



Department for
Communities and
Local Government



Cities & Local
Growth Unit

Single Pot Assurance Framework

National Guidance



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Introduction

Devolution agreements

Devolution deals signed between places and HM Government provide localities with greater local control, flexibility and responsibility over funding streams and their outcomes. Devolution deals are the beginning of a process whereby local partners will have increasing control over budget lines, as well as further responsibility for delivery and outcomes.

The combined authority (or other decision-making authority¹) that agrees a devolution deal operates according to the Local Government Financial Framework, as set out in Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG's) Local Government System Statement. These provide assurance to the Departmental Accounting Officer and to Parliament for how wider funding routed through local government is allocated and that there are robust local systems in place to ensure resources are spent with regularity, propriety, and value for money. (The Local Government System Statement cross-references system statements for other departments that fund local authority spending, which also apply to decision-making authorities.)

This document does not replace any of the checks and balances prescribed by the existing accountability system and local authorities' statutory responsibilities. Its purpose is to guide localities that are writing local assurance frameworks. HM Government is asking places in receipt of Single Pot funding to write a local Single Pot assurance framework, which DCLG will sign off before 2016-17 funding allocations of investment funds, and 2017-18 onward allocations of other funding streams, are paid.

A Single Pot

A significant fiscal agreement in devolution deals is a Single Pot approach to funding, which consolidates funding lines and reduces ring-fences.² Where a Single Pot has been agreed in devolution deals, it initially comprises: allocations of the Local Growth Fund; consolidated, multi-year transport settlements; and additional allocations of grant-based investment funds (sometimes called "Earn Back" and "Gain Share").

HM Government requires localities in receipt of a Single Pot to write an assurance framework that explains how they will appraise, monitor and evaluate schemes to achieve value for money. This document sets out HM Government's guidance for localities writing local Single Pot assurance frameworks. Localities will have freedom to determine how to apply the key practices and standards articulated in this national framework when writing their own local Single Pot assurance framework. These local frameworks must

¹ In the following paragraphs 'decision-making authority' means the authority with ultimate responsibility for managing and making decisions on use of the devolved funds, as set out in devolution agreements, whether this is a combined authority, mayor or individual local authority.

² The 'Single Pot' is an HM Government term. We recognise that terminology to describe the process may be different locally, and encourage places to reflect this in local assurance frameworks.

demonstrate robust assurance, project appraisal and value for money processes before they are signed off by DCLG.

Where Local Growth Fund is included in the Single Pot, existing assurance frameworks will continue to apply for Local Growth Fund spending in the transition period until the local Single Pot assurance framework is signed off by DCLG.

In addition, for areas in receipt of investment funds, an independent panel will also assess investments' impact on economic growth at five-yearly Gateway Reviews. This additional evaluation provides a further incentive to encourage appropriate project appraisal, assurance and value for money processes. (This Evaluation Panel is not the focus of this guidance.)

Implementation

The local Single Pot Assurance Framework will be one of a suite of key devolution deal implementation documents that should be viewed together. Other documents are:

- **Devolution agreement documents**, which set out the terms and commitments between HM Government and localities.
- **Implementation plans**, which set out clear plans to deliver commitments in devolution deals. These are led by places and developed with support from relevant Whitehall departments.
- **Single Pot settlement letters**, which outline the principles and content of the Single Pot.
- **Locality-specific annexes** to the respective devolution agreements, where places and HM Government have agreed additional allocations of grant-based investment funds. These annexes outline places' specific approaches to implementation, specifically how places intend the investment fund to operate and interact with the wider Single Pot investments.

The full commencement of the Single Pot is contingent on the ratification of the devolution deal in all relevant constituent authorities, the establishment of the agreed governance structures, and agreement with Whitehall to both a baseline implementation plan and a local assurance framework.

Each locality's local assurance framework is a core requirement of devolution agreements and will need to be agreed by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Accounting Officer in HM Government in advance of funding disbursement. Local authorities and LEPs undertake much of what is outlined already for Local Growth Fund assurance requirements, and may want to use LEP assurance frameworks as the basis for creating their local 'Single Pot' assurance frameworks based on this guidance.

