

Thurrock Borough Council

Governance Recovery Board

Minutes – Tuesday 13 June 2023

Attendees

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

Cllr Deb Arnold – Deputy Leader

Cllr John Kent – Opposition Group Leader

Patrick McDermott – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Asmat Hussain – Director of Legal and Governance

Paul Turner – Director of Legal, Essex County Council

Joanna Boaler – Head of Democracy, Essex County Council

Chris Stevenson – Senior Project Manager

Luke Tyson – Chief Intervention Officer

Apologies

Cllr Lynn Worrall – Opposition Group Deputy Leader

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1. Dr Dave Smith welcomed Board members to the meeting and introductions were made.

2. Draft Terms of Reference

2.1. The Terms of Reference were discussed and Cllr Kent asked that they reflect that the Board is a consultative body.

2.2. The Terms of Reference were agreed with this amendment.

Action: Terms of Reference to be amended.

3. Overview of the Programme and Projects

3.1. Asmat Hussain provided an overview of the programme and projects. Work will cover the constitution and decision making but also the scheme of delegations and will undertake work with all departments of the council to confirm the roles and responsibilities of Cabinet and Committees.

3.2. Asmat Hussain also highlighted the synergies of some of this work with the finance workstreams overseen by FRB.

3.3. Paul Turner raised the need for the programme to focus on transparency and information governance.

3.4. In the discussion that followed, Cllr Arnold reflected the importance of the links to the work of the Constitution Working Group and Cllr Kent reflected that the work needed to bring about root and branch change.

3.5. Dr Dave Smith raised that it is important for work on the constitution to keep pace and not get mired. Patrick McDermott asked about the resource and capacity in the team to deal with the breadth of change required.

3.6. Members discussed the importance of resources to make good progress, both practically and culturally and Paul Turner raised the link to reaching out to other councils to seek out good practice.

3.7. On the Audit workstream, Cllr Kent highlighted the importance of the role of the Audit Committee and the need for changes to the culture and the practicalities of the audit process.

3.8. On the Information Governance workstream, there was a discussion about the need to balance transparency and disclosure with information security. The Board agreed that the theme needed to be refocused and Members asked to see reporting on FOI and spending.

Action: Take a report to SLT / GRB regarding programme resources and capacity to deliver the governance function.

Action: Reframe the focus of the Information Governance workstream to include a focus on transparency, disclosure and reporting.

4. Overview of Performance

- 4.1. The Board noted that they had covered much of the detail of the workstreams in the previous item.
- 4.2. Cllr Arnold raised the ratings of benefits as green and the Board agreed that this should be reviewed.
- 4.3. The Board noted the point from Cllr Arnold that there is a need to consider benefits for residence and, in the future, the benefit of a programme for the involvement of residents in local democracy.

5. Overview and Scrutiny Update

- 5.1. Asmat Hussain provided an update on the work of CfGS on Overview and Scrutiny.
- 5.2. The Board discussed the role of pre-decision scrutiny and the need for the outcome of the review to be known ahead of any changes to process.

Action: Ed Hammond of CfGS to attend GRB to present project plan for review of Overview and Scrutiny.

6. Member / Officer Relationships

- 6.1. Asmat Hussain noted the importance of positive Member/Officer relationships to the overall improvement of governance.
- 6.2. The Board noted work to ensure that SLT members and senior staff were considering briefing Shadow PfHs when they did so with Cabinet members.
- 6.3. Dr Dave Smith said that this Board should be a forum for the members present to provide their insights and updates on the development of member officer relationships.

Action: Member and Officer relationships to be a standing item on GRB.

7. LGA Support Proposal

- 7.1. Asmat Hussain introduced the paper on proposed LGA report.
- 7.2. Members noted the need for further mentoring beyond group leaders. In the discussion that followed the Board noted that there needed to be more depth to these proposals, particularly regarding specialist training for members.

Action: Thurrock to revisit LGA offer of support and request additional support.

8. Forward Plan

- 8.1. The forward plan was discussed and agreed.

9. Any other business

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