

The Swindon Model

This article outlines the approach used in Swindon to arrive at the priorities and their respective indicators to be included in the second round Local Area Agreement (LAA). The Model ensured an open and transparent process for managing stakeholder expectations whilst selecting the most relevant measures to be delivered through the agreement.

Led by Swindon Borough Council the process was iterative, evidence-based and inclusive. GOSW have described the approach as 'an exemplar' and 'strongly open and transparent'.

More details on the application of the Swindon Model can be obtained from James Griffin, Head of Policy at Swindon Borough Council (james.griffin@swindon.gov.uk)

Context

Swindon borough is the most populous authority in Wiltshire and is growing at one of the fastest rates in England. Residents are predominantly based in the town of Swindon with the remainder residing in the surrounding rural areas. As with all local authorities it is an area with limited resources to tackle diverse challenges and appropriate alignment between these challenges and resources is essential to the delivery of improved outcomes for residents. A key part of this alignment is selecting the most relevant outcomes and measures to include for delivery through the Local Area Agreement – a powerful partnership delivery vehicle. The 'Swindon Model' was designed to ensure that this was achieved in a rational and transparent way.

Through the governance of the Swindon Strategic Partnership Swindon's first LAA strengthened shared working in the Borough and established a good working relationship between all key agencies. These agencies are represented through the five Blocks of Swindon's second LAA:

- Economic Development & Enterprise;
- Children & Young People;
- Safer & Stronger Communities;
- Healthy Communities & Older People; and
- Environmental Sustainability.

The first round agreement included 120 measures. The challenge for the second round LAA was to achieve a much tighter scope and to limit the chosen measures to 35. This would have to be done without losing the strength of the partnership relationship or weakening any of the Blocks.

Developing the second Local Area Agreement

To achieve this tightening of scope it was decided that the 'Swindon Model' focus on two key criteria to assess local priorities: that they were **important to a range of stakeholders** and that delivery was **dependent on partnership working**. Many priorities in Swindon fall into one or other of these categories, but it was felt that only those that could be ranked highly on both measures should be delivered through the second LAA.

The first stage in this was to develop the evidence base regarding partner priorities and identify which were of most importance to stakeholders and most in need of improvement.

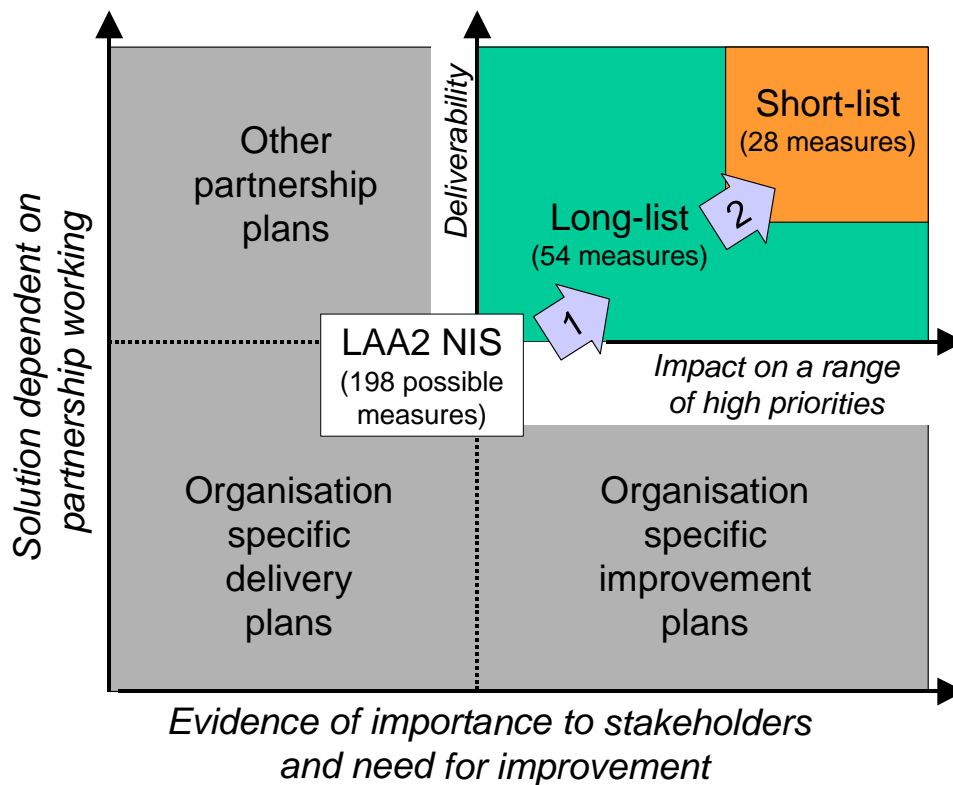


Figure one: The Swindon Model

Arrow 1: Stakeholder engagement

Arrow one (in figure one) represents the development and application of this evidence base. Overseen by the Blocks and the Partnership Board and facilitated through the cross-partner Senior Officer Group internal and external stakeholder engagement took place in the three months leading up to January 2008.

