One Eastern Devon Board

MANAGING OUR CORE BUSINESS

FOR DISCUSSION

Purpose

- This paper invites the Board to agree how it will manage its core business: translating its Terms of Reference (ToR) into a regular agenda covering strategic direction, decision-making and assurance, without duplicating the work already underway in sub-groups and task-and-finish groups.

Why This Matters Now

- The Board's ToR, endorsed in March 2026, commit it to developing within its first year a mechanism for accountability to the Forum, a process for declarations of interest, and further decision-making processes including sub-committees and escalation routes. None of that has yet been settled.
- As the Board's delivery groups become established, there is a real risk that meetings drift into receiving reports rather than exercising the functions the ToR actually set out. That would not be light touch as set out in earlier discussions, but duplicative. This paper proposes a simple, regularised agenda to keep the Board aligned to its agreed mandate.

Translating the ToR into Practice

- The ToR set out four functions for the Board. Two are explicit in the ToR's own words: developing and maintaining the partnership's strategic direction, and acting as its collective decision-making body (both at paragraph 5). A third, external interface, is equally explicit: providing a clear interface with other systems and a common voice on the partnership's behalf (paragraphs 4 and 5). The fourth, assurance, is this paper's term for what the ToR calls oversight: oversight of delivery (paragraph 4) and oversight of funding, resources and accountability arrangements for public funds (paragraph 5). In discussion, we agreed we need to retain a light-touch, trust-based approach and not replicate the heavier vertical governance structures often seen in the NHS, where meetings become focused on reporting.
- The table below sets out a simple test, anchored to the ToR's own language. Essentially, if an item does not pass at least one question, it is not Board business: it stays with the sub-group, or it is shared for information outside the meeting, rather than narrated as an agenda item.

ToR function	What it looks like in practice	Test before it reaches the Board agenda
Strategic direction *(ToR, para 5)*	Setting or adjusting priorities, principles, the shape of the partnership's offer	Does this require the Board, as the collective, to set or change direction — or is it already settled?
Decision-making *(ToR, para 5)*	Collective decisions on resources, funding, hosting arrangements, formal commitments on behalf of partners	Does this need a decision only the Board has the mandate to take — not one a sub-group could take itself?

ToR function	What it looks like in practice	Test before it reaches the Board agenda
Assurance *(this paper's term for the ToR's “oversight” — paras 4 & 5)*	Confidence that funded activity, risk and resources are being managed as agreed	Is there a risk, blocker or accountability issue here, or is delivery on track and safe to stay with the group running it?
External interface *(ToR, paras 4 & 5)*	Representation and a common voice to the ICB, the Forum, or other systems	Does this need the Board to speak, or be visible, on behalf of the whole partnership?

A Light-Touch Standing Agenda

- Applying that test, a standard agenda for a 90-minute meeting might look like this. The intention is a working rhythm the Board can settle into quickly, leaving room within each meeting for whatever genuinely needs the Board's attention that month.
- We also agreed the meeting can be curtailed to an hour, or postponed, if there isn't sufficient business to transact.

Standing item	Time	Purpose and ground rules
Welcome, declarations of interest, review of actions	5 min	Standing item from the first meeting; review of actions keeps prior decisions live without a separate tracking paper. Declarations of interest process to be confirmed (see Outstanding ToR Commitments).
Strategic direction: one topic	20 min	A single rotating theme tied to an agreed priority (e.g. the Health Inequalities Strategy, neighbourhood health). The Board uses this slot to shape direction, not to receive a briefing on it.
Decisions required	30 min	Pre-circulated short papers, each stating the decision sought. Only matters that pass the decision-making test above.
Assurance by exception	20 min	Sub-groups and task-and-finish groups are heard only when they have a risk, blocker or resource ask for the Board. Routine progress sits in a shared tracker, not on the agenda.
External interface	10 min	What is coming from, or going to, the ICB, the Forum, or other systems; where the partnership needs to speak with one voice.
Forward look	5 min	What is coming to the Board next, and anything to flag early so future agendas stay light.

What Stays With Sub-Groups

- The corollary of a light-touch Board is clear ownership lower down. Sub-groups and task-and-finish groups should expect to take their own decisions within delegated authority, manage their own routine reporting, and bring matters up only where they need a Board-level decision, are carrying a risk they cannot resolve themselves, or need the Board's voice externally. This is a deliberate act of trust, consistent with the relational basis on which the partnership is built — not an absence of oversight.

Outstanding ToR Commitments

- The ToR (paragraph 8) already identify three pieces of unfinished business: the Board's accountability mechanism to the Forum, a declarations of interest process, and further decision-making and escalation procedures. Rather than treat these as a separate piece of governance work, it is suggested the Board handles each as a short paper through the "decisions required" slot above, with a named owner and a return date within the next two to three meetings.

Recommendation

- The Board is asked to:
    - endorse the four-function test set out under 'Translating the ToR into Practice' as the basis for what comes to its agenda, rather than a standing reporting cycle;
    - adopt the proposed standing agenda structure set out under 'A Light-Touch Standing Agenda' on a trial basis, to be reviewed alongside the wider 12-month ToR review;
    - confirm that sub-group and task-and-finish reporting to the Board is by exception only, with routine progress tracked outside the meeting;
    - agree owners and return dates for the three outstanding ToR commitments set out under 'Outstanding ToR Commitments'.