

# **Thurrock Council**

## **Improvement and Recovery Board**

**Minutes – 2pm, Monday 22 April 2024**

### **Attendees**

Gavin Jones (GJ) – Lead Commissioner (Chair)  
Nicole Wood (NW) – Finance Commissioner  
Dr Dave Smith (DS) – Managing Director Commissioner and Chief Executive  
Alex Powell (AP) – Assistant Chief Executive  
Cllr Andrew Jefferies (AJ) – Leader of the Council  
Cllr John Kent (JK) – Opposition Group Leader  
Cllr Lynn Worrall (LW) – Opposition Group Deputy Leader  
Dawn Calvert (DC) – Interim Chief Financial Officer and Section 151 Officer  
Louise Neilan (LN) – Assistant Director of Communications and Engagement  
Claire Demmel (CD) – Interim Executive Director of Place  
Ian Wake (IW) – Executive Director of Adult and Health  
Daniel Fenwick (DF) – Executive Director of Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer  
Luke Tyson (LT) – Chief Intervention Officer  
Patrick McDermott (PM) – Outgoing Chief of Staff to the Commissioners  
Crissy Hall (CH) – Incoming Chief of Staff to the Commissioners  
Kerry Thomas (KT) – Chief of Staff to the Chief Executive  
Keilah Gallardo (KG) – Business Support Officer, Chief Executive

### **Guests**

Chrissie Farrugia (CF) - National Intervention Specialist for Local Government

### **Apologies**

Sheila Murphy (SM) – Executive Director of Children's Services  
Cllr Deborah Arnold (DA) – Deputy Leader  
Cllr Graham Snell (GS) – Cabinet member for Finance, Human Resources and Payroll

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

## **2. Matters Arising**

2.1. Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

2.2. It was noted that Audit resources are being reviewed and discussed appropriately. There were no further comments on the actions.

## **3. Managing Director Commissioner Update**

3.1. DS noted that governance of savings has been streamlined and attention was turning to identifying savings for 2025/26.

3.2. DS shared that preparations were underway for the new Overview and Scrutiny structure going live in the new municipal year and noted that officers and Members will have to think differently about those functions going forward. He also noted that the Governance Review was scheduled for the summer and that it would be useful to cover this at a future meeting. GJ noted it would be good to know when the timescale will be ready.

**Action: Add an update on the Governance Review to the forward plan for IRB.**

3.3. DS also updated the Board the new Assistant Directors had started that week. Commissioners agreed to meet with the new cohort of Assistant Directors once they had settled into their roles.

**Action: Diarise session for Commissioners to meet with Assistant Directors as a group.**

## **4. Corporate Plan**

4.1. AP provided an update on the draft corporate plan. AP shared that the purpose behind the document is to provide ambition and drive the change and ambition required. AP noted it is designed for staff and aims to outline priorities and ambitions, focusing on what the Council want to achieve for the three priorities of People, Place and becoming an enabling council. AP confirmed the next steps were to present the plan to both Cabinet and Full Council over the summer.

4.2. AJ noted that the lack of local political manifestos made planning hard without the political direction from Members.

4.3. JK reflected that the plan was inward-looking but needed to be laser focussed on the Council making the necessary improvements. He suggested that rebuilding trust in the council should be brought out more strongly in the document through simple actions on how it can be accomplished.

4.4. AP agreed, stating that having a Corporate Plan allows the Council to start setting uniform and accountable objectives for staff. AP explained that in addition to

developing the plan, they were working on an engagement plan for residents in the borough with clear long-term messages about improvement.

- 4.5. LW remarked that people will be clear about where the council was heading, believing this process will allow residents to recognise how the council was improving. AP noted that departments have been asked to view outcomes and the drivers for these. PM noted this is a living document that needs to be reviewed each year. PM confirmed the plan was to come back with a detailed performance framework.
- 4.6. DS stated the Corporate Plan was about the organisation addressing its needs and changes, and that there was also a need to articulate the political leadership of this.
- 4.7. There was a discussion about the development of a more public facing document.
- 4.8. GJ mentioned the need for a plan that shows the delivery phases and suggested the next step be to consider how the political decisions will be informed by data and insights to meet the needs of communities. GJ also urged the importance of keeping in mind the need stated in the BVI Report for clarity of political purpose.

## **5. IRP Progress Reporting**

- 5.1. DC provided an update on budget monitoring plans for next year, noting this should be ready for P1 in May. DC also provided an update on recruitment of the Chief Accountant post and that budget holder training was due to start in May. DC also provided a brief update on the divestment programme, reporting back from the FRB meeting.
- 5.2. DF stated that on Governance, the focus going forward will be around the decision-making pathway to the Cabinet, adding structure to the decision-making process.
- 5.3. AP mentioned that the Corporate Plan is the most significant milestone. AP noted the progress being made on implementing the Council's new operating model. AP also shared there would be a focus on restructuring project management.

## **6. AOB**

- 6.1. There was a brief discussion on risk management, the corporate risk register and internal audit. The refreshed corporate risk register is to be reviewed, with a report to be presented to the Cabinet by June. GJ highlighted the need to improve the organisational culture and maturity in risk management.
- 6.2. DC emphasised the importance of quickly implementing steps to improve Risk Management within the organisation. DF noted the necessity of pre-planning and integrating considerations into business cases at least six months ahead of Cabinet decisions.

6.3. Regarding governance frequency, JK proposed assessing the progress of this board and other boards post-May to ensure the governance was still fit for purpose.

**Action: Review intervention governance and determine whether it is fit for purpose.**

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

- **Action: Add an update on the Governance Review to the forward plan for IRB.**
- **Action: Diarise session for Commissioners to meet with Assistant Directors as a group.**
- **Action: Review intervention governance and determine whether it is fit for purpose.**