

# Thurrock Borough Council

## Finance Recovery Board

**Minutes – 9:30am, Thursday 19 October 2023**

**Room 4, 4th Floor, Civic Offices.**

### **Attendees**

Nicole Wood (NW) – Essex County Council Commissioner (Chair)

Cllr Andrew Jefferies (AJ) – Leader of the Council

Cllr Graham Snell (GS) – Cabinet Member for Resources

Jonathan Wilson (JW) – Acting Director of Finance

Luke Tyson (LT) – Chief Intervention Officer

Patrick McDermott (PM) – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Rob Large (RL) – Programme Director, Asset Disposals

Mark Bowen (MBo) – Interim Project Lead (Legal)

Lorraine Surrey (LS) – Senior Project Manager

Vince Waddams (VW) – Delivery Assurance Manager

Jackie Hinchliffe (JH) – Interim Director of HR, OD and Transformation

Keilah Gallardo (KG) – Business Support Officer, Chief Executive (minutes)

### **Apologies**

Dr Dave Smith (DS) – Managing Director Commissioner, Chief Executive

Steven Mair (SM) – Acting Chief Finance Officer

Cllr John Kent (JK) – Opposition Group Leader

Cllr Lynn Worrall (LW) – Opposition Group Deputy Leader

Mark Bradbury (MB) – Interim Director of Place

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

## **2. Matters Arising**

- 2.1. VW noted that when mentioning '23/24 Savings Delivery Risk Assessment', the word 'confidence' not assurance should be used.
- 2.2. LT and PM raised the Rental Income paper has not been shared to the board and urgently needs to be followed up. NW suggested that a virtual update be given by MB in lieu of the paper not being ready.
- 2.3. JK raised that action 177 was not resolved and sought out further clarification. DS to provide update for Action Log.
- 2.4. NW raised that action 181 was not resolved and sought out further clarification. PM confirmed there would be a virtual update to follow before the next FRB.

## **3. Workstreams Update**

### **Sponsor report**

- 3.1. JW reported that the Toucan sale was imminent, noting that the Investment Panel, Cabinet, and Council have has updates. JW also noted there has been further review on the tail of investments.
- 3.2. JW provided an update on Fees and Charges, noting phase two was on track and will also look at corporate savings. This will be brought back to members in November and December.
- 3.3. JW noted there are ongoing reviews of timing and MRP, with the most impact on the budget report. JW noted the earlier sales take place, the lower charged for Toucan Wind Farm, the more interest goes down.
- 3.4. JW confirmed the investment portfolio is moving but the response time has been limited. JW noted there is a wider sector proposal to clear audits from 2023 back to 2021. This would require the audits to be signed off with qualifications. NW asked this paper to be brought back, noting that on an accounts basis it is very possible that previous years would need to be reviewed. PM noted that there is a proposal, but Ministers are yet to make a final decision.

### **Highlight report**

- 3.5. NW noted that it would be helpful to see the current progress for the capital review in the next Highlight and Narrative Report.
- 3.6. JW confirmed that the Capital Programme will go through to SLT next week, noting that it to be a draft paper. NW suggested that LT should be monitoring this as part of the IRP.
- 3.7. NW inquired whether there was an update on budget consultation to which JW confirmed SMA was working on this and would bring an update to the next FRB.
- 3.8. PM noted that he has had meetings with Emma Callaghan regarding budget comms and consultation with the public. PM noted these proposals will be going to SLT and then FRB.

**Action: Bring paper on the statutory financial accounts and the backstop approach / process for the following FRB meeting.**

**Action: Bring highlight and narrative report back with clear indication on status of capital review.**

**Action: Provide an update to members and commissioners on the budget consultation process.**

#### **4. Asset Disposals**

4.1. RL provided an update on asset disposals, including the forecasting sales. RL noted the Asset Disposal was drawn out of a much more detailed monitoring schedule. RL discussed the Amazon related land and other property updates. RL noted that planning history has not been clear on this site. RL also noted the anticipation for changes in the budget forecasting.

4.2. NW noted that if in relation to the budget, this may have effects on offers. NW asked for clarity on this point and what/if any aspects may change. RL noted that this information should be ready for the next FRB meeting.

