

Thurrock Borough Council

Improvement and Recovery Board

Minutes – Tuesday 17 January 2023

Attendees

Gavin Jones – Essex County Council Commissioner (Chair)

Nicole Wood – Essex County Council Commissioner

Patrick McDermott – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Cllr Mark Coxshall – Leader, Thurrock Council

Cllr John Kent – Opposition Group Leader, Thurrock Council

Cllr Kevin Bentley – Leader, Essex County Council

Ian Wake – Acting Head of Paid Service

Gareth Moss – Chief Financial Officer

Jonathan Wilson – Acting Section 151 Officer

Mark Bradbury – Director of Place

Karen Wheeler – Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth

Jackie Hinchliffe – Director of HR, OD and Transformation

John Jones - Interim Director of Legal and Governance

Phil Cruddace – Advisor to the Leader, Essex County Council

Luke Tyson – Delivery and Strategy Manager

Gary Staples – Transformation Manager

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

Apologies

Cllr Graham Snell – Cabinet Member for Finance

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1. Gavin Jones welcomed Board members to the meeting.

2. Minutes/Actions of the previous meeting

2.1. The Minutes of the previous meeting and actions were agreed.

3. Commissioner/Council Relationship

3.1. Gavin Jones set out the progress of the intervention to date noting the positive working relationships between Commissioners and officers and members.

3.2. Gavin reiterated the importance of principle that any decision with a financial impact requires input and sign off from Commissioners noting that there had been some recent examples where this had been missed.

3.3. Cllr Bentley reflected the impact that intervention has on the whole sector and said it was important for the Council to continue working together for improvement.

3.4. Ian Wake noted that there had been no deliberate attempt to exclude commissioners and it was agreed that the process needed to be confirmed.

3.5. In the discussion that followed it was noted that the organisation needs to pivot to service the directions from the Secretary of State to focus capacity on ensuring members are provided with timely reports of a consistent high quality.

Action: Appropriate process to be confirmed to ensure that Commissioners have the opportunity to provide comment and approve papers to all committees, including Overview and Scrutiny, that have a financial impact.

4. Improvement and Recovery Plan

Overview of IRP Report

4.1. Ian Wake updated that the IRP had been submitted and thanked all those who contributed to it for their work.

4.2. DB leads have been identified and all staff sessions on the plan have had positive feedback.

4.3. Gavin Jones said it was clear there had been a sea change.

4.4. Cllr Kent reflected that there had not yet been sufficiently wide engagement with the IRP across the Council. In the discussion that followed about publication of the plan, it was decided that further engagement was required and this should be taken as an action.

Mobilisation and Risk Approach

4.5. Gary Staples updated the Board on the mobilisation of the plan, the adaption of the ECC approach and training on the project book and toolkit.

4.6. In the discussion that followed, there was a recognition of the importance of the work on the risk register and the need to invest in appropriate expertise.

Theme Updates

- 4.7. Jonathan Wilson provided the Finance update with a focus on the timeline to the budget, the capital programme and development of the treasury management policy.
- 4.8. Mark Bradbury provided the Place update. There has been medium progress and workstreams are now joining up but there needs to be a continued review of resource.
- 4.9. Gavin Jones asked if there was now a culture of honest reporting. In the discussion that followed, it was noted that members and officers need to rebuild trust with the reporting of problems.
- 4.10. John Jones provided the Governance update with a focus on the review of the constitution and financial delegations, a new member induction programme and stronger ownership of the Forward Plan at DB.
- 4.11. There followed a discussion about the importance of clarity for the organisation and members on the impact of the pre-election period.
- 4.12. Jackie Hinchliffe provided the Leadership and Culture update. There have been immediate positive changes in this cross-cutting work.
- 4.13. There was a discussion about the importance of the forthcoming detailed cultural plan and Gavin Jones asked that an iteration come to the next meeting of the Board for consideration, given the importance of this work.
- 4.14. Karen Wheeler provided the Strategy update. The work is on track where it has started with other workstreams will commence later.

Action: Further engagement on the IRP is required across the Council.

Action: Culture Change Plan to be developed further and come to the next IRB meeting.

5. Resource Plan

- 5.1. Jackie Hinchliffe presented the plan which has been developed to support the delivery of the IRP. The resource is aligned to the themes of the IRP and this is a living document that flexes with delivery.

Action: Commissioners to meet officers separately on the Resource Plan.

6. Communications and Engagement

- 6.1. Paul Masterman provided an update on ongoing communications and engagement on the intervention.
- 6.2. There has been a focus on the s114 and the immediate future requires planning for the publication of the full BVI report.

7. Any other business

- 7.1. There being no other business, the meeting closed.