



Improvement and Recovery Plan

Executive Summary



Establishing Thurrock’s future direction

The need to define and agree a new direction for Thurrock Council, and to re-establish the purpose and strategic direction of the council and its officers, is the fundamental and essential building block for this Plan and the related Corporate Plan. This will require difficult decisions to be made. In this updated version of our Improvement and Recovery Plan, we have looked at what Thurrock needs now at this stage of intervention and for the future.

The loss of confidence in the council, shared by government, partners, stakeholders, residents and local businesses, will have a long legacy that will inevitably extend beyond the actions of this and the previous Plan in addressing the immediate weaknesses of financial, governance and leadership control. The council needs to reestablish its purpose, reconnect and re-commit to its residents and businesses.

In refocusing the Plan, actions have both been mapped across to the specific Directions and to the draft Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Best Value Duty, where the requirement is that Local Authorities demonstrate a commitment to continually improve their leadership, governance, culture, use of resources, service delivery and partnerships and community engagement. Our ambition is to ensure the Plan provides assurance to Commissioners and Government that Thurrock Council has a deliverable strategy to improve, be self-governing and fulfils its Best Value Duty in the shortest time possible. Commissioners will assess and monitor progress using the outcomes set out in this Plan, which will inform their update reports and recommendations to Government to allow Ministers to make decisions about the intervention.

Through the council’s Corporate Plan there will be a continual and clear focus on improvement in leadership, culture, service delivery and the governance and financial management environment.

The new priorities, while distinct themes with clear outcomes, are inextricably linked and interdependent. All are equally essential to realise the improvement required.

Full document available here www.thurrock.gov.uk/improvement/improvement-and-recovery-plan



Our Priorities

Priority/Theme	Workstream/Project		Objectives
Improving leadership to accelerate change	Leading a new vision and direction	We have a published Corporate Plan and a revised operating model for service delivery, that is developed in partnership by Members and officers. This workstream will refocus our efforts and actions on being exemplary and visible place leaders for the communities we serve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A long-term purpose and direction for the council Develop a medium-term Corporate Plan A new approach to strategy-led business planning
	Building our corporate capability	We have a new operating model that positions the Council as enabling the most effective and efficient delivery of public services within the resources available. We will redesign our organisation and have a corporate structure agreed and mobilised that has the right people in the right jobs to make a significant personal and corporate contribution to change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New operating model Redesign and restructure the Council Stand-up a PMO
Improving governance and controls	Establishing the foundations for governance excellence	We have in place the policies and practice required to demonstrate strong governance. We will ensure that our policies are compliant and provide a solid foundation for the efficient and effective delivery of corporate and service priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and refresh all of our governing policies Build a capable and effective scrutiny function Governance review for all external companies or partnership bodies (Thames Freepart)
	Creating an exemplary control environment	We have in place processes, protocols and a culture of accountability, that positions the Council as having a highly effective control environment. Members and Senior Leaders will collaborate to develop and implement an approach to the management of risk, including ensuring officers are empowered to deliver corporate objectives within a clearly articulated scheme of delegation. Through our control environment we will be accountable and transparent internally and externally for our actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk managed operating environment. Assurance and audit functions are re-set Proportionate processes that maximise transparency and accountability
Improving financial sustainability	Divesting of the Council's Investments	We have significantly reduced the debt of the Council and reduced the budget financing debt charges to secure a more stable financial position in the longer term to mitigate future risks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dispose of investments
	Improving our stability through budgetary savings and maximisation of income	We have implemented a range of actions to demonstrate significant savings, reductions in the capital programme, generation of capital receipts. All of which will lead to significant reduction in general fund borrowing, as well as maximisation of income to pay down a proportion of our debt, and ensure that service and programme spending delivers the highest level of service and outcomes within the constrained resources available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Savings, income and discussions with DLUHC Capital receipts Review of the capital programme
	Improving our financial management capability and practice	We have a fit for purpose finance function that demonstrates exemplary leadership and management, implements robust financial controls, and champions effective scrutiny and reporting to enable clear accountability, risk management and compliance with statutory requirements and accounting standards. That there is strong and appropriate financial capability for leaders, budget holders and members enabling them to fulfil their own fiduciary duties and engage meaningfully in scrutiny and challenge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate exemplary corporate financial leadership Redesign and restructure the Council's financial service

Thurrock's Improvement and Recovery Outcome Framework

An evaluation framework has been produced based on considerable engagement with Members on what improvement should look and feel like, along with best practice guidance and input from Commissioners.

The framework will provide for quantitative and qualitative assessment of the Council's improvement and recovery. This allows for the fact that while some aspects are measurable (such as having the correct policies in place and measuring key performance indicators), Members' and Commissioners' judgement on how well the Council has improved is a vital measure for continuous improvement and (in the case of Commissioners' judgement) powers being handed back to the Council.

Below is a summary of some of the measures against each of the 12 outcomes. The full details can be found in section 7 of the full Improvement and Recovery Plan document.

Improvement in the quality of decision making

- Decisions presented align to direction, values and objectives.
- Options are supported by clear risk analysis.

Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members and officers

- Meaningful engagement in the development of the new direction and purpose for the Council.
- Locality teams develop protocols for closer engagement with local Ward Councillors to update and engage them.

Improvement in the transparency of performance information

- Where performance information highlights a risk or issue materialising, there is additional communication if required to brief on this.

Improvement in responsiveness to the public

- Correlation with compliments is monitored and reviewed.
- Locality teams (as part of new operating model) identify increased opportunities for Member and officer community engagement and monitor take up and track queries.

Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise

- Support, networking and alignment with professional bodies as a means of shaping policy and practice is encouraged and benefits to individuals and the teams reviewed as part of the Personal Development Review process.

Improvement in corporate capability

- Recruitment and selection strategies test the capabilities needed through use of alternatives to interview alone. Probation targets and standards are set, and managers actively manage.

Improvement in value for money

- Business plans in place for savings opportunities and for the new operating model implementation.
- Audit reports test improvements in value and costs. Outputs and outcomes are consistently delivered for lower cost.

Improvement in responsiveness to poor performance

- Performance improvement and capability deficit processes for officers are developed, well understood, and monitored.

Improvement in Member and officer confidence

- Mutual trust and confidence between Members and officers.
- Member forums and meetings are conducted in a respectful way.

Improvement in risk management

- A revised risk policy, strategy, management action plan and reporting tool is developed and reviewed in detail with Audit Committee Members.
- Risk Management has a clear escalation route, and this is actively managed and tested in every team.

Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council

- Residents have access to more information, support and customer service as a result of implementing the new operating model, for example a new corporate contact centre, locality teams perhaps and similar.

Improvement in assurance and audit

- Annual governance review is comprehensive, built on evidence from Members, Leadership, Commissioners and engaging appropriately with partners and stakeholders.