

Thurrock Borough Council

Improvement and Recovery Board

Minutes – 2pm, Monday 18 December 2023

Attendees

Gavin Jones (GJ) – Essex County Council Commissioner (Chair)

Nicole Wood – Finance Commissioner (NW)

Dr Dave Smith (DS) – Managing Director Commissioner and Chief Executive

Cllr Andrew Jefferies (AJ) – Leader

Cllr Deborah Arnold (DA) – Deputy Leader

Cllr John Kent (JK) – Opposition Group Leader

Cllr Lynn Worrall (LW) – Opposition Group Deputy Leader

Steven Mair (SM) – Acting Chief Finance Officer

Alix Macfarlane (AM) – Intervention Communications Lead

Claire Demmel (CD) – Interim Director of Public Realm

Luke Tyson (LT) – Chief Intervention Officer

Patrick McDermott (PM) – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Kerry Thomas (KT) – Chief of Staff to the Chief Executive

Sarah Welton (SW) – Policy Manager

Apologies

Jonathan Wilson (JW) – Acting Director of Finance

Mark Bradbury (MB) – Interim Director of Place

Cllr Graham Snell (GS) – Cabinet Member for Finance, Human Resources and Payroll

Keilah Gallardo (KG) – Business Support Officer, Chief Executive

Sheila Murphy (SM) – Executive Director of Children's Services

Asmat Hussain (AH) – Interim Director of Legal and Governance

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Matters Arising

- 2.1. Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed. There were no further comments on the actions.

3. Lead Commissioner Update

- 3.1. GJ updated the Board that the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement is expected to be published shortly.
- 3.2. In January, Commissioners will submit their third report to the Secretary of State proving an update on the progress of the intervention. Commissioners agreed that they will provide a verbal briefing to the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition around the time of submission. PM will confirm the timescale in the new year.
- 3.3. GJ reflected that the approval of the Local Plan to move to the next stage of consultation and engagement is a milestone for the Council. It was pleasing to see so many contributions from Members highlighting the importance of engaging communities on this iteration of the Local Plan.

4. Managing Director Commissioner Update

- 4.1. DS updated the Board on the progress of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England Review which is underway to coincide with Whole Council Elections in 2025. The Member Working Group is established will consider the response on council size which is to be submitted at the end of this week.
- 4.2. DS offered his reflections on the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny session on the 2024/25 budget which had been a helpful exercise that Members had engaged well with but could be refined further.
- 4.3. On the new operating model, DS said that there is work underway to ensure that more Members, particularly those on the backbenches, have the opportunity to participate in discussions about the new community-based model.
- 4.4. To bring this to life, a delegation of Members will undertake visits to other authorities who have adopted this model in February 2024.
- 4.5. AJ commented that that O&S process had been useful for all Members and JK noted that the exercise was broadly positive and much better than what had gone before. There is more work to do to ensure that the organisation is improved.

5. Finance Commissioner Update

- 5.1. This item was included in the Financial Sustainability Performance Report at Item 6.

6. Performance Report

- 6.1. DS presented the Performance Report for Leadership for Change and provided an update on the policy framework, and timeline for the Corporate Plan and operating model.

- 6.2. The Board had a discussion about what is informing the priorities, use of evidence, financial constraints, the use of data across the Council and the need for insight maturity.
- 6.3. CS presented the update for Governance and Controls with a focus on internal audit. DS added there was a need for focus on the role of Accountable Body for the Thames Freeport and to ensure appropriate arrangements for the Thames Estuary Growth Board.
- 6.4. The Board discussed feedback on training from Members and the need to analyse and act on that feedback.
- 6.5. SMa presented the update for Financial Sustainability with a focus on the finance restructure and preparation of the 24/25 budget.
- 6.6. NW said that recruitment is an issue and risk to be aware of, particularly given what will be a very busy month in January with budget setting. NW also noted the marked difference in the budget setting process this year.

7. Interim Performance Scorecard

- 7.1. SW presented the Scorecard and explained the approach to the Board.
- 7.2. Commissioners commented this was a useful tool in the development of the wider PMAF in good time.

8. Communications and Engagement Update

- 8.1. AM provided a verbal update on communications and engagement. The team are making good progress and there has been positive change.
- 8.2. The review of the service is underway and ongoing. The aim is to have clear recommendations in place for the arrival of the new AD in spring 2024. Officers will engage Members in the review, particularly Overview and Scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair.

9. Any other business

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

Appendix I: Full Meeting Actions

There were no actions that arose from the meeting.