader)

At a high level inspectors and councils were generally clear about the criteria and the broad areas of overlap between CA and JAR but there were areas where they could be better aligned for example around ‘healthier communities’ and ‘being healthy’. The processes were largely perceived as striking an appropriate balance between a focus on process versus outcomes, although this was definitely not a universal view and inspectors acknowledged there were practical difficulties. Similarly most but not all councils, felt that reasonable account was taken across the teams of local circumstances and priorities across the teams (linked back to the use of common baseline information in the previous section).

Importantly there were not seen to be competing priorities between the focus of CA and JAR. Inspectors valued the opportunities to learn from each other’s methodologies, to test out findings with another team, and to be able to draw on a wider range of examples for triangulation of evidence. However, due to the newness of the processes, many inspectors felt they had only just got to grips with their own criteria and therefore were not sufficiently familiar with the other team’s criteria and the overlap between criteria.

The lack of time for team-building meant that differences in cultures, styles, terminology and approaches were very much in evidence across JAR and CA teams, as well as within teams, and further impacted on the coherence of the approach across JAR and CA.

Differing approaches were taken to feedback sessions which did not always give the impression of a coherent approach to councils. Not all feedback sessions were

undertaken jointly between CA and JAR, and some councils were not consulted on the timing and format with one instance of the CA and JAR feedback sessions being run concurrently. Some councils and inspectors felt that the feedback sessions did not adequately draw on the findings of the other inspection to maximise the value of the joint process.

One of the key areas used in our evaluation to test out the coherence of the approach was diversity, equalities and human rights. It was not clear that the joint processes had given any greater weight or impact to this important area than in previous inspections and some councils felt that the JAR and CA teams did not have a consistent view.

3.6 Consistency of outcomes

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency in key messages from CA and JAR • Processes felt to be comparable or sometimes better quality than previous • QA clear to inspectors and seen as timely and helpful • Joint inspector attendance at both CA and JAR team meetings and feedback important in supporting coherence and consistency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some inconsistencies in draft reports pointed out by councils to inspectors • Different reporting styles and formats make joining-up more difficult • More clarity on how capacity for improvement judgement is reached • QA processes not effectively co-ordinated and have different approaches • Links around common outcomes were less evident • Some councils and inspectors felt the inspections lacked depth and consistency of rigour particularly in the outcome areas • Difference in style and tone between feedback and reports.

In most cases the messages from CA and JAR were largely seen to be consistent, although at the workshop some councils reported that they had drawn the inspectors' attention to inconsistencies between the draft reports, and questioned whether this should be their role. Attendance of the joint inspector at both CA and JAR team meetings and feedback sessions was an important factor in ensuring this consistency. Some councils at the workshop noted a hardening of the style and tone of messages between the feedback given on site and the messages in the report, but this was inconsistent between councils. This change in style went against the positive communications reported on the ground.

There were some areas of uncertainty in terms of consistency which included, in some cases, a lack of clarity about how the capacity for improvement judgement of JAR should be reached drawing on the CA findings. The links in terms of common outcome areas between JAR and CA (e.g. outcomes related to healthy and safe) were



also less clear and councils did not always feel that JAR and CA were sufficiently linked in terms of reporting findings in these areas.

Quality assurance processes whilst they were clear to most inspectors and provided them with timely and helpful feedback, were not effectively co-ordinated across CA and JAR and differed in approach.

“I am not sure how the outputs from the separate QA processes connect together, if at all. The CPA grades did move after QA - I am not sure if the JAR grades did or not”
(CA team member)

As noted earlier councils were not clear about the purpose and joining up of these quality assurance processes.

The inspection processes themselves were felt to be comparable or sometimes better quality, than previous inspections experienced by councils. Although some councils and inspectors felt that the inspections lacked depth due to the broad coverage of the criteria and the skills and capacity of the inspection teams to assess the outcomes in a consistently rigorous way.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Introduction

As a result of the work we have done in the evaluation phase, we have identified a number of areas where we believe improvements can be made. In the main these fall into two broad categories:

- those improvements which are mainly administrative in nature, are adjustments or refinements to the current process without major policy implications and some of which can be achieved in a relatively short time span: and
- those which require a more fundamental review of the process to tackle some of the deeper-rooted problems.

We have set out our proposals on the administrative improvements in the four categories we used for the evaluation framework, but the more fundamental choices are addressed on a stand alone basis.

We recognise that throughout the evaluation the inspectorates were constantly receiving feedback from both inspectors and councils on the practical difficulties arising from the bedding in of new processes. As a result of this feedback they were constantly refining the process in order to 'iron out the wrinkles' that were apparent in preceding inspections /reviews. While this constant refinement is to be applauded, it does mean that our recommendations are not made against a static canvas and some will already have been acted upon or been incorporated in some way into future inspections/reviews.