The accountable decision-making authority and their associated Local Enterprise Partnership(s) must agree the final local assurance framework, and submit it to DCLG. Due to the anticipated lifetime, value and significance of certain elements within devolution deal agreements, local assurance frameworks will need to be formally signed off by DCLG. DCLG will have a role in periodically reviewing how the local assurance frameworks are

operating in practice. This will assure the Accounting Officer that a local assurance framework and appraisal process is agreed, being implemented and meets the standards set out in this guidance. We expect that local authorities' audit and scrutiny committees will also consider how the local assurance frameworks are operating in practice.

The Single Pot policy may evolve over time. Should further funding be incorporated, or if wider changes affect local authority responsibilities, the National Guidance will be updated. In such instances, local Assurance Frameworks will need to be updated accordingly.

Recognising the fluidity and lifetime of the programme of investments, we expect local iterations of the assurance framework to be live documents, refreshed annually by the locality. Where potential changes result in significant divergence from approved local assurance frameworks, adjustments must be agreed by the Accounting Officer for DCLG, in consultation with relevant Accounting Officers across Government.

1: Accountable and Transparent Decision-making

- 1.1 Resources will be paid where possible via a section 31 grant determination to the accountable decision-making authority.
- 1.2 The accountable decision-making authority, working with relevant officers, will need to put in place appropriate arrangements for the proper use and administration of funding, building on the existing local government systems, and which fall under the annual audit of the local authorities' accounts. The accountable decision-making authority would also be responsible for ensuring that decisions are made in accordance with the local assurance framework for funding lines awarded through devolution deals.
- 1.3 The local assurance framework should set out the key roles and responsibilities in decision-making. In particular it should set out which body(ies) have the authority to set strategy, budgets and individual investment decisions, including any delegated authority. It should set out, for example, in the case of mayoral combined authorities, the distinct responsibilities of the Mayor and Combined Authority members.
- 1.4 In line with existing local authority rules and regulations we expect the accountable decision-making authority to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that decision-making and recording is transparent, and that requests for information, conflicts and complaints are dealt with appropriately. We would also expect to see arrangements in place to enable effective engagement with local partners and the public.
- 1.5 Local Enterprise Partnerships have a vital leadership role to play, and are responsible for developing and maintaining the Strategic Economic Plan, which should provide the basis for investment decisions³ for the accountable decision-making authority. LEPs already fulfil an integral role in allocating Local Growth Fund spend, which HM Government expects to continue for future awards, alongside their continued responsibility for delivery of existing projects.⁴ Government expects this collaboration between the LEP and accountable decision-making authority to be adopted for the wider Single Pot, where investments are designed to boost economic growth.
- 1.6 In instances where the establishment of a mayoral combined authority is agreed as part of a devolution deal, assurance frameworks should set out the means by which elected mayors will be involved in funding allocation and decision-making. This is particularly the case with the additional allocations of grant through an investment fund ("Gain Share"), where areas may receive funds ahead of the first mayoral elections. No spending commitments beyond the initial five-year allocation should be made until elected mayors are in place and have agreed to the investment strategy. Assurance frameworks should also include a mechanism by which the associated combined authority must review decisions that had been taken before the appointment of the

³ Alongside the delivery of statutory requirements and other local transport objectives

⁴ 'Existing projects' refers to projects currently being implemented and/or with funding already allocated.

mayor, if the mayor requests once they are in post. This is consistent with the ambition and agreement to hold a single democratically elected figurehead accountable, and for their democratically invested power to influence the allocation of funding.

1.7 We expect the local assurance framework to:

- confirm accountable body arrangements for funding received from Government through devolution deals;
- confirm that use of resources is subject to the usual local authority checks and balances – including the financial duties and rules which require councils to act prudently in spending, which are overseen and checked by the Responsible Chief Finance Officer, and to ensure transparency that annual accounts are published;
- confirm investment decisions will be made for all funding with reference to statutory requirements, conditions of the funding, local transport objectives and the Strategic Economic Plan through formal LEP involvement; and
- Describe the arrangements for enabling effective and meaningful engagement of local partners and the public to inform key decisions and future strategy development.

