

Thurrock Council

Governance Recovery Board

Minutes – 12:45pm, Tuesday 13 May 2025

Attendees:

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

Gavin Jones (GJ) – Lead Commissioner

Denise Murray (DM) – Finance Commissioner

Cllr John Kent (JK) - Leader

Cllr Lynn Worrall (LW) - Deputy Leader

Alex Powell (AP) – Assistant Chief Executive

Helen Nicol (HN) – Assistant Director Legal and Governance

Dawn Calvert (DC) – Chief Financial Officer / S151

Luke Tyson (LT) – Corporate Policy and Improvement Manager

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

Amber Robinson (AR) – Executive Assistant, Chief Executive (Minutes)

Guests:

Matthew Boulter (MB) - Head of Democratic Scrutiny and Member Services

Gloria Ighodaro (GI) - Interim Chief Officer - Housing, Economic Development and Regeneration

Apologies:

Cllr George Coxshall (GC) – Leader of the Opposition Group

Cllr Jacqui Maney (JM) – Deputy Leader of the Opposition Group

Daniel Fenwick (DF) – Executive Director of Corporate Services

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. Update on CfGS Overview and Scrutiny review

3.1. MB provided a briefing on the recent Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements. The review was positive about the changes to the Council's arrangements over the last year and outlined seven recommendations in light of their findings. The team are positive about the review, which they will use as a basis to make further improvements.

3.2. MB specifically highlighted a couple of recommendations, including one which suggested retaining the three Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) committees. However, discussions are ongoing with members around whether a fourth committee is required next year to split the People O&S Committee into two separate committees for Adults and Children's Services. This proposal to move to four committees will be presented to Annual Council in May.

3.3. LW welcomed the report and expressed her view in support of moving from three to four committees in order to manage the Committees' workloads. She asked about the impact on staffing and resources to support the expanded scrutiny function. MB confirmed that discussions had begun to understand the additional resourcing requirements, with plans to engage Finance shortly.

3.4. DM asked about the relationship between O&S Committees and the Audit Committee, and how well they align. MB explained that the Audit Committee Chair joins the quarterly O&S Chairs Forum, ensuring there is consistency in messages to all Chairs. He added there is a natural information sharing between O&S and Audit committees through shared membership and overlapping areas of focus.

3.5. DS acknowledged the progress and maturity of the scrutiny function in supporting decision-making but agreed with the review's observations around the inconsistent engagement between Cabinet and Scrutiny. Board members agreed that this needs to be addressed in line with the proposed recommendations.

3.6. GJ added that Commissioners continue to pay close attention to the O&S arrangements, as it is a critical component of effective council governance. With the Member Development Day taking place tomorrow, GJ suggested it would be useful to assess the broader understanding of scrutiny among all Members.

4. Towns Fund Governance arrangements

4.1. GI introduced the item, explaining that the Grays and Tilbury Town Deals originated from the Towns Fund opportunity which launched in 2019. Thurrock Council submitted a successful bid in 2021, securing £19.9m for Grays and £22.8m for Tilbury. Since then, the team has been working to deliver the programme as outlined in the original bid, although GI noted that the intervention created challenges with supplier engagement.

- 4.2. Following the 2025 election, new board members were appointed which re-opened discussions around the original bid and its value for money. After discussions with MHCLG, an extraordinary board meeting was held where new chairs were appointed and the programme reaffirmed.
- 4.3. GI clarified that Thurrock Council is the Accountable Body for the funding, responsible for ensuring compliance with the grant agreement. MHCLG remains the grant funder, and the Council maintains regular engagement with them on progress. However it is the Boards who make the investment decisions. GI noted that there is more to do in terms of community engagement.
- 4.4. GI provided an overview of each of the projects and outlined the internal governance arrangements within the Council. GI reminded the board that all funding must be spent by March 2026. The biggest challenge remains procurement, but the team is working at pace to meet deadlines.
- 4.5. There was a discussion around MHCLG's oversight and GI confirmed MHCLG representatives sit on the boards as observers. GJ asked about broader Member scrutiny and CD confirmed this takes place through Portfolio Holder meetings.
- 4.6. DM asked about the team's RAG assessment regarding timely delivery in meeting that March 2026 deadline. GI acknowledged the risks, particularly around procurement, and confirmed that a risk register is maintained and outlined that if risks escalate, MHCLG will be notified. Extensions may be granted under exceptional circumstances if reported in advance.
- 4.7. DS asked whether community engagement had improved as that was a growing concern for members. GI and CD reflected that community engagement has significantly improved since the AD for Comms and Engagement has been involved. The Chairs of the local community forum have now been invited to sit on the Boards and a dedicated online portal has also been launched to showcase information on the projects under the Town Deals programme.

5. Update on Legacy Projects

- 5.1. CD provided an update on the background and status of legacy projects within the Place Directorate. The Directorate was established in March 2024 and inherited several legacy issues, primarily involving large-scale infrastructure projects.
- 5.2. To address these, a Legacy Board was established as an open forum for discussion and guidance on these complex projects and to provide assurance to Members that officers were demonstrating grip. The Board brings together officers from across the council, to ensure strong cross-directorate collaboration.
- 5.3. There are currently 17 active projects going through the Legacy Board, with some dating back to 2020. Through the Board, there is regular monitoring and reporting of progress for each project, which also track key stages and milestones. CD confirmed that several projects are now progressing and have started to move through the

Cabinet approval process. CD gave an example of the work Thurrock has done to review all of their S106 projects as one of their successes.

5.4. There was a discussion around the join up with finance colleagues and whether the funding for these projects were factored into the Council's MTFS and capital programme. Officers confirmed that where appropriate, the Finance team is closely involved to ensure robust financial oversight and compliance.

5.5. Commissioners asked around the resourcing challenges between balancing business as usual activity and addressing these legacy problems and whether the Council has the right skills mix to deliver some of these projects. CD acknowledged the challenges on the team's workload but noted that if the authority takes a one council approach to delivery, it would be achievable.

5.6. JK reflected that when there have been issues with the delivery of projects, the Council needs to ensure the lessons are being captured and applied. He also asked to ensure mechanisms are in place to ensure continuous improvement on delivery of projects.

6. Forward look of agenda items / AOB

6.1. There being no AOB the meeting closed.

Appendix I: Full meeting actions

There were no actions from this meeting.