

Thurrock Borough Council

Improvement and Recovery Board

Minutes – Monday 28 November 2022

Attendees

Gavin Jones – Essex County Council Commissioner

Nicole Wood – Essex County Council Commissioner

Patrick McDermott – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners (Acting Chair)

Cllr Mark Coxshall – Leader, Thurrock Council

Cllr John Kent – Opposition Group Leader, Thurrock Council

Jonathan Wilson – Acting Section 151 Officer

Karen Wheeler – Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth, Thurrock Council

Jackie Hinchliffe – Director of HR, OD and Transformation, Thurrock Council

Les Billingham - Interim Director of Adult Social Care, Thurrock Council

John Jones - Interim Director of Legal and Governance, Thurrock Council

Phil Cruddace – Advisor to the Leader, Essex County Council

Luke Tyson – Delivery and Strategy Manager, Thurrock Council

Graeme Green – Essex County Council

Katrina Fraser - Essex County Council

Apologies

Ian Wake – Acting Head of Paid Service

Cllr Graham Snell – Cabinet Member for Finance

Debbie Knopp – Director of Transformation, Delivery and Support, Essex County Council

1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1. Patrick McDermott welcomed the Board members and introductions were made.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

- 2.1. Patrick McDermott confirmed that each page of the previous minutes was agreed. Nicole Wood mentioned that Members would benefit from a confidentiality session.

Action: Patrick McDermott to confirm Member training details.

- 2.2. Graeme Green read through the outstanding actions.

3. Finance workstreams update

- 3.1. Jonathan Wilson provided a briefing on the latest Q2 financial position reiterating that the figures are subject to movement as more information becomes available. He also commented on the longer-term MTFS implications and the need to plan mitigation over a period of time. Further information on the capital programme will follow, and this should align to the budget setting process.
- 3.2. Cllr Kent asked about Thurrock's exposure in relation to investments. Jonathan Wilson confirmed the administration process will set out the position. Cllr Kent also questioned why the 20/21 accounts have yet to be signed off. Jonathan Wilson commented that detailed technical work was needed to confirm impairments in the accounts and any implications this may have to previous accounts; these were being worked on with Commissioners.
- 3.3. Nicole Wood raised the potential for a s114 and the timings and communications around any such notice. She also mentioned the importance of getting sight of the assessment of the scale of the investment in relation to any request for exceptional financial support. Nicole Wood also noted that the assets valuation work was coming together.
- 3.4. Cllr Coxshall asked about official's confidence in the impairment assessment figures. Jonathan Wilson confirmed it was a reasonable assessment based on known information and that figures needed to be contextualised.

4. Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP)

- 4.1. Karen Wheeler provided an update on the draft IRP.
- 4.2. The timing of the submission of the draft IRP, alongside the Commissioners first report, was discussed.

Action: Patrick McDermott to confirm with commissioners and DLUCH officials the timing of the Commissioners first report.

- 4.3. Gavin Jones noted that the draft IRP was ambitious and would be difficult to deliver against a backdrop of savings and other budgetary pressures. Thurrock need ensure they had both the capability and capacity to deliver, including the programme management capability.

- 4.4. Gavin Jones noted that the need for culture change is addressed in the IRP, but such changes take enormous effort and considerable time. This needed to be better reflected in the IRP. Cllr Coxshall agreed.
- 4.5. Gavin Jones also commented that the delivery of the IRP needed to be considered in the context of service delivery. There are areas where service delivery is weak and these need to be identified and impacts considered, but not necessarily in this document.

Action: Karen Wheeler to review the IRP in light of the comments made and send a version to Commissioners for comment. And would submit a final version by the end of the week.

5. Communications and engagement

- 5.1. Karen Wheeler briefly ran through the Comms plan for the publication of the Q2 report, noting that it included feedback from the Finance Recovery Board.
- 5.2. A discussion followed on the comms plan and the need to ensure the wording on key areas, e.g. s114, was accurate. Cllr Coxshall mentioned the need to ensure key partners get to see the plan.

Action: Karen Wheeler to set up a media feedback chain and ensure a copy of the comms plan is sent to key partners.

Action: Jonathan Wilson to review comments regarding s114 to ensure accuracy.

- 5.3. Nicole Wood asked about testing the efficacy of the comms plan with staff. Karen Wheeler confirmed that a sub-group of partners and staff test messages and provide feedback.
- 5.4. Karen Wheeler confirmed that the comms strategy is part of an overarching comms strategy for the BVI and Intervention.
- 5.5. Patrick McDermott confirmed that LGA comms support is now being provided.

6. Forward Plan

- 6.1. Luke Tyson ran through the forward plan confirming the finance elements have been included. He confirmed that a lot of more detailed workstream information was being finalised. This will sit below the high-level forward plan.
- 6.2. Patrick McDermott noted that it was useful to see the forward plan and it was important for Commissioners to comment on this and the more detailed workstream plan to ensure milestones can be achieved within the capacity available.

7. Risks and Issues

- 7.1. This is an on-going agenda item. There was a discussion about the identification of service risks in Waste, but that was not for this Board.

Action: Attendees to consider how risks should be identified and managed in the IRB. Patrick McDermott to include as an agenda item on the next IRB.

8. Any other business

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