

a councillor's guide to the new local area agreements

- making LAAs work for you locally
- the key roles of councillors
- what's new about the new LAAs



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Location and excellent communication links mean that **Swindon** is economically prosperous, attractive to business, and provides a strong range of employment opportunities. However, there is a significant gap between the skills of Swindon's residents and those required by Swindon's employers, and many of the people who work in Swindon look elsewhere to live, shop, and play. This problem could get worse as Swindon's population is growing at one of the fastest rates in England and the economic and cultural regeneration of the town continues apace. Through the powerful Swindon Strategic Economic Partnership, the LAA will provide a focus for a partnership approach to up-skilling the resident workforce to ensure a more sustainable approach to Swindon's continued economic growth.

introduction

The new local area agreements (LAAs) are different, and they are important. Over the next few months, councils in England will be negotiating with other public services and with government to put in place LAAs for the next three years, 2008-11.

The new arrangements:

- make LAAs **the centrepiece of partnership work** for the next three years, and are fundamental to implementing your most important ambitions for the local area;
- are based around a clear recognition of the democratic role of councils in leading LSPs, with important political **roles for councillors** in leadership, strategy development, scrutiny, and neighbourhood representation;
- include a **new legal duty on other public services** to co-operate with councils in negotiating and fulfilling LAAs. This gives councils new scope to influence the priorities of much of the public sector in each locality;
- provide a choice of targets which is wider in scope and more flexible, with the LAA negotiations being the only place where government can **agree targets** with councils and local partnerships;
- require that the ambitions of the LAA agreed with government be at the core of **what is assessed** by the forthcoming comprehensive area assessment (CAA).

Decisions are being made now, and councillors need to be more involved, ensuring the new approach genuinely empowers communities. Here, we tell you more about the new rules for LAAs.

Most importantly, we give you some examples of what different councils want to achieve locally.



the key roles of councillors

It is vital that councillors get more involved in LAAs. We see councillors as having four main roles in relation to LAAs:

leadership: leaders and other executive members have a vital role in leading LSPs, in defining and negotiating priorities, and in ensuring delivery, but all councillors are leaders of the community. The council's leadership role should influence the priorities of other public services, reducing the democratic deficit in relation to partnership working. Councillors also play an important leadership role in sub-partnerships such as Children's Trusts, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, and health partnerships. Councillors are also among the leaders of other agencies such as police authorities, passenger transport authorities, and regional development agencies, which will be partners involved in LAAs;

strategy development: sustainable community strategies, related thematic strategies, and local development frameworks, are approved by the elected members, and form a vital means to advance their political priorities. These strategies will be the basis of LAAs. All members have a role to play in the strategy development responsibilities of their tier, and in making sure that community priorities are taken forward in these strategies;


scrutiny: councils will gain new powers to scrutinise other public services and to hold service providers (including the council) to account in achieving the ambitions set out in the LAA. Imaginative scrutiny enquiries, involving partners, service users, and outside experts, can find new ways to tackle the issues covered by LAAs;

neighbourhood representation: all councillors have a role in advocating the needs of their communities, and in championing community involvement. In some areas they will do this via neighbourhood forums and committees. All councillors need to be engaged in defining what the most important priorities are for LAAs, and in reviewing the realities of implementation in their neighbourhoods.



The **Suffolk**
Sustainable

Community Strategy will provide the evidence base for negotiating the new LAA. The LAA will help us reflect the mosaic of places that make up Suffolk and ensure that the inequalities we currently experience are narrowed. We want to harness the opportunities of renewable energy in Waveney and the high-tech corridor to Cambridge. We want to reduce crime in Ipswich and make people feel safe in mid-Suffolk. We want to increase skills and employment opportunities for the generations to come and maintain a safe, healthy and green environment for those who live, work and visit the county. Suffolk's ambition to be recognised for its unique environment and quality-of-life for all will drive partners' activity and resources to deliver real benefit for our communities.



what's new about the new LAAs?

