

# Thurrock Borough Council

## Finance Recovery Board

**Minutes – Thursday 15 June 2023**

### **Attendees**

Nicole Wood – Essex County Council Commissioner (Chair)

Cllr Andrew Jefferies – Leader, Thurrock Council

Cllr John Kent – Opposition Group Leader, Thurrock Council

Cllr Graham Snell – Cabinet Member for Finance, Thurrock Council

Dr Dave Smith – Managing Director Commissioner, Thurrock Council

Steven Mair – Chief Finance Officer, Thurrock Council

Jonathan Wilson – Acting Section 151 Officer, Thurrock Council

Mark Bowen – Head of Legal Services, Thurrock Council

Rob Large – Programme Director, Asset Disposals, Thurrock Council

Patrick McDermott – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners, DLUHC

Luke Tyson – Chief Intervention Officer, Thurrock Council

Gary Staples – Strategic Lead Corporate Programmes, Thurrock Council

Lorraine Surrey - Senior Project Manager, Thurrock Council

### **Apologies**

Mark Bradbury – Director of Place, Thurrock Council

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

- 1.1. Nicole Wood welcomed Board members. All attendees had received papers.

## **2. Terms of Reference, Minutes of last meeting / Action Log**

- 2.1. The Board agreed an updated Terms of Reference and the Minutes of the previous meeting.
- 2.2. A discussion followed on the action log and the need for the Red-Amber-Green (RAG) ratings to be updated.

**Action: Refine Action Log ahead of the July FRB meeting.**

## **3. Workstreams Update**

- 3.1. Steven Mair provided an update on the financial sustainability workstream. In particular he updated on, additional resource to support work on the commercial strategy and business cases, the review of the finance function.
- 3.2. Work to review the HRA has been deferred by one month while progress has been made on fees and charges, with a report to Cabinet.
- 3.3. Work continues with BDO on the outstanding accounts.
- 3.4. In the discussion that followed Members asked for more detail on the impact of changes to rents and on the timeline of the finance function review.

**Action: Bring a detailed plan for the Finance Function Review as part of the Workstream Report to FRB in July.**

**Action: Team to respond separately to Cllr Jefferies' questions about rental income and impact on sole traders.**

## **4. Budget 23/24, 24/25 and beyond**

- 4.1. Steven Mair presented the ongoing work on the budget for this and future years. He noted that there is a focus on the revenue position in budget planning and assured the Board that all savings proposals would include businesses cases, impact assessments and a clear action plan.
- 4.2. Nicole Wood noted that on the DRA it is disappointing to be in the position we are on in-year savings. There followed a discussion on the need for confidence in the DRA in coming months and the importance of it.
- 4.3. Cllr Kent raised concerns over the deliverability of the savings in these budget plans. Steven Mair reflected that other councils have achieved savings of this magnitude and this is the only option for sustainability.
- 4.4. Dave Smith reflected that the Council has concentrated resource and focus on achieving these savings.
- 4.5. Nicole Wood said it would be useful to understand Members' reflections on political engagement in the budget process.

4.6. Cllr Kent said that it feels there could be increased soft management on savings and budget proposals.

4.7. Cllr Snell reflected on the impact of election cycles and short-termism.

**Action: Include a detailed plan for member engagement in the budget within the report to July FRB (Budget 23/24, 24/25 and beyond).**

## **5. Thurrock Estimated Long-Term Financial Position (MTFS)**

5.1. Steven Mair introduced the update on the Medium-term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

5.2. Nicole Wood reflected that it will be increasingly important as we move into the summer that our discussions with DLUHC be supported by a detailed position on the MTFS.

5.3. In the discussion that followed, it was noted that there's an importance in benchmarking on tax positions as part of the MTFS.

**Action: In the report to September FRB on MTFS, outline where tax rises would position Thurrock in terms of benchmarking and averages.**

**Action: Bring a report to FRB in July on the service implications of the long term financial model and variations to it, to inform conversations with DLUHC.**

**Action: Prepare materials that can be used to engage staff and members in the discussions about the long term financial position of the Council.**

## **6. Investments Financial Update**

6.1. Nicole Wood noted that this was a detailed, clear and helpful update and noted the total spent to date and what is projected.

6.2. Mark Bowen provided an update on the progress of legal cases.

6.3. The Board discussed the progress of legal cases and next steps. They noted that more detail is required on costs to assess value for money and decision-making processes.

**Action: Reflect on value for money in relation to legal costs, setting out a clear audit trail on decision-making.**

## **7. Property and Assets Update**

7.1. Rob Large provided an update from the Property Board and disposals.

7.2. Dave Smith said that there is more confidence in the programme and a sense of momentum.

7.3. The Board discussed some of the sites set for disposal and the need for clearer reporting on progress.

**Action: Develop a mechanism to show Actuals on the Disposals Tracker for future FRB reporting.**

**Action: Discuss sites in South Ockendon put forward for disposal with Cllr Jefferies.**

**8. Items for the next meeting**

8.1. The Board discussed items for the next meeting.

**9. Any other business**

9.1. There being no other business, the meeting closed.