

# **Thurrock Council**

## **Governance Recovery Board**

### **Minutes – 2pm, Tuesday 30 July 2024**

#### **Attendees**

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

Cllr John Kent (JK) - Leader

Cllr Lynn Worrall (LW) - Deputy Leader

Cllr George Coxshall (GC) – Opposition Deputy Leader

Alex Powell (AP) – Assistant Chief Executive

Daniel Fenwick (DF) – Executive Director of Corporate Services

Luke Tyson (LT) – Chief Intervention Officer

Crissy Hall (CH) – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Paul Turner (PT) – Director of Legal, ECC

Amber Robinson (AR) – Executive Assistant (Minutes)

#### **Guests**

Frankie Smith (FS) – Head of Financial Assurance Internal Audit Risk and Insurance

Stephen Taylor (ST) – Head of Freeports

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

#### **Apologies:**

Chris Stephenson (CS) – Senior Project Manager

Cllr Andrew Jefferies (AJ) – Opposition Group Leader

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

1.1. DS welcomed board members to the meeting.

## **2. Matters Arising**

2.1. Minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

## **3. Governance Review**

3.1. DF introduced the item and went through a short slide presentation which was a summary version of where the team is with the governance review and what actions need to happen to change the way the council works going forward.

3.2. DF confirmed that whilst producing the report he has had political and commissioner conversations, informal and formal meetings.

3.3. DF noted that the themes underpinning the findings are ensuring there is an overarching purpose for the activity, so the foundations of good governance are implemented by May 2025, the key date throughout this workstream. Other key themes include the need for increased pace and prioritisation, proportionality, and a cultural shift.

3.4. DF gave a summary of the findings across the workstreams which make up the improvements in governance including: decision making, corporate forward planning, the review of the Constitution, changes to Overview and Scrutiny, conduct, roles and responsibilities, and training and development.

3.5. DF advised the next steps will be to have commissioner sign off and to share the paper with SLT for them to sign up and adopt.

3.6. LW asked when they are likely to start receiving the reports in the new format. DF confirmed that Mod.Gov training is underway, reports are starting to be put through Mod.Gov for Cabinet and this will be rolled out to other meetings by December. LW further asked about Member training following the election in May. DF advised that he is considering options for an induction day for members.

3.7. PT advised that the paper is positive but asked if the planning that had already taken place has been cross referenced within the review. DF advised that previous plans have been considered and achievements to date had been captured within the paper. PT noted that report writing training had been delivered previously, but it doesn't appear to have embedded and suggested we keep an eye on this. PT offered to assist with member training.

3.8. JK noted that things are moving forward. JK wanted to explore partnering with an organisation which would allow Members to obtain a qualification after their 4 years of being elected.

3.9. JK asked to know more about the open governance workstream, DF advised that this is a cultural approach to how the council is around the disclosure of information or being open about information, making sure papers are proactively

published. Members are not fully aware of what rights they have with information and what they can do with it.

- 3.10. JK noted that procurement was referred to a lot within the paper and it is essential that we look at procurement is a totally different way for this work to be a success. DF advised that this is being looked at and will be moving away from being a transactional, contracting exercise to some alternative options. AP advised that the new AD for Financial Management and Procurement has been looking at how to improve the internal functions to better support the organisation looking forward. They are also looking at bringing someone in temporarily to look at building market capacity and strategic commissioning.
- 3.11. GC supports the work being done with procurement and welcomes the changes to Members training. GC noted that this year's training programme was one of the best he has received.
- 3.12. DS asked who is going to quality assure reports and who is making this judgement, DF advised that we could have a star chamber board that can review the report which both DF and DS can sit on. DS asked how we avoid workarounds to the new system, DF noted officers will be encouraged to produce the report within Mod.Gov.
- 3.13. The board are happy to support this report in principle.

#### **4. Risk Management**

- 4.1. FS presented this item providing updates on the resources, strategy and priorities for the team over the coming months, such as updating the Corporate Risk Register.
- 4.2. LW asked if the training should be delivered to more members and include the Shadow Cabinet. FS agreed and will circulate an invite once the training is booked.
- 4.3. HN noted that within the new report writing process in Mod.Gov, there is a section on risk which will need to be completed for each report.
- 4.4. DS advised that SLT had a half day training session on risk which was productive, but asked FS to look into the progress made since, factoring this into the team's plans.

#### **5. Freeport Governance Arrangements**

- 5.1. ST provided an update on the latest developments on the Thames Freeport governance arrangements, and the legal agreements required.
- 5.2. ST also provided an update on the funding agreements that had been put in place to fund Freeport operations while negotiations on the longer-term agreements continue.
- 5.3. ST updated the board that they previously had an assurance visit from then DLUHC who had some concerns regarding the governance arrangements,

however the Council were still yet to receive the report. The Council expects to address the concerns raised by DLUHC through the longer-term legal agreements.

5.4. JK advised in the Council's role as Accountable Body, we should focus on ensuring all parties comply with the requirements set out in the Memorandum of Understanding for the Freeport signed with the Government. JK asked how we move to the next stage and resolve this, ST confirmed that various conversations have taken place but that there are still matters in the long-term agreements to be resolved.

5.5. DS asked for a letter to the Chair of Thames Freeport to be drafted, asking for a meeting that address issues with the long-term legal agreements.

**Action: ST to draft a letter to the Chair of Thames Freeport setting out the actions we are taking, the concerns that we have and offer the Chair a meeting.**

## **6. Annual O&S Report**

6.1. MB introduced the report and noted that this is presented every year and highlights achievements from the previous year.

6.2. MB advised that this year's report is slightly different as it explains how points within the BVI report have been addressed and the journey the council is on to improve Oversight and Scrutiny.

6.3. LW and JK noted how improved the report is.

6.4. The board are happy to support this report.

## **7. Future GRB Meetings and Ways of Working**

7.1. CH updated the board on the upcoming changes to the frequency of the boards and that we will be seeking Member's involvement in the preparation of future agendas.

7.2. JK supported this but sort clarification that this gives Commissioners enough assurance. It was agreed that additional meetings will be scheduled if needed.

## **8. AOB**

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

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

- Action: ST to draft a letter to the Chair of Thames Freeport setting out the actions we are taking, the concerns that we have and offer the Chair a meeting.**