Beginning in September 2007 the **external engagement** took in the views of groups representing Swindon’s diverse stakeholder groups on what the priorities for Swindon should be. Groups consulted included the PCT Staff and Board, Parish Clerks, the Equalities Advisory Forum and the Climate Change Steering Group amongst others. The methodology was adapted to fit with each audience but typically involved visiting standing groups or meetings to present and provide information on the LAA process. Each group was asked to think about their priorities in terms of ‘fit’ with the upper right quadrant of the Model. Questions asked of each groups’ priorities included:

- Is this a priority for the whole of Swindon or for specific stakeholders only?
- Does this priority need to be fulfilled through partnership working or would it be better served in an individual partner’s delivery plan?

In conjunction with this targeted engagement externally accessible communications were used to maintain a high level of awareness around the LAA2 process. A dedicated website (<http://www.swindonlaa.org.uk/>) was updated regularly and articles were placed in internal and external email bulletins with details of how to become involved.

As a key partner and agency for delivery it was also important for all **internal Swindon Borough Council** groups to be aligned with the process. Swindon Borough Council will be required to provide a large share of the resources and expertise required to deliver the measures and careful selection to fit with internal priorities is vital. Groups consulted included the Arts & Culture Teams, the Leaders Advisory Group, local MPs and the Senior Officers Group amongst others. Consultation was ongoing with these groups throughout the process.

In total around **800 people** representing over **40 groups** were engaged in the process. A clearer picture of where each priority sat in the Model was developed allowing the Policy and Partnership team along with Partnership Board to develop a clearer understanding of what short-listed measures should be chosen to match these priorities. In addition to the consultation the development of the new Community Strategy was dovetailed in order to feed into the process.

This process allowed the 198 measures in the National Indicator Set (NIS) to be cut down to 54 measures. This constituted a manageable amount to take forward to the **Partnership Board Workshop** as represented by arrow 2 on figure one.

Arrow 2: The Partnership Board Workshop

The purpose of the Partnership Board Workshop was to select a short-list of up to 35 measures from the long-list generated through engagement with the wider stakeholder groups and analysis of the evidence-base.

By this stage the list contained only those measure most suited to partnership working and felt across partners to be a priority for Swindon's residents. The short-listing looked more closely at the measures, specifically assessing them on two key criteria: **what strategic impact will delivering this measure have** and **how deliverable is this measure?** This forum was in a sense a reality check conducted by those responsible for the delivery of these measures. The table below lists some of the questions asked of each measure.

Strategic impact	Deliverability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there evidence of strategic importance to stakeholders and need for improvement? • Is it highly dependent on partnership working? • Will it positively contribute to a number of shared improvement outcomes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the methodology for establishing the baseline and tracking the improvement robust? • Is a significant improvement deliverable in the three year life-cycle of LAA2? • Is there the opportunity to lever resource to assist in delivering the measure?

To set the scene the Chairs of each Block presented the case for the inclusion of their respective long-list measures. There then followed a two-stage examination of each measure by the Board allocating a score from 1 (low) to 3 (high) against **strategic impact**. Once those chosen to be of low strategic impact were disregarded the remaining measures were scored against **deliverability**.

These assessments were carried out through group discussion amongst the full Board including representation from the Government Office South West (GOSW) and in smaller 'break-out groups'. Facilitation was provided by the Office for Public Management (OPM). Feedback from the Workshop found that all partners felt fully involved and reported a high level of enthusiasm for both the process and the outcome it generated.

Through this process it proved particularly challenging to consider those measures felt to be strategically important but of lower deliverability. For example, NI 186, the reduction of CO₂ for the borough, is clearly of high importance to Swindon. Environmental sustainability is an increasingly important aspect of local government and high on the Swindon agenda. However the perceived lower deliverability within the 3-year timescale meant that this measure was ultimately not included in the LAA by the Workshop attendees.

Removal of a measure from the LAA does not however mean that this priority is discounted in Swindon, rather it signals that the priority would be better served through different delivery routes. Partner agencies plans and strategies such as SBC's Climate Change Action Plan, Transport vision and individual partner agencies will address the priority to reduce CO₂ emissions in the borough. By using this process measures are included or discounted with clear rationale arrived at through partnership working.

Next Steps

The Swindon Model works. There has been rigorous stakeholder challenge of the short-listed 28 measures during the Swindon Strategic Partnership Conference and from GOSW. This challenge has resulted in a small number of measures being reconsidered by the Partnership board but overall stakeholders have reported that they feel that the evidence-based priority

outcomes are right. Agreement on the final submitted measures is now pending from GOSW.