



Department of
Education
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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

AREA PLANNING GUIDANCE

for

2022 – 2027

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Area Planning Guidance

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Area Planning Guidance – Update Summary

Version	Date of Issue	Summary of update	Section
1	9 August 2021	Publication of new Area Planning Guidance for SAP 2 (2022-2027)	
2	12 August 2021	Minor amendment to Area Planning Pre-Planning Timetable (2021/22)	Annex B
3	11 November 2021	Amendment to wording at paragraph 3.6	

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

1.1. This guidance aims to provide an overview of Area Planning for those involved in the process to deliver the aims and objectives of the “Schools for the Future – A Policy for Sustainable Schools” (SSP) with particular emphasis on delivering the Ministerial priorities.

1.2. The guidance is applicable to the new five year Area Planning period – *1 September 2022 to 31 August 2027*. It takes account of lessons learned from the development and implementation of the first Strategic Area Plan (SAP), the barriers identified during the Department’s Transformation Programme, Delivering Schools for the Future Project (DSF) and the findings from the Education Authority (EA) commissioned Strategic Investment Board (SIB) review which have contributed to a number of new or refined processes to improve Area Planning.

Context

1.3. The Department of Education’s vision is to provide:

‘A system that is recognised internationally for the quality of its teaching and learning, for the achievements of its young people and for a holistic approach to education.’

1.4. All Departmental policies contribute to the delivery of that vision and all have, as a central tenet, the educational well-being of the children and young people for whom the education system is designed. It is essential that schooling reflects the educational needs of the pupils and addresses these needs in the most efficient and effective way possible. This can best be achieved through a network of viable and sustainable schools that are of the right type, the right size, located in the right place at the right time and have a focus on raising standards.

1.5. Area Planning is being taken forward in the context of:

- the Department’s commitments in the new draft Programme for Government (PfG) (*particularly in relation to, but not exclusive to, the outcome of giving our children and young people the best start in life - which is underpinned by a number of priorities including ‘a strategic approach to area planning’*);
- the Department’s commitments in the New Decade New Approach (NDNA) (*particularly in relation to its commitment to transform public services, including Education*);
- current education policies; and
- all statutory obligations including to encourage and facilitate the development of Integrated (Article 64 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989) and Irish medium (Article 89 of the Education (NI) Order 1998) education and to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education (Shared Education Act (NI) 2016). The principles of promoting equality of opportunity and good relations should be adhered to throughout the process.

Background

1.6. Since 2011, the EA, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), sectoral support bodies and schools have been engaged in implementing the SSP through the Area Planning process. The first EA led strategic Area Plan was developed for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2020 however for a range of reasons it was extended to 31 August 2022.

1.7. The SSP applies to primary and post-primary schools and provides the framework (for schools and managing authorities) to consider the educational experiences of children and young people and make the best use of resources. Strategic planning for Special Schools and Specialist provision in Mainstream schools will be taken forward under separate arrangements using the EA's strategic planning frameworks and will be subject to separate guidance.

1.8. The SSP sets out six sustainability criteria and associated indicators which are the key reference for assessing existing and future education provision to ensure it meets the needs of pupils. The six criteria are:

- Quality Educational Experience;
- Stable Enrolment Trends;
- Sound Financial Position;
- Strong Leadership and management by Board of Governors and Principals;
- Accessibility; and
- Strong Links with the community.

1.9. A copy of the SSP can be accessed on the Department's website at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/schools-future-policy-sustainable-schools>

1.10. A SSP User Guide is being developed which will condense the policy and highlight the main issues that schools and others need to be familiar with. A copy of the SSP User Guide will be published on the Department's website in due course.

2. AREA PLANNING AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1. Area Planning is the process of strategic planning of primary and post-primary education provision and was developed to support the implementation of the SSP.

2.2. The Department requires the statutory planning authorities (EA and CCMS), school managing authorities (MA) and the sectoral support bodies to identify current and future education needs and develop solutions to meet these on an area basis.

2.3. The aim of Area Planning is to ensure that all primary and post-primary pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their educational needs in a school that is educationally and financially viable and sustainable.

2.4. Throughout the Area Planning process the EA, working with the CCMS and engaging extensively with the sectoral support bodies, should take account of the guidance issued by the Department and seek to fulfil the following objectives to:-

(for pupils)

- identify and meet the needs of all primary/post-primary aged pupils in an area;
- ensure that pupils are taught in an education system that comprises a network of sustainable schools; are within a reasonable travelling time for pupils (as defined in the SSP) and capable of delivering effectively the statutory curriculum and, in post-primary schools, the Entitlement Framework; and
- enhance the quality of provision and raise standards;

(for the system)

- maximise effective engagement with all stakeholders through the Area Planning Support Structures (e.g. Area Planning Steering; Working and Local Groups);
- support effective strategic planning for delivery of the curriculum through the use of robust and verifiable information;
- identify deliverable, innovative and creative solutions to address educational need, including opportunities for collaborative, shared and cross-sectoral models, particularly to retain a sustainable educational presence in rural communities;
- maximise the use and sharing of the existing schools estate including potential for collaborative models of shared and/or co-located facilities (including co-location of mainstream and special schools);
- maximise the impact of available resources by reducing duplication of provision and the number of available places; and
take full account of appropriate and relevant Further Education (FE) Sector provision for 14-19 year olds to avoid unnecessary duplication.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1. There are a number of key contributors to the Area Planning process with differing statutory and non-statutory roles. The legislation which outlines the specific duties of those with a statutory planning role is outlined in Annex A. The contributors and their respective roles are summarised as follows:-

Department of Education (DE)

