

Thurrock Borough Council

Improvement and Recovery Board

Minutes – Tuesday 25 April 2023

Attendees

Gavin Jones – Essex County Council Commissioner (Chair)

Nicole Wood – Essex County Council Commissioner

Dr Dave Smith – Managing Director Commissioner and Chief Executive

Patrick McDermott – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Cllr Mark Coxshall – Leader, Thurrock Council

Cllr John Kent – Opposition Group Leader, Thurrock Council

Steve Mair – Acting Chief Finance 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

Asmat Hussain - Interim Director of Legal and Governance

Alix Macfarlane – Intervention Communications Lead

Luke Tyson – Chief Intervention Officer

Gary Staples – Transformation Manager

Apologies

Cllr Graham Snell – Cabinet Member for Finance

Cllr Mark Coxshall – Leader, Thurrock Council

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

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.

2.2. Patrick McDermott updated on the outstanding actions.

3. Managing Director Commissioner Update

3.1. Dr Dave Smith provided an update to the IRB on his first few weeks in his role, thanking colleagues for their warm welcome. Dr Smith was clear that he has seen no denial of the issues facing the council but that there is work to do on the ramifications and solutions. He noted that none of this was insurmountable.

3.2. Dr Smith said that his practical focus would be on the senior structure and the budget and savings in the first instance with other areas of focus being the Freeport and the role of scrutiny.

3.3. In the discussion that followed, Cllr Kent raised the need for consultation on the dates for training and Asmat Hussain set out the detail of plans for induction.

4. Improvement and Recovery Plan

4.1. Opening the item, Gavin Jones reflected that the next iteration of the IRP should be more focused on the recovery.

Action: Commissioners to provide an update of their views on prioritisation of the Improvement and Recovery Plan at the next IRB meeting.

Reporting Update

4.2. Gary Staples provided an update on the development of project book and the improvement of the detail and quality of reporting, the reporting cycle for assurance has commenced this month via SLT with further check and challenge built in for the May cycle.

4.3. In the discussion that followed, Gavin Jones asked about the measurement of success and how the model is embedding the council. Gary Staples noted that the model had been embraced but that there was more to do to imbed reporting practices in a disciplined way.

Theme updates

4.4. Steve Mair provided an update on Financial Sustainability. The workstream is rated as amber.

4.5. Steve Mair drew Commissions attention to the following, the expansion of savings from 23/24, the ongoing work on the finance function that is rated as red, progress on fees and charges and CIPFA led work on the review of companies.

- 4.6. Nicole Wood reflected that there was a need to understand the rhythm and beat on divestments and an urgent need to understand the position on the pay review and to further pick up the DRA and the Finance Recovery Board.
- 4.7. Asmat Hussain provided an update on Governance and Scrutiny. The workstream is amber. There is now a statutory scrutiny officer in place and progress is being made with engaging with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and on the Constitutional Working Group.
- 4.8. Asmat Hussain raised that there is further work to undertake on audit risks and opportunities.
- 4.9. There followed a discussion on the review of companies, that is to align with the financial work on the same companies.

Action: Commissioners to meet with the MO on audit, risks and opportunities ahead of the next IRB meeting.

- 4.10. Gary Staples provided an update on Leadership and Culture theme which is rated green overall and focused on diagnosis and engagement.
- 4.11. Gavin Jones reflected that the reporting did not reflect the pace we would like to see and Nicole Wood noted that the reporting did not provide clarity. Dave Smith reflected that it's unfortunate that members of the team are not here to discuss with Commissioners.

Action: A deep dive discussion on the Leadership and Culture Workstream with Commissioners to be held before the next IRB Meeting.

- 4.12. Karen Wheeler provided an update on strategic direction. There has been improvement in the customer journey and development of the next iteration of the IRP is underway.
- 4.13. Nicole Wood raised the need to look in detail at the corporate performance management and assurance framework.

Action: A discussion on performance management and assurance to be an item on the next IRB meeting agenda.

- 4.14. Mark Bradbury provided an update on place leadership and growth which is rated as amber. There is a focus on the local plan and economic development plan and how they fit the shape of the organisation.

5. Communications and Engagement

- 5.1. Alix Macfarlane provided an update that covered an overview of the initial elements of the plan. There are key issues around sequencing and more coordination on deadlines.
- 5.2. The main areas of focus will be the next iteration of the IRP, the core narrative and the 24/25 budget.

6. Any other business

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