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Royal Town Planning Institute

**RTPI  
Research  
Paper**

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# MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Planning Outcomes Research Handbook



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot



An Roinn Tithíochta,  
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht  
Department of Housing,  
Local Government and Heritage



Oifig an  
Rialaitheora Pleanála  
Office of the  
Planning Regulator



Ministry of Housing,  
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Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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RTPI champions the power of planning in creating prosperous places and vibrant communities. We have over 25,000 members in the private, public, academic and voluntary sectors. Using our expertise and research we bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking, putting the profession at the heart of society's big debates. We set the standards of planning education and professional behaviour that give our members, wherever they work in the world, a unique ability to meet complex economic, social and environmental challenges. We are the only body in the United Kingdom that confers Chartered status to planners, the highest professional qualification sought after by employers in both private and public sectors.

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## About this paper

This Handbook is part of a suite of documents forming the [Measuring What Matters Planning Outcomes Research](#). This Handbook offers practical guidance alongside the research toolkits that provide the practical framework for implementing this new process of measurement. Other documents forming part of this research are:

- [Measuring What Matters: Planning Outcomes Research Report and Toolkit](#) (this toolkit can be adapted and applied to any nation)
- [Scottish Report and Toolkit](#)
- [Irish Report and Toolkit](#)
- [Wales Report and Toolkit](#)

### Front and back cover image

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# 1. The handbook introduction

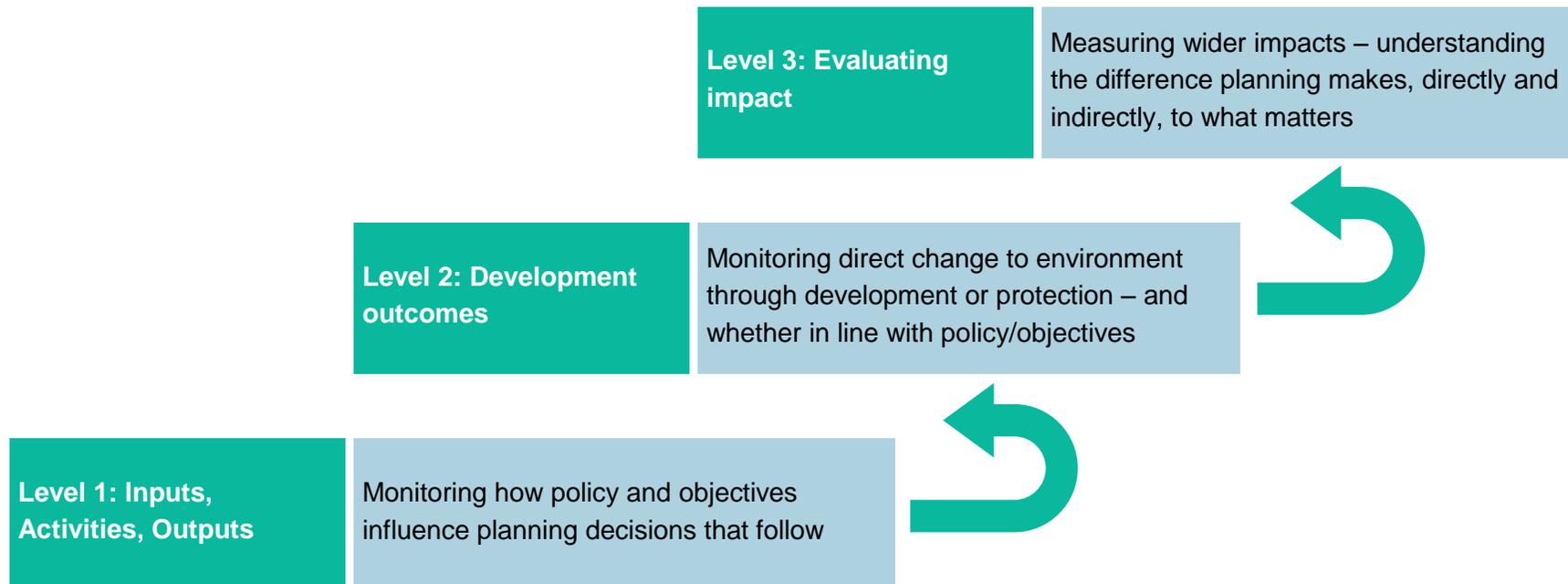
This document is a supplement to [Measuring What Matters: Planning Outcomes Research Report](#) and sets out the process for use of the toolkit. The toolkit is a way of bringing all the necessary information and data into a single location, to be ‘diagnosed’ and reviewed as part of the process in shifting output monitoring towards tracking impact. Four versions of the toolkit exist - for Scotland, Ireland, Wales and a common toolkit that can be applied in other planning jurisdictions. Use this handbook, alongside any of the toolkits, as a guide through the process and to help make the most of your use of the toolkit.



