

# Expert Solution Based Report

Cheadle

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## About this report

The High Street Task Force (HSTF) undertook to provide bespoke Expert Support to help High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to look at repurposing Cheadle to tackle the decline in footfall and the underused assets such as the Market and vacant units. At the same time looking at developing its networks to create an overarching 'Partnership', to build wider ownership, help the transformation of Cheadle Town Centre and create capacity for delivery. As such Sonia Cubrilo as our Expert provided help and guidance in this area.

Through various meetings, discussions and reports that culminated in a facilitated workshop on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2021, for the town's key stakeholders, the Experts have been able to provide you with a roadmap to take this work forward.

On behalf of the High Streets Task Force, may I take this opportunity to thank all those who gave up their time to help inform this report and for the frank and positive manner throughout our engagement with your town.

It is clear that there are many strengths, great enthusiasm from the town key business stakeholders and the Council to work together, to reactivate the town centre, build a strong, effective network and reshape Cheadle partnership working. As such I hope that this report will help you build on those strengths as you seek to transform your town.



Matt Colledge  
Project Director (Interim) - High Streets Task Force

## **1. Introduction**

In its Unlocking Your Potential report, delivered on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021, the High Streets Task Force Expert advised that broadening the towns offer and activating the centre, needs to be the main area of focus to transform Cheadle.

The report also recommended arranging an away day with the local authority, business and community leaders to review challenges facing the town and that a range of short/medium/long term workstreams are developed to help the town reinvent itself.

As such, the Council, following a further 'deep dive' into the challenges facing Cheadle (30<sup>th</sup> June 2021), agreed to work with the HSTF to bring together the town's key stakeholders in order to explore the appetite for forming a network to improve partnership working. The workshop on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 2021 was the first point in this process.

## **2. Information Gathering**

The objective of the workshop was to gather information, harness the enthusiasm of key town centre stakeholders and to ensure that this first meeting acted as a clear starting point to a new way of working together. It explored how stakeholders can help put the 'buzz' back in to Cheadle town centre, coalesce thinking around what its USP is and who needs to be involved to develop an initial 'road map' which will highlight key actions required to take the transformation of the town centre to the next stage.

Attendance was strong with 23 people present (see Appendix 1), from a variety of businesses (Team Cheadle), residents and the Council, demonstrating that there is strong support to develop the town and a good pool of talent available to draw from.

### 3. Findings

Town Centres are complex, experiencing fundamental change, which requires new understanding and approaches to be taken based on a unified vision, partnership working and strong place-leadership. COVID-19 has exacerbated the rate and scale of this change, and as such this understanding is now more important than ever.

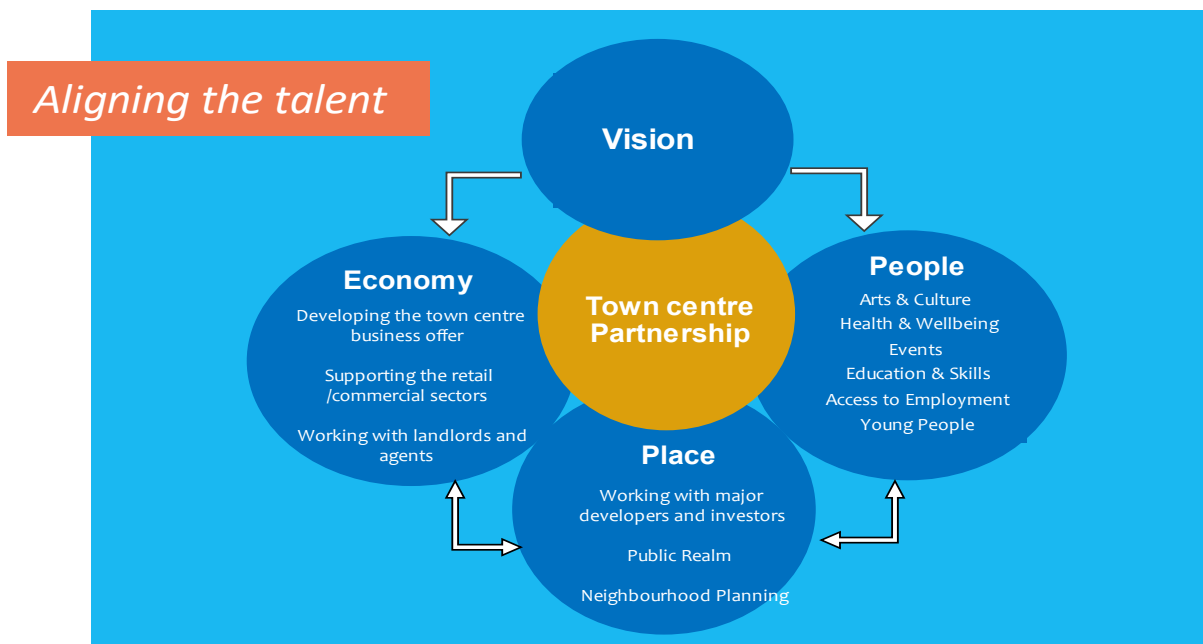
A strong working relationship based on trust needs to be developed between stakeholders from all sectors and new structures and systems need to be introduced. Having capacity and a partnership structure in place is a proven and effective way of improving the town's vitality and viability.