The LAAs being negotiated now, under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, are different in a number of ways from the first phase of ways from the first phase of LAAs. Here's a summary of the main differences:

	old	new
	LAA's 2005-2008	LAA's from spring 2008
legal status	No legal requirement to negotiate an LAA	Statutory: all (upper-tier) councils must prepare an LAA with partners
two-tier arrangements	County council negotiated and led LAA	County council the 'responsible authority' to lead partnership, district councils are important partners
timescale	Three-year agreement: Commenced in three groups, 2005-6, 2006-7, 2007-08	Three-year agreement: all councils/areas on same timetable: 2008-11
scope	Three, later four blocks: safer and stronger communities; children and young people; healthier communities and older people; economic development and enterprise	No requirement for blocks: local flexibility based on sustainable community strategy and other local priorities.
local and national targets	Some mandatory targets, choice of others	National Indicator set including 16 education and early years statutory targets, up to 35 other targets to be negotiated according to needs of area. Named partners should also negotiate and support local targets
finance	Previously ring-fenced funds merged into funding tied to blocks; later into LAA grant; also pump-priming grant	No specific LAA grant; all partners should gear mainstream funding towards LAA objectives.
reward funding	Financial reward tied to achievements on specific agreed 'stretch' targets	Formula to pay reward funding according to performance across the range of targets
partnership arrangements	Voluntary co-operation in a LSP, some statutory requirements on specific services to engage with thematic partnerships	Statutory 'duty to co-operate' on named agencies to negotiate LAA, sign up to specific local and national targets, implement, and respond to council scrutiny
performance management	Local performance management, reported to government office (GO)	Local performance management, new council scrutiny powers, external assessment by CAA

two-tier issues

In two-tier areas, the LAA is led by the county council, and will be a county-wide agreement. District councils are important partners in the LAA and in delivering particular targets. It's vital that districts get fully involved in LAAs, and there are a range of issues which need to be planned in a joined up way:

- arrangements for LSPs at district and county levels with clear roles;
- developing community strategies at county and district levels which inter-relate;
- community involvement in strategy development, and in the LSPs;
- scrutiny arrangements for the new LAA;
- CAA, which will be county-wide.

a stronger framework for partnership work

Every area has a LSP which brings together the council, other public services, community, voluntary and private sector organisations. In two-tier areas there are a range of possible arrangements to reflect district and county roles. The partnership agrees and moves forward the most important issues for the area, generally focussed on the sustainable community strategy.

A wide range of public services now have **a legal duty to co-operate** with the council in partnership work, to achieve the ambitions of the locality. These organisations are listed below. Each geographically relevant organisation must co-operate in negotiating the LAA, in agreeing targets, and in implementing relevant targets. They will be subject to council scrutiny, and the CAA will review how agencies are fulfilling these duties.

It's also important that the LSP includes community and voluntary organisations, and private businesses locally, but these organisations do not have the same legal duty to co-operate.

organisations which have a 'duty to co-operate' with LAAs

District councils
The Environment Agency
Natural England
Fire and rescue authorities
Jobcentre Plus
The Health and Safety Executive
The Broads Authority
National Park Authorities
Youth Offending Teams
Police authorities
Transport for London
Chief Officer of Police
Local Probation Boards
Probation Trusts and other providers of probation services
Primary Care Trusts
National Health Service Trusts
NHS Foundation Trusts
Joint waste authorities
Joint waste disposal authorities
Regional development agencies
The Learning and Skills Council
Sport England
English Heritage
Arts Council
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
Highways Agency
Metropolitan Passenger Transport Authorities
Others could be added by Secretary of State (by order)

“ Westminster has a number of very wealthy wards and pockets of high deprivation, and the LAA will focus on narrowing the gap between these areas. One example of the improvements Westminster partners intend to deliver is to the levels of unemployment amongst disadvantaged groups, such as lone parents and incapacity benefit claimants. Work with the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus partners will identify neighbourhoods of specific need and establish initiatives to drive up employment. These will focus on driving up skill levels, helping people find suitable employment and providing support for those entering work after a long period of unemployment. The LAA will help partners develop a single job-brokerage service, called Westminster Works, which will provide neighbourhood-based employment support services for job-seekers. This will not only contribute to economic activity in the area but will also impact on health, housing and child poverty.”

It's fundamental to the future of **Barking and Dagenham** that we use the LAA to tackle low-skills and worklessness. Nearly six out of ten working age residents in Barking and Dagenham have qualifications below level two (equivalent to five good GCSE grades) – the lowest level of any adult population in the whole of England and Wales. Generations of low-skill levels, associated low incomes and long-term worklessness are major contributors to disillusioned and anti-social youth, teen pregnancy, domestic violence and health inequalities. In the past ten years our schools have achieved some of the fastest rates of improvements in qualifications in the country. We are now focusing on those who have already left compulsory education. Initiatives include the council Signing the Skills Pledge – ensuring all of our eight thousand employees are supported to achieve at least level two, and that Job Shops in Barking – and soon in Dagenham – are supported by brokerage services led by the third sector. There is much more to be done to ensure all of our community can enjoy the economic benefits of living in one of the major cities in the world.

finance

There is no specific LAA grant for the new LAAs. It's up to the local partners to decide how to fund the achievement of the LAA priorities, and whether the LSP should have an overview of any specific budgets. Many of the government's ring-fenced and specific grants will now be paid

through one area-based grant to councils. This becomes a general council revenue grant; it's not LAA grant.

