

Gloucestershire Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Joint Scrutiny Panel

Hosted by Cheltenham Borough Council on behalf of participating Gloucestershire Councils

1. Background and purpose

1.1 The seven existing Gloucestershire councils (Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council, Stroud District Council, Cotswolds District Council and Forest of Dean District Council) (“the Participating Councils”) are currently progressing work associated with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

1.2 The Participating Councils have agreed to set up a Joint Scrutiny Panel (“the Joint Scrutiny Panel”) in order to provide accountability for the LGR Portfolio and those charged with delivering it.

1.3 The Joint Scrutiny Panel is established to provide cross-council, non-executive and non-decision-making scrutiny of the **process** for LGR across Gloucestershire, including the arrangements for governance, decision-making, finance, engagement, evidence and transparency.

1.4 The Joint Scrutiny Panel is set up by Cheltenham Borough Council as a Scrutiny Task Group in accordance with Part 4D para 2.8 of Cheltenham Borough Council’s Constitution.

2. Scope

- **In scope:** scrutiny of the Gloucestershire LGR Portfolio, which is comprised of 9 individual programmes and the governance arrangements for the first transitional period (up to the date of the elections for the new unitary authority(ies) of LGR, including project management, risk and issue management, overview of stakeholder engagement and inter-authority working arrangements.
- **Out of scope:** determination of the final LGR model or political negotiation; individual staffing decisions or any matter reserved to the Participating Councils’ Executives/Cabinets or Full Councils except insofar as the Joint Scrutiny Panel reviews the robustness and transparency of the process.

3. Objectives

1. To provide a forum for coordinated, cross-council scrutiny of the LGR process in Gloucestershire.
2. To provide a sounding board for working through issues and choices during the LGR process.
3. To review whether portfolio governance supports openness, accountability, timely decision-making and effective management of risk.
4. To make recommendations to the Portfolio Board to improve the LGR process.
5. To support public understanding by holding Joint Scrutiny Panel meetings in public, as far as reasonably possible.

4. Membership and composition

- The Joint Scrutiny Panel will comprise 14 Members, **two elected Members from each Participating Council**, nominated in accordance with that Council's arrangements.
- Nominations should, where practicable, reflect each Council's approach to political proportionality and scrutiny expertise.
- Members are expected to act in a non-partisan manner consistent with the scrutiny role.
- Membership will continue for the life of the Joint Scrutiny Panel unless a participating Council replaces its nominees.

5. Chairing, vice-chairing and support

- The Joint Scrutiny Panel will appoint a **Chair** and **Vice-Chair** from amongst its Members at its first meeting for the life of the Joint Scrutiny Panel.
- Democratic Service Support including agenda production and meeting administration will be provided from across the Participating Councils. Cheltenham Borough Council, as host authority, will provide support for the publication of papers.
- Where specialist advice is required (e.g., legal, finance, programme management), the Joint Scrutiny Panel may request officer attendance from the relevant LGR Programme.

6. Meetings

- Meetings will be held **in public** at a location or locations to be agreed by the Joint Scrutiny Panel, unless the Joint Scrutiny Panel resolves to exclude the

public for an item in accordance with the relevant access to information provisions.

- The **frequency of meetings will be determined** by the Joint Scrutiny Panel, having regard to key LGR Portfolio milestones and decision points but as a minimum the meetings will take place not less than once every 2 months.
- Meetings will be scheduled and publicised with reasonable notice, and agendas and reports will be published by Cheltenham Borough Council in line with statutory requirements and local protocols.
- The Chair may call additional meetings where necessary to consider urgent matters relating to the LGR process.
- Attendance by officers, advisers and other attendees may be in person and/or by remote means where permitted by local arrangements.

7. Quorum and decision-making

- The quorum for a meeting will be **one nominated Member from at least half of the Participating Councils**
- The Joint Scrutiny Panel will seek to operate by **consensus**. Where a vote is required, each Participating Council present will have **one vote**, exercised by its nominated Member(s) as agreed between them. The Chair will not have a casting vote
- Decisions of the Joint Scrutiny Panel are **recommendatory** only and do not bind any Participating Council.

8. Work programme, information and evidence

- The Joint Scrutiny Panel will agree a work programme aligned to the LGR timetable, including the key themes and questions it wishes to examine.
- The Joint Scrutiny Panel may request relevant reports, briefings and data from the LGR Portfolio, subject to legal constraints and confidentiality.
- The Joint Scrutiny Panel may invite partner organisations and subject matter experts, to provide evidence as and when required.

9. Reporting, recommendations and responses

- The Joint Scrutiny Panel may produce interim notes, interim recommendation reports or final recommendation reports as it deems appropriate
- Reports and recommendations will be submitted to the LGR Portfolio Board or Participating Councils' Scrutiny (or equivalent) committees

- Where recommendations are made, recipients will be asked to provide a written response within an agreed timescale (normally within 28 days) setting out acceptance, partial acceptance or reasons for non-acceptance.
- Outputs will be published by Cheltenham Borough Council, except where publication is restricted by law or by agreed confidentiality.

10. Standards, confidentiality and information governance

- Members will comply with their own Council's Code of Conduct and declare any interests in line with their Council's requirements.
- The Joint Scrutiny Panel will operate transparently; however, it may consider exempt or confidential information where lawful and necessary.
- Information will be handled in accordance with applicable legislation and policies, including the UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018, Freedom of Information Act 2000 and relevant access to information rules.
- In undertaking scrutiny, the Joint Scrutiny Panel will have due regard to equalities duties and the need for inclusive engagement and accessible communications.

11. Duration, review and amendment

- The Joint Scrutiny Panel will commence on 22 July 2026 and will conclude once the Preparing Authority or Shadow Authorit(y)(ies) are established following the unitary authority elections in May 2027.
- These Terms of Reference may be amended by the Joint Scrutiny Panel from time to time to ensure continued relevance.