4.2 Developing criteria

At the workshop we wanted to use the opportunity to involve participants in a debate about what inspections/reviews were supposed to deliver both in terms of process and output so that we could then judge potential improvements against these 'criteria.'

The most commonly agreed 'desirable features' of inspections/reviews were:

- Transparent criteria
- Fair
- Positive and challenging
- Consistent/ national approach/ clear framework
- Sufficient evidence for robust judgements
- Proportionate approach
- Manageable and efficient
- Flexible

- Understanding the local context and priorities
- Regular and open feedback
- Clear findings/ direction for change/ value-added (SMART) recommendations focused on improvement
- Outcome and user focus / customer involvement
- Providing public assurance
- Clarity about follow-up

4.3 **Administrative and process refinements**

In this section we address process changes which seek to alleviate some of the frustrations experienced by both inspectors and councils without any reformulation of the criteria or guidelines already agreed between inspectors and councils and some of which can be made in a relatively short timescale. We recognise that there will be some resource implications of these proposals both in planning and implementation but we do not believe the investment required is major and would expect the benefits to be significant in terms of both efficiency and quality improvement.

4.3.1 **Clear Communications**

Key issues identified as areas for improvement were:

- Briefing sessions - clarity of expectations, consistency of message and coverage
- The effectiveness of joint set up meetings
- Understanding the roles and expectations of other regulators
- Uncertainty over the criteria
- Scheduling
- Information requests
- Rationale for interviews
- QA process/purpose and reporting arrangements

In order to address these, we believe the inspectorates should consider:

- 1 *Enhancing the briefing materials for partners/councils to explain the links between the CA and JAR* - producing a simple guide to the process that the Council could share with stakeholders' particularly council staff and partners could help to explain the rationale, purpose and links between inspections. The materials should clarify the roles of other regulators such as the Audit Commission relationship manager, the CSCI business link inspector and the external auditor. They should also explain the process and rationale for QA and reporting and set out a clear timetable of events.

- 2 *Reviewing the content of the briefing sessions* - in order to ensure that councils' expectations are clearly managed and that they are realistic in the light of past experience.
- 3 *Better co-ordination of document requests* - many of the documents needed by the teams are common; more co-ordination would ensure the smooth running of the process and that each team received documents in a timely manner without increasing the burden on the councils; this may also help councils in better signposting sections of the documents to ensure that the inspectors are clearly aware of the evidence being provided.
- 4 *Communications with council link officers* - are viewed by many as a strength but need to be consistent in the way they approach the programming of the inspection work to ensure that the Council gets the maximum time to set up the interviews etc and that the rationale and expectations for these interviews are made explicit.

4.3.2 **Managing the process**

Key issues identified as areas for improvement were:

- Logistics, particularly for small councils
- The timing and style of guidance and the toolkit
- Roles and training for inspectors
- Time and capacity - insufficient for planning, joint meetings etc
- Administrative support and IT
- No council felt that inspection burden had reduced and other inspections/assessments taking place in close proximity
- Some duplication and changing of interviews
- The sustainability of the overall process

In order to address these, we believe the inspectorates should consider:

- 1 *Compatibility of IT systems across inspectorates* - different IT systems meant that the sharing of information between teams was made difficult and tardy; while it may not be possible in the short term to have completely compatible IT systems it should be possible to establish processes to ensure that both teams could access the others findings more quickly to inform judgements and ease communications without the need for face to face meetings.
- 2 *Joint administration support* - the CA process was helped by administrative support which was not available to the JAR; a joint administrative role could ensure time savings for all concerned and also facilitate the exchange of information between teams.
- 3 *Creating more time/opportunity for CA and JAR teams to meet beforehand* - this would ensure a greater understanding between the teams and enable information

and approaches to be shared in a co-ordinated manner, thus ensuring the smooth running of the processes once on site.

- 4 *Reviewing the timing and content of guidance* - ensuring that councils have a realistic timeframe in which to act upon guidance and ensuring that its content is regularly reviewed to reflect feedback received.
- 5 *Developing training for inspectors* - to ensure that joint inspectors have sufficient grounding in order to undertake what is a demanding but critical role and that other inspectors have sufficient training to make the links across to the other framework in order to lessen the burden on the joint inspector.
- 6 *Understanding the burden* – while it is unlikely that the burden for councils will be significantly decreased without some major changes to the frameworks for CA and JAR, lead and joint inspectors can acknowledge the difficulties caused by changes to schedules, late guidance etc and can work with link officers to minimise these impacts. Training for inspectors should reinforce this role.
- 7 *Managing overall inspection activity* – ensuring where possible that other inspection and audit activity is kept separate from the process.