1.8 Any divergence from the local Assurance Frameworks, once approved, must be agreed by the Accounting Officer for DCLG, in consultation with relevant Accounting Officers across Government.

2: Ensuring value for money: prioritisation, appraisal, business case development, and risk management

- 2.1 Building on the arrangements which local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships put in place for the Local Growth Fund, it is important that all localities have robust arrangements in place to ensure value for money and effective delivery, through monitoring⁵, strong project development, project and options appraisal, prioritisation, and business case development. There are two main aspects to this.
- 2.2 The section below on option appraisal and prioritisation addresses what localities will need to consider in deciding how to allocate their funding to projects and prioritise between proposals. Given the considerable variation in types and sizes of projects which localities may want to support, and acknowledging that many local authorities and LEPs already have effective practices in place, our intention is not to establish any rigid 'rules' about the methods which localities use, to prioritise between projects, but rather establish a set of guiding principles.
- 2.3 The second section on value for money and business case development considers the more detailed business case work we would expect a promoting local authority to undertake, and the accountable decision-making authority to scrutinise, once a project has been identified for funding, to ensure that the proposal is optimised and represents value for money and is a realistically deliverable solution.
- 2.4 Across both of these aspects, localities should ensure that they have robust processes in place which ensure all funding decisions are based on impartial advice and with appropriate checks and balances particularly when assessing the merits of (potentially competing) business cases. This work will consider the net impact of the overall programme of investments from the Single Pot, to ensure projects work together when assessed cumulatively.
- 2.5 Accountable decision-making authorities should also ensure that arrangements are in place which support the active management of risk across all matters for which they are responsible including, but not limited to, propriety and value for money issues. This should include having a named individual of appropriate seniority who is responsible for the identification and management of risk.

Options appraisal and prioritisation

- 2.6 Accountable decision-making authorities should have a clear and transparent basis, (published on their website) against which projects and programmes are initially identified / commissioned, appraised and prioritised. Local assurance frameworks should set out:

⁵ This should include a proportionate means for monitoring delivery and clarity about how spend against delivery of outputs will be reported.

- the evidential basis on which the need for intervention is based and how the locality will ensure rigour and data quality and programmes and projects are identified based on need/opportunity and clear application of best practice;
- the methodology used to assess overall value for money of the investment programme, and to produce a list of prioritised projects, ensuring that the full range of options which enable the strategic objective to be met/ problem addressed, are considered. Particular attention should be given to how different types of projects will be compared and assessed. Typically this would include consideration – at a level proportionate to the scale of funding required for the proposal – of:
 - whether there is a clear rationale for the interventions linked with the delivery of statutory requirements, strategic objectives identified in the Strategic Economic Plan, and other local transport objectives;
 - whether the proposal has clearly defined inputs, activities, outputs and anticipated outcomes which are additional and therefore would not have happened in the absence of the proposal. This will mean ensuring that factors such as displacement and deadweight have been taken into account where appropriate;
 - the financial costs of proposals;
 - the degree to which benefits exceed the costs of intervention - the Net Present Public Value - and the size of the ratio of benefits to costs (the Benefit Cost Ratio);
 - whether there are sufficient mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate the proposal;
 - whether deliverability and risks have been appropriately considered and if there are likely to be clear mitigations for those.
- how the evidence will be used to inform decisions and how the locality will ensure rigour and data quality.

Value for Money and Business Case development

2.7 The methodology used to assess value for money for HM Government and the degree of detail to which business cases are developed in support of particular projects or programmes should be proportionate to the funding allocated and in line with HM Government's established guidance (including the HM Treasury Green Book). Typically we would expect business cases to address, in a proportionate manner, the 5 cases set out in supplementary business case guidance to the Green Book. There will also be further guidance available in the form of the DCLG Appraisal Guide which can be used to help appraise various forms of development as well as DfT's WebTAG for transport interventions.

