

Independent Assurance Panel - Terms of Reference

- 1 The purpose of the Panel will be to:
 - i. Provide external advice, challenge, and expertise to Cheshire East Council in driving-forward improvement, transformation, in developing its Corporate Plan and other plans, and in aligning its MTFS.
 - ii. Support the coordination and sequencing of activity central to the Council's improvement.

The Panel will draw upon a wide range of expertise to:

- a) Provide regular advice, challenge, and support to the Council on the full range of its improvement activities and specifically on the delivery of recommendations included in the Council's Corporate Peer Review and progress towards financial sustainability.
- b) Ensure financial sustainability of the Council is achieved.
- c) Support and monitor progress against the recommendations of the Peer Review and identify risks.

Format and Frequency:

- 2 It is intended that the Panel will convene for the first time before the end of August 2024, in order to consider the Council's Transformation Plan and Corporate Peer Review Action Plan, prior to their submission to Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the LGA. It is expected to conclude its work in May 2026, subject to the Panel and the Council being assured of the Council's ongoing stability.
- 3 It is anticipated that the Panel will initially meet monthly (more frequently if required). Meeting frequency will be reviewed after six-months with a view to moving to quarterly meetings, subject to appropriate progress being made.
- 4 Meetings will be held in private, and the minutes to support these meetings will not be published. Instead, the communications of the Panel will be set out through their formal update letters to Full Council, via the Chief Executive. Additional reporting from the Panel will be via the Chief Executive to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and other stakeholders.
- 5 Meetings will be supported by a secretariat provided by Cheshire East Council. This will include the coordination of papers and their distribution four working days in advance of the meeting.

- 6 Meetings of the Panel will be held either in person or online to allow flexibility and recognising the travel implications for many Panel members.
- 7 Subject to the proviso that the Panel may provide progress updates to the Council at any time, written update letters to Full Council will be submitted by the Panel twice a year.

Membership and Alignment:

- 8 The Membership of the Panel will comprise the following, who will be appointed for a two-year term. Importantly, these appointments will not be 'employee' appointments of the Council. They will be independent 'post-holders'.
 - Independent Chair
 - Independent External Finance lead
 - Independent External Transformation lead
 - Independent External Governance lead
 - Local Government Association (Regional Improvement Lead)
 - Local Government Associate Peer (Inde)
 - Local Government Association Peer (Lab)
 - Local Government Association Peer (Con)
 - Leader of the Council
 - Deputy Leader of the Council
 - Leader of the Opposition
 - Chief Executive

Substitutes will not be permitted.

- 9 Additional independent external or internal individuals may be appointed to the Panel if required or invited for specific meetings/agenda items to be agreed by the Chair and Chief Executive, as further progress is made with the Council's improvement journey.
- 10 The Panel will work closely with the Council. The relationship between the Panel and the Council will not be reflected in the Council's constitution.
- 11 As an advisory Panel, the Panel will not vote on formal committee and other decisions. However, it will provide challenge and advice.

Costs and Support

- 12 Costs associated with the Panel, will in part be met by LGA support and remainder be met by Cheshire East Council. This includes the officer time required to support the Panel.
- 13 Panel members will need to work flexibly as the demands of the role require. However, the Council may wish to agree in advance the number of days advice to be provided by each Panel member over each 12-month period. It should also be recognised that there is likely to be more need for input at the start of this process, and days should be weighted accordingly.
- 14 The Panel will be supported by an effective programme officer at Cheshire East Council to ensure that the overall programme plan is proactively tracked, kept up to date, and that issues and risks are managed on a day-to-day basis through officers.