

Wirral Council Independent Assurance Panel

1.0 Terms of Reference

1.1 The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has requested that Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (WMBC) establishes an Independent Assurance Panel (IAP) consisting of non-executive advisors that will remain in place for two-years.

1.2 The request came in response to a series of recommendations made in the governance and finance reports that were published 02 November 2021, as part of an external assurance review commissioned by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

1.3 This Panel will advise and scrutinise the development and implementation of the Council's Improvement Plan; providing assurance that it is both robust and deliverable.

1.4 The panel will monitor delivery of the plan and report to Council on performance at least twice a year.

1.5 The panel will provide regular updates and reports on progress to the DLUHC

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of the Panel is to:

2.1 Provide external advice, challenge, and expertise to WMBC in driving forward the development and delivery of their Improvement Plan.

2.2 Provide assurance to the Secretary of State on the development and implementation of the Council's Improvement Plan.

2.3 Provide regular updates and progress reports to the Council on the delivery of the Improvement Plan.

The panel will draw on a wide range of expertise to:

2.4 Provide regular advice, challenge, and support to the Council on the full range of their improvement activities and specifically on the delivery of the 10 recommendations included in the CIPFA Finance report and 17 recommendations included in the Governance Review.

2.5 Ensure financial sustainability of the Council is achieved through a financial recovery plan for years 2022/23 to 2024/25.

2.6 Seek assurance that key decisions are made cognisant of the financial implications and impact on in-year budgets and the long term MTFS.

2.7 Support and monitor progress against the recommendations and identify risks.

3.0 Format and Frequency:

3.1 The Panel will convene for the first time in December 2021 and is expected to conclude in December 2023, subject to the Panel being assured of the Council's ongoing stability.

3.2 It is anticipated The Panel will initially meet monthly (more frequently if required). Meeting frequency will be reviewed at six-months with a view to moving to quarterly, subject to appropriate progress being made.

3.3 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 the Secretary of State. The first response from the Council to the SOS will be the end of January 2022.

3.4 Meetings will be supported by a Secretariat provided by WMBC.

3.5 Meetings of the Independent Panel will be held either in person or online to allow flexibility for meetings to continue should there be limited availability of attendees, or further restrictions introduced due to COVID-19.

3.6 Written updates to the Secretary of State will be shared with all Panel Members prior to submission for issues of factual accuracy. Content will be approved by the independent Chair and will be submitted on a six-monthly basis as set out by the recommendations (indicatively April and October) with the intention of aligning to financial reporting.

4.0 Membership and Alignment:

4.1 The Membership of the IAP will comprise the following, appointed for a two-year term. Importantly, these appointments will not be as 'employees' of WMBC, but rather as independent 'post-holders'.

Independent Chair	Carolyn Downs
Independent External Member (Finance)	Richard Paver
Independent External Member (Governance)	Quentin Baker
Independent External Member (Assets, Contracts, and Companies)	Sean Hanson
Local Government Association Regional Improvement Lead	Claire Hogan
Local Government Association Peer (Lab):	Cllr Shaun Davies
Local Government Association Peer (Con):	Cllr Mike Wilcox
Leader of the Council	Cllr Janette Williamson
Leader of the Opposition	Cllr Tom Anderson
Chief Executive	Paul Satoor

4.2 Additional independent external members may be appointed to the panel in the future if required as further progress is made with the Council's Improvement Journey.

4.3 The Independent Assurance Panel will work closely with the existing Committees and Forums of the Council. The relationship between the IAP and these Committees will not be reflected in the Council's constitution, instead, the IAP will oversee and challenge the existing constituted forums of the Council.

4.4 As an Advisory Board, it is not proposed that the IAP would vote on decisions, and instead would provide challenge and advice in the round.

5.0 Costs and Support

5.1 Any costs associated with the Independent Assurance Panel will be met by Wirral MBC. This includes the officer time required to support the Panel, and the delivery of the Council's Improvement Plan.

5.2 Panel members will be paid a fee for their work as appropriate; the fee will be paid on a personal basis.

5.3 Panel members will need to work flexibly as the demand of the role requires. However, 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.

5.4 The Panel will be supported by an effective programme office 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.