4.3.3 **Coherence of approach**

Key issues identified as areas for improvement were:

- Different methodologies do not support joining-up
- Lack of consistency and standardisation in the inspection approaches - evidence collection, terminology, feedback sessions etc
- Impact on equalities, diversity and human rights
- Differences in JAR/CA guidance and format for self-assessment
- Inspection teams familiarity with each other's criteria, sharing of evidence and examples.

In order to address these, we believe the inspectorates should consider:

- 1 *Developing greater consistency in the style and timetabling of feedback* - including:
 - what constitutes feedback
 - the expectations of daily briefings on progress and areas that needed further investigation
 - the degree to which arrangements are ad-hoc or formalised and time-tabled
 - a unified scoring system
- 2 *Ensure training for inspectors covers an understanding of the other's methodology.*
- 3 *Use the pre-site joint planning meeting to:*

- enable the CA team to provide feedback to the JAR on their self assessment and vice versa. This would ensure that both teams had a confirmed understanding of the other's work and possible areas for investigation; it may highlight a commonality of areas of concern or those where less investigation was necessary
- work out an agreed approach to covering equalities, diversity and human rights issues.

4.3.4 **Consistency of outcomes**

Key issues identified as areas for improvement were:

- Different reporting styles and formats
- More clarity on how the capacity for improvement judgement is reached
- QA processes not effectively co-ordinated and have different approaches
- Links around common outcomes
- Depth of inspection

In order to address these, we believe the inspectorates should consider:

- 1 Developing a more unified reporting style*
- 2 Making clear how the capacity for improvement judgement is reached - particularly how the CA findings are used to inform the JAR judgement*
- 3 Working towards a common QA system - to ensure consistency of outcomes and reports and to minimise the duplication of activity*

4.4 **The longer term**

In this section we take a longer term view and try to identify changes and choices which go beyond those of incremental improvement. In particular these cover:

4.4.1 **The timing of inspections/reviews**

Throughout our evaluation we have been aware of a range of views about whether the bringing together of the CA and JAR process has brought benefits in the concentration of inspection activity or has added to the burden because of its unwieldiness. Certainly it has been the experience of councils that these are two distinct and separate inspection activities, that claims made for their integration have not been fully realised and that by their very nature will always 'feel' different because they set out to do different jobs in a different way. So, while there are clearly some benefits in the bringing together of inspection teams in that they offer a challenge to each other's findings and there are practical improvements that can be made from better 'bedding in' the new activities, there is a majority view that the

inspections happening at precisely the same time did not bring sufficient benefits to warrant the additional administrative workload, both for councils and inspectorates.

In order to tackle this issue we have identified two possible solutions. The first is to stagger the inspection activity so that JAR starts around a week before the CA. This would have the benefit of the JAR's more community-based activity taking place in the first week while the period of overlap would be at the time that it is considering more strategic aspects, which is where the CA also concentrates its first week. The 'on the ground' findings from JAR's first week would then be able to feed more naturally into overall judgements in both JAR and CA, while at the same time offering a slightly reduced burden to the Council in the intensity of interview arrangements and associated administration.

An alternative would be to separate JAR and CA activities by a wider margin. In this scenario, JAR would be seen as a stand alone service inspection which would inform the CA in the same way that other service based inspections inform it, but the separation of the activity by a period of, say, three months would spread the burden on councils and allow time for a considered judgement of the evidence from JAR before it feeds in to the CA.

Initially we felt that the evidence pointed to the second option being more likely to produce the greater benefits. From the initial feedback we had received from both councils and inspectors we felt that the process could be made significantly more manageable with a three month separation while many of the benefits of co-ordination could be retained. However, the view of the majority of councils at the workshop was that the more staggered approach would be preferable - they felt that it was best 'to get it over in one go!'

4.4.2 **Resources**

While we cannot assume that there are significant new resources available for conducting CA/JAR, it is clear that there are some areas for improvement which do require a review of the way resources are currently used. Within the work to date interviewees have highlighted that:

- The role of the joint inspector is particularly arduous and will need to be carefully managed to be sustainable over the programme of planned inspections
- There needs to be additional administration support for JAR teams - even if it is provided on a joint basis
- Teams should arrange to spend a greater time together in the analysis phase in order to co-ordinate understandings and inspection activities more fully
- During the on-site phase there needs to be more time for reflection and hypothesis testing

The impact of each of these individually is not particularly large but overall they represent an additional resource requirement for each inspection/review. Some of this could be achieved by the bedding in of processes allowing teams to 'work smarter'

but it is unlikely this will cover all of the gap, so there will need to be a re-assessment of the overall resource.

