

Thurrock Council

Governance Recovery Board

Minutes – 2pm, Monday 12 February 2024

Attendees

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

Alex Powell (AP) – Assistant Chief Executive

Cllr Deborah Arnold (DA) – Deputy Leader

Cllr John Kent (JK) – Opposition Group Leader

Cllr Lynn Worrall (LW) – Opposition Group Deputy Leader

Asmat Hussain (AH) – Director of Legal and Governance

Luke Tyson (LT) – Chief Intervention Officer

Chris Stephenson (CS) – Senior Project Manager

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

Paul Turner (PT) – Director of Legal, ECC

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

Guests

Matt Boulter (MB) – Head of Democratic Scrutiny and Member Services

Ed Hammond (EH) – CfGS, Deputy Chief Executive

Apologies

Cllr Andrew Jefferies – Leader (AJ)

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Matters Arising

2.1. Minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

2.2. It was noted that action updates will be circulated, and outstanding actions will be brought forward to the next meeting.

3. CfGS O&S Project Update

3.1. EH presented the project update, indicating that work has been ongoing for a couple of months. A review of the O&S function has been undertaken to align its purpose and reflect on common themes across organisations and councils. A new structure for committees is being considered, along with changes to the scrutiny process and planning. The aim is to ensure the right topics are addressed effectively. EH also highlighted efforts to improve culture through learning and development, with a focus on proactive member engagement.

3.2. LW expressed concern about the workload and timing, particularly with new councillors potentially joining after May. JK emphasised the importance of independence between scrutiny and executive functions, suggesting a closer look at savings proposals from the beginning of the year.

3.3. DA raised concerns about the timetable, questioning the role of standards and audit in scrutiny.

3.4. AH addressed concerns about workstreams, highlighting efforts to engage with scrutiny members and align training with work plans. MB discussed plans for member training and integrating learning into scrutiny processes.

3.5. It was suggested to introduce a parallel approach, with immediate scrutiny during the election period and development of a long-term programme starting in late May or early June. AH agreed, emphasising the need for continuity and transparency.

3.6. EH stressed the importance of setting a framework for the work programme to provide flexibility for new members and prioritise urgent matters.

3.7. DS clarified whether the current principles of the project could be agreed, with the proposal for a phased approach, combining immediate scrutiny with the development of a broader programme informed by officers. Board members agreed.

3.8. LW and MB discussed potential adjustments to allowances and the role of the Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel in reviewing new posts. DS emphasised the need for a justifiable rationale for allowances to attract members to scrutiny roles.

3.9. AH suggested creating a job profile for clarity.

Action: Speak to Independent Remuneration Panel Chair regarding the change of Member allowances for chair of Scrutiny committee.

Action: Circulate role profile for chair of Scrutiny committee

4. Review of External Companies and Bodies

4.1. AH presented a report focusing on a review of external companies and bodies.

4.2. JK raised concerns about community forums not being included and suggested future work on governance for such bodies. JK sought clarification on the purpose of the list of companies.

4.3. AH clarified that the list included companies which the Council had legal obligations to, with plans for further work on grant-funded bodies.

4.4. AP suggested focusing on liabilities and outcomes, with plans for a deeper dive into resource allocation. AH highlighted the need for collaboration between officers and members in understanding relationships with external bodies.

4.5. AP raised concerns about resource allocation for CIPFA's work.

4.6. AH proposed involving members in discussions on historical knowledge.

4.7. The Board agreed to prioritise companies with legal obligations and revisit community forums in the future.

Action: Ahead of the CIPFA review of companies, confirm the organisations in scope, i.e. those with statutory or responsibilities, and confirm the information ahead with CIPFA through a Council deep dive.

5. Transparency & Accountability Workstream

5.1. Plans to establish a task and finish group to focus on transparency and accountability were discussed.

5.2. DA raised the importance of including members in the working group, as this would contribute to improving member officer relationships.

6. Governance & Controls Performance Reporting

6.1. AH highlighted progress in the programme but noted delays in risk strategy management due to capacity issues. AH confirmed that the programme was moving in the right direction. AH noted that there was now an individual acting up to the role of Chief Internal Auditor.

6.2. JK raised concerns about a lack of capacity in the programme. DS acknowledged this point and noted that there could be more recalibration of the programme.

6.3. AP noted that though the risks may not show as 'green', it did not reflect or indicate the progress of a programme.

6.4. AH suggested that a paper be brought to GRB regarding the recalibration of the programme. DS asked that it focus on the risks associated with this delay, focusing on the potential need for increasing resourcing. AP asked that this paper be circulated to him for review before submission to this board.

Action: Complete a recalibration of risk and audit work, bringing back rewritten paper to GRB that has been peer reviewed by AP.

7. Member/Officer relationships

7.1. The board was informed about initiatives to improve member/officer relationships, including mentoring opportunities that have been accepted by Group Leaders. PM confirmed Commissioners are also engaged in this.

Action: Circulate profiles for Member-mentors

8. AOB

8.1. Financial matters regarding LGA funds were briefly discussed.

8.2. JK raised concerns about a recent planning committee meeting, prompting discussions about training and procedural issues. DS noted that this matter would be investigated.

8.3. LW asked for an update on disabilities access in the Chambers.

8.4. As this was AH's last meeting, she was thanked for her work at Thurrock Council.

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

APPENDIX I: Full Meeting Actions

- **Action: Speak to Independent Remuneration Panel Chair regarding the change of Member allowances for chair of Scrutiny committee.**
- **Action: Circulate role profile for chair of Scrutiny committee.**
- **Action: Ahead of the CIPFA review of companies, confirm the organisations in scope, i.e. those with statutory or responsibilities, and confirm the information ahead with CIPFA through a Council deep dive.**
- **Action: Complete a recalibration of risk and audit work, bringing back rewritten paper to GRB that has been peer reviewed by AP.**
- **Action: Circulate profiles for Member-mentors.**