2.8 We expect undertaking such assessments to be in line with current practice across the local government sector. LEPs should have already adopted these practices for Local Growth Fund projects, as well as the Skills Funding Agency practices for skills capital

projects. [A list of basic expectations for different types of specific project appraisal are attached at Appendix A]

2.9 Infrastructure UK has produced a routemap that accountable decision-making authorities may find helpful when reviewing these aspects of business cases for infrastructure projects.⁶

2.10 For all projects and programmes, accountable decision-making authorities will need to ensure that there is a named individual with overall responsibility for ensuring value for money, and that named individuals (not necessarily the same person) should be responsible for scrutiny and recommendations on each business case. These responsible individuals should, in the case of projects promoted by the accountable decision-making authority, sit outside the management unit responsible for developing and promoting the business case, and in the case of projects promoted by other authorities, should sit outside the promoting organisation.

Evaluation and Monitoring

2.11 Decision-making authorities will need to ensure that there is appropriate output and outcome monitoring and evaluation of schemes taken forward.

2.12 Existing monitoring and evaluation will continue for specific elements of the Single Pot (in addition reporting requirements of the core Local Government Financial Framework). These may include Local Growth Fund monitoring and evaluation and Department for Transport's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Local Authority Major Schemes.

2.13 The impact of investment fund spending and particularly its additional contribution to economic growth will be evaluated by an independent Evaluation Panel, as described in the Introduction. The requirements of the Evaluation Panel are outlined in a specification document shared with places in the development of this evaluation process.

2.14 Evaluation can deliver the following objectives:

- Provide accountability for the investment;
- Justify future spending allocations;
- Assess the value of private sector investment that is part of any growth interventions;
- Enhance the operational effectiveness of existing schemes or future scheme extensions; and
- Improve future initiatives (as well as future VfM appraisal) based on learning.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-infrastructure-delivery-project-initiation-routemap>

- 2.15 Accountable decision-making authorities must ensure a proportionate approach to monitoring and evaluation. Evaluation objectives should relate back to the business case and build on the assumptions used in the appraisal process.
- 2.16 The specific outcomes that will be monitored and measured will differ depending on the type of intervention. Monitoring and evaluation should therefore focus on those outcomes that are most relevant to the impact of the schemes objectives.

Appendix A: Project appraisal

These guidelines cover all HM Government funding to accountable decision-making authorities. It is supported by advice from relevant departments and NDPBs set out below.

These are wholly consistent with the principles and practices set out in this document and should be read together.

The Single Pot policy may evolve over time. Should further funding be incorporated, these guidelines will be updated to reflect that. In such instances, local Assurance Frameworks will need to be updated accordingly.

Transport

Transport projects with a capital cost of £5m or over will be subject to the minimum requirements on value for money assessment, assurance and evaluation of transport projects set out at Appendix B. These are based on the requirements for Local Transport Bodies and the Local Growth Fund.

The basis of transport appraisal is the DfT's appraisal guidance known as WebTAG. WebTAG is not a standard 'one size fits all' process. It promotes the use of proportionate appraisal and gives some significant discretion in the level of detail that is appropriate depending on the nature of the transport scheme concerned.

For these purposes a 'transport scheme' is defined as any scheme that significantly changes the transport network infrastructure, whatever its objectives. For example, improving journey times may not be the objective of a scheme but the impact on journey times, if expected to be significant, would still need to be considered as part of the overall value for money consideration of a scheme.

Housing

We would expect that accountable decision-making authorities will base their local processes on Home and Communities Agency good practice, advice and guidance tailored to local circumstances, or put in place equivalent robust local arrangements to ensure value for money and effective delivery of housing, regeneration and related infrastructure schemes. For example, DCLG will soon be publishing its DCLG Appraisal Guide which provides guidance on how the Department appraises residential and non-residential development which local partners may wish to follow, particularly if seeking central government funding. This should be achieved through strong partnership working, e.g. joint venture agreements with the private sector, robust project development, robust programme management including clear delivery milestones and forecasts, robust valuation criteria, project and options appraisals, prioritisation, and business case development.