4.4.3 **Proportionality and focus**

There are two issues here which are both related to delivering inspections/reviews which are more tailored to the specific circumstances of an individual council and area and more attuned to an assessment of risk. Within the evaluation phase, some councils and inspectors have expressed the view that the current approach errs too much in the side of 'one size fits all' and does not take sufficient account of local circumstances. Within JAR this is most often expressed in the difficulty in making any change to the 'ten judgements' which are pre-selected as areas of focus as a result of the analysis phase. For CA, it might also be expressed in the judgement on outcomes, which is not yet full mature as a process, and which therefore tends to be process driven.

It appears to us that the forward strategic regulation agenda is pointing towards a process which sees each organisation and area as unique and which requires a proportionate, focused and co-ordinated programme of inspection/review activity. In order to meet this requirement CA and JAR will evolve to be more flexible than is currently the case and will use data collection processes BVPIs, APA, audit judgements including Use of Resources and contextual information such as the area profiles to agree more bespoke inspections/reviews. This will also have a significant impact on resources, there may be a reduction in the requirement in some councils/areas but an increase in others.

4.4.4 **Better explanation of the inspection/review process**

Finally, there is a clear need to explain the inspection/ review process in order that all parties, particularly those who are not so close to the activity such as key council partners, are aware of the objectives, processes, outputs and consequences of inspection/review activity. There is no doubt in our minds that some of the difficulties encountered in the evaluation phase have been caused by a lack of explanation and understanding rather than any fundamental flaw in the principle. This is true within the inspection teams as well as in the interaction between inspectors and councils. For this reason we see the need to build a more co-ordinated approach to the explanation of inspection/review, not only in correspondence with councils but also in inter-inspectorate activity and the training of inspectors so that the whole process is consistent and transparent and clarifies expectations.

5 Appendices

5.1 Appendix 1 - Evaluation Criteria

5.1.1 Clear communications

Arrangements for the JAR/CA processes were communicated effectively so that the rationale and approach were clear to the Council and partner organisations. Requests for information and ongoing engagement with the Council and its partners were effective and well co-ordinated.

- How were the communications/relationship managed? By one inspection support coordinator/link inspector? What was the role of the Audit Commission's Relationship Manager and the CSCI Business Link Inspector?
- Did the briefings and on-going communications clarify the purpose, rationale and approach of the CA/JAR and the linkages between them, to the Council and partner organisations? Were inspectors' expectations of the Council and other agencies clearly communicated at a sufficiently early stage?
- Were expectations of the Council with regard to the logistics of the inspection communicated clearly and was the Council given the opportunity to express their views about the best way to find the necessary evidence? Were joint set-up meetings held and at a timely moment and how effective were they? Did they allow councils enough time to make the practical arrangements?
- Were there separate requests for documents from the two inspection teams? Or was this handled in a coordinated manner? If there were separate requests were the timeframes for these different or co-ordinated?
- Was the rationale behind the inspection schedule clear? Was there any duplication in terms of the inspection schedules e.g. duplicate interview requests with council staff and partners in the locality?
- Was ongoing engagement effective, well co-ordinated and clear and were requests for information co-ordinated and communicated in a timely manner?
- Were the quality assurance arrangements made clear to the Council? Was it clear how the information would be used?
- Were the deadlines/timescales for reporting made clear to the Council and were they met? Were both the JAR and CA reports received at the same time?
- How would you rate the effectiveness, clarity and co-ordination of communications with the council and partner organisations on a 1 to 5 scale (where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent)?

5.1.2 **Managing the process**

Internal processes ensured that JAR and CA inspectors effectively plan the inspection and share ongoing findings for example in terms of self-assessments, information requests and recording of evidence, in order to minimise the burden on the council and its partners and optimise the inspectoral input.

- Did the two inspection teams have access to appropriate tools/guidance, training, briefings to support the smooth running and robustness of the process?
- Did inspectorates share information at an early stage? Were the inspection teams working from the same contextual/baseline information and effectively co-ordinating information from other sources e.g. relationship manager, external audit reports?
- How did the teams work together to plan and manage the inspection so that JAR and CA processes were consistent /complementary to each other where possible? Did the teams agree upfront with each other what meetings would be conducted jointly and at what points the team would liaise / meet? Did they or should they have planning workshops/weeks together? How did teams share findings during the on-site and reporting stages?
- Was there an on-site support administrator for the inspection teams? Did this improve the organisational logistics of the inspection? Did it reduce the burden on the Council?
- Were inspectors clear about their respective roles and responsibilities across the two teams including the role of the joint inspector?
- Did the JAR Lead Inspector attend the CA challenge meeting? Was the CA Lead Inspector involved in the JAR pre-inspection briefing (PIB)?
- Did the Council feel that the inspection was effectively joined up - in the planning, on-site and in the analysis and reporting?
- Did the need to produce two self-assessments to accommodate both JAR and CA provide an added burden? To what extent are they complementary? How did the teams make use of the self-assessments during the process? Was this clear to the Council?
- How would you rate the management of internal processes on a 1 to 5 scale (where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent)?