3.2 DE is responsible for:-

- a) setting the direction for strategic planning by outlining and evidencing the strategic priorities to be addressed in the Area Plan (including the publication of the Sustainability Baseline Report (SBR));
- b) setting and reviewing policy, strategic frameworks and timeframes to support efficient and effective area planning;
- c) providing advice and guidance to support the planning authorities and others;
- d) leading on preparatory work in advance of the commencement of the pre-planning year; to include:
 - undertaking a Resetting for Area Planning (decreases) exercise; and
 - undertaking a Normalising School Admissions and Enrolments (increases) exercise.
- e) For the development and implementation of the Area Plan, DE will:
 - scrutinise and challenge the aspirations and objectives of the Area Plan in line with the SSP and the priorities outlined in SBR;
 - monitor the pace of delivery of the Area Plan (through effective monitoring of the Operational Plans' work streams);
 - agree appropriate monitoring and evaluation tools; and
 - consider the need for any additional resources to support further development and delivery of Area Planning processes (as required and within budgetary constraints).

Arm's Length Bodies

3.3 Under the Education Orders, responsibility for education planning for all grant-aided school sectors rests with the EA. CCMS has a subsidiary planning role in relation to Catholic maintained schools. Sectoral support bodies are not planning authorities but act as advocates for their school sectors.

The Education Authority (EA)

3.4 The EA has overall operational responsibility for planning of provision within the policy, strategic framework and timeframe set by the Department. In particular it has:-

- a) statutory duties to ensure (inter alia);
 - i. that efficient primary and secondary education provision is available to meet the needs of all pupils; and
 - ii. that schools sufficient in number, character and equipment are available in its areas;
- b) responsibility for the co-ordination of the production and publication of
 - i. the Strategic Area Plan in line with the agreed Area Planning cycle; and
 - ii. Annual Area Profiles.
- c) responsibility (insofar as its powers as the managing authority extends) for the implementation of Operational plans;

and should:

- d) represent, as the managing authority, the interests of the controlled sector within the planning process through ensuring appropriate representation on planning groups;
- e) take into account the educational needs across all sectors as well as its own;
- f) work in partnership with CCMS and collaborate with other sectoral support bodies in identifying deliverable innovative, creative and shared solutions for sustainable provision; and
- g) seek to engage with all other sectors in the process, with a view to adding to educational quality and viability of provision.

3.5 While the EA is the chief planning authority, there is a need for all sectors to have the opportunity to present evidence based proposals that reflect the interests of their sectors in the Area Planning process.

3.6 In preparing the Area Plan, the EA must collaborate with CCMS as the planning authority for Catholic maintained schools, and should engage with sectoral support bodies representative of the Integrated¹ (NICIE), Irish medium (CnaG) and controlled sectors (CSSC). They should also engage with Voluntary Grammar Schools (VGS) and their Trustees, through the GBA and CSTS and 'other maintained' schools (i.e. church schools) through the *Transferors Representatives' Council (TRC)* all of which are represented on each of the Area Planning Group structures. Account should also be taken of the contribution that FE Colleges make to the delivery of the 14-19 Curriculum offer.

¹ Controlled Integrated Schools are managed by the EA and supported by NICIE and CSSC.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)

3.7 CCMS has:

- a) a statutory duty to promote and co-ordinate, in consultation with the Trustees, the planning of the effective provision of Catholic maintained schools;

and should:
- b) provide input for the Catholic maintained sector to the Area Plan;
- c) represent the interests of the Catholic maintained sector within the planning process through ensuring appropriate representation on planning groups;
- d) take into account the educational needs across all sectors as well as its own;
- e) work in partnership with the EA and in collaboration with other sectors in identifying innovative, creative and shared solutions for sustainable provision;
and
- f) engage with all other sectors in the process, with a view to adding to educational quality and viability.

Other Sectoral Support Bodies

3.8 Within the Area Planning structures, there are a number of other Sectoral Support Bodies and representative bodies which look after the interests of their respective sectors; these are:

- *Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)* - encourages and facilitates the development of integrated education.
- *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)* – encourages and facilitates the strategic development of, and provides guidance and advice to, the Irish medium education sector.
- *Governing Bodies Association (GBA)* – supports and represents the views of Voluntary Grammar Schools.
- *Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC)* - provides a representative and advocacy role for controlled schools and works with the EA to raise educational standards.
- *Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (CSTS)* - professionalises the contribution of the Catholic Trustees to area planning and shared education on behalf of the whole Catholic-managed sector, including Catholic grammar schools; and
- the *Transferors Representatives' Council (TRC)* - non-statutory body representing the largest Protestant churches on education matters.

3.9 These bodies should:-

- a) represent their interests, ethos, needs and perspectives within the planning process through ensuring appropriate and proportionate representation on the relevant planning groups;
- b) take into account the educational needs across all sectors as well as their own;
- c) inform policy development through engagement in consultation exercises;
- d) provide robust evidence based information, analysis and advice on proposals pertaining to and impacting on their schools;
- e) collaborate with the EA and CCMS in identifying and delivering innovative, creative and shared solutions for sustainable provision; and
- f) engage fully with all other sectors in the process, with a view to adding to educational quality and viability of all provision.

3.10 Other participants – include:

- the *Department for the Economy* (DfE) a member of APSG in an advisory and collaborative capacity to provide information on its plans for Further Education (FE) and oversee FE sector participation in the Area Planning process.

4. GOVERNANCE AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES

4.1. Area Planning is a complex and multi-layered process which requires support at a strategic, operational and local level. The following structures have been developed to ensure there is appropriate support at each of these levels. Full details of the roles and responsibilities are outlined in Annex C.

