

**A modern approach to inspecting services – questions being asked by the Audit Commission relating to a new regime (to take effect April 2005)**

Audit Commission question	Page	Rochford response
Is the use of four levels of performance correct or should there be more?	8	It is more appropriate to have five levels of performance to correspond with the CPA ratings. The star rating system is useful. Using 5 levels, it would range from 0 to 4 stars.
What language or descriptions do you think the Commission should use to explain the performance levels?	8	The descriptions should be the same as for CPA.
Do you think we are right to retain the language to describe the inspection findings for the 'prospects for improvement' judgement?	8	<p>We feel that 'good' should be added, making 'promising' the mid-point. There is a significant difference between 'promising' and 'excellent'.</p> <p>Note: An analysis of inspectors' assessments on this judgement would be helpful to identify whether there is any validity in their ratings over time and to identify the key items and weightings that inspectors have taken into account.</p>
Are these questions to determine the first judgement appropriate? If 'no', what changes would you propose to the high-level questions, and why?	9	We feel that assessing value for money will be very difficult. In an organisation where individuals perform a number of tasks it is difficult to split the jobs to determine costs and comparisons between organisations is not possible where levels of service differ. For example, a homelessness service can offer varying levels of housing advice which may or may not impact on the number of homelessness applications. It is very difficult to evaluate value for money on this.
Are these questions to lead to the second judgement appropriate? If 'no', what changes would you propose to these high-level questions, and why?	9	We feel these questions are appropriate.

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Do you think that our proposed approach to value for money is right? If 'no', what are your views about how we should make judgements about value for money?	13	As stated above, we are concerned at the concept of measuring value for money. Previous value for money studies conducted by external audit were primarily audits of the services being offered and offered very limited evaluation or recommendations on 'value for money'.
We propose introducing proportionate self-assessment for all service inspections. What is your view on this proposal?	15	We feel that self assessment is appropriate. No guidance could be found in the consultation document on the relevance of 'proportionate' in this regard.
Do you think that our proposed proportionate approach to recommendations is right? Will it be helpful for us to prioritise recommendations and identify potential benefits of implementation?	16	We agree with a proportionate approach to recommendations and the establishment of recommended priorities. However it is for the organisation to agree its priorities and recommended priorities should not therefore become the yardstick for future measurement, where the authority can demonstrate consideration and rejection of the recommendation.
To what extent should the Commission indicate the potential cost of implementing recommendations that arise from service inspection recommendations?	17	It would be of benefit for inspectors to identify costs as a means of establishing the practicability of their recommendations.
Do you think our proposals for a comprehensive appeals process are appropriate? Are there any changes you wish to propose?	18	We are happy with the proposal to apply a consistent appeals procedure for all inspections.