

Commissioner Comments

1. Commissioners welcome the introduction of regular reporting to Council on the progress of the delivery of the Improvement and Recovery Plan.
2. Members and officers have worked constructively with Commissioners over the last year to tackle the challenges the Council faces.
3. The challenges and difficult decisions for the coming months are set out in section three of this report and recognised by Commissioners. The team would draw particular attention to:
 - a. the early work to build a budget for 2024/25 including developing savings plans commensurate with the necessary ambition to achieve financial sustainability;
 - b. the work to date on divestment of investment assets, ensuring that there is debt reduction in accordance with the directions and further supporting the pathway to financial sustainability;
 - c. building on the foundations of work to improve governance and embedding real change to the culture of the organisation.
4. Work on the financial sustainability theme is mature and has benefited from an increased focus, particularly debt reduction and divestment. Thurrock is still at the foothills of its financial recovery and Members will need to demonstrate their ability to make the choices necessary to live within a radically reduced financial envelope, particularly as they approach the setting of the 2024/25 budget.
5. Commissioners are disappointed however, that some timelines have slipped. Notably, this has impacted; the review of the capital programme to reduce borrowing requirements and a review of pay. There will need to be renewed focus here in coming months.
6. The foundations have been laid for progress on the governance and scrutiny theme where Commissioners have seen excellent engagement from Members and noticeable increase in training and development for Members and officers.
7. There is further work required on the risk management and internal audit themes to ensure they match the expectations of Commissioners and the team recognise the work required on transparency and wider capacity highlighted in this report.

8. On strategic direction and leadership and culture, it is clear that the new operating model and its implementation, alongside external partners, is having a significant impact. Commissioners are keen that there is a focus in the coming months on the development of a corporate plan that articulates a vision, a defining purpose and mission and a set of strategic priorities.
9. The Managing Director Commissioner notes the progress on devolution and the Freeport detailed in this report, which he is leading on behalf of the Commissioner team. Commissioners are keen to ensure that all information on programmes and projects undertaken by the Council come forward for consideration by Members at the earliest opportunity.
10. Commissioners are clear that the Council needs to adopt an executable plan for the delivery of improvement in the next phase of the intervention. The work underway to develop an Enhanced Improvement and Recovery Plan shows promise. Commissioners are keen to see Members and officers adopt the Plan and drive it forward in the coming weeks.
11. Commissioners recognise that a programme management approach has been adopted by the Council to track and measure progress. However, Commissioners do not yet feel that these reporting processes are robust enough to ensure that Members and Commissioners can scrutinise and assure themselves of the progress of delivery. Commissioners are keen that development of reporting tools is matched with the cultural change required to ensure information reported is robust and to a high standard.
12. Commissioners look forward to continuing to work with all forty-nine Members and officers to support them with the decisions and challenges ahead.