

Thurrock Council

Improvement and Recovery Board

Terms of Reference

Context

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities used his Best Value powers to appoint Commissioners at Thurrock Council on 2 September 2022. He directed the Council to prepare and implement an Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP) to address the failures in the finance functions of the council.

On 16 March 2023, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities expanded the intervention in Thurrock Council and directed the Council to ensure its IRP addressed weaknesses in the council's governance function, transparency and internal controls. On 17 July 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution announced an extension of the intervention at Thurrock Council until 30 April 2028 and issued new Directions to the Council.

An Improvement and Recovery Board is required to oversee the work of the intervention and to consider and report on progress as required by the Directions.

The Board will meet quarterly, with a minimum of at least three meetings per year.

Purpose

The Council is directed to continue to implement and report on plans for their continuous improvement and recovery, to ensure all required actions and changes are fully implemented to the satisfaction of the Commissioners, with resource allocated accordingly to drive, embed, and sustain improvements across governance, culture, partnership, use of resources and service delivery.

The Board will oversee the delivery of the Directions and the Council's improvement activity and plans. This Board will particularly focus on the Council's actions to:

- Embed culture improvements across the organisation.
- Ensure it has personnel with sufficient capability and capacity, enabled by a strengthened corporate culture, a robust officer structure and an effective framework for performance management across the Authority.
- Define and implement its proposed operating model.
- Develop and maintain a revised Corporate Plan which incorporates and builds upon the enhanced IRP and reflects the necessary work remaining to ensure the Council's compliance with the Best Value Duty.
- Actively work with Commissioners on the work with other councils in the Greater Essex area for unitary local government and the Devolution Priority Programme on implementing any such proposals later agreed upon.

It will enable the Commissioners to provide assurance to Thurrock residents and the Secretary of State that the Council is taking the right action and has the capacity and capability to deliver the improvement required.

To this end, the Board will:

1. promote a corporate, council-wide culture of continuous improvement and collective accountability for the Council's improvement journey towards achieving financial sustainability and meeting its Best Value Duty
2. oversee, and receive regular reporting on, the delivery of its improvement activity and action plans to ensure desired outcomes are achieved and the requirements of the Directions are delivered
3. receive reports on progress from the Finance Recovery Board and Governance Recovery Board through updates from Commissioners, Members and senior officers
4. manage the formal reporting element of the progress reports to the Secretary of State to the timescales set out in the Directions or as determined by the Commissioners
5. provide advice, guidance and challenge to the council on the actions required

It is for the Council to take the actions required to deliver improvements, using the policies and procedures it already has in place or introduces to enable its improvement plans to be delivered.

The Board will act as a consultative forum, providing challenge and advice as appropriate. The Commissioners will exercise the powers given to them by the Directions as and when necessary.

The Board will consider wide-ranging and potentially contentious solutions to rectify the current position of the council. For the Board to operate effectively, it is critical that Board members and deputies agree to treat these sensitive discussions as confidential. The Board will not meet in public. Its minutes will be published on the Commissioners page on www.thurrock.gov.uk.

Membership

- Gavin Jones – Lead Commissioner (chair)
- Denise Murray – Finance Commissioner
- Dr Dave Smith – Managing Director Commissioner /Chief Executive
- Cllr Lynn Worrall – Leader of the Council
- Cllr Lee Watson – Deputy Leader of the Council
- Cllr Valerie Morris-Cook - Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
- Cllr Lynda Heath – Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Constitutional and Civic Affairs
- Cllr George Coxshall – Opposition Group Leader
- Cllr Barry Johnson – Opposition Group Deputy Leader
- Alex Powell – Assistant Chief Executive
- Dawn Calvert – Chief Financial Officer and Section 151 Officer
- Daniel Fenwick – Executive Director of Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer
- Claire Demmel – Executive Director of Place
- Robert Persey – Executive Director of Adults and Health
- Sheila Murphy – Executive Director of Children's Services
- Kerry Thomas – Chief of Staff

- Louise Neilan – Assistant Director of Communications and Engagement
- Patrick McDermott – Assistant Director of Strategy, Policy, Performance and Partnerships
- Sarah Brown – Head of Strategy, Policy and Performance
- Luke Tyson – Corporate Policy and Improvement Manager
- Cristina Hall – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners
- Amber Robinson – Executive Assistant

Deputies to attend as required, fully briefed and able to contribute. Other attendees may be required as determined by the matters considered by the Board.

Updated: September 2025