AREA PLANNING STRUCTURES – KEY ACTIONS SUMMARY

APSG

- **Advise** - DE on strategic Area Planning issues & related Departmental policy matters impacting on Area Planning; and APWG/LG on specific issues to support delivery on Ministerial priorities;
- **Assist** - DE review & refine AP processes to ensure consistency of approach, efficiency and effectiveness; and
- **Report** - progress on the delivery of the Area & Operational Plans; impact of slippage in relation to delivery of Ministerial priorities & contingency plans.



APWG

- **Advise** - APSG through discussion papers (e.g. on resolving barriers to progress &/or raising innovative & creative solutions);
- **Support** - APLGs draft and develop the Area & Operational Plans - prioritising and taking account of the Ministerial Priorities outlined in the SBR;
- **Standardise** – approach across all sectors;
- **Monitor, Review & Evaluate** - impact of the Area Plan and Operational Plans; and
- **Report** - through quarterly monitoring reports to APSG on the delivery of the Area and Operational plans, outlining progress, slippage and contingency planning to support the delivery of the Ministerial priorities.

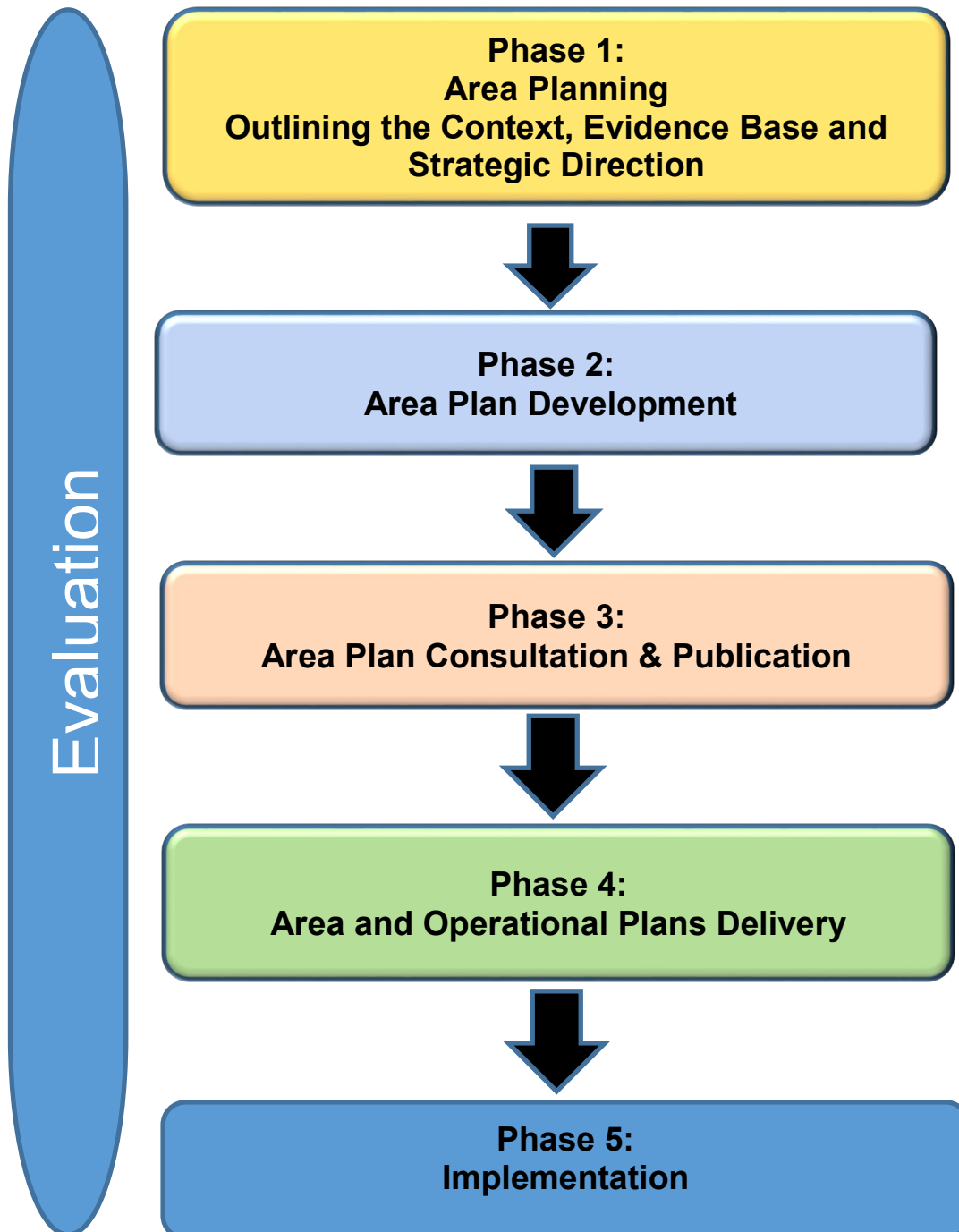


APLG (3 Localities)

- **Collaborate and co-operate** - each APLG will consider the needs of all sectors; develop evidence based proposals taking account of Ministerial priorities & SBR;
- **Contribute** - to development of the Area Plan in line with Ministerial priorities & DE Guidance;
- **Prioritise** - content of the Operational Plan aligned to Ministerial priorities;
- **Prepare** - Operational Plans for its Area Planning locality; and
- **Assist** - with the implementation process for the Area and Operational Plans.