As such, the development of an overarching partnership for Cheadle is fundamental to driving sustainable change in the town centre and will help build the capacity, leadership and resources needed to deliver the transformation required.

At the meeting the below model of partnership working was presented by the HSTF Experts and discussed as a proposed basis for Cheadle. The model takes into account that there are existing teams, groups and organisations already working on specific aspects of the town but, for Cheadle to really succeed, it needs to have a collaborative overarching partnership that draws all of these strands together behind a compelling vision, which this cross-sector partnership seeks to achieve.

This model shows how a number of component parts that make up a town are broadly grouped into People, Place and Economy subgroups. It was explained by the Expert at the workshop that these component parts will have specific work streams, as determined by the partnership, once the strategy and action plan have been developed.

*(Model by IntoPlaces)*



#### 4. Outputs of Workshop

The workshop explored a number of questions with stakeholders, looking at the vitality and viability of Cheadle Town Centre and its USP to identify quick wins and who else needs to be involved to make the proposed model that was presented work for Cheadle (this is outlined in further detail in Appendix 2).

There appears to be a number of groups who are all working hard to improve Cheadle, however, a lack of co-ordination and joined-up working/communication hampers efforts to make an impact and a real difference to the town centre.

It was highlighted that there were some key partners missing from the workshop who could have helped progress the discussion and address issues/consider solutions that are needed to help optimise the town centre's transformation. These were namely representatives from the County Council and leading Councillors from the District Council. Going forward, involving representatives from these bodies is key and they should be part of any newly established overarching Cheadle Town Centre Partnership.

There were a number of outputs and recommendations that need to be taken forward from the meeting and these have been outlined in the next section headed 'Next Steps'. However, having this very passionate group of businesses from the town discussing taking Cheadle forward, along with local Town Councillors and a couple of District council officers who are all keen to be good place leaders, is a really good starting point. This group could be the basis to build a new town network and an overarching partnership whose key focus is transforming Cheadle high street.

#### 5. Next Steps/Roadmap

Having held a successful workshop with businesses, it is important for the District Council to swiftly capitalise upon the willingness of all parties to move this work forward by using the High Streets Task Force 4 R's framework – repositioning, reinventing, rebranding and restructuring. This will provide the structure and strategic approach needed to stimulate Cheadle's high street renewal.

The primary focus going forward for Cheadle needs to be on developing actions that address the restructuring and reinventing priorities. Though work on repositioning and rebranding will be necessary, this can be worked on once a partnership has been established.

- **Restructuring - Partnership Development**

We recommend that Cheadle develops a robust partnership using a systematic, but not too formulaic, approach. It is important that it maintains enough flexibility to ensure that, as it grows, it does so to meet the specific needs of Cheadle. Ultimately

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the partnership may be around for 5 – 10 years and so laying solid foundations will be very important.

To support this work, the District Council may consider providing some initial staffing resource to help co-ordinate and get a partnership model established. Once an overarching partnership has been set-up, it can withdraw or taper its support, to allow the partnership to be more self-sustaining.