5.1.3 Coherence of approach

JAR and CA processes are complementary and standardised where possible and common criteria are used for judging overlapping areas such as leadership and service management

- Were the inspection criteria clear and coherent to the council and its partners? Was it clear what the council needed to focus on and provide in the self-assessment in terms of evidence against the criteria? Did the process take sufficient account of local priorities across CA and JAR?
- Was there consistency across CA/JAR in terms of terminology and style of approach?
- How did inspection teams cover/prevent duplication when assessing common themes e.g. on service management and outcomes? Were the JAR and CA criteria appropriately aligned e.g. on leadership and service management and common outcomes such as healthier communities/being healthy, safer and stronger communities/staying safe and achieving economic well-being / sustainable communities?
- Was there clarity about how the capacity for improvement judgment would be reached in the JAR drawing on the CA findings?
- In planning the schedule and identifying key areas on which to focus were there any 'competing' priorities between the JAR and CA that made 'focusing' the inspection 'difficult'?
- Was equality of opportunity and human rights consistently assessed across JAR and CA? Is there any evidence that the implementation of the new CA/JAR is having a positive or negative effect on the promotion of human rights and equality of opportunity?
- Was a proportional amount of time spent on corporate and service management themes compared to assessing outcomes against the shared priorities and the JAR outcomes? Was there enough time to adequately assess the contributions of the councils (and other partners) to outcomes outlined in both inspection processes?
- Did teams work effectively together to prepare for on-site feedback? Were feedback sessions informally/formally undertaken jointly or separately and was there a consistency in the messages given in both informal and formal feedback from the inspection teams?
- Do joint inspections help to make the processes proportionate to risk and tailored to local needs and circumstances?
- How would you rate the coherence of the approach in overlapping areas such as service management on a 1 to 5 scale (where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent)?

5.1.4 **Consistency of findings/outcomes**

Inspection reports are consistent with each other in terms of messages and grading, based on secure evidence and provide a clearer focus for improvement than would have been the case as a result of two separate inspections.

- Was the inspection of comparable quality with previous similar inspections?
- Did the inspectors focus, from the council's perspective, on the relevant areas and use the joint process to maximise the range of activities that inspectors carry out whilst on-site? Was there anything they should / should not have done?
- Did JAR and CA inspectors effectively share and communicate their findings and analysis to ensure JAR and CA reports are consistent with each other in terms of messages and grading and make coherent, relevant, well-founded and clear judgements? Were judgements valid, securely based on the evidence collected and consistent? Were the reports useful to the Council in providing a basis for a well informed and focused improvement planning process?
- Did the Internal quality assurance add value to the process? Could QA processes be more co-ordinated? How were the consistency panels managed? Was the extent and focus of quality assurance proportionate and differentiated?
- Did the two inspections process reduce the burden on the Council and did it result in a more proportional inspection process? Were there other benefits / negative implications?
- How would you rate the consistency of the findings and outcomes on a 1 to 5 scale (where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent)?

5.2 **Appendix 2 - Questionnaire and scoring**

5.2.1 **Questionnaire analysis**

The general sentiment emerging from the questionnaire analysis indicates that the joint inspection process was a positive experience for the team members involved, but much work remains to be done. The post of the joint inspector received very positive feedback, and communication between team leaders and within teams worked well. Co-location, information sharing and joint interviewing were also regarded as helpful.

However, suggested improvements reflect a strong feeling that the process of joint working is not yet fully optimised. The differing emphasis of the two inspections, differing methodology and the lack of common feedback templates made working together difficult. As co-ordination time was limited, "on the ground" communication between teams was weak. Additionally, final results don't seem to have been shared yet; as can be seen below, caution was exercised by most team members when rating question 4.

A final recurring theme was the lack of preparation, communication, and assistance to the Council. It was acknowledged that even in cases where the process appeared coherent and organised to team members this was probably not the case for council staff. Although responses from council staff are too few to be representative, some strong views were expressed. It was felt that the process created unnecessary bureaucracy and did not add value.

Overall, views on the process differ widely, with answers ranging from poor to excellent on each category even within the same team. Average ratings are indicated in the table below, but for reasons indicated above should be interpreted with care.

