

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)

Our Single Accountable Body (SAB) team have worked ever closer with the Black Country Consortium's Programme Management Office (PMO), to develop new ways of working over this difficult year, rising to the challenge of managing existing programmes as they near their completion date and successfully bidding for new funding awards.

This period has seen us review existing processes to respond to demands to spend new funding in short timeframes, and work collaboratively with the PMO and other authorities to update the assurance framework to improve efficiencies and reduce approval timescales, whilst still ensuring the framework is fully compliant and easily understood to the full range of stakeholders.

The SAB finance lead ensures that all section 151 responsibilities are understood, delivered and met by Walsall Council, and the BC LEP through its PMO. This provides the required financial oversight, review and input into all papers, and attendance at Boards and Sub-Groups in the Framework, ensuring that all appropriate financial information, governance matters and risk is accurate and understood, in particular by decision makers.

SAB senior officers have built good relationships with BEIS representatives over the period. This has ensured that any financial, compliance or governance matters arising have been understood at the earliest opportunity and have been able to be resolved swiftly. In particular this assisted the SAB in securing the same freedoms and flexibilities as the WMCA for the Getting Building Fund. It has also improved understanding of monitoring and compliance matters, particularly on the Enterprise Zone (EZ) returns which has also assisted other accountable bodies in understanding requirements.

There has been a focus on EZs, since our appointment as the SAB, and Finance have led on:

- (a) Creation of a single consolidated EZ financial model, with consistent assumptions and policy across the entire black country EZs;



(b) Aligning the EZ governance with the LEP's assurance framework, plus providing additional policy and guidance specific to EZs.

This work has firmly brought back EZ oversight and policy to the focus of the LEPs, with surpluses being realised and forecast using a consistent approach and reported on a consolidated basis rather than by local authority.

The SAB team have carried out monitoring and compliance audits on all live projects and programmes, assessed on their compliance with grant agreements and the Assurance Framework, and the risk of non-performance relating to match funding, procurement and output delivery. Additional visits are undertaken to provide support where concerns are noted.

Quarterly programme updates are provided to the s151 officer (or deputy) where concerns are discussed and addressed. In addition, all programmes managed by the SAB require an internal audit in line with our risk based internal audit plan. To date no significant issues have been identified and all have been completed successfully.

Due to the robust monitoring and compliance processes in place, and strong relations with stakeholders, issues are drawn out early to enable us to respond and develop action plans. As a result no significant issues have been raised in Annex A and no improvement plans with BEIS have been required. The BCLEP, supported by its SAB, has navigated through an economically and operationally challenging time yet still delivered on its spend targets, and I am confident in successfully spending and closing the Growth Deal in its final year.

Signed: _____

Name: Deborah Hindson

Position: Exec Director Resources and Transformation – s151

Date: 20-01-21