5. AREA PLANNING PROCESS

5.1. The Area Planning process has been in place since 2011 and has gone through several processes of review and refinement. This guidance details the process for the development of the Area Plan for the planning period September 2022 – August 2027 which includes some new features and these are outlined in detail in this section. The 2022-2027 Area Planning process will be taken forward in five main phases (with monitoring and evaluation running throughout) which are:



PHASE 1 – AREA PLANNING – OUTLINING THE CONTEXT, EVIDENCE BASE AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION

5.2. The Department of Education, in line with its roles and responsibilities, sets the policy and priorities for Area Planning. As part of this role the Department reviews and refines existing processes to ensure continuous improvement and to address issues that have emerged throughout the previous process. It was apparent that the Department needed to establish a baseline for the next Area Plan which was grounded in evidence taken over the past decade. It was evident throughout the previous planning period that there were changes that should and could be made to some schools to reflect their established pattern of admissions and enrolment and that these should be done in advance of the development of the new Area Plan for 2022-2027. Preparatory work to support the development of the new Area Plan to establish a baseline that reflects the reality in Local Government Districts and schools and allowing an objective assessment of the extent to which the SSP was being implemented includes:-

Resetting for Area Planning and Normalisation (of admissions / enrolments)

5.3. The Department, working with the input from the planning authorities, sectoral support bodies and schools, has developed and implemented the following two new processes to facilitate changes in the approved admissions and enrolment numbers of eligible primary and post-primary schools.

Resetting for Area Planning process

5.4. The *Resetting for Area Planning* process (decreases) facilitates changes in the approved admissions and enrolment numbers of primary and post-primary schools to help provide as robust a starting position for development of the next Area Plan as possible.

5.5. Further details on the Resetting for Area Planning process can be accessed on the DE website at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/resetting-area-planning>

Normalising School Admissions and Enrolments Pilot Process

5.6. The Normalisation of Admissions and Enrolments process facilitates increases to a grant-aided school's approved admissions and enrolment numbers which may not require a Development Proposal (DP). The pilot process is designed to 'normalise' admission and enrolments numbers where there is evidence demonstrating an historical pattern of such increases approved through the Temporary Variation (TV) policy. Further details on the Normalising School Admissions and Enrolments' pilot process will be published on the DE website at the following link: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/area-planning-overview>

5.7. It is intended that the resetting and normalising exercises will be undertaken every five years in advance of the pre-planning year of future Area Planning Cycles.

Sustainability Baseline Report

5.8. The Department regularly assesses how its SSP is being implemented and determines the priorities to focus the use of available resources in achieving the maximum impact of SSP aims and objectives. It uses the findings of assessments to support the setting of priorities for the next planning period.

5.9. The Department has completed a detailed baseline analysis (the “Sustainability Baseline Report” (SBR)) to support the planning authorities and sectoral support body representatives in the development of the next Area Plan and provide evidence to inform the Ministerial priorities for the implementation of the SSP. The key themes emerging from the SBR have informed decisions on priorities for action over the 2022-2027 planning period. The SBR can be found on DE’s website at the following link: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/sustainability-baseline-report>

5.10. This report will not replace any aspect of the planning responsibilities of the managing authorities and sectoral support body representatives. It will remain their collective responsibility to scope and develop options and provide the required evidence to demonstrate that proposals are consistent with the Minister’s priorities and are brought forward with a focus on the educational needs of children and young people rather than the interests of individual institutions or sectors.

PHASE 2 – AREA PLAN DEVELOPMENT

5.11. The Area Plan is a statement of how present and future educational needs of children and young people will be addressed through broad solutions for an area, consistent with relevant policies and Ministerial priorities.

5.12. The development of the Area Plan will be taken forward by the EA and CCMS, as the planning authorities, in close collaboration with the sectoral support bodies. The Area Planning Strategic, Working and Local Groups will provide structure and defined roles within this process.

5.13. From the outset it is essential that all participants have a clear understanding of the relevant education policies/strategies and Programme for Government (PfG) commitments and outcomes as well as an awareness of the wider political and socio-economic environment to fully inform local discussion.

5.14. The EA, in conjunction with CCMS and sectoral support bodies, should draw from and build on the SBR to produce the Area Plan. The SBR outlines existing provision generally and at Local Government District (LGD) level based on robust data and identifies at macro (NI) and LGD (meso) levels the extent of unsustainability across settings assessed where possible against SSP criteria and indicators.

5.15. A range of common data sets are reflected in the SBR. It is expected that this data alongside the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) population projections for each LGD will help inform the number of school places needed to meet demand in each LGD but individual APLGs may wish to supplement the common data sets with information that is specific to an Area Planning locality to address circumstances unique to that area.

5.16. The plans for future overall provision should reflect cohort trends and ensure that pupils are counted only once. It is critical therefore that due consideration is given to the potential of sectors to grow in line with demand and associated reshaping of the existing provision to reflect this growth should be a feature of the proposals. Establishing a projected demand for each sector and management type will be a matter for local reconciliation and negotiation. Determining the sectoral split should be based on the best interest of pupils and not focused on the ambitions of individual institutions.

5.17. APLGs should seek to ensure that administrative boundaries do not prevent the development of natural and logical solutions for effective and efficient delivery of education provision. Active collaboration and partnership working between APLGs should be a normal part of the process to ensure best fit solutions are developed.

5.18. The EA and CCMS, as statutory community planning partners, are represented in each Community Planning Partnership. Efforts should be made to ensure the Community Planning Partnerships are aware of Area Planning and the associated operational plans for their LGD. EA and CCMS as statutory partners should seek to advocate the advantages that Area Planning can bring to Local Community plans. Strategic Community Planning partnerships are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Area Plan and seek to positively engage with and support its delivery where appropriate.

