

Thurrock Council
Finance Recovery Board
Minutes – 2pm, 9 December 2025

Attendees:

Denise Murray (DM) – Finance Commissioner (Chair)
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 Finances and Resources
Cllr George Coxshall (GC) – Opposition Group Leader
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
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
Amber Robinson (AR) – Executive Assistant, Chief Executive
Maggie Miedlar (MM) – Executive Assistant, ACE

Apologies:

Gavin Jones (GJ) – Lead Commissioner
Cllr Barry Johnson (BJ) – 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. The minutes of the last meeting were agreed. Two outstanding actions were discussed, and both have been added to the forward look for future meetings.

3. Update from Finance Commissioner

3.1. DM provided an update on Commissioners' forthcoming report; noting that it will set out both the progress achieved to date and the challenges that remain in strengthening financial management. She highlighted the incremental improvements made across the organisation and the continued move toward greater transparency in financial reporting, particularly through improved tracking of key financial metrics to support more informed decision-making.

3.2. DM emphasised the importance of adhering to regulatory codes and guidelines, stressing that compliance is a shared responsibility across the Council. Work continues to deliver the debt reduction strategy and understanding the level of debt the Council can hold.

3.3. DM outlined the ongoing focus on financial management, noting the need to ensure the Council has sufficient capacity and capability across finance to manage the ongoing improvement activity. She stressed the importance of aligning strategic plans with available resources to secure sustainable long-term improvement. DM also acknowledged the progress made so far, recognising that the work will be phased as not everything can be done simultaneously.

3.4. LW queried the Council's current capacity and staffing levels, particularly the reliance on short-term contracts, and how this affects operational resilience moving forward.

4. Update on regulatory compliance

4.1. DC provided an update on the ongoing review of the Council's financial regulations and scheme of delegation, clarifying approval routes and decision-making responsibilities. There was discussion on the timescale for completing this work and confidence to meet the deadline. DM noted the importance of updating the schemes of delegation as this was explicitly covered in the Ministerial Directions.

4.2. DC mentioned that the self-assessment against CIPFA Financial Management Code has been revised and would come back to a future board meeting.

4.3. DC outlined the progress on procurement, noting that a more detailed update to discuss the KPIs was on the forward look for a future meeting. Lots of activity has taken place to ensure compliance with the Procurement Act 2023 and regular reporting on breaches is now taking place, with an intention to report this to SLT. DC explained the training that was taking place to ensure staff understand the new requirements and their implications and there was a question around ensuring members were briefed on the changes too. The

Council's contract procedure rules have also been updated, and they are now working on developing an annual procurement plan, setting out intentions for the year ahead, which board members welcomed. There was a discussion on the impact of LGR on existing contracts, following a question by LW.

4.4. SJ noted that the Council had done a self-assessment against the Global Internal Audit Standards which will be presented to SLT in the new year, prior to being shared with Audit Committee in March. A development plan to strengthen compliance will be shared with members. Looking ahead, SJ was positive that the Council would have a Head of Internal Audit opinion as a result of the improvement activity taking place. DS noted the importance of getting independent assurance in this area.

4.5. DS also reflected that as the internal audit system matures, it will be vital that reports provide clear recommendations on next steps and that services develop and implement action plans to address these recommendations.

5. Update on financial management

5.1. DC provided an update on capacity, capability and resourcing in finance and the plans for upcoming recruitment. There was a discussion around getting the right processes in place e.g. for Cabinet reports, which will improve capacity within the team. There were also questions about the plans to ensure the Council has the right resources in place to deliver the improvements.

5.2. With the expected upcoming audit of the accounts, the board discussed how ensuring there is adequate resourcing remains a priority. DM noted that Thurrock was not included on the recent list of authorities yet to publish their accounts, which reflects positive progress. However, she emphasised the need for continued focus moving forward.

- **ACTION: DC and DMc to bring finance service resource plan to next FRB**

6. Update on financial health

6.1. DC highlighted the volume of work done in Q2 on the corporate and technical budgets in preparation for setting the 2026/27 budget. The team are reviewing underspends and also intend to review reserves and to streamline reporting and incorporate bad debt provisions. DC also noted that the Council's request for Exceptional Financial Support needs to be submitted this month. DC also updated on the draft budget and MTFs, noting that the team would need to reflect the impact of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement once it was published next week.

6.2. There was a discussion on the capital programme and in-year capital slippage. Board members asked for an update on how the Capital Board was working and whether this new governance was providing greater oversight. DS noted that this was a council wide challenge to own and does not solely sit with finance.

- **ACTION: GRB to consider the governance, impact and effectiveness of the Capital Programme Board**

6.3. DC provided an update on the HRA and outlined how this would be referenced in the upcoming Cabinet reports. The board discussed the Council's work to refresh the HRA business plan, reflecting recent changes and additional work undertaken.

6.4. DM stressed the importance of managing HRA debt effectively and maintaining a robust 30year business plan to ensure long-term sustainability. She noted that tough choices will be necessary to balance Cabinet's priorities with ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements. The Board also discussed the need to engage with tenants on the plans.

- **ACTION: DC and CD to produce an updated HRA plan of action and bring to a future FRB**
- **ACTION: CD to convene a deep dive into the HRA with the relevant officers, councillors and commissioners**

7. Forward look of agenda items/AOB

7.1. There being no further discussion, the meeting was closed.

Appendix I: All meeting actions

- **Action: DC and DMC to bring finance service resource plan to next FRB**
- **Action: GRB to consider the governance, impact and effectiveness of the Capital Programme Board**
- **Action: DC and CD to produce an updated HRA plan of action and bring to a future FRB**
- **Action: CD to convene a deep dive into the HRA with the relevant officers, councillors and commissioners**