The model above, provides a framework to guide partnership development whilst allowing you to tailor specific work programmes within it. For example, it will be important that work on any future funding bids is aligned to the partnership, but that it isn't hindered by the time that it takes to grow a successful partnership.

As such, we are recommending that you focus on an initial plan of action that will provide the basis for building the partnership out to cover some of the points in the model above and getting it ready for the launch. Our recommendation is that you aim to publicly launch a town partnership early next year. At the launch you will lay out your ambition for Cheadle, and how everyone can play a part in that process.

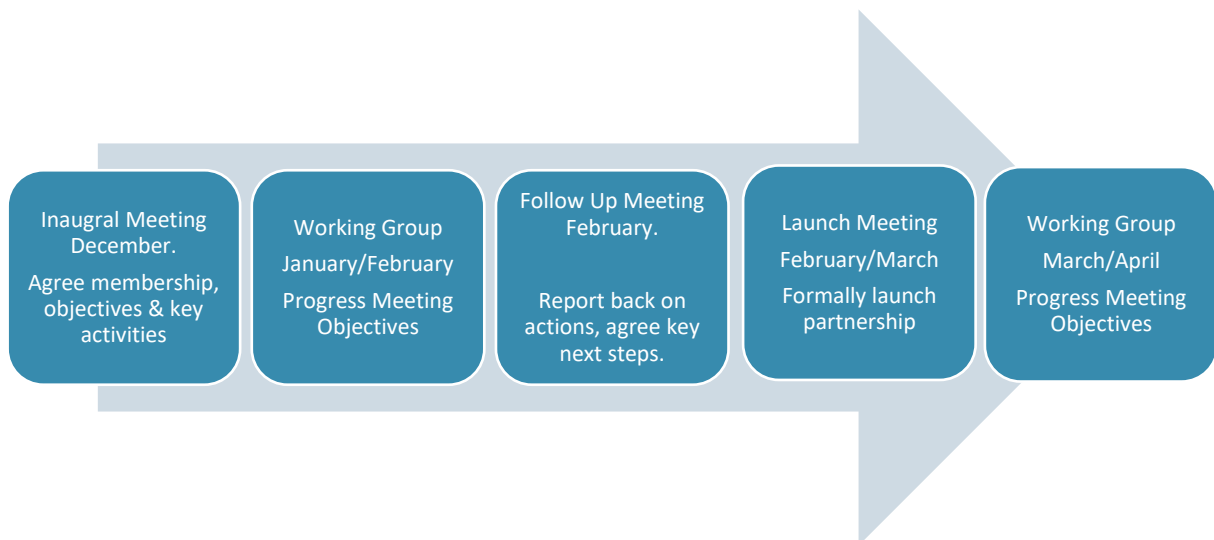
We believe the key actions over the coming months are to:

- Formalise the arrangements for the core elements of the partnership framework covering the board and the subgroups of Economy, Place and People. This will include consideration on membership, role, remit and objectives of the partnership and the subgroups.
- Consider the future vision for Cheadle – this will become the bedrock of the partnership and will inform the previous step.
- Start to develop a 12-month plan of action for the town (including existing initiatives) that can be showcased in a prospectus and actively engage residents and businesses.
- Brand the partnership, and communicate widely, so everyone knows this is an exciting vehicle of passionate townsfolk who will make change happen in Cheadle.
- Focus on some early wins to show that incremental change is as important as the bigger opportunities around new developments.
- Determine how existing stakeholders and community groups, and plans for transformation, can be aligned with and sit under the umbrella of the partnership.

- **Timeline.**

The timeline below provides a notional guide to the development of the partnership. It is vital that any new partnership is seen as a credible body that will execute change in Cheadle, therefore it will be important that time is taken to properly set it up so that it can be launched with maximum fanfare.

At this launch it will be important that the partnership, and those within it, are able to show that this is a seminal moment for the future of Cheadle.



As suggested above, the aim is to formally launch the partnership in early Spring, so it will be important that by then you are able to evidence the beginnings of an ambitious, collegiate and action orientated partnership.



In doing so our experience is that the partnership will become a credible agent for change which will help inspire confidence and excitement around future opportunities for the town.