The Area Plan

5.19. The Area Plan will set the Strategic Direction for the next five years in Area Planning and should reflect the need to deliver the Ministerial priorities linked to the efficient and effective implementation of the SSP, draw on the evidence presented in the SBR and result in an increasing number of children and young people being taught in sustainable schools. Particular attention should be paid to areas where there is evidence of schools that, over a period of time, have been exhibiting stress indicators under the SSP criteria. The aim should be to address Ministerial priorities as well as presenting solutions that create educationally and financially viable provision that is sustainable into the future.

5.20. The Area Plan will have a five year life span based on academic years (September 2022 – August 2027). The content of the Area Plan will be informed by the SBR and Ministerial priorities.

5.21. The Area Plan will cover all primary and post-primary schools of all management types and it should enable the key stakeholders to understand the:-

- policies and Ministerial priorities driving the Area Planning process;
- benefits for pupils, teachers, schools, parents, communities, wider society and economy of having a network of viable and sustainable schools meeting the educational needs of all pupils;
- current issues and challenges facing education as a whole and specific issues in their local area as highlighted in the SBR;
- proposed future shape of education provision for each Area Planning Locality; how that level of provision will be achieved and indicate the priorities for action to deliver the Minister's priorities;

- Area Planning process and the short, medium and longer term high level actions to be taken over the five years covered by the Area Plan to deliver the Ministerial priorities and other changes required to meet the needs of pupils; and
- consultation process, how to comment on the Area Plan and the steps following the consultation.

5.22. The Area Plan should be as concise as possible and should aim to present complex statistical data in a meaningful way, use maps to help the reader understand the profile of the Area Planning locality and avoid the use of jargon. The format and content of the Area Plan will be agreed at APSG. The Department will work with the Planning Authorities to ensure the Area Plan is fit for purpose.

5.23. It will not be possible to address all of the sustainability issues at once therefore the Area Plan should have short, medium and long term aspirations. It should be deliverable and planners should clearly indicate this can be done effectively within the current available resources.

Operational Plan

5.24. Specific actions to deliver the Area Plan will be outlined in the Operational Plans. The planning and managing authorities will outline their collective proposals for change to address sustainability issues and met demand in line with the Ministerial priorities outlined in the SBR.

5.25. The actions to deliver the Area plan will be detailed in a series of AP biennial operational plans. In the five year Area Planning Cycle operational plans will be prepared as follows:-

- OP1 – Years 1 and 2
- OP2 – Years 3 and 4
- OP3 – Year 5 – final actions to deliver AP

5.26. The biennial operational plans should:-

- outline the objectives from the Area Plan (aligned to Ministerial priorities) which will be addressed in the period the operational plan covers;
- be split by primary and post-primary schools within the Area Planning localities;
- detail the actions that will be taken in relation to developing area solutions and specific actions relating to DPs for changes to individual schools;
- clearly identify linked proposals. Any related proposals should be brought at the same time and not held back by one sector / school;
- provide dates and expected outcomes from the action to be undertaken: and
- include an ‘exploratory’ element for areas which require change in the longer term but which require wider community input to design on an area basis.

5.27. The AP Operational Plan (OP1) should be submitted to the Department with the final Area Plan in June 2022 (and subsequently published) and in June of the relevant year for subsequent plans. The operational plan will be monitored and reported on a quarterly basis to APSG.

5.28. Area planning is an ongoing process and at any time there will be proposals at differing stages of development. It is envisaged that the overall Area Plan and supporting operational plans will reflect the differing aspects of the process which include strategic direction, exploration of options and making firm proposals through the statutory Development Proposal process. The APLG should examine how best to deliver the Ministerial priorities and efforts should be concentrated on delivery of those priorities above other considerations.

5.29. It is unlikely, given the nature of Area Planning that the strategic direction will be changed over the life span of the planning period however it should be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure it remains fit for purpose in the current context. Development of the Operational Plans should provide an opportunity to review the Strategic Plan.

5.30. Some proposals included in the Operational Plan may require significant capital investment to fulfil their aspirations. However, it should not be assumed when including such proposals that all approved proposals can be delivered in new school accommodation from the approval date. It is therefore essential that primarily first day accommodation needs are considered and discussed with schools while acknowledging that longer term capital solutions will be developed once the proposals are operational. In some instances more than one school will be involved and the sequencing of proposals should be a key consideration to ensure minimum disruption to the education of the pupils already in the system and to enable delivery of a whole area solution.

PHASE 3 – AREA PLAN - CONSULTATION AND PUBLICATION

Submission of Draft Area Plan to DE

5.31. In line with the Area Planning Cycle the Area Plan will be submitted to the Department for scrutiny and challenge.

5.32. At this stage the Department will be seeking to ensure that the Area Plan is fully compliant with DE policies and reflects the Ministerial priorities before it goes out for wider public consultation for a period which aligns with government guidance. The Department will wish to satisfy itself that appropriate action is being proposed to address the Ministerial priorities above all other considerations.

5.33. Approval to go to consultation on the draft Area Plan is not final approval to that plan but simply agreement that the draft Area Plan to be consulted upon is compliant with DE policies and Ministerial priorities.

5.34. The EA will manage the public consultation process on the draft Area Plan and take account of any feedback and findings. These will be shared with members of APSG, APWG and APLGs to consider and determine, if as a result of these, any changes are needed to the Area Plan before finalising the plan for submission to the Department.

5.35. A Consultation Report will be made available on the EA website.

Submission of Final Area Plan

5.36. Following public consultation and assessment of the responses the EA should submit the finalised Area Plan to the DE in line with the timetable contained in Annex C through the APSG. The EA's Chief Executive Officer and others as appropriate should prepare a formal presentation for the Minister on the content of the plan and highlight how the responses of the consultation have been taken into account in preparing the final plan. This will take place prior to the Minister's decision to endorse the Area Plan.