Additionally, the number of responses differs according to each question, with question 1 receiving 22 ratings, dropping to just 14 out of 26 ratings for question 4 which is probably a reflection of the fact that the questionnaire was issued whilst the reporting stage of the inspection processes was ongoing and therefore some respondents felt unable to comment on consistency of outcomes.

	Overall	CA Team	JAR Team	Leaders and Joint inspectors	Council
<i>Number of responses*</i>	26	6	11	4	5
Average scores					
Clear Communication	3.2	3.6	3.1	3.3	3.0
Managing the Process	3.3	3.6	3.4	2.7	3.0
Coherence of Approach	3.0	2.8	3.1	3.3	2.7
Consistency of Outcome	3.4	3.8	3.0	3.5	3.0

* The number of responses indicates the number of questionnaires received from each group. Not all respondents allocated scores for each category.

5.2.2 Summary of all scores

The following table summarises the average scores given by Councils and by Inspectors incorporating scores given by interviewees and the scores from the questionnaire (see above).

Aspect of the process	Average score	
	Councils	Inspectors
Clear communications	3.1	3.5
Managing the process	2.7	3.3
Coherence of approach	2.5	2.9
Consistency of outcomes	2.8	3.5

5.3 **Appendix 3 - Emerging conclusions workshop**

The findings of our evaluation from the early pilots and tranche 1 councils were presented at an emerging conclusions workshop in early December 2005. This was attended by representatives from the inspectorates and councils involved in the evaluation and members of the Oversight Panel. This section gives details of the workshop objectives and structure, workshop participants, and a summary of the key messages from the discussion sessions.

5.3.1 **Workshop objectives and agenda**

Workshop objectives:

- Provide the opportunity for stakeholders to understand and confirm our evaluation findings
- Collect ideas about how the process might be improved for the future

Workshop agenda:

10.00 Tea and coffee available

10.30 Start/introductions/purpose of the day

10.40 Presentation by KPMG of the main findings of the evaluation

11.10 First break out groups - separate groups for inspectors and council officers at this stage. Where possible inspectors should avoid being in the same group as their inspection 'team-mates.'

Topic - do the findings reported by KPMG broadly match the group's experiences and what are the key aspects which worked well/ less well in each of the areas identified in the KPMG report i.e.

- Clear communications
- Managing the process
- Coherence of approach
- Consistency of outcomes

Ask each group to focus on no more than 3 or 4 items under each heading

12.00 Short feedback from each group

12.30 Lunch

1.10 Second break out groups - mixed groups.

Q1. What are the desirable features of the inspection process to satisfy the needs of both councils and other stakeholders in inspection?

Q2. What changes could be made?

- in the short term; and
- the longer term

..which will move the process towards this ideal?

2.00 Short feedback from each group

2.30 Concluding remarks
What happens next?
Thanks for attending

2.45 Close
Tea/coffee for those able to stay and network

5.3.2 Workshop participants

Name	Organisation
Huw Jones	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
Sarah Diggle	Audit Commission
Paul Jackson	Audit Commission
Sue Bamford	Calderdale Council
Chris Batty	CSCI
Mary Perry	CSCI

Name	Organisation
Sue Eardley	Healthcare Commission
Arran Poyser	HMICA
Alison Trew	London Borough of Enfield
Marie Basting	Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Melanie Swanwick	Staffordshire County Council
Alison Jordan	Staffordshire County Council
Clive Harrison	Audit Commission
Susan Mew	Audit Commission
Jonathan Swain	Audit Commission
John Browning	DfES
Nick Easton	LGA
Flo Hadley	OfSTED
Liz Terry	Slough Borough Council
Wayne Longshaw	Stoke City Council
Bill Sanderson	Audit Commission
Pat Johnson	Audit Commission
Alan Jones	CSCI
Jane Jones	Herefordshire Council
Liz Calderbank	Home Office
David Olney	London Borough of Sutton
Hilary Morse	ODPM
John Cordwell	OfSTED

Name	Organisation
Jo Preston	Slough Borough Council
Helen Riley	Staffordshire County Council
Sue Barnes	Stoke City Council
Sally Lee	OfSTED
Corinne Bartholomew	London Borough of Sutton
Annie Brookes	Herefordshire Council
Richard Parry	West Sussex County Council

5.3.3 Key messages

Summarised below are the key messages from the two break-out sessions held at the workshop. There were many common themes between the individual groups.

