

Thurrock Borough Council

Governance Recovery Board

Minutes – Monday 10 July 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

Chris Stevenson – Senior Project Manager

Helen Mitchell – Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) (item 4)

Apologies

Cllr Lynn Worrall – Opposition Group Deputy Leader

Luke Tyson – Chief Intervention Officer

1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1. Dr Dave Smith welcomed Board members to the meeting.

2. Minutes and actions of the previous meeting

- 2.1. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed and the actions discussed.
- 2.2. Asmat Hussain updated the Board on work to progress an information charter to cover all aspects of sharing information with Members.

3. Local Government Association (LGA) support offer

- 3.1. Chris Stevenson provided an update on the LGA Support Offer with a particular focus on Leadership Academy places and mentoring for Members.
- 3.2. The Board discussed the overall approach to Member Development and the need for a Member group to oversee the whole project, reporting to the Standards and Audit Committee.
- 3.3. Asmat Hussain provided an update on report writing training. Dave Smith said this training should be mandatory and the Board agreed. Further training on working in a political environment will follow.
- 3.4. Paul Turner raised that the Member-led group on development was important step and noted the links to the Constitution Working Group.
- 3.5. Cllr Kent queried if this plan for Member Development was responding to the scale of the problem. In the discussion that followed, the Board noted the need to set out clear aims and objectives for the programme that was multi-layered and covered the basics and personal development needs.
- 3.6. Members discussed further the need to know what good looks like on development and the size and make-up of the Member led committee. There was a discussion about the need for an independent voice and critical friend on that committee to ensure robust scrutiny. It was agreed these points should be explored further.

Action: Officers to develop a strategic approach to Member Development (vision, success criteria) that steers the design and delivery of Member Development.

Action: Attendance at report writing courses is to be mandatory for all relevant officers.

Action: Officers to seek advice from the LGA as to the nature of good member development governance being led by Standards and Audit Committee, including size of membership of sub-committee and inclusion of co-opted member.

4. Review updates

Constitution Review

- 4.1. Asmat Hussain provided an update of the review of the Constitution. The Working Group has been approved by General Services Committee.

- 4.2. There was a further discussion about the technical support required to support the review and approaching the LGA to provide that.

Action: Secure additional resource from LGA to support the delivery of the Constitution Review.

Overview and Scrutiny Review

- 4.3. Helen Mitchell from CfGS joined the meeting to provide an update on the Overview and Scrutiny review.
- 4.4. The proposal is a blend of training, support and consultancy for the scrutiny improvement review.
- 4.5. The proposal was supported by the Board. There was a discussion about Member engagement with the review – particularly achieving a wider Member view on the operation of Overview and Scrutiny. There are options for there to be a direct contact with the review team and survey for Members.

Action: Provide an overview of member engagement activity in respect of the CfGS review.

5. Governance function resources

- 5.1. Asmat Hussain presented the paper on the proposals to resource the governance function.
- 5.2. The aspects of the proposal drawn to the attention of the Board were the two Scrutiny Officer roles, the roles of Political Assistant and the Head of the Leader's Office.
- 5.3. There was a discussion about the way in which these roles would support the work to improve scrutiny and allow the roles of democratic services officers to be better defined and raise the standard of committee support.
- 5.4. Cllr Kent asked what the increase in roles was against the baseline of staffing numbers and sought assurance that this model provided the level of support required to a council with this number of Members.

Action: Advise GRB of the final net additional staff growth for the Governance Team review.

6. Member / Officer Relationships

- 6.1. Cllr Arnold and Cllr Kent both reflected that there were no issues to raise. The work and actions flowing from meetings feels demonstrably better.

7. Programme performance

- 7.1. Asmat Hussain presented the highlight reports for the programme to the Board.
- 7.2. On Audit, it was noted that leave had caused a delay to work and that recent recruitment had been unsuccessful.
- 7.3. It was noted that the Constitution Working Group requires a shared workplan so that Members are clear on the direction of travel and progress.

- 7.4. The Information Governance Workstream has been updated to reflect the comments of the Board and there is to be a further meeting with Paul Turner.
- 7.5. The collaboration agreement for the Freeport is outstanding.
- 7.6. Cllr Arnold reflected on the timeliness of reporting and the quality of updates, noting that more depth is required to improve understanding. It was discussed that there would be picked up in a PFH discussion and in the wider review of reporting.
- 7.7. Cllr Arnold also asked for further assurance on pace on Thames Freeport and TR Ltd.

Action: Review the approach and appropriateness of project performance data that is submitted to governing bodies.

8. Any other business

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