- **Partnership Board**

The purpose of the partnership board is to act as the central coordinating function of the partnership's activities. It will ultimately determine the vision for a future Cheadle, setting out the strategy to achieve the vision, and will drive, and monitor, the numerous work streams being undertaken to deliver the vision.

At this stage, as the partnership is effectively in shadow, the focus will initially be on setting up a working party to determine the arrangements of a board and the purpose of the partnership.

We recommend that you consider the relevant skill sets of local stakeholders that are needed to form this working party (we recommend a maximum of 10 people, ideally representative of the wider business and community population).

The composition of this group will change over time as the partnership evolves and it is envisaged that some of these people will have a role to play on the sub-groups (further information on the sub-groups, is outlined in Appendix 3). In addition, the partnership should include representatives from the Town Council, the District Council and the County Council.

We recommend that you now consider the following:

- The aim, objectives, role and remit of the partnership.
- The basic operational and governance structure of the partnership and board, including terms of reference.
- The membership and a suitable chair-person.
- Resourcing issues.
- Frequency of meetings.

In terms of the Board membership, we would suggest that it is drawn from senior council leadership, senior business leaders, representatives from the retail/service sectors, a community/third sector representative, a local resident, further public sector representative (possibly the College Principal), landlord/property owner, leisure and health providers and maybe a professional with strategic planning and or property experience.

- **Reinventing**

There are a number of quick wins identified (outlined in Appendix 2) that this group could also start to work on. Developing a programme of events in Cheadle town centre using the existing public realm will be a starting point. We recommend that you work to identify and engage with organisations who can move their events to the town centre. Including local schools, colleges, community groups, voluntary sector

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groups and local faith groups as part of this can have a real impact. Other local authorities are using multi-storey car parks, roofs, empty shops and derelict land for performances, pop-up cinemas, rap battles, growing spaces, walking tours and craft markets. The Welcome Back Fund could act as the catalyst for this work.

In addition, some of the empty premises could be quickly adapted for temporary use, working with landlords to focus the offer on young people and those that are not currently using the town centre. For example, this might include providing cheap or free rents for designer makers and artists, offering incentives for independent businesses to set-up in Cheadle and collaborating with local cultural and creative groups to convert empty space into a performance area.

The Market, in a perfect central location, could be a key attraction for the town centre. Currently, locals feel that the Market has significantly reduced in size over the years and does not carry the same appeal. A greater focus on working to improve the Market offer, looking at how the town centre can be repurposed to provide a more attractive offer and addressing the under representation of leisure, food and evening economy, will all help increase dwell time/spend and footfall.

The Market owner has indicated his willingness to sell the Market asset. The Expert has brokered discussions between the Council to explore, with the Market owner, possible opportunities of the District Council purchasing the Market going forward. The Council is carrying out its due diligence and financial checks on the asset before any purchase decisions can be made.

## 6. Recommendations

The approach outlined within this document provides a number of steps and a road map of activities that we believe will help you build the foundations for an effective overarching Cheadle Town Centre partnership vehicle. We have found that this approach not only makes for highly engaged and committed partners but also provides a large amount of additional in-kind resource.

Should you wish to proceed we believe you will need to consider the following recommendations in order to operationalise the model:

- **Professional strategic support and guidance.** We have highlighted the key steps in this report however we suggest that you consider seeking further professional support to help you with the detail of the process, including how to marshal it into a consistent and effective structure and way of working. You may have access to this from within the council, from the wider stakeholder group or via the services of place leadership and management organisations.
- **Resources.** Setting up and facilitating a partnership requires a resource commitment. This might range from support to arrange meetings, surveys, engaging with businesses, chasing bids and indeed the production of materials. It is hoped that once established the partnership can become more self-supporting, but the Council will need to consider some pump-priming of support and/or funds.
- **Council Governance.** It will be necessary to consider how the partnership relates to the Town Council, District and County Council's governance arrangements. Good partnerships tend to be fast moving whereas council governance can take longer. You might want to consider how the partnership can operate as an effective arm's length body that conforms to, but is not slowed down by, council governance. Likewise, it might be that the council will be asked to act on something quickly – such as a street closure for an event or removal of unsightly street furniture. We have found being able to act quickly will help with credibility.
- **Leadership.** All partners in successful partnerships have a place leadership role to play, however, it is vital that a passionate and collaborative individual takes an active role as the figurehead of the partnership.

