

Thurrock Council

Improvement & Recovery Board

Minutes – 2pm, Monday 24 March 2025

Attendees:

Gavin Jones (GJ) – Lead Commissioner (Chair)

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

Cllr John Kent (JK) – Leader of the Council

Cllr Lynn Worrall (LW)– Deputy Leader of the Council

Cllr George Coxshall (GC) – Opposition Group Leader

Alex Powell (AP) – Assistant Chief Executive

Daniel Fenwick (DF) – Executive Director of Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer

Rob Persey (RP) – Executive Director of Adults and Health

Dawn Calvert (DC) – Chief Finance Officer

Liz Haynes (LH)– Assistant Director of HR/OD

Patrick McDermott (PM) – Assistant Director of Strategy, Policy, Performance and Partnerships

Crissy Hall (CH) – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Luke Tyson (LT) – Corporate Policy and Improvement Manager

Amber Robinson (AR) – Executive Assistant, Chief Executive

Apologies:

Cllr Jacqui Maney (JM) - Opposition Group Deputy Leader

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1. GJ welcomed board members to the meeting. CH noted that, as Opposition Group Deputy Leader, Cllr J Maney will now be a member of the Board.

2. Minutes/ Actions of the previous meeting

2.1. Minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

3. Lead Commissioner discussion

3.1. GJ led a conversation with board members regarding Commissioners' next report which is due in the spring. He reflected that this report will be slightly different from previous reports as it will discuss the Council's progress against each of the Best Value themes covered in the statutory guidance.

4. Leader update

4.1. JK advised that, ahead of the next report, he was drafting a letter setting out his views on the Council's improvement which will be shared with Commissioners before they submit their report.

4.2. JK confirmed the letter on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) has been submitted which was agreed by all 15 authorities and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. GJ asked to see the final expression of interest that was submitted and noted that Commissioners would welcome early sight of milestones and evidence.

- **Action: Copy of the expression of interest submitted on Devolution and LGR to be shared with Commissioners.**

4.3. DS noted that a paper was discussed at the last Essex Leaders and Chief Executives meeting that contained a paragraph setting out Commissioners' role and the agreement that Commissioners have the opportunity to comment at each gateway. These stages are yet to be formalised.

4.4. There was a discussion around Thurrock's debt and the need to ensure the financial sustainability of the new authority. DC noted that within the finance workstream on LGR, all S151 officers across Greater Essex are meeting regularly and have split the work between them.

5. Managing Director Commissioner update

5.1. DS reflected that there needed to be further internal discussions on the benefits and risks of devolution, as much of the attention was focused on the impact of LGR to date.

5.2. DS advised the board on the new governance around Devolution and LGR, noting that steering groups have been established for Members to set the direction. A Programme Manager has also been appointed and DS reflected that a small senior team working on Devolution would help drive progress.

6. HR Progress update

6.1. LH updated the Board on the delivery plan to improve performance management, noting that a report on the performance management policy went to SLT earlier in the month. To provide context, LH set out the issues that had been identified with the current approach. GJ asked whether there was organisational support for the plans, with LH reflecting that SLT were enthusiastic about the policy. LW asked about the effectiveness of the systems in place with LH noting that work is being done on the system to address the issues raised. LH informed the board that the plans include a full training programme to improve the capability of managers.

6.2. GJ reflected on the need for the political leadership to be made aware of these proposed plans and kept informed as they are implemented. LH confirmed plans to take a report to Cabinet soon.

6.3. LH updated the board on the staff survey. DS noted that significant work has been undertaken with officers on the results. The team are now compiling feedback from conversations with directorates, although it was acknowledged that specific actions needed to be identified as a result of this feedback. There was a discussion on engaging Cabinet members on the results of this survey as this had not yet taken place. DS noted that these discussions could go to a Policy Briefing meeting.

- **Action: LH to take the staff survey results to a Cabinet Policy Briefing.**

7. Q3 Corporate Performance

7.1. PM updated the board that this is the second cycle of reporting under the new corporate plan. Since the last report, work has been done with officers in the demand-led services to further refine their metrics which has ensured a more robust RAG status. PM explained that the team has also established an insight board which is an internal opportunity for officers to discuss the data and performance and be a critical friend in the process.

7.2. LW updated the board that she is pushing Cabinet to own their own scorecard and will raise this in her meetings with Portfolio Holders. It was noted that both Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) committees are using the report well to challenge and reflect on performance. There was a discussion that Devolution and LGR should be added to the scorecard.

7.3. There was a discussion about how cabinet members get scrutinised on their portfolios, with DF reflecting that some discussions are taking place, but the Council is still on a journey with this. GC wanted Portfolio Holders to regularly attend O&S meetings, but others reflected it was dependent on the views of Committee Chairs.

7.4. DS noted he would like to see performance reports explaining what the data means; this will help explain the challenges and issues the Council is facing and

what actions are being taken. GJ asked why some items have a green RAG status when the narrative suggests the data is worse. LT outlined that a negative direction of travel does not necessarily mean that it has moved outside of the target and this should be explained more fully in the narrative. PM noted the team will introduce narratives to areas in amber.

8. Improvement and Recovery Plan Reporting

8.1. LT updated the board that this second report was presented at Cabinet last week and will be discussed at Full Council. Progress on the Annual Governance Statement and financial management have seen reporting move from amber to green. Since the last report, the timing and planning of a Corporate Peer Challenge and other external assessments has move to red, due to developments around LGR.

8.2. DS noted a risk around the organisation's capacity to continue with the pace of improvement due to devolution and LGR. He also noted that it was vital to ensure that Members were fully engaged on both devolution and LGR.

9. AOB

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

APPENDIX I: Full Meeting Actions

- 1. Copy of the expression of interest submitted on Devolution and LGR to be shared with Commissioners.**
- 2. LH to take the staff survey results to a Cabinet Policy Briefing.**