

# Thurrock Borough Council

## Improvement and Recovery Board

### Minutes – Wednesday 31 May 2023

#### Attendees

Nicole Wood – Essex County Council Commissioner (Acting Chair)

Gavin Jones – Essex County Council Commissioner

Dr Dave Smith – Managing Director Commissioner and Chief Executive

Patrick McDermott – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Cllr Andrew Jefferies – Leader, Thurrock Council

Cllr Deb Arnold – Deputy Leader, Thurrock Council

Cllr Graham Snell – Cabinet Member for Resources, Thurrock Council

Cllr John Kent – Opposition Group Leader, Thurrock Council

Cllr Kevin Bentley – Leader, Essex County Council

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

None.

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

- 1.1. Nicole Wood welcomed Board members to the meeting and introductions were made.

## **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. It is clear that there is an acceptance of the issues Thurrock faces within the organisation. There is now a need to change that acknowledgement into action. There is a deeply imbedded culture of atomised practice that needs to move to a practice of whole council decision making.
- 3.2. There has been a lack of collective ownership of a purpose vision and mission and there is a need to move from broader statements of intent to an executable plan.
- 3.3. Dr Dave Smith also updated on operational changes within the council, the development of the new structure and the establishment of the change team and reflected on the need for prioritisation within the next iteration of the IRP.
- 3.4. Gavin Jones thanked Dave Smith for his honest and helpful assessment of the situation.
- 3.5. Cllr Snell noted that these reflections did not feel like anything new and Cllr Bentley reflected that the intervention made this approach fundamentally different.
- 3.6. In the discussion that followed, Cllr Arnold noted the anger still felt by residents and Cllr Kent noted that while he was grateful for the work to date the fact that the BVI has not yet been published limits the recognition of the problem that all staff can have.
- 3.7. Cllr Jefferies noted that there is real evidence of change but that Councillors are also still impacted by the situation. He asked that senior officers continue to engage with members and said that the publication of the BVI was essential to make progress.

## **4. Improvement and Recovery Plan**

### ***Theme updates***

- 4.1. Steven Mair provided an update on Financial Sustainability. There has been good progress on the commercial and divestment strategies. Sustained work on the long-term financial model has meant that the HRA review has been deferred.
- 4.2. CIPFA are undertaking a review of companies and the associated governance and appropriate quality assurance of the accounts continue.
- 4.3. Nicole Wood noted that there had been good progress on this theme and helpful discussions on the financial model with DLUHC. She noted it was important that we ensure that members are appropriately briefed on the budget and financial model.

**Action: Arrange a session with Cabinet to ensure understanding of the financial position and budget.**

- 4.4. Asmat Hussain provided an update on Governance and Scrutiny. The Governance Recovery Board will meet for the first time in June and provide detailed scrutiny of the theme. There has been a focus on work with the CfGS to develop a workplan on overview and scrutiny and with the LGA to develop a member development and support offer. The Constitutional Working Group will continue its work on the review of the constitution.
- 4.5. On audit function, self-assessments will be sent to Audit Committee members and GRB will monitor the ongoing scoping of the work.
- 4.6. Jackie Hinchliffe provided an update on Leadership and Culture theme which focused on diagnosis and engagement through managers forums. A further discussion is later on this agenda.
- 4.7. Karen Wheeler provided an update on strategic direction. The change team is now in place to develop the corporate plan and next iteration of the IRP.
- 4.8. Cllr Arnold noted the importance of KPI and corporate performance in this work and Patrick McDermott noted that performance management and assurance work will come the June IRB.
- 4.9. Mark Bradbury provided an update on place leadership and growth. Work has focused on the development of the Business Board and the economic development plan and development of the governance model for the Thames Freeport.
- 4.10. Nicole Wood noted the importance of the reporting of capital projects.

## **5. Culture Change and Leadership Update**

- 5.1. Dr Dave Smith introduced the paper. It covers work with staff to help them understand the scale of the issues and allow their views to influence this work.
- 5.2. In the discussion that followed, officers discussed the wider context of this work linked to the other culture change required at the council and members raised the importance of culture change with members and the importance of maintaining a positive working culture.

## **6. Communications and Engagement Update**

- 6.1. Alix Macfarlane presented the paper, which members praised as a good piece of work.
- 6.2. In the discussion that followed, members raised the importance of strong communication to residents and the need to identify what can be done quickly on this. The Board reflected that the next key moment for communications was the publication of the BVI report and discussed preparations for this.

## **7. Any other business**

- 7.1. Patrick McDermott updated that the BVI report would be published imminently and Commissioners made reference to their upcoming second report to Ministers.