We have greatly enjoyed working with you and it is great to see such commitment from the council and stakeholders. This bodes extremely well for the future of Cheadle. We hope the support over the last few months, culminating in this report, has been beneficial and that you are able to maintain the passion and drive that will undoubtedly drive Cheadle forward.

**Appendix 1: Attendees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation/Business</b>
Cllr Kate Martin	Town and District Councillor Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Cheadle Town Council Cheadle Stakeholder Group
Cllr Ian Plant	Cheadle Town Councillor District Councillor Cheadle Town Councillor. Cheadle Stakeholder Group Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Cllr Ray Wood	Cheadle Town Councillor. Market superintendent
Cllr Sue Whalley	Cheadle Town Council Mayor
Jo Booth	Business owner Reborn Interiors
Natalie Staton	Business owner Country Interiors
Cllr Stephen Haines	Cheadle Town Councillor
Cllr Elizabeth Whitehouse	Cheadle Town Councillor
Sue Tighe	Business owner Crafty Urchins
Dee Beardmore	Business owner Redeezine
Cllr Jamie Evans	Cheadle Town Councillor
Paul Plant	Business owner Cheadle PC Repairs
Cllr Gary Bentley	Town and District Councillor Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Cheadle Town Council Cheadle Stakeholder Group
J Belfield	Resident
Cllr Richard Alcock	Town and District Councillor Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Cheadle Town Council
Z Brownhill	Business owner Vape Shop
Dave Mullington	Cheadle Town Clerk
Miriam Birchall	Business Owner Reborn Interiors
Lisa Hollins	Business owner Kenral
Carol Goodwin	Business owner E & E Furniture
Debbie Evans	Business owner Wool n' Stuff
Kerriane Evans	Business owner Wool n' Stuff
Cllr Peter Wilkinson	Business owner and District councillor

## Appendix 2:

### CHEADLE - WORKSHOP SESSION 1

<p>Key Factors Affecting Cheadle Town Centre's Vitality and Viability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of signage, seating and wayfinding information into the town and car parks. Not easy to navigate around town centre – particularly from car park (people tend to drive through, using town centre as drive through)</li> <li>• Location of entrance of car park in relation to the High Street</li> <li>• Empty Shops – Landlords not wanting to rent them out</li> <li>• Cleanliness of the public realm</li> <li>• Car parking – times and charges/free parking needed to encourage people to visit town centre</li> <li>• County Council/ SMDC Cabinet Members interest</li> <li>• Lack of Investment</li> <li>• Competition from other town centres</li> <li>• Connectivity</li> <li>• Closure of Prince George Street/landslide shops</li> <li>• Lack of bunting etc as in Ashbourne.</li> <li>• Lack of variety of retail offer</li> <li>• Reliance on District and County Council's</li> <li>• Road Infrastructure</li> <li>• Safety/Drugs</li> </ul>
<p>Cheadle USP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent shops (would like more) and large catchment area (in walking distance)</li> <li>• Long standing businesses</li> <li>• Proximity to Alton Towers</li> <li>• Heritage/historic architecture – The Church, Pugin's gem, architectural features</li> <li>• Strength of Community spirit/volunteering (Team Cheadle and other community groups active)</li> <li>• Business network</li> <li>• Market Ground area for events and potential for a reinvigorated Market</li> </ul>