## 2. Measuring What Matters: the process

The research highlighted that there is a need to develop a toolkit that enables a better understanding of the impact of planning. The toolkit is built around addressing the question – what difference is planning making? To understand the impact of planning, the immediate activities and direct outputs of planning need to be understood, alongside the wider outcomes from the planning process.

The three levels below provide a guide, showing a progression from understanding policy effectiveness in application determinations (Level 1), to direct physical development outcomes (Level 2), to wider cumulative direct and indirect impacts of planning (Level 3).



### 3. The toolkit framework

The Toolkit is a flexible tracking framework that can operate at multiple spatial scales. It has been tested in a range pilots, ranging from regional plans to urban development frameworks. This framework is used to pull together all the information needed to undertake the assessment for any level. By drawing plan information together with monitoring information, it acts as a diagnostic tool, moving beyond simply monitoring to aiding an assessment of progress towards objectives/targets. A full-size version of the framework below, with examples, is provided in the [Measuring What Matters: Planning Outcomes Research Toolkits](#).

Theme	Ref No.	Policy/Objective	Objectives/Targets	Monitoring Indicators	Data	Achievement Score
Place, Design & People						
Health & Wellbeing						
Environment, Conservation & Improvement						
Climate Change						
Homes & Community						
Economy & Town Centres						
Movement						
Process & Engagement						

## Toolkit Input Columns (see columns on page 6)

<b>Themes</b>	The eight themes reflect the sectoral areas over which spatial planning has an influencing a role and impact
<b>Ref No.</b>	A numbering system for users to refer and cross-refer with a data library. This is important for tracking
<b>Policy/Objective</b>	Identify theme-related policies or objectives to be monitored. This material may be drawn from approved statutory plans and their constituent policies or from other strategies/masterplans at a variety of scales (e.g. city, regional)
<b>Objectives/Targets</b>	Clearly identify the purpose of the plan or policy, including any specific objectives and/or targets
<b>Monitoring Indicators</b>	From available monitoring material, identify appropriate performance measurement indicators that are relevant to the policy/objective being tracked
<b>Data</b>	Insert data associated with the indicator, beginning with a 'baseline' position. Note likely tracking intervals (e.g. 1, 2, 5 years)
<b>Achievement Score</b>	Assessment of the data against objective/target. An aggregate score for the theme can be presented using diagrams. More detail is provided on Scoring at page 9

*Note: The data source tab in the toolkit can be used to help record available data sources*

## 4. The toolkit steps

Central to the process is the working through a series of steps over time to measure progress. The five steps below form a full evaluation cycle: Step 1 is preparation, Steps 2 to 4 use the toolkit (from collecting data to diagnostic review and assessing impact) while Step 5 guides the future actions arising from evaluation. These steps can be applied at each of the three levels (shown on page 5).