Endorsement of Final Area Plan

5.37. DE will assess the Area Plan for alignment with DE policies, guidance and Ministerial priorities and liaise with EA, CCMS and others. It will assess how the issues raised in the consultation have been addressed. Pending satisfactory resolution of any issues, EA should publish the three-part Area Plan on its website.

PHASE 4 – AREA AND OPERATIONAL DELIVERY

Monitoring and Reporting

5.38. Delivery of the aims and objectives of the SSP and Area Planning will be determined by the degree to which the Area and Operational Plans are delivered. It will be essential to have robust and verifiable evidence to demonstrate how well the plan is being executed. The Department will work with APSG in taking an outcomes based approach to agree how best to measure the success of the Area Planning process and to evidence extent and quality of effort (how much did we do and how well did we do it?) as well as extent and quality of effect (is anyone better off?).

5.39. The EA will develop a comprehensive work schedule to reflect the actions contained in the Operational and Exploratory Plans. A report will be submitted to the APSG on a quarterly basis and this report should outline the progress, slippage and contingencies against all actions. Issues must be identified and raised with APSG. Details are also included in the roles and responsibility in Annex C.

PHASE 5 – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AREA PLAN ACTIONS

5.40. The Department will work with the EA and CCMS and the sectoral support bodies to ensure that the implementation of the proposals emerging from the Area Plan is supported in an appropriate manner. Work will begin to develop support systems to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation processes. This guidance will be updated when the systems are agreed.

Legislative Context

Area Planning is being taken forward under existing legislation. The extracts of the relevant legislation is outlined in Appendix 1 of this annex.

The Department of Education

The Department has a duty to ensure that its Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) effectively deliver the full suite of education policies. It also has a duty under Article 64 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 to encourage and facilitate the development of Integrated Education, a duty under Article 89 of the Education (NI) Order 1998 to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish Medium Education and a duty under the Shared Education Act (NI) 2016 to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education. Those bodies with a statutory duty to plan education provision are expected to assist the Department, through their planning activities, to exercise these duties.

Education Authority

The Education Act (NI) 2014, created the Education Authority (EA) with effect from 1 April 2015. The EA has assumed, unchanged, the powers, duties and responsibilities of the previous five Education and Library Boards and assumed duties to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education and the community use of school premises.

Article 5 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986) requires the Authority to ensure that efficient primary and secondary education are available to meet the needs of the community. This is a significant, overarching role relating to schools in all sectors and of all types. Article 6 places a duty on the Authority to ensure that there are sufficient schools available for providing primary and secondary education. The definition of 'sufficient' refers to the 'character' of the schools as well as the number. Thus, the Authority has a duty as planner of schools that spans all sectors and types. This duty is separate from the Authority's power under Article 7 to establish controlled schools.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)

Under Article 142 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, CCMS has a statutory role in consultation with the Trustees in relation to planning for the effective provision of Catholic maintained schools.

AREA PLANNING – EXTRACTS FROM RELEVANT LEGISLATION

1) DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – GENERAL DUTY

Education Reform (NI) Order 1989

General duty of the Department

3. It shall be the duty of the Department—

(b) to secure the effective execution by the Authority and other bodies on which ... powers are conferred or duties imposed under the Education Orders of the Department's policy in relation to the provision of the education service.

2) EDUCATION AUTHORITY – PLANNING DUTIES

Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986

Stages and purposes of statutory system of education

5. (2) It shall be the duty of the Authority (so far as its powers extend) to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, cultural, intellectual and physical development of the community by securing that efficient primary education and secondary education are available to meet the needs of the community.

Duty of the Authority to secure provision of primary and secondary education

6. (1) ... the Authority shall secure that there are available sufficient schools for providing primary and secondary education and the schools available shall not be deemed to be sufficient unless they are sufficient in number, character and equipment to afford for all pupils opportunity for education offering such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities and aptitudes, and of the different periods for which they may be expected to remain at school ...

(1A) In fulfilling its duty under this Article to secure that there are available sufficient schools for providing secondary education the Authority shall have regard to any facilities for full time education which are provided for senior pupils in an institution of further education; and

3) COUNCIL FOR CATHOLIC MAINTAINED SCHOOLS – PLANNING DUTIES

Education Reform (NI) Order 1989

Functions of the Council

142. (1) The Council shall—

(b) promote and co-ordinate, in consultation with the trustees of Catholic maintained schools, the planning of the effective provision of Catholic maintained schools

AREA PLANNING: PRE-PLANNING YEAR TIMETABLE (2021/22)

Pre-planning Year 2021/22	Action
By 31 Jan'21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DE - prepare first draft of the Sustainability Baseline Report (SBR) & circulate to APSG members for views.
By 12 Feb'21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DE - workshop arranged to secure APSG comments on SBR.
Mid-End Feb'21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DE – review APSG comments from workshop & incorporate as agreed into draft SBR.
Early May'21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DE - present to APSG, finalised SBR & discuss Area Planning Guidance.
End May'21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Area Planning Guidance prepared.
By mid Aug'21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister's statement on Area Planning priorities & SBR/Strategic Area Plan (SAP2). Publish Area Planning Guidance. Publish SBR.
Summer/Early Autumn 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EA non-school & school stakeholder engagement.
Jun-Oct'21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> APSG/WG/LG - Finalise SBR/draft SAP2 and Operational Plan (OP1).
End Nov'21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EA - complete internal approvals. EA – submit final draft SAP2 to APSG.
Early Jan'22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DE press release – <i>EA commencement of SAP2 consultation.</i>
Early Jan – end Mar'22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EA–Stakeholder consultation/engagement. EA – submit draft OP1 to APSG.
April'22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EA – Consider and report to DE on SAP2 consultation findings.
May'22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EA - complete internal approvals.
Jun'22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EA – 7 June meeting of SPPC (<i>final approval</i>). EA - 8 June submission of SAP2/OP1 to DE/APSG.
Mid Jun'22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister's statement to Assembly – SAP2 consultation outcomes/next steps.
Mid Jun'22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EA - publish SAP 2 & OP1 (<i>to take effect on 1 September 2022</i>) before schools close for summer.
1 Sept'22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAP2/OP1 – commence

