

## Annex D: Section 151/73 Assurance Statement

The Section 151/73 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. In particular, you should focus on any particular issued raised in Annex A. **(max 500 words)**

- The Section 151 Officer continues to work closely with the SSLEP and is engaged with all financial aspects of its key activities, including attendance at various SSLEP Groups. The S151 Officer produces the financial information which is reported to the Executive and produces the formal year end accounts which are included in the SSLEP Annual report.
- The Section 151 Officer provided the annual statement of assurance on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2018.
- On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 Staffordshire CC took over from Stoke on Trent City Council the management of the SSLEP's revenue grants, and is now the sole Accountable body, which is in line with the requirements set out in Strengthened Local Enterprise Partnerships. This transfer went smoothly and is testament to the close working relationship between, SCC, Stoke on Trent, SSLEP and other partners.
- An independent annual audit of the financial arrangements and compliance with the GD/CD grant dated 1st October 2018 provided substantial assurance that controls were in place, operating effectively and that risks against the achievement of objectives were well managed.
- An audit of compliance with the national assurance framework is also undertaken annually and the last report in April 2018 provided adequate assurance that appropriate controls were in place. All recommendations from the report have been implemented.
- Due diligence is undertaken by the Accountable body, for example ensuring grant conditions are complied with; funds are used appropriately, agreements are in place which protect public funds; and decisions and activities of the SSLEP conform with legal requirements with regard to equalities, social value, environment, State Aid, procurement etc.
- No issues of concern in respect of the governance and assurance process, including transparency of decision making have been identified from a financial point of view during the year.
- The SSLEP has also delivered the relevant quarterly returns in line with the deadlines set by MHCLG.
- One issue of concern during the last 12 months has been the ability of the SSLEP to spend the level of CD/GD available. This risk has been monitored closely and mitigations have been put in place through the identification of alternative schemes in November / December 2017, following a call for expressions of interest, and a further open call in September 2018, the outcome of which is currently being assessed. The SSLEP has improved its performance in terms of making decisions more quickly to remove schemes from

the programme that have not delivered a timely business case, replacing them with alternative schemes. The SSLEP has also put in place an assessment process to review requests, using an independent consultant and a specific ranking system, which includes how it meets the overall objectives / output targets of the SEP, value for money and deliverability.

- A further minor issue of concern was the transparency to the SSLEP of the position and progress on the Enterprise Zones. This has now been resolved with the introduction of regular update reports to the Executive Board.
- The S151 Officer does not routinely attend the Executive Board or see all reports prior to them being distributed. The S151 Officer does however see the agenda papers when they are distributed and is able to pass comments for consideration at the Board as required. This process will be reviewed as part of the consideration of the changes required to meet the requirements of the updated national assurance framework.
- The next key financial challenge that the SSLEP faces is to meet the new requirements of the assurance framework, including becoming an independent corporate body and ensuring the principles set out in the CIPFA document published in August 2018 are embedded into normal SSLEP practice and procedures.

Signed:



Name:

Simon Ablewhite

Position:

Strategic Finance Business Partner and S151 Officer to SSLEP

Date:

3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018