### Step 1 Scoping exercise

- Identify clearly **what plan and policy is to be tracked** and its performance monitored, including reasons
- Define the **spatial scope and timeframe** of assessment and note what stage the plan/policy is at in its current cycle
- Explain the **purpose and stage of assessment** (e.g. mid-term review of policy, thematic review, baseline, 5-year review)
- Identify any **current monitoring processes and evaluation feedback** to benchmark policy effectiveness and data
- Reflect on how **toolkit will be used to identify activities and select indicators** to measure outputs and outcomes
- State any **working assumptions** underpinning the use of the toolkit
- Establish **project team and agreed procedures** (e.g. for sharing and tracking data across organisations/teams)

### Step 2 Collation of data

- **Confirm selection of plan and policies to be tracked** - these may be drawn from a mix of site/locational/area specific, to strategic/sectoral and indirect impact (e.g. health and wellbeing)
- **Assign selected policies** to one of the eight framework themes
- Identify tracking **indicators** from available monitoring material
- **Publicly available data connected to impact**, either directly or indirectly attributable to planning, is required
- Draw together **all data sources relating to monitoring** of plans/ policies and their objectives/targets

### Step 3 Diagnostic review

- **Analyse trends in measurable data** to gain picture of performance over timeframe
- **Support measurement with qualitative assessment** - include via group review - to reflect on context of application and limitations
- **Identify and understand effectiveness of the policy** in operational decision-making - e.g. applications and appeals
- **Identify any gaps in data and monitoring knowledge.** This can influence future data and performance enhancement

### Step 4 Assessing impact

- **Evaluation and scoring of performance** to be undertaken as either internal, external (or combined) team assessment
- **Assign a score of between 1 and 5** reflect performance against target, policy effectiveness, achievement of objective
- **Aggregate scoring** allows for visualisation and composite presentation of findings for multiple policy strands in same theme. (See pages 9 - 11 for advice on the visualisation of scores)
- Consideration may be given to **weighting of different policies** depending upon their strategic importance before producing finalised aggregate score

### Step 5 Review, resolve, implement

- **Review the strengths and weaknesses in performance** of plan/strategy/policy in the round
- Consider how **policies align with higher level strategy and objectives**, such as national or regional
- Review of **effectiveness and outcomes of the policy**, and if the policy is working
- **Review and amend strategy/policy/plan objectives**, if required from analysis
- **Update indicators and monitoring process including** additional data gathering requirements
- **Identify and share all lessons learnt** for the assessment process
- **Implement the lessons learnt** the next cycle of performance measurement in the chosen timeframe

## 5. Scoring

A method of comparative scoring is needed to give an indication of achievement against objectives that can be read across policies, plans and the eight themes. To provide such comparability, the scoring is based on a **five-level ranking**, each with **performance benchmarks** and **proposed action**.

To be rigorous and fair in measuring impact, the scoring needs to be an assessment of data against targets. This ensures that the measurement is a real gauge of progress over time, not an arbitrary ranking.

