

# **Thurrock Council**

## **Governance Recovery Board**

**Minutes – 2pm, Monday 18 March 2024**

### **Attendees**

Dave Smith (DS) – Managing Director Commissioner and Chief Executive (Chair)

Cllr Andrew Jefferies (AJ) – Leader

Cllr Deborah Arnold (DA) – Deputy Leader

Cllr John Kent (JK) – Opposition Group Leader

Daniel Fenwick (DF) – Executive Director of Corporate Services

Luke Tyson (LT) – Chief Intervention Officer

Chris Stephenson (CS) – Senior Project Manager

Paul Turner (PT) – Director of Legal, ECC

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

### **Apologies**

Alex Powell (AP) – Assistant Chief Executive

Cllr Lynn Worrall (LW) – Opposition Group Deputy Leader

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

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

1.1. Dan Fenwick was welcomed to his first GRB meeting.

## **2. Matters Arising**

2.1. Minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

2.2. Member mentor profiles will be circulated shortly, awaiting member permission to release specific information.

2.3. DS raised concerns at the rate of pace regarding the proposed split of Standards and Audit.

## **3. Governance elements of Commissioners' 3rd report**

3.1. DS reflected on the Third Report to the Secretary of State that has been published by DLUHC, noting that areas of the report reflected on the progress made in certain areas like member/ officer relationships, report writing, and governance. DS appreciated that DF is currently conducting a Governance review.

3.2. Members agreed with the contents of the Report. DS noted the importance of the involvement of Members for Councils undergoing intervention.

3.3. LT noted that in full Council on Wednesday there is an agenda item including a verbal update from the Lead Commissioner.

3.4. JK felt that generally, in circumstances where members are behaving poorly, it is usually caused by a lack of understanding in the system and politics. JK asked the Board how this might be remediated. DS noted there needed to be continued dialogue and training.

## **4. Initial Reflections and Governance Review**

4.1. DF commended the progress of Thurrock in intervention. DF noted that key points to be reviewed were quality assurance, the pace of governance, and effective planning. DF felt that Overview and Scrutiny should always act as a critical friend. Regarding member/ officer relationships, DF felt a clear line needs to be drawn regarding comportment. DF confirmed it was his plan to speak to all groups on how they would like to approach this.

4.2. DA raised concerns about the volume of papers and short notice, noting that it gives little time to read and be made aware of key decisions and report content. DF confirmed he was aware of this and is reflecting on how to improve this, and was considering a 12 month look ahead in a forward plan. DF felt that there may be a benefit in shorter report writing. DF would like to see report writing training that is continuously running.

- 4.3. DS asked DF if he had formed a view about a plan / prioritisation. DF shared that working with Democratic Services and the Chief of Staff will be key in shaping and improving the programme.

## **5. Governance & Controls IRP Progress Reporting**

- 5.1. DF noted he was working with DC to form a plan on capacity issues and making information more accessible.
- 5.2. Regarding the governance workstream, DF noted that he would like to refresh the purpose of this work, highlighting this purpose more clearly to Members.
- 5.3. DS noted the major risk is Internal Controls and Audit and asked what plans were in place to move this forward. DF acknowledged the gap and confirmed it was part of the work he and DC were working on.

## **6. Transparency and Accountability update**

- 6.1. LT noted that following a previous agreement made by the Board, the working group came together in March. LT shared there was a discussion regarding the aims and objectives, as well as a pool of comments from Commissioners and the BVI Report findings.
- 6.2. DS would like a report from Jayne Middleton-Albooye for Members' views at the next Board meeting.

**Action: Jayne Middleton-Albooye to bring back Transparency and Accountability report to the next GRB.**

## **7. Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Review**

- 7.1. CD provided an update on the PAS review, noting that the action plan follows the high-level recommendations. CD appreciated that there is still work to be done.
- 7.2. DA noted that the report's tone was similar to that of the BVI.
- 7.3. DA suggested a 'Place Recovery Board' could monitor progress rather than an item at GRB. CD confirmed that there will be an officer-led Board in place that would review decisions made.
- 7.4. JK asked CD if they were confident in the capacity and the delivery of this. CD confirmed they were still reviewing this.
- 7.5. JK acknowledged that there needed to be more member involvement in the Planning Committee. AJ noted that this would hopefully further restore Member/Officer relationships.
- 7.6. DS acknowledged there is an evident need for much stronger leadership for Planning, politically and managerially. DS asked about the resource, to which CD confirmed that feedback would be given to the appropriate boards.

**Action: CD to consider membership of Boards as they relate to the Place Directorate.**

**8. AOB**

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

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

- Action: Jayne Middleton-Albooye to bring back Transparency and Accountability report to the next GRB.**
- Action: CD to consider membership of Boards as they relate to the Place Directorate.**