

Thurrock Council

Finance Recovery Board

Minutes – 12pm, Thursday 11 April 2024

Attendees

Nicole Wood (NW) – Finance Commissioner (Chair)
Dave Smith (DS) – Managing Director Commissioner, Chief Executive
Cllr Andrew Jefferies (AJ) – Leader of the Council
Alex Powell (AP) – Assistant Chief Executive
Dawn Calvert (DC) – Interim CFO / S151
Luke Tyson (LT) – Chief Intervention Officer
Patrick McDermott (PM) – Outgoing Chief of Staff to the Commissioners
Lorraine Surrey (LS) – Senior Project Manager
Mark Bowen (MBo) – Deputy Monitoring Officer
Cristina Hall (CH) – Incoming Chief of Staff to the Commissioners
Keilah Gallardo (KG) – Business Support Officer, Chief Executive

Guest

Mark Williams (MW) – CIPFA

Apologies

Cllr John Kent (JK) – Opposition Group Leader
Cllr Lynn Worrall (LW) – Opposition Group Deputy Leader
Cllr Graham Snell (GS) – Cabinet Member for Finance, Human Resources & Payroll

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1. Dawn Calvert and Cristina Hall were introduced as it was their first FRB meeting.

2. Matters Arising

2.1. Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

2.2. The action log was reviewed. It was noted the action regarding costs can be distributed.

2.3. DC noted they were arranging an initial meeting with auditors regarding the cost of audit and accounts.

2.4. Regarding the dedicated schools grant (DGS), DC explained risks will be included in the quarterly report moving forward. NW agreed but suggested bringing this to a future meeting. DS asked NW to clarify whether the deficit on DSG is a problem for the revenue account. DC stated that currently, the deficit is held against the reserves. NW noted that both her and DC need to have oversight. DC agreed to share the slides from this meeting as background information.

2.5. DC provided an update on clawback of capital in reference to major projects . DC requested a meeting with DLUHC for follow-up. AJ asked that the options for Stanford-le-Hope, be reviewed.

2.6. Actions related to last month's rentals update were closed.

ACTION: DC to schedule reporting of DSG High Needs Grant for oversight of deficit

3. IRP Progress Reporting

3.1. DC provided an update on the financial management workstream and noted there were changes to be made in Finance's staffing structure. The initial changes have been made, with focus now on vacant posts, budget holder responsibilities, and finance capability across the council.

3.2. NW raised a point on external auditor's approval of the MRP policy, emphasising the need to resolve this quickly.

3.3. NW noted concerns about capacity, particularly with the Chief Accountant, highlighting the technical pressure and the need to prioritise this.

4. Divestments Update

4.1. MW provided updates, noting that the Toucan and CCLA investments have been sold, generating funds for 23/24. MW noted there are remaining risks and decisions to be made with the tail investments, outlining some potential options.

- 4.2. MW reflected on the governance arrangements, noting they are positive and appropriate. MW noted that in the post-sale phase, the arrangements should be 'reset' and revisited, possibly by revisiting a bespoke governance structure.
- 4.3. AJ raised a concern regarding the timeline for draft reports.
- 4.4. MBo provided updates on litigation proceedings.
- 4.5. NW inquired about the next Member Oversight Board meeting. MBo noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 2nd July for the Member Investment Advisory Panel.

5. Asset Disposals

- 5.1. RL noted the report and highlights, mentioning substantial amounts of money and property exchanged and completed. Capital receipts were as expected for the year. RL noted without the monies from St Chad's residential property, the forecast would have been below expectations. Challenges with due diligence and asset sales continue. RL confirmed the forecast for this and the next financial year is sound. RL noted the report may be amended quarterly in the June FRB and the following year for deliverability.
- 5.2. DS remarked on the move into the next phase, noting the involvement of looking at council-owned buildings rather than commercial stock. DS shared that this phase focuses on operational buildings used by the council. DS and felt that when considering the disposal strategy, a policy needs to be developed by the council for the properties to be retained, linked to the operating model. RL acknowledged there may be individual challenges with certain properties to be addressed by the Cabinet.
- 5.3. MW mentioned that similar property work is being done with other councils and offered to collaborate with RL.

6. Items for next meeting

- 6.1. A forward look of items for the next meeting was discussed and agreed.

7. AOB

- 7.1. There being no other business, the meeting closed.

APPENDIX I: Full Meeting Actions

- **ACTION: DC to schedule reporting of DSG High Needs Grant for oversight of deficit**