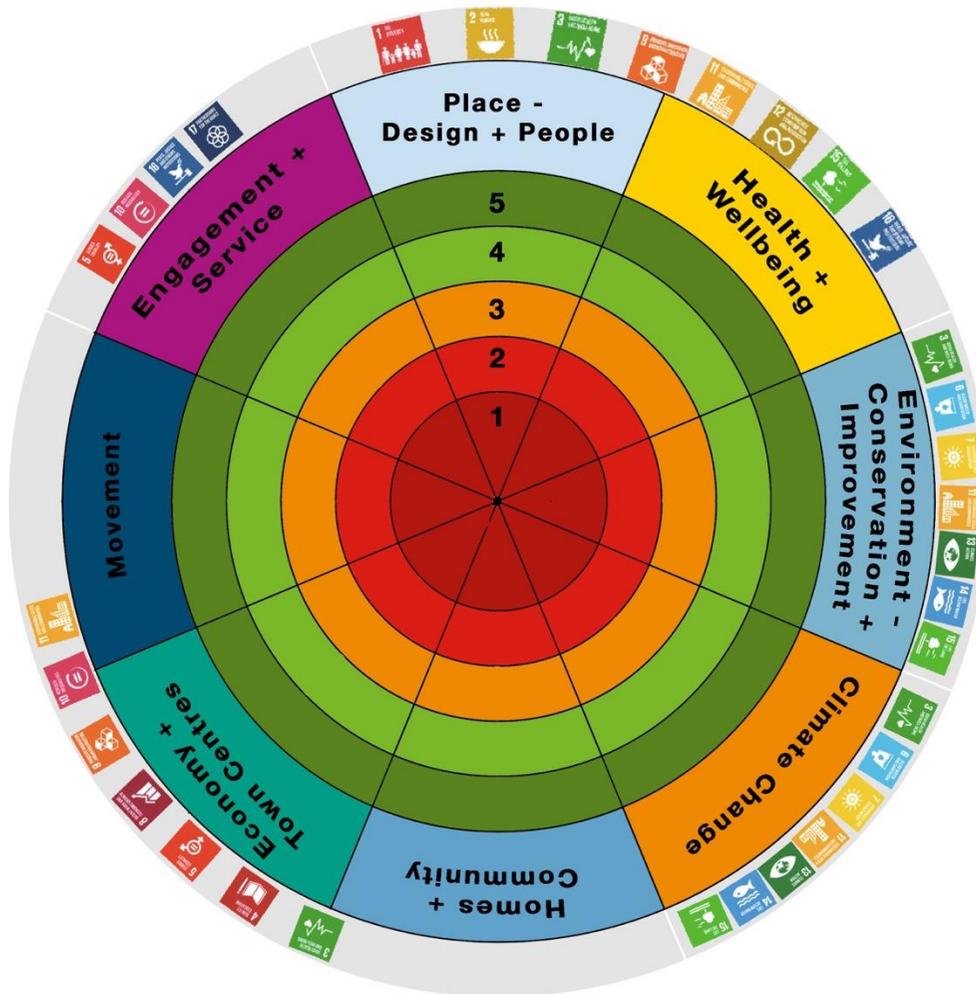
To influence future performance the achievement score needs to be associated with some action in the next steps of the process.

Score	Performance benchmark	Action
5	Excellent progress towards outcomes	Share learning with others
4	Good progress towards outcomes	Consider increasing ambition in policy objectives/targets
3	Fair progress towards outcomes	Review and aim to improve implementation and raise ambition in policy
2	Poor progress towards outcomes	Review policy and understand implementation
1	Not achieving progress towards outcomes	Immediate review and revisit of policy and its delivery

The first cycle in the application of the toolkit will establish baseline scores. It may be that, in the course of this initial cycle, accurate evaluation is not possible due to a lack of clear goals or reliable indicator data.

Because the process relates to sharing lessons and guiding future action, this should aid not only better performance, but also better policy and future measurement too.