There will be some reward grant from government to encourage local areas to achieve their targets.

deciding priorities, setting targets

It's vital you decide locally what are the most important priorities for your place which should be covered in your LAA. These will come from your political priorities as councillors, from the ambitions for your place set out in the community strategy, from the views of the public and community organisations, and from evidence of how your area compares with others on important social issues such as employment, skills, crime levels, housing needs.

One of the aims of the new arrangements has been to reduce the national requirements for many different measurements of what is being done, which were rarely co-ordinated between government departments and initiatives. Progress has been made on this, with the announcement of the National Indicator Set.

This has 198 indicators, which define all the government's priorities for councils working alone or in partnership. The National Indicator Set covers big picture issues about worklessness, health improvement, community safety and sustainability; it's not just about measuring what local

government does. Many of these indicators link to the government's national priorities (defined in the public service agreements of government departments) which local government can help to deliver.

Some of these indicators overlap with the performance requirements for other partner organisations such as the police or the Primary Care Trust. You have to monitor and report on all 198 locally. Within this are 16 education and early years indicators for which targets are agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families. For the LAA, each area will also be negotiating with the government office (GO) up to 35 targets from the 198 priorities covered by the National Indicator Set – these will be different priorities according to the circumstances of the area. These targets will be 'designated' as being of national importance, when the LAA is signed by the secretary of state.

The LAA can also include other purely local targets and ambitions (on issues not covered by national indicators). Where partner organisations sign up to them, these local targets will also be covered by the duty to co-operate.

assessing achievements locally

The arrangements to check that the local area agreement is being achieved cover:

Performance management locally.

Every LSP will need to have good arrangements to monitor how well the LAA is being achieved, and tackle things which are going wrong. Performance against all the 198 national indicators will need to be published, but purely local indicators are of equal importance. The council has a vital role in making sure this happens. The GO for the region will also be reviewing progress.

Scrutiny by the council of the whole LAA.

There will be new legal powers for the council (both tiers in counties) to require partner organisations to be

subject to scrutiny. These powers require organisations to provide information to scrutiny committees, and to respond to and have regard to recommendations which relate to relevant local improvement targets. This will strengthen the council's role in ensuring good LAA performance by all partners, and reviewing how problems are being tackled.

The new CAA. This replaces comprehensive performance assessment (of the council) in 2009. This will look at how councils and all the organisations subject to the duty to co-operate are contributing to achieving local ambitions, and the prospects for the place to improve. It will have a big emphasis on local people's views about their area and its services.

“ The decline of the textile and manufacturing industries has left **Oldham** with an outdated physical infrastructure and an economy dominated by low-skill, low-wage employment opportunities. Through the LAA we will be repositioning the economy to focus on higher-value key sectors such as science, technology, education, and culture; and utilising strategic regeneration initiatives to stimulate investment and business growth. We also aim, through our LAA, to increase the opportunities in life for all residents, with a focus on reducing worklessness and unemployment. We will continue to provide opportunities for residents from different neighbourhoods and communities to come together, as we continue to build community cohesion and community stability across the borough.

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timetable

November: with partners, agree local priorities to negotiate targets with the GO, plus purely local priorities

December: compare local and national ideas about LAA priorities

January: agree up to 35 priority issues with GO

March: agree children's services statutory targets by end of March 2008

February-May: negotiations with GO on up to 35 targets

June: recommended targets sent to ministers for sign-off

Now is the time to get engaged with what your LSP is discussing, what the LAA negotiating arrangements are locally, your council's headline priorities in the negotiations; and what the GO thinks are the local priorities.

Find out more

There is more information about LAAs on the LGA and IDeA websites www.lga.gov.uk, www.idea.gov.uk and government information on www.communities.gov.uk

You can also send questions to the LGA Improvement Team via improvement@lga.gov.uk

For further information about the work of the LGA please contact the Local Government Association at Local Government House, Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

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