AREA PLANNING STEERING GROUP (APSG)

The APSG is the strategic steering group to support DE as it takes forward the implementation of Departmental policies (particularly SSP), contributes to PfG outcomes; delivers on Ministerial priorities and further refines the process of Area Planning. It provides a forum for Chief Executives to discuss and agree a common approach to Area Planning issues which should reflect greater consistency and clarity, increased engagement among sectors for area based solutions and innovative ideas for improved sustainability and access for children and young people.

As the apex of the planning framework, APSG will (inter alia) act as a conduit between DE as policy maker and the EA and CCMS as planning and implementing bodies, and the sectoral and non-statutory support bodies who act as advocates for their respective sectors.

Members will, throughout the 2022-2027 Area Planning period;

- a) Identify, consider and provide advice to the Department on strategic Area Planning issues ;
- b) Identify, consider and provide advice to the Department on Departmental Policy issues impacting on Area Planning;
- c) Examine and provide advice to APWG and APLG on area specific issues to support the delivery of the Ministerial priorities;
- d) Report on the delivery of the Area Plan and the associated Operational plans, outlining progress, slippage, contingency planning and impact to support the delivery of the Ministerial priorities; and
- e) Assist the Department to review and refine the Area Planning processes to ensure consistency of approach, efficiency and effectiveness.

DE will agree forward work programmes with the APSG which will be designed to:-

- a) Further embed a single approach to Area Planning and implementation across all existing organisations;
- b) Increase the pace of implementation of the SSP through effective Area Planning including improved approaches to consultation using virtual methods.

While APSG collectively represents the planning and sectoral authorities, it will not affect the roles, responsibilities and accountability of individual members as Chief Executives and (where applicable) Accounting Officers, nor their individual accountability for the planning of educational provision.

Membership

APSG will comprise the Chief Executive and Director responsible for Area Planning of the EA and CCMS, the Chief Executives of NICIE, CnaG, CSSC, CSTS; GBA and a TRC representative.

A senior official from DfE will attend as an observer to provide a further education perspective

APSG will be chaired by the responsible Deputy Secretary in DE who is supported by the Director of Sustainable Schools Policy and Planning Directorate (SSPPD) and the heads of the Area Planning Policy Teams (APPT) and School Admissions Team (SAT).

The Minister will normally chair two meetings per year to hear a progress report.

Meeting Schedule/Approach

It is envisaged that APSG will meet formally four times yearly (usually quarterly). Meetings will be conducted through either a 'virtual' or 'face to face' forum. It is expected that all members will strive to be in attendance or provide a suitable deputy so that all organisations are represented at every meeting.

Extra-ordinary meetings may be called as necessary and more meetings will take place in the pre-planning year for the next Area Plan.

The programmed meetings will comprise the following sessions:

- 1) Session 1: **Strategic Policy** – *to consider subjects and topics requiring strategic discussion and decisions by all sectors; and potentially requiring the support of APWG/LGs; and*
- 2) Session 2: **Locality Review** – *to focus on one locality and consider and discuss the content and progress of related proposals contained in the Operational Plan (OP).*

Recording and Reporting

Secretarial support is provided by SSPPD (DE).

Papers submitted to the Secretariat by members to support agenda items will be submitted 7 working days before a meeting to allow for timely issue to members.

Any other business must be notified to the Department 2 working days in advance of the meeting.

Agendas and associated papers will be circulated 5 working days before a meeting. In exceptional circumstance, if development of papers is delayed, members will be notified of the date papers will issue.

Draft minutes of meetings and action points to be circulated within 14 working days of each meeting.

Members will respond to requests for inputs in line with the stated deadlines.

The Chairperson and the SSPPD Director will update the Minister and DE Board regularly through normal DE reporting channels.

AREA PLANNING WORKING GROUP (APWG)

The APWG is a forum for officers of member organisations (planning authorities and the sectoral support bodies) who are involved with the operational aspects of Area Planning. This forum will facilitate discussion and collaboration at cross-locality/cross-sectoral level on how best to address and deliver the Ministerial priorities in a common and consistent manner and all other matters relating to Area Planning.

APWG will:

- a) Provide support to APLGs on the development of the Operational Plans prioritising and taking account of the Ministerial Priorities outlined in the Sustainability Baseline Report;
- b) Agree a consistent approach to the Area Planning process and a tailored response to addressing specific Ministerial priorities in the Area Planning localities;
- c) Support the drafting of the Area Plan and associated Operational Plans for 2022-2027;
- d) Monitor, review, revise and evaluate the impact of the Operational Plans;
- e) Prepare quarterly monitoring reports for APSG, on the delivery of the Area Plan and associated Operational plans, outlining progress, slippage and contingency planning to support the delivery of the Ministerial priorities; and
- f) Consider current Area Planning and related processes, identify opportunities and risks and prepare and submit discussion papers to APSG which outline the issues, options/proposals to address these and stating the outcome required from APSG.

Membership

APWG will be chaired by the EA Assistant Director for Area Planning.