## 6. Visualisation options



### Visualisation of Scores

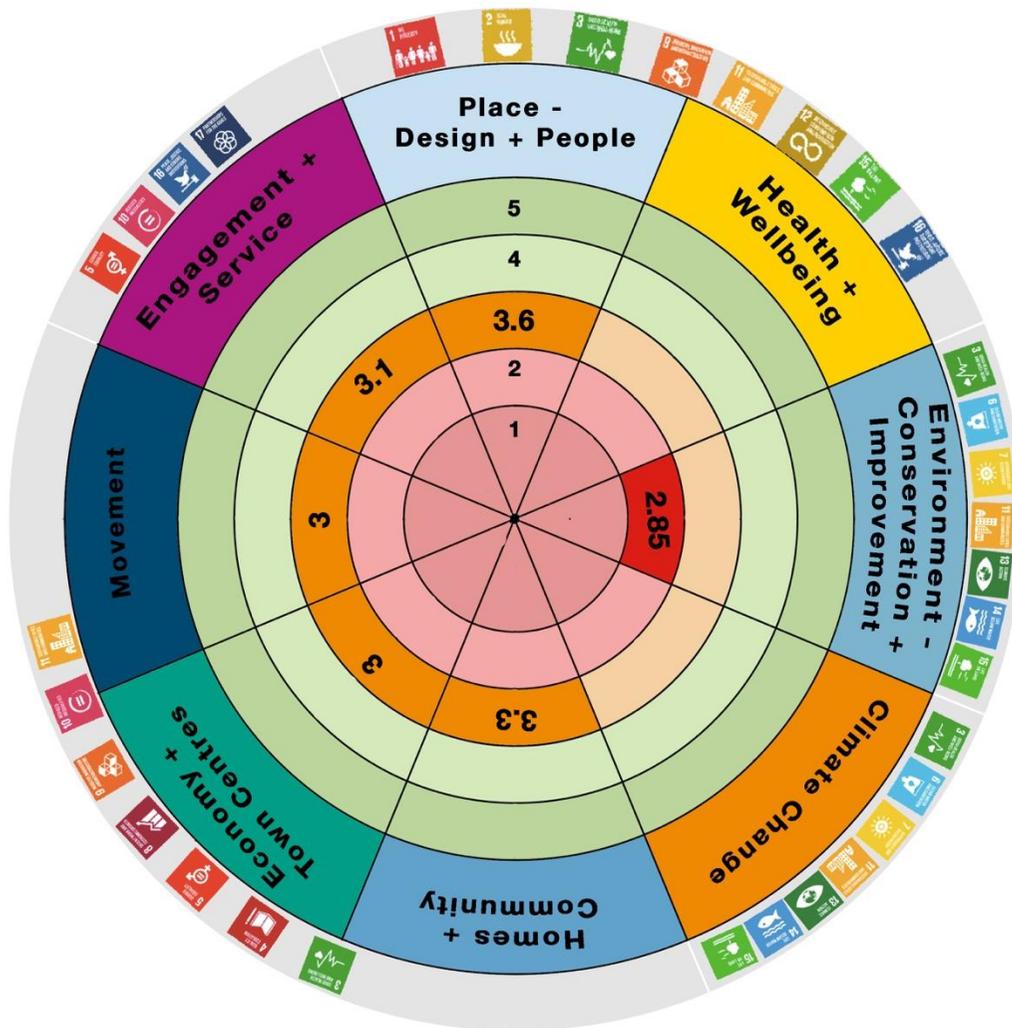
Communication of the impact of planning by scoring is a key visual product of the toolkit. We have created two options for illustrating this.

By aggregating the scoring within in each of the eight themes, and visually representing on a radar diagram (opposite) or graphic equaliser matrix (below on page 12) we can provide quick 'easyread' feedback on the impact planning for a specified plan, area, policy.

As both forms show, performance can be linked to the UN SDGs and also to a range of national objectives or outcomes.

The circular 'radar' diagram scores performance from the inside (low, under-achievement) outwards to the outside (excellent). It is useful for communicating online, in presentations or other instances where early visual impact is important.

The linear 'graphic equaliser' diagram can be more nuanced for formal reporting and other uses where space and visual impact are not at a premium.



This shows an example of a radar diagram with aggregate scores from each theme inserted.