## CHEADLE - WORKSHOP SESSION 2

<p>Quick Wins – Putting the buzz in to Cheadle?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use empty shops to promote the town centre more proactively, so don't look a blight on the town centre</li> <li>• Advertising the town (the SMDC reported that they doing Christmas promotion/bus wraps/events for town)</li> <li>• More events and the Help Back Fund will support this</li> <li>• Links to with Alton Towers (park and ride).</li> <li>• Getting more businesses and residents involved with the town centre to develop programme of events</li> <li>• Encouraging a Farmers Market once a month</li> <li>• Craft Demonstrations</li> <li>• More Art and Cultural events</li> </ul>
<p>What is missing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town centre co-ordinator based in the town</li> <li>• Dedicated events space that could be controlled locally, so that do not need to seek landowners' permission or road closures.</li> <li>• Connection with Alton Towers (park and ride).</li> <li>• More commitment to cross service working between Town Council, the District Council and County Council</li> <li>• Traders commented that car park closures/road closures don't always support businesses.</li> <li>• Friends of the Royal Oak pub need support with a community asset/funding bid.</li> <li>• Cheadle has plenty of assets but need promotion.</li> <li>• Better public transport links from surrounding villages</li> </ul>
<p>How can you build wider ownership of town centre? Who needs to get involved for Cheadle? How can you encourage them to get involved?  Who else needs to be involved?</p>	<p>Extend the network invite other participants by wider engagement – suggestions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Farmers</li> <li>• Artisan producers</li> <li>• Golf Club</li> <li>• JCB</li> <li>• Alton Towers</li> <li>• Schools/Colleges/Young People</li> <li>• Leisure providers</li> <li>• Health providers</li> </ul>

## **Appendix 3 – Partnership Model (Sub-Groups)**

The model earlier in the report highlights the range of activities that you will want to consider undertaking to activate Cheadle and to ensure it is able to present a diverse offer

### **People Working Group.**

For the purpose of the first three months, we recommend that activities are focused on developing a brand for the partnership and a campaign to raise awareness of your aims and objectives. Alongside this you may want to also conduct a stakeholder review to ensure that the reach of the partnership is maximised.

- As with the partnership board, agree working arrangements and membership composition.
- Develop a positive brand for the Cheadle partnership, with associated messaging, to showcase the ambition for change in the town, that it is a true town centre partnership and highlight how everyone can be involved.
- Consider how best to position the partnership for a successful early Spring launch.
- Look at measures to maximise stakeholder involvement and wider community engagement, across all sectors of the community and young people in particular.
- Consider how to engage the town businesses, potentially linking with the economy subgroup.
- Consider other opportunities to activate the town, such as events, arts and leisure.

Membership might include individuals or firms with marketing, communication and engagement experience, local people running Facebook or social media sites featuring Cheadle, faith group leaders, councillors and officers, those with an interest in arts and culture, running events, young people plus people from community/civic partnerships.

### **Place Working Group.**

The place working group may wish to look at both short term initiatives as well as longer term plans, some of which will already be in place, for improving the physical environment. It will be advantageous to be able to present a number of initiatives at the September launch.

- To consolidate working arrangements and agree a work plan.
- It will be beneficial to consider existing and any planned developments and strategic plans for Cheadle. This will link to any future funding bids/Levelling Up etc.
- Consider which key stakeholders need to be involved, e.g., developers and investors.
- To look at any early measures for improving the public realm – this might be low level/low-cost interventions.

- Consider how access/connectivity could be improved across the town and better use of public space.
- Look at how potential improvements can be made to existing building and vacant units.
- Consider cleaning and greening initiatives.

Alongside the council, membership might come from those with an interest and experience in rethinking public space, looking at transport and connectivity, maybe neighbourhood planners, those with an interest in sustainability, design, greening and cleaning as well as civic or community groups, plus health and wellbeing may well take an interest.

### **Economy Working Group.**

The economy working group will ultimately be an engine for supporting and encouraging economic vitality in the town. The specific areas of focus will be for you to determine. However, we envisage that you will want to bring key sectors of the town's economy together and also look at potential measures to support businesses.

- Agree working arrangements and key activities
- Encourage active participation from the retail and leisure sectors as well as landlords/property owners -we have found that establishing forums for these sectors is beneficial to places.
- Review the digital offer for Cheadle.
- Potentially consider the night time economy and measures to stimulate this.
- Consider who else needs to be involved – conduct a stakeholder audit.
- Potentially consider surveying business owners to understand their issues – link to the people subgroup.

Membership for the economy group might come from landlords, retail and leisure sector representatives, commercial agents, local Chamber of Commerce representative, people with digital insight as well those from the wider business world and of course from the council and other relevant public sector bodies.