Skills capital

We would anticipate that accountable decision-making authorities will base their local processes on Skills Funding Agency good practice, advice and guidance tailored to local

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circumstances, or put in place equivalent robust local arrangements to ensure value for money and effective delivery of skills capital schemes, through strong project development, project and options appraisal, prioritisation, and business case development.

Enterprise, innovation and business support

Accountable decision-making authorities are expected to put in place robust local arrangements to demonstrate ability to deliver value for money through evidence-based business cases aligned with HM Treasury Green Book guidance. This should include robust evaluation methodology, with a commitment to publishing results to add to the evidence base on what works, where appropriate, and evidence of contribution to local and national policy goals on productivity and growth.

LEP-led Growth Hubs, Innovate UK and the British Business Bank are key partners in enterprise, innovation and business support schemes. Good practice when working with partners should include ensuring a connection to national expertise and infrastructure and non-duplication of existing support, investments and finance options.

Regeneration

In line with the National Planning Policy Framework and the Planning Practice Guidance, we would anticipate that accountable decision-making authorities will have local arrangements in place that provide assessment and support to ensure schemes deliver value for money and positive growth. For regeneration these projects might extend beyond housing and transport interventions, and include investment in things like enabling works, land assembly, utilities, and/or public realm projects. The DCLG Appraisal Guide may be a suitable document for helping appraise the costs and benefits of these types of interventions.

Appendix B: Transport Schemes

Value for Money

Decision-making authorities will need to be satisfied that the proposed schemes will achieve value for money.

Decision-making authorities will need to demonstrate that they have established processes to ensure that the modelling and appraisal is sufficiently robust and fit for purpose for the scheme under consideration. This should describe how they will ensure that the modelling and appraisal of schemes meets the guidance set out in WebTAG.

The use of WebTAG, which is mandatory for all schemes of £5m or over, does not preclude additional assessments or methodologies (e.g. wider economic benefits) being employed to prioritise and assess the overall business case for a scheme.

Neither does it dictate the weighting or importance that decision-makers should attach to any aspect of the WebTAG assessment or any additional assessment. In particular, the Benefit to Cost Ratio is only one component of the value for money assessment and should not be the sole driver of decision-making.

The overriding principle is that the full range of the material costs and benefits of a scheme, both quantified and unquantified, should be available to decision-makers.

Minimum requirements	<p>The modelling and appraisal of schemes contained in business cases must be developed in accordance with the guidance published in WebTAG at the time the business case is submitted to the decision-making authority for approval.</p> <p>Central case assessments must be based on forecasts which are consistent with the definitive version of NTEM (DfT's planning dataset). This requirement doesn't stop decision-making authorities considering alternative planning assumptions as sensitivity tests and considering the results of these in coming to a decision about whether to approve a scheme.</p> <p>The appraisal and modelling will be scrutinised by the decision-making authority to ensure it has been developed in accordance with the WebTAG. This will be undertaken independent of the management unit or authority promoting the scheme. The assurance framework will set out how this will be done.</p> <p>The assurance framework must set out how the assessment and scrutiny of business cases will be quality assured.</p>
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Recommended	Set out mechanisms for providing early advice to scheme promoters on whether the study approach is fit-for-purpose, particularly in relation to modelling and Social & Distributional Impacts (which both can have significant lead times)
Optional	<p>A description of how the decision-making authority will ensure that WebTAG will be applied by scheme promoters in a proportionate and robust way.</p> <p>A description of the circumstances under which external scrutiny or audit of the appraisal or modelling of schemes would be commissioned e.g. controversial or particularly costly schemes.</p>

The decision-making authority will need to put in place a process for producing a Value for Money (VfM) statement for all schemes put forward for approval summarising their overall assessment of the economic case. This VfM statement will need to be reviewed and updated at each approval stage.

Minimum requirements	<p>A value for money statement for each scheme in line with published DfT WebTAG guidance and DfT advice on assessing VfM⁷ must be presented for consideration to the decision-making body at each approval stage.</p> <p>The VfM assessment must be signed off as true and accurate by a named officer with responsibility for Value for Money assessments within the decision-making authority.</p>
Recommended	Set out what processes will be put in place to ensure that all impacts of a scheme (monetised and non-monetised) will be assessed by officers on a consistent basis and are based on reasonable assumptions.

