

# Thurrock Council

## Finance Recovery Board

Minutes – 2pm, Tuesday 7 October 2025

### Attendees:

Denise Murray (DM) – Finance Commissioner (Chair)  
Gavin Jones (GJ) – Lead Commissioner  
Dave Smith (DS) – Managing Director Commissioner/ Chief Executive  
Cllr Lynn Worrall (LW) - Leader of the Council  
Cllr Lee Watson (LWa) - Deputy Leader  
Cllr Valerie Morris-Cook (VMC) – Cabinet Member for Resources  
Cllr Barry Johnson (BJ) – Representative of the main opposition group  
Dawn Calvert (DC) – Chief Finance Officer / S151 Officer  
David McNamara (DMc) – Interim Deputy S151 Officer  
Satinder Jas (SJ) – Head of Financial Assurance, Internal Audit, Risk and Insurance  
Robert Kleinberg (RK) – Counter Fraud Investigation Manager  
Jessica Nwoko (JN) – Head of Procurement  
Alex Powell (AP) – Assistant Chief Executive  
Kerry Thomas (KT) – Chief of Staff to the Chief Executive  
Cristina Hall (CH) – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners  
Luke Tyson (LT) – Corporate Policy and Improvement Manager

### Apologies:

Cllr George Coxshall (GC) – Opposition Group Leader  
Cllr J Maney (JM) - Opposition Group Deputy Leader  
Daniel Fenwick (DF) – Executive Director of Corporate Services

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

1.1. DM welcomed board members to the meeting.

## **2. Minutes of previous meeting/Action log**

2.1. Minutes of the last meeting were agreed. Open actions to be discussed during relevant agenda items.

## **3. Update from Finance Commissioner**

3.1. DM explained that the Board's Terms of Reference have been revised in light of the updated Directions and to reflect the priority areas of focus for the Board going forward. This includes regulatory compliance and ensuring that the Medium Term Financial Strategy appropriately aligns with the Council's priorities.

3.2. DM noted that commissioners are currently drafting their next report. They have seen good progress in several key areas within the finance function, particularly on monitoring and reporting the in-year financial position and introducing greater rigour on the capital programme. She also recognised how the function has supported cross-cutting programmes such as LGR and transformation. However, she remains concerned about resource, capability and capacity to deliver the ongoing action plans.

## **4. Counter Fraud Update**

4.1. SJ and RK outlined the current status of the Counter Fraud service and identified areas of concern. There was a discussion about the current workload, capacity and resource levels of the service given that regulations have changed so the service should be operating more proactively.

4.2. LW noted concerns around how the service was being funded as it is currently funded by the HRA. There was a discussion around an external contract that the service is involved in and the options for the service given their capacity constraints and contractual obligations. When asked about the timeline, SJ outlined that this should be resolved within the next two weeks.

4.3. DM sought clarity that this was added to the corporate risk register and asked about the implications for the Annual Governance Statement. It was also agreed that SJ/RK would return to the Board with an action plan.

- **ACTION: SJ/RK to produce and bring to a future board meeting an action plan on Counter Fraud to address some of the key issues identified within the paper.**

## **5. Updated Financial Management Recovery Plan**

5.1. DC provided an update on the refreshed Financial Management Recovery Plan, starting with the resourcing and recruitment of the teams. DC noted the recent progress in recruiting an interim Deputy S151 Officer and the new structure in internal audit. DC noted there are still technical areas where they would like to strengthen the capability of the teams however the team is no longer holding any vacancies. DC noted the challenges that occur because of churn in the function.

- 5.2. Commissioners emphasised that the Council needs to make sure they've got the right skills and capacity within the function, and the right processes and systems in place to ensure that the basics are done right, noting their concerns about the sustainability of the function. DM reflected that the ongoing work to assess and ensure compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code will support with getting the basics right. Cabinet Members noted their support for DC's aim to further strengthen the resilience of the finance function.
- 5.3. DM noted the challenges ahead as they need to deliver on key strategies and demonstrate that improvements have been embedded, alongside delivering the significant volume of business-as-usual work for the team.
- 5.4. DC outlined that the team are refreshing the capital programme and have established a temporary Capital Board, chaired by VMC, to scrutinise any new bids, avoid slippage and learn from the lessons of previous years. DM was positive that this board was now in place and starting to review proposals but noted that it needs to ensure the programme aligns with the Council's priorities.

## **6. MTFS strategic planning**

- 6.1. DC summarised the work taking place in advance of the budget and to provide Board members with assurance that the necessary engagement with commissioners, members and committees has been considered and incorporated into the plan. Members noted that it was helpful to see all the actions captured in once place through this planning document.
- 6.2. DC outlined that both the transformation savings and the non-roadmap savings will follow the same timetable to ensure that the business cases being developed as part of the transformation roadmap will be factored into the MTFS planning. The MTFS will be going to O&S for discussion in November.
- 6.3. The MTFS is currently being refreshed and the updated Q2 position will be incorporated at the appropriate time. The team are currently reviewing the assumptions on growth. Several reports will be going to December Cabinet as part of the draft budget. DC confirmed that the draft budget papers will discuss each of the funds but that there is more to do on the HRA business plan. The timing and approach for public consultation is being finalised ahead of the Budget Council meeting in February.
- 6.4. DM asked about the delivery risks and the team's level of confidence in completing the remaining work, DC was confident about the work done to date but noted that lots of work was still to be completed. DM also referenced the ongoing discussions with MHCLG on debt, reflecting that benchmarking on services needed to be incorporated in these discussions.

## **7. Overview of procurement**

- 7.1. JN gave an overview of the procurement function, noting that the Council has a centralised procurement team, who have oversight of any procurement over £25k, but a decentralised model for contract management. The governance follows the Procurement Act 2023 and the Council's own contract procedure

rules and there are various check points and approval processes in place before anything is procured. JN outlined some of the improved tools they have introduced such as a public contract register, contract expiry notifications and directorate procurement boards.

7.2. There was a discussion around the annual forward plan and the KPIs that are used to understand effectiveness, both of which the service is working on. VMC outlined how the social value work that service is doing will also be factored into the Council's wider corporate performance reporting but there was a discussion that members should consider agreeing a social value policy to give this a clear focus.

7.3. DS asked how the service is proactively managing the decentralised model of contract managers to ensure they have the right capability and skills and there was a brief discussion on how this interacted with the strategic commissioning workstream in the transformation roadmap.

- **Action: Produce and bring to a future board meeting an outline of a forward plan on procurement which could be shared with members, which includes timescales and key KPIs to measure it.**

## **8. Forward look of agenda items/AOB**

8.1. There being no further discussion, the meeting closed.

#### **Appendix I: All meeting actions**

- **Action: Produce and bring to a future board meeting an action plan on counter fraud to address some of the key issues identified within the paper.**
- **Action: Produce and bring to a future board meeting an outline of a forward plan on procurement which could be shared with members, which includes timescales and key KPIs to measure it.**