APWG membership (in addition to the Chairperson) will comprise two representatives of the EA and CCMS and one representative from NICIE, CnaG, CSSC, GBA, CSTS and TRC.

Departmental officials will attend all meetings to provide support and advice on matters relating to the SSP and the Area Planning process as necessary.

Meeting Schedule/Approach

The APWG will meet 4 times per year and at least 2 weeks in advance of APSG meetings. Meetings will be conducted through either a 'virtual' or 'face to face' forum.

Extra-ordinary meetings may be called as necessary and more meetings will take place in the pre-planning year for the next Area Plan.

The role of APWG requires it to feed into the strategic issues (APSG), the local issues (APLG) and to address its own business. The approach to the meeting should reflect

these differing roles and may at time require whole group or time limited task and finish sub group formats.

Recording and Reporting

The EA will provide the secretariat and arrangements for issue of agendas, papers and minutes will be determined by the Chairperson. It is expected that similar arrangements to APSG will be adopted. A full record of all meetings, discussions, decisions and agreed action points should be maintained. Draft minutes of meeting and action points to be circulated within 14 working days of each meeting.

The APWG will provide a written report for each of the APSG meetings including a monitoring report on the Operational Plan. This will be required 7 working days in advance of the APSG quarterly meeting date. The Department will agree the format of these reports.

AREA PLANNING LOCAL GROUPS (APLGs)

Roles and responsibilities

The APLGs are the fora for local stakeholders with area specific knowledge and experience, nominated by the planning authorities, sectoral support bodies, FE and any other relevant interests (to be agreed by group) to:

- a. contribute to the development, review or revision of an Area Plan in line with Ministerial priorities and Departmental guidance ;
- b. assist with the implementation process for the strategic Area Plan; and
- c. discuss the content of Operational Plans before they are sent to the EA for approval to submit to the Department.

The aim is to ensure that all relevant interests are given an opportunity to input to the development of the Area Plan, and have their contributions to delivery of Ministerial priorities taken fully into account when the plan is being developed, reviewed, revised and implemented.

For effective planning purposes, the EA has established three APLG localities comprising the following LGDs:-

Locality	Local Government District (LGD)
South West	Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Fermanagh and Omagh Mid Ulster
North	Antrim and Newtownabbey Mid and East Antrim Causeway Coast and Glens Derry and Strabane
East	Ards and North Down Belfast Lisburn and Castlereagh Newry, Mourne and Down

Each APLG will:

- a) consider the needs of all sectors for primary or post-primary provision and in execution of the duties placed on EA in Article 6 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, ensure that the Area Plan takes account, and adequately reflects the educational needs of current and future pupils in each school sector;
- b) develop evidence based proposals for inclusion in the Strategic Area Plan for primary and post primary taking account of Ministerial priorities and the SBR analysis;
- c) prepare Operational Plans for its Area Planning locality; and
- d) identify opportunities and risks impacting on Area Planning for consideration by APWG for resolution or referral to APSG as evidence based discussion papers.

Membership

The APLG will be chaired by the Education Authority.

In addition to the Chairperson, membership will comprise two representatives of the EA and CCMS and one representative from NICIE, CnaG, CSSC, CSTS, GBA, TRC and the local FE college(s).

A DE official will attend these meetings in an advisory capacity to provide support and advice on matters relating to the SBR, SSP and Area Planning process as necessary.

The APLG may invite appropriate individuals or groups to attend on an ad hoc basis.

Meeting Schedule

The schedule of meetings will be agreed between APWG and APLG chairpersons. The frequency of meetings will depend on the phase of the Area Planning Cycle. It is likely that meetings will be more frequent in the pre-planning year to support the development of the Area plan for 2022-2027. At other times they will be linked to the review and monitoring of Operational Plans. Extra-ordinary meetings may be called as necessary. If required task and finish subgroups may be established to deal with specific issues. However these groups are not intended to prolong discussions on matters where there is no agreement. In these cases the issue should be raised to APWG and APSG for guidance.

The timing of meetings will be a matter for group agreement and depending on the need to address area planning requirements in localities however the Department expects that the groups will meet a minimum of twice a year.

Meetings will be conducted through either a 'virtual' or 'face to face' forum.

Recording and Reporting

The EA will provide the secretariat and arrangement for issue of agendas, papers and notes will be determined by the Chairperson. It is expected that similar arrangement to APSG will be adopted. A note of all meetings, discussions, decisions and agreed action points should be maintained.

Abbreviations/Glossary of Terms

ALB	Arm's Length Body
AP	Area Plan
APLG	Area Planning Local Group
APSG	Area Planning Steering Group
APWG	Area Planning Working Group
ALB	Arms-Length Body
APPT	Area Planning Policy Team
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CnaG	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
CSSC	Controlled Schools' Support Council
CSTS	Catholic Schools' Trustee Service
DE	Department of Education
DfE	Department for the Economy
DP	Development Proposal
DSF	Delivering Schools for the Future
EA	Education Authority
EP	Exploratory Plan
FE	Further Education
GBA	Governing Bodies Association
LGD	Local Government District
MA	Managing Authorities
NDNA	New Decade New Approach
NI	Northern Ireland
NICIE	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
OP	Operational Plan
PfG	Programme for Government
SAP	Strategic Area Plan
SAT	School Admissions Team
SBR	Sustainability Baseline Report
SIB	Strategic Investment Board
SSP	Sustainable Schools Policy (Schools for the Future – A policy for Sustainable Schools)
SSPPD	Sustainable Schools Policy and Planning Directorate
TRC	Transferors Representatives' Council
TV	Temporary Variation
VGS	Voluntary Grammar School