4.3. NW inquired regarding confidence levels on its completion of some sales. RL noted that further information should be available in the next ten days but was confident completion would take place within the current financial year.

4.4. AJ asked about progress with the adult education site. RL noted that there was renegotiating for the lease and that this is still a work in progress.

**Action: Include in the next asset disposals report to FRB when the revised position will be known for inclusion in the refresh of the medium-term resourcing strategy.**

#### **5. Capital Programme**

5.1. JW presented the Capital Programme noting the report sets out requirements and what work is nearly completed. JW noted there is a potential to expand this for three to five years, with an improvement proposal to be discussed with relevant senior officers. JW clarified that there would be more detailed reported that will come back to FRB, following the route to go to O&S and ICB. JW also noted there is still guidance from DLUHC on decisions making protocols from departments but. This will be provided when available.

**Action: Provide report to FRB in November on the Capital Programme (execution of the review, and the implementation of appropriate financial reporting).**

#### **6. Investment Recovery and Litigation Update**

6.1. MBo updated the Board on progress since their last meeting. It was noted that DLUHC would be sighted in the process with third-party agencies. NW inquired about readiness, with a suggestion for period cost oversight. The Board also discussed future reporting to Council.

**Action: Include an oversight of costs in relation to investments and litigation in the narrative report each month, starting in November 2023.**

## **7. 23/24 Savings Delivery Risk Assessment**

- 7.1. VW presented current confidence levels at 79% and noted performance trends. VW noted that the main goal in these exercises would be the presentation of evidence for confidence, noting that this would be expected to rise. VW presented directorate monthly performance noting a general trend of being on track, noting Place needs more work to assure confidence levels.
- 7.2. NW suggested that a deep dive on Place be investigated to resolve lower confidence levels. NW asked VW to have this ready for the next FRB.

**Action: Liaise with relevant officers to provide an additional update on place savings in the DRA report in November.**

## **8. Section 114: Management Information Report**

### **Progress update for Resourcing / Recruitment Panel**

- 8.1. JW presented updates on staffing and turnover, noting a significant number in Housing and Public Realm. JW also noted that duplicate requests have been withdrawn, especially when post have been vacant. JH noted that there have been requests from managers to soften the criteria and/or exempt some services but, that this was not in line with the approach. JH also noted that for agency requirements, there is only an allowance for extensions of 6-8 weeks. JH also felt there should be further comms on the ongoing impact of the Section 114.
- 8.2. NW noted that these points were good to be made aware of, and that the approach of Section 114 implementation would not change.

### **External Commissioner Assessment of Effectiveness**

- 8.3. NW noted a third-party review, noting the successful delivery of savings. NW commended the Council for the work that has taken place. NW note areas for attention including internal audits.
- 8.4. JW noted that regarding internal audit, there has been a meeting with audit to agree their review. AJ noted the improvements in expenditure understanding and compliance, noting continuing this was fundamental.

**Action: Include an appendix to the narrative report in November to respond to the recommendations in the ECC S114 report.**

## **9. Items for next meeting**

- Workstreams Update
- Financial Strategy Update
- Delivery Risk Assessment
- Asset Disposals
- Rental Income

## **10. Any other business**

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

## **Appendix I: Full Meeting Actions**

- Action: Bring paper on the statutory financial accounts and the backstop approach / process for the following FRB meeting.**
- Action: Bring highlight and narrative report back with clear indication on status of capital review.**
- Action: Provide an update to members and commissioners on the budget consultation process.**
- Action: Include in the next asset disposals report to FRB when the revised position will be known for inclusion in the refresh of the medium-term resourcing strategy.**
- Action: Provide report to FRB in November on the Capital Programme (execution of the review, and the implementation of appropriate financial reporting).**
- Action: Include an oversight of costs in relation to investments and litigation in the narrative report each month, starting in November 2023.**
- Action: Liaise with relevant officers to provide an additional update on place savings in the DRA report in November.**
- Action: Include an appendix to the narrative report in November to respond to the recommendations in the ECC S114 report.**