Session 1: Confirming evaluation findings

The general consensus from participants was that our findings are a fair reflection of their views of the JAR and CA process. Participants were surprised at the variation in terms of experiences and approaches between councils, although in terms of main messages there was a high degree of consistency of views about what had worked well and what could be improved (summarised below), and these helpfully reinforced our findings. A number of groups felt that it was unclear what ‘added value’ had been gained from joining the processes and felt inevitably that they were parallel processes that connected at certain points rather than a joined up process. The extra effort put in by inspectors and councils to make this work was recognised and it was challenged whether this was sustainable, and whether the same effort would still be applied in later tranches and if not, the implications of this in terms of rigour and consistency of approach. There were varying views in relation to whether the joining of CA and JAR had resulted in the focus within the council being skewed towards children’s services. This was an area of our findings where some people disagreed, and some councils felt that this focus had been helpful in raising the profile of the children’s agenda at a corporate level.

There was recognition by many that the approach will take time to embed and some of the issues were indicative of a new and emerging system. Councils when discussing their experiences in the groups, recognised that there had been improvements between the early pilot inspections and tranche 1 inspections which they saw as positive. From the discussions between the groups of council representatives it was clear that the logistics of the inspection processes had been hard

for all involved, and there were differing views about whether it was better to get both JAR and CA out of the way in 'one hit' or whether to have had two separate inspections.

What worked well?

Clear communications:

- Communications between the council and inspectors including daily briefings (although not universally positive for all councils)
- Timeliness of communications in the lead up to the inspection

Managing the process:

- Inspectors staying in the same hotel
- Role of the link inspector in taking an overview across CA and JAR
- Good working relationships between lead inspectors is key

Coherence of approach:

- Flexibility in approach taken by some teams to reflect local circumstances
- Use of evidence between teams (but more JAR to CA than vice versa)

Consistency of outcomes:

- Quality assurance was helpful for some inspectors
- Teams being able to challenge each others' findings was useful in terms of testing whether judgements are secure
- Findings largely consistent between teams

What could be improved?

Clear communications

- Early briefings not always helpful in understanding the practicalities
- Not all joint interviews were appropriate or purpose made clear
- Rationale for specific interviews not always made clear
- Scheduling was difficult and time consuming and involved late changes

Managing the process

- Insufficient time for team-building and to make links between the processes
- Lack of joint admin support across JAR and CA teams
- Burden on the joint inspector (trying to do two jobs)
- Different evidence recording systems between JAR and CA
- Differences in culture and approach between inspectors from different backgrounds

Coherence of approach

- Late guidance
- Differing and inconsistent approaches to on-site feedback
- Not always sufficiently focused on outcomes due to burden of getting the inspection process done

Consistency of outcomes

- Purpose of the quality assurance not clear to councils and processes did not link up across CA and JAR
- Differing messages and a hardening of messages between on-site feedback and reporting
- Differing experiences in terms of quality of reports between councils
- Reporting styles and formats different between JAR and CA
- No control group to judge if burden has reduced or not

Session 2: Ideas for the future

In the second break-out session the groups were first asked to identify what they felt were the desirable features of the 'ideal' inspection process to satisfy the needs of both councils and other stakeholders in inspection. They were then asked what changes could be made in the short and longer-term to move the process more towards this ideal. The key messages are summarised below.

Desirable features

The most commonly identified features in no particular order were:

- Transparent criteria
- Fair
- Positive and challenging
- Consistent/ national approach/ clear framework
- Sufficient evidence for robust judgements
- Proportionate approach
- Manageable and efficient
- Flexible
- Understanding the local context and priorities
- Regular and open feedback
- Clear findings/ direction for change/ value-added (SMART) recommendations focused on improvement
- Outcome and user focus / customer involvement
- Providing public assurance
- Clarity about follow-up

Short-term ideas for improvements

Clear communications

- Make clear what the added value/expected benefits are and set clearer expectations on the joining up of processes and on feedback at different stages and how definitive it can be
- Establish clear relationship between star rating, APA, JAR and implications for CA/CPA
- Ensure a clear rationale for activities – make clear what the focus and purpose is which should flow from initial analysis
- Regular briefings / catch-up meetings between teams and councils – jointly by CA and JAR
- Better engagement across the process for wider stakeholders e.g. health, police
- Articulate expectations of the link council officer
- Communicate arrangements earlier

Managing the process

- Feasibility of timetabling – explore ways to do joint interviews in week one
- Firmer/tighter ‘upstream’ scheduling
- Make clear which joint interviews will be most valuable
- More preparation time
- Joint admin support
- More time between analysis week and fieldwork week

- Take account of holiday periods e.g. for surveys
- Spread joint inspectors role across other team members and be clear re: joint inspector expectations
- Composition of team including skills mix and diversity to better match inspection requirements / local circumstances
- Creating the 'space' to learn and evaluate (and feed in improvements) to the inspection process
- Earlier co-ordination of joint planning
- Compatible IT systems

