

## **Response to the Comprehensive Area Assessment Consultation**

### **Do you broadly agree with our proposals for the overall CAA framework?**

Circle Anglia welcomes the concept of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) as set out in the consultation document.

Circle Anglia is one of the UK's leading providers of affordable housing. With a dedicated team of more than 1,600 staff, Circle Anglia manages more than 46,000 homes, including supported and sheltered housing, for more than 180,000 people across the UK.

The Circle Anglia Group includes 10 partners. Seven registered social landlords (RSLs): South Anglia Housing, Wherry Housing Association, Old Ford Housing Association, Circle 33 Housing Trust, Roddons Housing Association, Mole Valley Housing Association and Russet Homes; two support & care partners: EPIC Trust and Invicta Telecare, as well as Commercial Services Circle Anglia for shared ownership, market rent and private sale properties.

As a group we have a commitment to improving the prospects for the whole community where our residents and service users reside and believe that a tool such as CAA is necessary to enable residents, our local partners and central government to understand the local area, the changes that are happening and what interventions are having an impact.

Circle Anglia's commitment is guided by our Sustainable Communities Strategy which sets out how we will operate a comprehensive approach to our presence in the community. When implementing this strategy it is often difficult to prioritise our activities in the absence of a complete picture of the needs of the local population in a particular area. Therefore we welcome the bringing together of different assessment regimes to show how the different actions of various agents combine to have an impact on place. It is only by looking at the cumulative impact of all activities in an area, delivered by different organisations that we will be able to improve the way that we work together.

### **Are the area assessment and the organisational assessment, as the two key elements of the framework, clearly explained?**

Yes – but as a housing organisation it is still unclear how the new inspection regime will relate to these assessment processes. We do believe that these two elements of the framework should enable us to identify which service areas we need to concentrate on in delivering services to our residents and users.

We understand that the CAA will cover a wide range of issues including the strength of the local economy availability of affordable housing, children's wellbeing, how safe people feel, support for individuals to improve their health, provision for the vulnerable, and the quality of the local environment.

We believe that Circle Anglia and its residents and service users will benefit by the drawing together of assessments from such a broad scope. Indeed we believe it should be widened as much as possible as Circle Anglia looks forward to working together with other key providers of services where our residents live.

EPIC, a charity which is a member of the Circle Anglia group, and provides a wide range of support and care functions can also see value in the more developed picture of integration of services that

CAA will introduce. EPIC sees one of its main aims as the integration of support and care clients into the wider community through engaging with other service providers and wider community activities. So, for instance, we encourage residents in sheltered accommodation to take part in activities that take them out into the community and bring the community into their homes. If introduced the CAA should enable this to happen more easily as services will move towards holistic assessment as well as this approach being recognised and valued.

### **Is the link between these two assessments clear?**

As set out the CAA will give people a clear and impartial assessment of how successfully local organisations are working together to improve the quality of life in their areas. If it succeeds in this it can only help all providers improve service provision.

The introduction of CAA is an opportunity for housing providers to develop closer place making relationship with key local authority partners. We therefore welcome the statement - ***“it is vital for local authorities and their local housing partners to work well together for the benefit of the communities they serve. ... CAA will act as a catalyst for public services to deliver better housing outcomes for local people and better value for public money, as well as to contribute to an improved quality of life and well-being for the communities they serve.”***

To succeed in this we support the need for an area assessment and an organisational assessment of local authorities and fire and rescue service. In our key areas we play a role on the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in delivering local Sustainable Community Strategies to deliver Local Area Agreement priorities. The area assessment is necessary and will help us to evaluate our performance and improve outcomes local communities rather than just manage housing stock in isolation.

We feel less able to comment on the organisational assessment process.

The Housing Corporation’s Neighbourhood and Community Strategy (2006) sets out their overall policy for this area and stresses that Housing Associations must have strategies which are responsive to their communities’ local, economic and social environments. The National Housing Federation is also keen to promote the wider role of Housing Associations through Inbiz.

With the advent of the new Tenant Services Authority and the Homes and Communities Agency Circle Anglia hopes that there will be increased focus on the integration of the provision of good quality homes and the services meeting local community needs. We are planning to further develop programmes that meet the needs of the wider communities where we provide significant numbers of homes and to demonstrate how we are prepared to enhance our strategic partnerships with local authorities.

Whilst some Housing Associations are not of sufficient size or have different businesses, the experience of Housing Associations who are willing and able to play this wider place making role should contribute to the CAA.