Decision-making authorities will need to confirm that they agree to only approve schemes that meet a minimum VfM threshold and put in place the appropriate checks and balances to ensure compliance with this requirement.

The overwhelming majority of local major schemes funded in recent years were assessed by the Department as offering at least “high” value for money.

We would like to ensure that the value for money of major transport investment is maintained and therefore would expect that decision-making authorities would only in exceptional circumstances agree to fund schemes with lower than “high” value for money.

If decision-making authorities wish to retain the flexibility to fund schemes assessed at less than “high” value for money, the assurance framework should clearly set out the

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/value-for-money-advice-for-local-transport-decision-makers>

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circumstances under which funding for such schemes would be considered, and outline any additional scrutiny or conditions that would apply.

Minimum requirements	<p>The decision-making authority must either; only approve schemes that offer at least “high” value for money, as assessed using DfT guidance, or; set out the limited circumstances under which schemes offering lower than “high” value for money would be considered.</p> <p>Schemes must be assessed against the relevant thresholds at each approval stage.</p>
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Decision-making authorities are required to demonstrate separately (in other sections of the assurance framework) that they are transparent and open when reporting the results of modelling and appraisal, and that they have plans in place to obtain the necessary resources to fulfil the requirement to secure Value for Money.

External views on business cases

This section should outline what arrangements exist for the decision-making authority to invite and consider any external comment and/or scrutiny of business cases prior to approval. In previous DfT guidance, bidding Local Authorities were required to place their business case on their own websites when bids were submitted for funding and that practice should continue.

Minimum requirements	<p>Business cases must be published (and publicised) before funding approval decision is made so that external comment is possible.</p> <p>Opinions expressed by the public and stakeholders must be available to relevant members or boards of the decision-making Body when decisions are being taken.</p>
Recommended	<p>The above period should be at least 3 months.</p> <p>The decision-making Body should make public how they have taken external comments into account</p>

Evaluation and Monitoring

Decision-making authorities should ensure that there is a proportionate approach to report spend against delivery of outputs of transport schemes regardless of their size. **Outputs** are the tangible deliverables in a scheme (e.g. a new bus service, the length of bus lanes, rail and road improvements, road safety measures, maintenance, walking and cycling and transport information interventions).

The following requirements on the evaluation and monitoring of **outcomes** apply to transport schemes over £5m.

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Minimum requirements	<p>The decision-making authority must put in place mechanisms to ensure that schemes are monitored and evaluated in line with the latest DfT guidance⁸ on the evaluation of local major schemes. In particular the decision-making authority should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out proportionate evaluation and monitoring (M&E) plans that clarify: 1) requirements for individual schemes including funding of M&E activities; 2) responsibility for undertaking M&E, how minimum standards will be met and timescales for completion and decisions. • ensure that, for each scheme, there is clarity about how spend against delivery of outputs will be reported. • ensure that M&E plans are in place for schemes by the time that funding is signed off or before any data collection is programmed. • put in place processes to ensure that the results of any evaluation and monitoring are published.
Recommended	<p>The decision-making authority should have the results of any evaluation and monitoring reviewed independently of the scheme promoter.</p> <p>Decision-making authorities should prepare an evaluation 'handover pack' as part of the appraisal process that documents all key assumptions so that those responsible for scheme evaluation can fully understand how appraisal estimates were produced and can examine the potential drivers of any differences between forecasts and outturns.</p>
Optional	<p>Set out how the decision-making authority will share best practice obtained from evaluation and monitoring reports.</p>

Decision-making authorities and scheme promoters should refer to published DfT frameworks for advice on monitoring **outcome** (e.g. reducing congestion, improving journey reliability etc.) measures, data collection methods and potential data sources.⁹

⁸ <http://www.dft.gov.uk/publications/evaluation-local-major-schemes>

⁹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/35975/lstf-monitoring-evaluation-framework.pdf;

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/301284/bba-monitoring-and-evaluation-framework.pdf;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/monitoring-and-evaluation-framework-for-local-authority-major-schemes>