

# **Thurrock Council**

## **Finance Recovery Board**

**Minutes – 1:30pm, Wednesday 12 February 2025**

### **Attendees:**

Nicole Wood (NW) – Finance Commissioner (Chair)

Cllr John Kent (JK) - Leader of the Council

Cllr Lynn Worrall (LW) - Deputy Leader

Cllr Sara Muldowney (SM) – Cabinet Member for Resources

Cllr George Coxshall (GC) – Opposition Deputy Leader

Dawn Calvert (DC) – Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officers

Daniel Fenwick (DF) – Executive Director of Corporate Services

Mark Bowen (MB) – Interim Project Lead - Legal

Alex Powell (AP) – Assistant Chief Executive

Cristina Hall (CH) – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Luke Tyson (LT) – Chief Intervention Officer

Amber Robinson (AR) – Executive Assistant, Chief Executive

### **Apologies:**

Dave Smith (DS) – Managing Director Commissioner / Chief Executive

Cllr Andrew Jefferies (AJ) – Opposition Group Leader

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

1.1. NW welcomed board members to the meeting.

## **2. Matters Arising**

2.1. Minutes of the last meeting were agreed. NW ran through the actions, and it was agreed that the Finance Procedure rules and a discussion on the cost drivers would come back to future FRB meetings at the appropriate time.

2.2. There was also a brief discussion on the Impower work which would also come back to FRB following further discussions with the Senior Leadership Team.

## **3. Budget preparations and Exceptional Financial Support**

3.1. DC ran through the latest updates ahead of February's Cabinet meeting and Budget Council meeting, recognising the hard work done by the team to improve their financial management but that Exceptional Financial Support would still be required to balance the budget.

3.2. The Q3 budget monitoring report is going to Cabinet in March and shows in improvement in the level of overspend.

3.3. DC gave an overview of the MTFs and noted that thinking had just begun in directorates on the work and transformation that needs to be done to achieve the savings target of £13m for 26/27. NW noted that the transformation programme needs to be transparent, clearly explaining the council's areas of focus and needs to have action plans for the major cost drivers, such as temporary accommodation. AP noted that the new style of IRP reporting and the role of service planning has given much more rigour to this process and improved the dialogue between the corporate centre and directorates.

3.4. DC explained that this will follow the same timeline as last year with the MTFs being reviewed and updated every 6 months. Cabinet will also be updated on progress every 6 months.

3.5. DC gave an update on the Capitalisation Direction model, noting that the model remains dynamic and so the current figures represent a point in time which will be subject to change. The Council continue to brief MHCLG on the position and key sensitivities and also continue to liaise with them on long term solutions. JK expressed thanks for all the work done to refine the model and noted that discussions needed to continue on the debt. There was a discussion around the impact of LGR on the timelines for these discussions.

- **Action: DC to provide an update on the Council's transformation programme linked to the savings plans for 26/27 to a future FRB meeting in the next quarter.**

#### **4. Savings for 25/26**

- 4.1. DC provided a progress update on the savings for 24/25, noting that performance has improved since Q2 with some savings which were previously considered as at risk having now moved to on track or delivered. There were some slippages however these have been factored into the tracker for next year.
- 4.2. DC also outlined to the Board that the focus is now moving to the £18.2m of savings for 25/26 and noted that the picture is looking positive at this early stage with a further update on this due in March. DC noted that there has been positive working with directorates to track these savings.

#### **5. Update on Finance Service Improvement Plan and next steps**

- 5.1. DC provided an overview of progress since the previous update on the Finance Service Improvement plan, referring back to the next steps section within her CFO report published alongside the budget. This includes finalising the updated financial regulations, adding more details to the quarterly financial monitoring reports and an assessment against the Financial Management Code. There was a brief discussion on sundry debt with a question asked about how internal audit were involved in reviewing the regular reports.
  - **Action: Deep dive on sundry debt and bad debt to be brought back to a future FRB meeting.**
- 5.2. LW asked about resources and recruitment to the finance team, with DC noting that the recruitment campaign was ongoing but that there were sector wide workforce challenges in recruiting to finance posts. A new head of internal audit had been appointed but some of the team were still temporary /agency staff. NW asked whether the Council were considering growing talent internally through graduate or apprenticeship schemes, DC noted that some of this work was happening already.
- 5.3. DC outlined that the Council's plans on training for both officers and members was continuing, with risk management training already being rolled out and budget holder training moving into BAU.
- 5.4. The Council's expenditure controls remained in place with DC considering ways to further streamline and assure this process through more spot checks. Through budget setting, the Council has made significant improvements in its plans to triangulate its financial strategies and has identified more areas for improvement on their internal processes.
- 5.5. SM praised the risk management training, reflecting that it should be mandatory for all members. Risk management was reported as red on the recent IRP report so there is more to be done. DF noted that risk management training could be added to the agenda for the upcoming member development day. There was also a discussion that the Council could set an expectation or condition that certain training sessions had to be completed before Members could be appointed to particular council posts, e.g. Portfolio Holders, Scrutiny Chairs.

- **Action: Update on training to come back to a future FRB meeting ahead of the next municipal year.**

## **6. Forward Look of Agenda Items**

6.1 Board members agreed the proposed agenda.

## **7. AOB**

7.1. MB provided a brief update on the Council's ongoing litigation activity.

7.2. DC provided an update on the Investment Advisory Panel and the plans to close this panel at the end of this municipal year. Officers outlined their plans to ensure members were appropriately briefed once this panel was discontinued.

- **Action: DC to circulate briefing on the end of the Investment Advisory Panel with FRB members.**

7.3. JK congratulated NW on her new role at Essex County Council and thanked her for her time as Chair of FRB.

## **APPENDIX I: Full Meeting Actions**

- **Action: DC to provide an update on the Council's transformation programme linked to the savings plans for 26/27 to a future FRB meeting in the next quarter.**
- **Action: Deep dive on sundry debt and bad debt to be brought back to a future FRB meeting.**
- **Action: Update on training to come back to a future FRB meeting ahead of the next municipal year.**
- **Action: DC to circulate briefing on the end of the Investment Advisory Panel with FRB members.**