

Annex B: Section 151/73 /127 Assurance Statement

The Section 151/73 / 127 Officer should here provide a report to the Annual Performance Review on their work for the LEP over the last twelve months, and their opinion, with a specific requirement to identify any issues of concern, on governance and transparency. The report should focus on any issues raised in Annex A: Annual Performance Review Preparation. This report should be sent to the Assurance Team via localgrowthassurance@communities.gov.uk, copying the Cities and Local Growth Unit Area Lead by **20 January 2021**.
(max 500 words)

This statement is drawn together against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 which impacted on service delivery and working practices in a manner that could not be predicted. Despite this, new ways of working adopted across the LEP enabled business to be progressed and strong governance to be retained and in some ways improved.

Shropshire Council provides Accountable Body (AB) support to the Marches LEP including the provision of a Treasurer role by the Section 151 Officer. This includes support from dedicated members of staff within the finance team, plus support from other senior finance officers as defined and approved by the s151 Officer. Support includes financial monitoring of LEP funding and spending including individual schemes, development of policies and procedures for the award of and monitoring of funding allocated and advice on the governance and administration of public funds.

Additional, resource intensive requirements placed on the LEP and AB this year, alongside Covid-19 restrictions led to some processing difficulties surfacing in the summer. The opportunity was taken to review and introduce new processes and disciplines that have led to tangible benefits. Nevertheless, recruitment to additional AB posts to provide added resilience have proved challenging.

The s151 Officer and relevant finance team staff continue to meet formally with the LEP team on a bi-monthly basis to ensure all financial and governance issues are discussed and reviewed in a timely manner. The s151 Officer also attends each Performance Risk and Monitoring Committee to present papers, provide updates and deal with any queries relating to finance or governance within the remit set out in the Accountability and Assurance Framework. The s151 Officer now attends all LEP Board meetings. Throughout 2020 all meetings have been held remotely using videoconferencing technology. The formal record (i.e. recording) provided by this approach increases accessibility and strengthens governance.



The 2019/20 Financial Statements for the Marches LEP Ltd, compliant with Companies House requirements were initially drawn up by the finance team before completion, audit and final presentation at the LEP AGM in September 2020.

The role of the s151 officer within the LEP is fully embedded at an officer and Board level. Financial and Risk implications of projects and actions taken forward by the LEP are considered at all stages by the Section 151 Officer and, where necessary and appropriate, reflected in reports through to the LEP Board. The Risk Management process has been thoroughly reviewed this year and improvements made.

The Section 151 Officers or their representatives (for each of the local authorities within the LEP) continue to be regular attendees of LEP meetings enabling informal support to be obtained at an early stage as a result.

Shropshire Council makes use of its internal audit service to identify an audit plan incorporating the LEP based on a risk assessment and discussion with the LEP Team and s151 Officer. In March 2020 a 'Good' level of assurance was given demonstrating a strengthening internal control environment which itself reflects the considerable amount of work undertaken to address weaknesses identified in previous years.

Work to strengthen governance, including a revised service level agreement between the LEP and AB, improved gateways and milestone monitoring have all been agreed and implemented this year.

Despite difficulties in progressing some projects and resilience issues experienced by both the LEP and AB against the Covid-19 backdrop, there were no major governance issues relating to the LEP that require further identification or reference here.

Signed:

Name: **James Walton**

Position: **Section 151 Officer & Interim Executive Director, Resources**

Date: **19th January 2021**