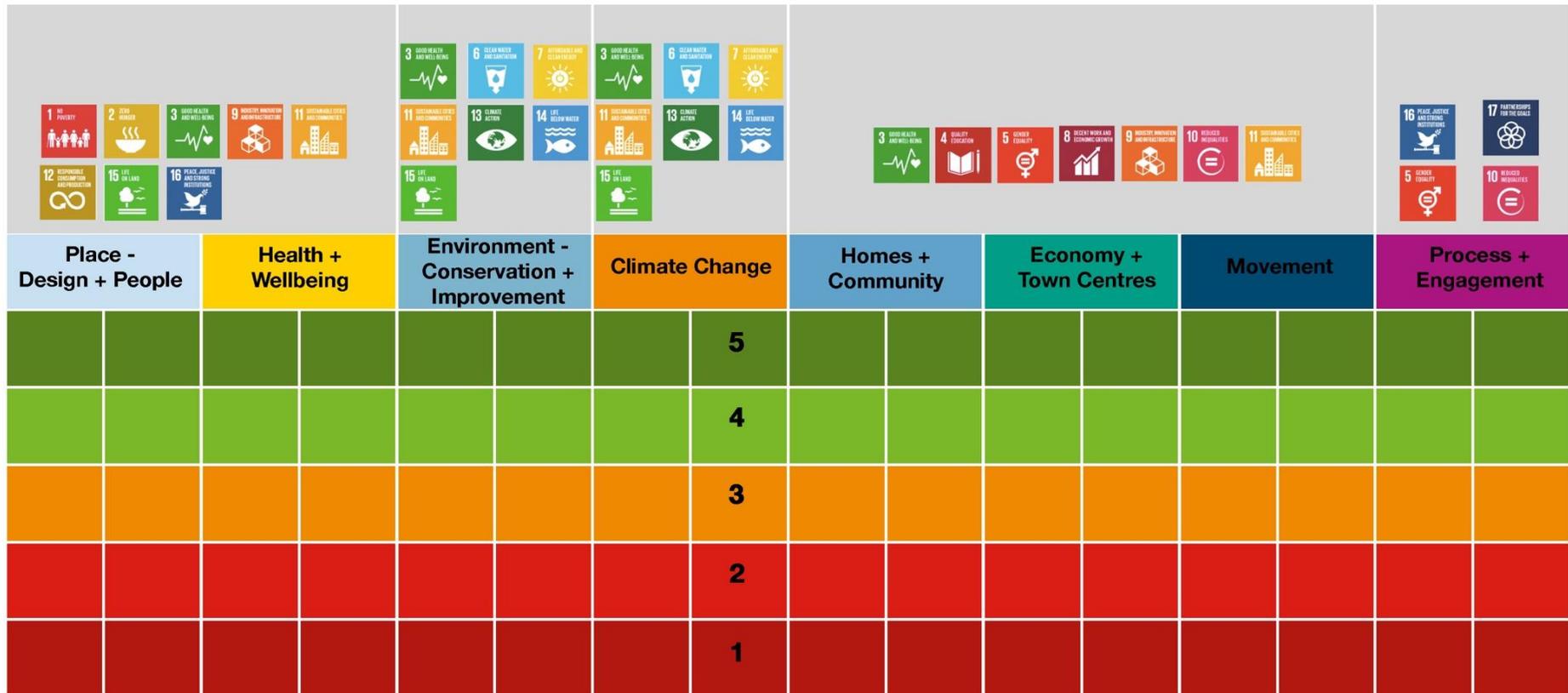
The themes with no scores showing reflect that either (1) no specific policies were identified under these themes for measurement, or (2) no data was able to be identified.

The expectation is that, over time, all theme categories will be able to be address at a local authority area plan level by at least some trackable policies, ideally several.

However, with some specialist plans or policies, such as economic, housing or health, they may not trigger policy objectives or responses across all eight themes.

# 7. Graphic equaliser variant

This version below shows the matrix/graphic equaliser method of representing the performance within each theme. The right choice will depend upon the occasion and audience. Typical audiences for communicating the analysis might include internal team members, elected members, funding agencies and the wider public, such as civic groups.



