

# Thurrock Borough Council

## Improvement and Recovery Board

### Minutes – Monday 17 July 2023

#### Attendees

Nicole Wood – Essex County Council Commissioner (Chair)

Dr Dave Smith – Managing Director Commissioner and Chief Executive

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 Lynn Worrall – Opposition Group Deputy Leader, Thurrock Council

Steven Mair – Acting Chief Finance Officer

Jonathan Wilson – Acting Section 151 Officer

Mark Bradbury – Director of Place

Karen Wheeler – Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth

Asmat Hussain – Interim Director of Legal and Governance

Alix Macfarlane – Intervention Communications Lead

Claire Demmel – Interim Director of Public Realm

Tina Dempsey – Strategic Lead for People and Organisational Development

Luke Tyson – Delivery and Strategy Manager

Patrick McDermott – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Vince Waddams – Assurance Manager

Kerry Thomas – Chief of Staff to the Chief Executive

Gary Staples – Transformation Manager

#### Apologies

Gavin Jones – Essex County Council Commissioner

Cllr Kevin Bentley – Leader, Essex County Council

Jackie Hinchliffe – Director of HR, OD and Transformation

## **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.

## **3. Managing Director Commissioner Update**

- 3.1. Dr Dave Smith provided his update to the Board. The proposed senior restructure is now in the consultation phase and, pending approval of GSC, will move to implementation.
- 3.2. Work continues to improve the process of reports to improve member decision making. It is understood that the timeliness and quality of reports is integral to building confidence in recovery. While the quality of reports is still variable, training for all staff has been commissioned.

## **4. Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP)**

- 4.1. Vince Waddams updated the Board on the assurance commentary which is based on the check and challenge process that has been developed. Future reports will also include a direction of travel.

### ***Theme updates***

- 4.2. Steven Mair provided an update on Financial Sustainability. The theme remains amber and cautious. On divestments, there has been good progress on divestments with 90% set to be completed by the end of the financial year.
- 4.3. The finance function review has commenced, and proposals will come to GSC for approval.
- 4.4. Phase 1 of the review of fees and charges is complete and phase 2 is commenced.
- 4.5. Cllr Arnold asked for clarity on the position on the tail investments and asset sales.
- 4.6. Nicole Wood said that there was a need for a financial capacity review following the completion of the function review. The scope is to be agreed. Nicole also highlighted the number of complex divestment decisions upcoming.
- 4.7. Asmat Hussain provided an update on Governance and Scrutiny. There has been significant progress on the Thames Freeport Accountable Body role and training for report writing.
- 4.8. There are ongoing concerns about the difficulties of recruitment to governance roles.
- 4.9. Cllr Arnold raised the timeliness of the reporting to the Board and its usefulness. Cllr Arnold also sought clarity on the review of Thurrock Regen Limited and the route to a Cabinet and Council decision.
- 4.10. Nicole Wood supported the comments on the timeliness and asked that these concerns be wrapped into the reporting review.

- 4.11. Tina Dempsey provided an update on Leadership, Culture and Strategic Direction theme. There will shortly be a paper to SLT on the outcome of the diagnostic, with phase 2 commencing with focus groups.
- 4.12. A discussion followed on the appropriate timeline for the Corporate Plan and how this links with the development of the Enhanced IRP.
- 4.13. Nicole Wood asked that the Assurance Management Framework comes back for further consideration at this Board.
- 4.14. Mark Bradbury provided an update on Place Leadership and Growth where the focus has been on the delivery of the Growth Strategy and the Local Plan.
- 4.15. Cllr Worrall asked about the Planning, Transportation and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutiny of major projects and there was a discussion about the timeliness of scrutiny.

**Action: To agree the scope of the financial capability workstream following the finance function review**

**Action: Reflect comments on timely and relevant commentary of IRB reporting in the wider review.**

**Action: Conduct a further deep drive into the Performance Management and Assurance framework at a future IRB meeting.**

## **5. Draft Member Engagement Framework**

- 5.1. Tina Dempsey introduced the framework.
- 5.2. Cllr Jefferies said that he was committed the engagement of all 49 members.
- 5.3. Cllr Kent said that this work is welcome. He noted that as engagement was focused on groups, there would need to be proportionate engagement with independents.
- 5.4. Dave Smith said that this work needs to be further stratified.

**Action: Member engagement framework to be further developed based on comments of the Board, alongside a strategy and come back to a future IRB for further consideration.**

## **6. Communication and Engagement Update**

- 6.1. Alix Macfarlane provided an update to the Board on improvements in the consultation team and process.

## **7. Any other business**

- 7.1. Dave Smith noted that the timeliness of reporting issue is linked to the pace of work at the moment and his keenness that reporting was robust and does not slow down activity.