**Do you agree that the three questions and supporting issues (see Appendix1) proposed for the area assessment are the right ones? If not, please suggest alternative questions and/or issues.**

### **What are the prospects for future improvements?**

The answer to these questions will help us assess how well we are contributing to the delivery of local priorities which is welcome. By providing people with a home, carrying out repairs, building new homes, and managing the environment, Housing Associations provide a solid base to meet individual aspirations. Circle Anglia is now advocating the adoption of a “Life Chances” approach and has five areas of operation we feel contribute:

- Development of new homes: By providing people with a home and by developing new homes with varied offers (such as shared ownership) we are meeting current and future needs and giving people choices
- Management of the asset: By investing in our homes, with the aim to provide efficient repairs service and improve the quality of home and the local environment we provide decent homes that improve the quality of life of our residents
- Management of the tenancy: By managing these homes in line with our neighbourhood management strategy we aim to address issues around respect and anti social behaviour to make the home, environment and area a better place to live. We are also developing through our resident involvement strategy a range of ways in which our customers can shape the services they receive and be involved
- Provision of Care and Support: By providing sheltered housing and a range of support for elders we are enabling people to live longer and independently in their own homes and the communities they live in. By providing wider supported housing and support for young people, people with learning disabilities and mental health issues we enable people to sustain their tenancies and live independently
- Wider role in the community: By providing community development work in line with our Sustainable Communities Strategy we contribute to developing and building communities.

The Life Chances model is a framework which can now be used to prioritise and provide a focus for these activities to improve the way we enable our residents to meet their aspirations. We are sharing this approach as part of our response to this consultation to demonstrate how the scope of our business contributes to meeting the aspirations of individuals and will impact on the wider community. We are keen that this approach and experience of delivery is able to contribute to CAAs and the answer to these questions will help us deliver our own business priorities as well as demonstrate our commitment to the local community.

In Hackney Circle 33 are currently working with the Local Authority to tackle worklessness – we have an outreach programme designed to identify our residents who would benefit from assistance of local agencies in finding work. With the introduction of the flexible new deal contracts we expect this activity to increase as many providers have contacted us with a view to working with us to provide access to residents who are not currently in work. The contact is face to face and tailored to individual's needs. We believe this activity will be an effective tool in bringing down worklessness, improving individual life chances and thus enhancing the local economy. The CAA should be able to demonstrate the worth of this activity, improve its delivery and know the impact of this work can be measured.

**Do you agree that we should use the green and red flag approach for reporting the area assessment? If not, please suggest an alternative approach.**

Circle Anglia has been engaged in developing methods of measuring the impact of its community focused activities both on the community and on its business priorities. It is working with other Housing Associations to develop a framework or toolkit to introduce an accepted way of measuring impact of community focused activity across the sector.

As set out in the consultation we believe it is important that any assessment builds on existing indicators and regimes. An examination of the data captured and information gathered through existing processes should identify enough indicators to build a bigger picture. If any additional

indicators are needed it will be necessary to ensure that resource expended is commensurate with impact of adopting new assessment processes. For instance we carry out surveys amongst our tenants on a regular basis which include questions about their local environment and would be interested in discussing how this data will contribute to the CAA when discussions about how the new housing inspection regime will relate to the process.

The Green and Red flag approach will be a useful way of giving an indication of the summary of this data and movement – we feel that in some cases an amber flag may be appropriate if there are no significant concerns or exceptional success.

**Do you agree that we should have one overall organisational effectiveness judgement, drawn from integrating the managing performance theme and the use of resources themes?**

It will be useful to have a one overall effectiveness assessment to better understand the performance of how the local authority and the fire and rescue services.

**Do you agree with our proposals for the key questions and focus for the managing performance theme of the organisational assessment for:**

**a) councils?**

**b) fire and rescue services?**

**If not, please suggest alternative questions and/or focus.**

The KLOEs cover the issues that would enable performance to be assessed from a housing associations point of view.

**Which of the three options for scoring the organisational assessment should we adopt? If you disagree with all the options, please propose an alternative approach to scoring.**

No views.

**Do the proposals provide for an appropriate focus to be given to people in vulnerable circumstances?**

The equalities and diversity commitments are robust and should ensure appropriate focus on vulnerable people.

**Do you agree that CAA should evolve over time?**

Although not a single Housing Association responded to the first round of consultation Circle Anglia believes it is important that the CAA recognises the wider place making role of housing providers and this should be properly integrated into an evolving process.

Although Circle Anglia accepts that the substantial change in the regulatory framework for housing means that it is not yet possible to develop this aspect of the CAA we welcome the opportunity of this consultation to express our commitment to our place-shaping role. We will also, when appropriate, respond to any consultations on the relationship of the new regulatory regime for housing to CAAs.

So yes – the CAA should evolve over time.

**Do you broadly agree with the way we are proposing to use the National Indicator Set within the CAA framework?**

It will be essential to demonstrate that actions are contributing to improvements desired by local people and to enable comparison across local boundaries – the use of the national indicator set will fulfil these purposes.

**Do you support our proposals to report the assessments as set out in our prototype CAA reporting tool? If not, please suggest alternative proposals for reporting.**

The website is clear and engaging although research has shown that many of our residents do not have access to the internet at home. We would recommend an additional summary leaflet.