

Thurrock Borough Council

Improvement and Recovery Board

Minutes – 2pm, Monday 22 January 2024

Attendees

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

Nicole Wood – Finance Commissioner (NW)

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

Alex Powell (AP) – Assistant 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

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

Alix Macfarlane (AM) – Intervention Communications Lead

Claire Demmel (CD) – Interim Director of Public Realm

Mark Bradbury (MB) – Interim Director of Place

Pete Pawson (PP) – Interim Programme Director of Change

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

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

Guests

Stephen Brown (SB) – Chief Executive, Slough Borough Council

Will Davidson (WD) – DLUHC

Carole Attfield (CA) – Lipspeaker, DLUHC

Apologies

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

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

1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1. Alex Powell, new Assistant Chief Executive was introduced. Guests Stephen Brown, Chief Executive of Slough and Will Davidson, DLUHC, were also introduced.

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 noted that the most significant news is the Commissioners' Third Report is due to be sent to the Department by close of play today. JK asked if the themes of the letter were to be shared with Members. GJ confirmed they would be, asking PM to arrange meetings with Group Leaders. Further regarding the report, GJ also noted that areas will address areas for improvement in member behaviour, noting this will be an area to continue reviewing.
- 3.2. DA asked whether the risk register accounted for directorates and if not, what was being done in the interim. LT noted that further work needs to be completed for this to take place but currently, individual risks are being raised by the SRO.

Action: Arrange a briefing meeting with Group Leaders regarding report themes.

4. Managing Director Commissioner Update

- 4.1. DS addressed concerns expressed, particularly around the pace of work among officers and Members. DS outlined a number of elements in the coming month will look to address the concerns. This includes Daniel Fenwick's arrival as Executive Director of Corporate Services, suggesting there be an ask for him to focus implementing a governance review. DS also noted the new members of SLT will be engaged in a series of discussions on the operating model. The third point DS suggested was to put together a study of other Councils undergoing change in their operating model, eventually presenting the information to Members. DS reassured that reviews of services are ongoing.
- 4.2. DA noted that there seems to be a positive shift of confidence levels in Recovery Boards.
- 4.3. JK raised concerns over the pace of work required over the upcoming months, noting it may lower staff morale. SB shared Slough's experience of working pace, noting that a steady pace is difficult to keep driving. SB explained momentum changes at difference phases of intervention. GJ welcomed the point made by SB, challenging the Board to consider how the context of being in intervention could be kept relevant and motivating. GJ appreciated that every council may operate differently.
- 4.4. GJ asked DS about the Operating Model. DS noted that the Operating Model should run parallel to the Corporate Plan.
- 4.5. LW raised that further training for members should be considered.
- 4.6. DS shared with the Board that as the Operating Model begins to develop, there will be a priority to engage constituents and Members.

- 4.7. GJ reflected that it may be beneficial to review how IRB is formatted and whether its current form is still fit for purpose. GJ asked for Board Members to consider the potential change in format. GJ encouraged any considerations be shared with PM and LT.

5. Performance Report

- 5.1. SMa shared performance report updates, noting a major element being the Toucan sale. JK asked whether there was an easier way to explain the Toucan sale to colleagues and the public. NW noted that there are ongoing discussions taking place regarding this to understand how to best communicate the dispersing of funds.
- 5.2. AH noted that for G&C, there has been a considerable amount of work on the report template. AH also updated that Overview and Scrutiny work is underway, with a new structure agreed – due to go to full Council in March. AH confirmed that permeant scrutiny officers have been recruited. AH shared with the Board that the Local Boundary Commission has confirmed 49 Councillors.
- 5.3. Deputising for SM, PP noted that Leadership for Change is on track, with three main priorities: producing the Corporate Plan, developing the Operating Model, and the purpose of the Change Team. PP shared that the intention for the Corporate Plan is for it to be Member led.
- 5.4. DA felt that these updates should continue monthly. NW noted these come in as a standing agenda item to FRB.
- 5.5. GJ asked PP to clarify what the Change Team do. PP noted that team consists of business analysts, project managers, and communication officers. PP shared that the entire team was meeting on the 31st of January. GJ how culture was defined in the Change Team and throughout the greater organisation. DS and PP shared that this is part of the work to complete as this been identified as an issue.
- 5.6. GJ asked that a review of staff surveys be put onto the forward plan for IRB in June/July

6. Communications and Engagement Update

- 6.1. AM shared that a Comms review has begun in-house, being led in the style of a peer review. AM noted that comms colleagues from outside the organisation have come to speak to the Comms Team. AM confirmed that the integrated forward plan for the Comms Team has begun taking shape, with a focus of BAU and intervention as one piece.

7. Any other business

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

Appendix I: Full Meeting Actions

Action: Arrange a briefing meeting with Group Leaders regarding report themes.