

Thurrock Borough Council

Governance Recovery Board

Minutes – 2pm, Monday 13 November 2023

Room 4, 3rd floor, Civic Offices.

Attendees

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

Cllr Andrew Jefferies (AJ) – Leader

Cllr Deb 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 Stevenson (CS) – Senior Project Manager

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

Paul Turner (PT) – Director of Legal, Essex County Council

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

Guest

Mark Bradbury (MBr)

Apologies

None.

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Matters Arising

- 2.1. Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.
- 2.2. In a review of the actions, AH noted AC-166, confirming a positive conversation. A proposal will be sent for engagement with members and officers. AH noted only two members attended the audit committee's risk management training.
- 2.3. AH confirmed a peer mentor for DA has been agreed upon. DA inquired about the delay, to which AH acknowledged it an oversight.

3. Standards and Audit Proposals

- 3.1. AH presented the proposal to separate the Standards and Audit committee functions. AH suggested a temporary separation for 2-3 years with a potential merge after intervention. AH noted complaints have increased, and the committee lacks time to address them.
- 3.2. JK supported the separation but expressed disappointment in the member working group's lack of meetings due to resource constraints.
- 3.3. DA observed insufficient meetings in the report, recommending maintaining the same number if there's a lack of resources. LW and AJ expressed concerns about officer and member capacity. AH confirmed the appointment of a Senior Democratic Officer.
- 3.4. DS suggested a business process to determine the resourcing for officers and members the overall demand on the committees. DS would like any business process completed to come back to GRB for review. LW noted the potential to release more members considering the new scrutiny but still raised concerns on member capacity. AH recommended a minimum of four meetings for each committee.
- 3.5. LT highlighted the value of reviewing timescales and required time, suggesting a review of efficiency in processes. CS was tasked with speaking to the business analyst team with a focus on volume rather than process re-engineering.

Action: Consult business analyst to determine business process regarding overall demand of standard and audit split.

4. O&S Review – Member Protocol *consultative draft

- 4.1. AH discussed the draft focused on a protocol that doesn't form part of the constitution but outlines how members would work. AH noted the desire to share with O&S. AH pointed out the document includes a job description.
- 4.2. DA noted potential missing elements and suggested inclusion of the Council recovery plan and clearer timescales.
- 4.3. JK recommended underscoring the report in the work program section and bringing forward the last bullet point about risk. LW noted the point that says any cabinet members can attend O&S. LW raised concerns about cabinet members dominating discussions. There was a suggestion for a protocol change or that their role to observe in a witness capacity unless otherwise called upon was made clearer in the report.

- 4.4. JK suggested the potential need for more vice chairs in the event larger scrutiny committees. AH noted that rather than several vice chairs, this may look like task and finish groups being chaired by other members. AH will pick up the point with CfGS and feedback to GRB.
- 4.5. PT suggested strengthening the protocol to involve scrutiny members more in agenda content decisions between O&S. AJ highlighted the lack of clarity pre-intervention on the route of reports for Cabinet and O&S. PT noted they can work in either direction – AH felt that a 'pre decision Scrutiny' route could work well. DS emphasized the importance of the pre-scrutiny framework and clear guidance. DA stressed the importance of including the Integrated Forward Plan in the protocol.
- 4.6. DS reflected that there are points to work through regarding the size of the scrutiny panel to make sure that there is enough coverage for the span of their responsibility.
- 4.7. AH noted in IRB it was discussed that three of the sub-committees would see their work picked up elsewhere. These were; the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force, the Local Development Plan Task Force and Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee. GRB supported this approach and agreed that the appropriate decision-making body of the Council needs to agree to this.

Action: AH to speak with CfGS regarding the possibility of vice chairs.

Action: Present the proposal to change scrutiny subcommittees to full council.

5. Planning Advisory Service Review Update

- 5.1. MBr provided a verbal update on the Planning Advisory Service review, highlighting key findings and positive aspects. MBr noted that this is a work in progress as more meetings with members are needed. MBr suggested the final report come to GRB when ready.
- 5.2. DS agreed that the finished report would be brought to GRB and formal Council for decision-making.

6. LG Boundary Review Summary

- 6.1. CS discussed the electoral review being commissioned 2025 elections, detailing stages and activities. CS shared there was an officer briefing last Thursday afternoon with a timetable set out for review. LW expressed concerns about the meeting with LGBCE, and PT stressed the importance of member engagement.
- 6.2. LW expressed concern following meeting between LGBCE and members, noting the need to revisit the conversation due to technical issues.
- 6.3. PT encouraged member engagement in the boundary review, considering this will directly impact ward boundaries. PT offered his time to AH to discuss Essex's experience with the Boundary review.
- 6.4. JK inquired about the support the Council might be able to offer for drawing up boundary proposals. DS explained that evidence is drawn up by the Commission and they would present this based on the data.
- 6.5. CS noted that dates in the timeline from LGBCE can be moved if needed. CS noted there is a methodology to develop regarding prediction for ward sizes moving forward.

Action: Consult PT on Essex experience with boundary reviews.

7. New G&C Theme Milestone Plan

- 7.1. CS noted the transition to consolidate six workstreams to two. CS also noted high level milestones will be plotted with the data that sit behind this plan.
- 7.2. DA highlighted the confidence factor and the need for a mechanism to ensure accountability.

8. Member/Officer Relationships

- 8.1. DS noted the need to map member engagement to develop a calendar. DS confirmed he has asked for this work to be completed.

9. Any other business

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

Appendix I – Full Meeting Actions

Action: Consult business analyst to determine business process regarding overall demand of standard and audit split.

Action: AH to speak with CfGS regarding the possibility of vice chairs.

Action: Present the proposal to change scrutiny subcommittees to full council.

Action: Consult PT on Essex experience with boundary reviews.