Coherence of approach

- Establish common principals for teams to support cultural change
- Finalise descriptors
- Better guidance for self assessment
- Better sign posting of where evidence is within documents
- Make better use of evidence and data pre on-site
- Improved scoping / tighter scoping

Consistency of outcomes

- Consistency of recommendations and particularly timescales – need to link to internal improvement/service planning cycles
- Clarity around reporting timescales, formats and publication and consistency between CA and JAR
- QA – more transparent and explain clearly up front

Long-term ideas for improvements

The long-term ideas for improvements focused largely around ideas relating to greater proportionality and differentiation according to risk, and a tighter inspection 'gateway' to manage inspection activity. Recognising local context was a crucial theme as was a focusing of activity on outcomes. In terms of whether JAR and CA should continue to be run as joint inspection processes, there were differing views as to whether there should be a degree of separation and how much this should be.

Specific feedback included the following suggestions:

- Refocus inspections onto the four blocks of the local area agreement and a corporate assessment of the LSP follows
- Long term monitoring of JAR outcomes
- More detailed learning /sharing good practice to support improvement
- Shift emphasis back to evidence like performance indicators and self-assessment on a continual basis with clear trigger points for inspection activity as a fall back position.
- Review differences in process between CA and JAR – consider if these are valid?
- Reconsider rule of 'one neighbourhood' in terms of the approach
- Timing - one process but phased e.g. run JAR slightly ahead of CA

- Flexibility from inspectors
- Do JAR and CA separately

5.4 Appendix 4 - JAR specific findings

The table below summarises the key issues raised in our evaluation which relate specifically to the JAR methodology / process and the implications of each issue.

JAR specific issue	Implications of this issue
Extrapolation of the neighbourhood study to apply to the whole area	In authorities with significant diversity for example in terms of demography, deprivation, geography etc, a neighbourhood study in one area can never be representative of the whole borough.
Large size of JAR teams	Makes it difficult to build relationships and develop a cohesive team. Impacts on the ability to join up effectively with the CA Team.
Lack of time for team-building – analysis week was often the first time that the whole team had met.	Impacts on the ability to develop a cohesive team. Results in tensions within teams in terms of inspection style and approach due to different backgrounds of team members.
Selection of the 10 judgements for the on-site work made too far in advance and without the benefit of the findings of the analysis week.	Results of the analysis week were not always consistent with the 10 judgements identified for the inspection focus. Some teams would have liked to have changed the focus to reflect the latest picture.
Tension between the focus on 10 judgements in the on-site work but the need to report on all the JAR judgements.	Lack of proportionality of approach, meant in some cases it felt like a ‘tickbox’ approach against the judgements rather than flexed to local circumstances. Added to the burden on the teams because additional work undertaken to ensure coverage of all judgements.
Some councils given preliminary scores in	An inconsistent approach between councils which will be

their on-site JAR feedback before the consistency panels had taken place.	seen as unfair. Undermines the role of the quality assurance process in terms of ensuring consistency of judgements and scoring.
Concise nature of JAR reports does not reflect the level of detail of the inspection process.	Councils do not perceive the reports as providing sufficient detail given the depth of the inspection, and therefore their value / impact is potentially reduced.

5.5 Appendix 5 - CA specific findings

The table below summarises the key issues raised in our evaluation which relate specifically to the CA methodology / process and the implications of each issue.

CA specific issue	Implications of this issue
Breadth of the inspection particularly in the shared priority areas – concerns that the coverage has grown but the resources have not.	Need to be selective in terms of use of the key lines of enquiry. Sustainability of the process in the long-term for inspectors who had to work long hours to ensure adequate coverage.
Difficulties evidencing impact in the shared priority areas.	May require different approaches to assessment depending on the quality of evidence presented by the Council e.g. some teams undertook more on the ground reality checking where paper based evidence of outcomes was weak.
Insufficient focus on exploring the user perspective in relation to the shared priority areas.	Inspection does not meet expectations of having a strong user focus and the approach is potentially undermined.
Skill mix within teams not always matched to the shared priority themes.	Different depths of understanding across the shared priority areas which meant the process was not consistent in terms of rigour across all themes.
Late timing of the stakeholder survey	The value of the survey was not always maximised in the analysis week particularly.
Lack of prescription of the self-assessment	Resulted in a weaker self-assessment compared to the



guidance	JAR, in some cases.
Availability and skills of peer team members (particularly IT skills)	Impacted on team capacity where peers had other commitments during the fieldwork, and where there were skills deficits which meant other team members had to provide additional support.



Oversight Panel

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process*

KPMG LLP

9 February 2006

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