

Thursday, 16 December 2021

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT ASSURANCE PANEL IN RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL ASSURANCE REVIEW REPORT</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>HEAD OF CORPORATE OFFICE</b>

## **REPORT SUMMARY**

This report seeks to progress the appointment of an Independent Assurance Panel, in response to the Ministerial External Assurance Review report, as agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee on 30 November 2021 (minute 93 refers) and as endorsed by Council on 6 December 2021.

The role of the Panel is to act in an advisory capacity to support the Council in delivering its Improvement and Financial Recovery Plan to the satisfaction of Council Members and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Chief Executive be recommended to appoint an Independent Assurance Panel for a period of up to three years consisting of the following membership:

Carolyn Downs (Chair)  
Richard Paver  
Quentin Baker  
Sean Hanson  
Claire Hogan  
Cllr Shaun Davies  
Cllr Mike Wilcox  
Cllr Janette Williamson  
Cllr Tom Anderson  
Paul Satoor

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 1.1 To ensure compliance with the Council's response to the DLUHC External Assurance Review.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 No other options have been considered as it is imperative that the Council complies with its response to the Review and the establishment of an Independent Assurance Panel is a key element of that response. In considering the Panel Membership, the LGA has provided advice on the disciplines and expertise that will best support the Panel in undertaking its role. The Panel appointed has been selected on the basis of having significant knowledge and expertise in these areas.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 On 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020, DLUHC published two reports following an external assurance review of the Council's governance and finance arrangements, undertaken as part of the Council's application for exceptional financial support in 2020/21 and 2021/22. The Council was given a month to set out how it would respond to the recommendations contained within the two reports.
- 3.2 The Council's response was the subject of a report to Policy and Resources Committee on 30 November 2021, the recommendations of which were approved by the Committee. A key element of the Council's response is to appoint an Independent Assurance Panel, with appropriate legal and financial expertise, to:
- (a) Advise and scrutinise the Council's Financial Recovery Plan to provide assurance to the Council that it is robust and deliverable;
  - (b) Monitor delivery of this Plan and report to the Council on performance against the Plan twice a year.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities will consider the Panel's report on progress against the Plan to seek assurance that the Council is moving effectively towards financial sustainability.

- 3.2 In preparing its response to DLUHC, officers have worked closely with the Local Government Association who provide advice and guidance to Council's to support improvement. The LGA have provided support in developing draft Terms of Reference (see Appendix A) and have put forward names for the Panel from a bank of respected advisers in different disciplines that it has worked with previously on local government improvement initiatives.

- 3.3 A process of selection has been undertaken and the Panel Members appointed are as follows:

Carolyn Downs – Chief Executive, London Borough of Brent  
Richard Paver – Former Treasurer of the Greater Manchester CA  
Quentin Baker – Director of Law & Governance, Hertfordshire County Council  
Sean Hansen – Chief Executive, Local Partnerships  
Claire Hogan – Principle Advisor, Local Government Association  
Cllr Shaun Davis – Leader, Telford and Wrekin Council  
Cllr Mike Wilcox – Lichfield Dist. Council, LGA Conservative Lead Member Peer  
Cllr Janette Williamson – Leader, Wirral Council  
Cllr Tom Anderson – Leader of the Conservative Group, Wirral Council  
Paul Satoor – Chief Executive, Wirral Council

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The costs associated with the Independent Assurance Panel have yet to be determined. Once understood, these will be reported to Members in due course.

#### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Independent Assurance Panel is advisory, with no constitutional or decision-making responsibility.

#### **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 There are no resource implications arising out of the appointment of the Panel. The secretariat for the Panel will be delivered by existing Council staff.

#### **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 There are no major risks foreseen in appointing the Panel. Failure to appoint a Panel would likely raise concerns at DLUHC that the Council has not accepted the findings of the external assurance review and is not progressing the implementation of the report recommendations.
- 7.2 The appointment of the Panel mitigates the risk that DLUHC does not see the Council acting swiftly and decisively to address the recommendations arising from the External Assurance Review

#### **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Engagement and consultation has taken place with the LGA in establishing suitable persons who are willing and able to sit on the Independent Assurance Panel. Group Leaders have been briefed on the appointment of the Panel and a copy of draft ToR shared with them. The Panel Membership has been shared with DLUHC who are content with the approach and appointments made.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None arising directly from this report, other than to select people with the appropriate legal and financial expertise.

## **10. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 No direct Environment and Climate implications arising from this report.

## **11. COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 No direct Community Wealth implications arising from this report.

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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

CIPFA Local Government Finance Review  
Governance Review  
Ministerial Response to the Review  
Report to Policy and Resources Committee, 30 November 2021

## **SUBJECT HISTORY**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Policy & Resources Committee	7th Oct 2020
Council	1st March 2021
Policy & Resources Committee	9th June 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	30th November 2021