## 8. Review and feedback loop

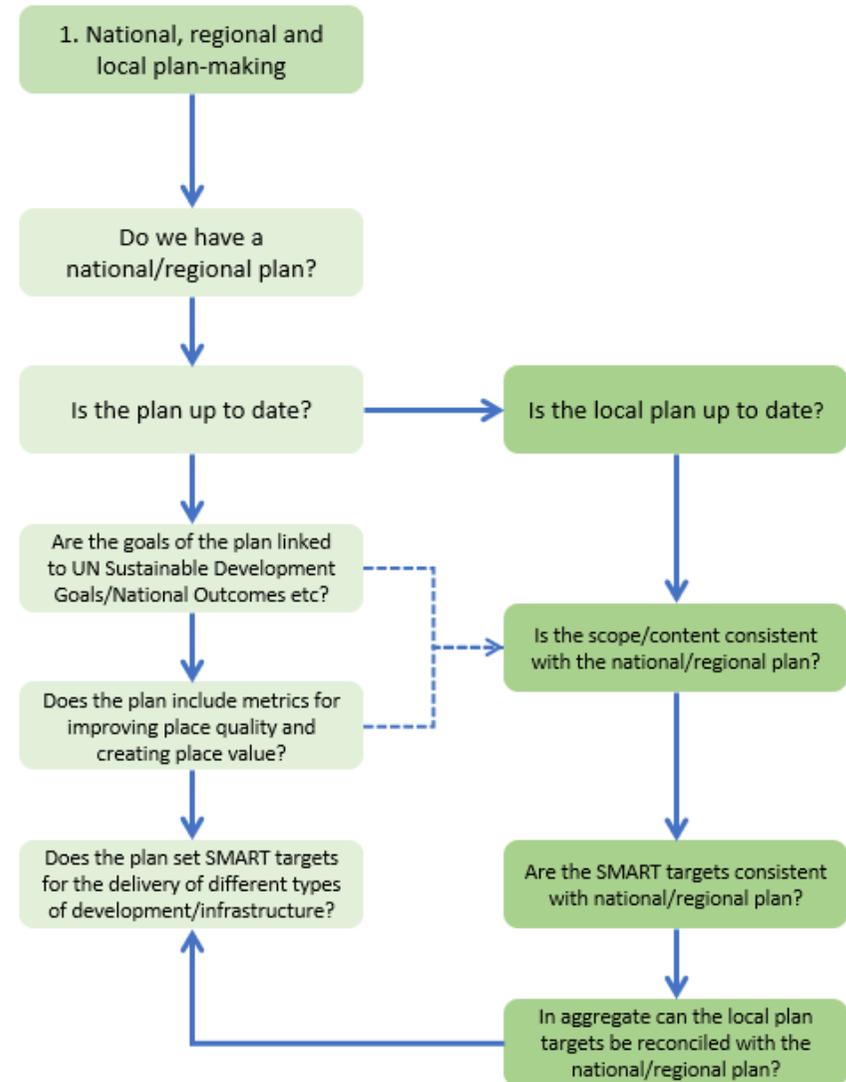
The toolkit is intended to be used in more than one full evaluation cycle, **embracing monitor, review and application of the learning**. Only by cyclical repetition of the process with a critical review at Stage 5, can improvement be tracked and delivered.

The process is set up to ensure that the basic building blocks are in place to assess impacts, address issues and improve performance.

The key elements of the Stage 5 review stage are:

### Review the assessment

- Are inputs being monitored?
- Are activities and outputs being monitored?
- Are development outcomes being monitored?
- Are place impacts (quality and value) being monitored?
- Does the scoring indicate strong alignment with local/regional/national plans and National outcomes?
- Are Key Performance Indicators, SMART targets or other markers being established where needed?



## Resolve issues arising

- **Inputs**<sup>1</sup> – what data needs to be captured to monitor effectively?
- **Activities and outputs** – what data needs to be captured to monitor effectively?
- **Outcomes** – what data needs to be captured to monitor effectively?
- **Impacts** – what data needs to be captured to monitor effectively?
- What **policy areas** need to be developed to create stronger alignment with local/regional/national plan and national outcomes?

## Implement actions

- Develop policy to align with local/regional/national plans and national outcomes
- Develop objectives and targets that can be measured
- Identify existing data to begin monitoring
- Identify future data requirements

This completes a feedback loop of any one cycle and feeds into the next cycle of monitoring. Evidence for how to take forward to higher levels of performance, including national and international, are provided in Appendix B of the research report.

Congratulations on completing your first cycle on the process towards measuring the direct and indirect impacts of planning.

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<sup>1</sup> Inputs refer to the human, financial (including fees from planning income) and other resources deployed by planning policymakers and Planning Authorities. The other resources may include legal powers, statutory plans, planning policies and published guidance. The inputs are deployed to deliver planning activities.



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