

# Improvement and Recovery Board – Meeting held on Thursday 22 February 2024

## Present:

Chair, Gavin Jones, Lead Commissioner  
Denise Murray, Finance Commissioner; Ged Curran, Commissioner

## Members:

Cllr Dexter Smith – Leader, with responsibility for Improvement and Recovery

## Officers

Stephen Brown - Chief Executive and Head of Paid Services  
Adele Taylor - Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services and S.151 Officer  
Marc Gadsby - Executive Director of People and Adults  
Sarah Hayward - Executive Director of Strategy and Improvement  
Sue Butcher - Executive Director, Children's Services, Chief Executive Slough Children's Services

## Secretariat

Nasreen Brittain, Executive Assistant to the Commissioners (Minutes)

## Also present

Andrew Merritt-Morling, Programme Manager  
Deemle Brain, Programme Manager  
Paul Moffat – DfE Commissioner  
Cllr Christine Hulme, Labour, deputising for Cllr Mann

## Apologies for Absence

Cllr Wal Chahal - Deputy Leader, and Lead for Financial Oversight and Council Assets  
Cllr Pavitar Mann - Leader of the Opposition  
Mandy Brown - Chief of Staff to the Commissioners  
Stephen Taylor, Monitoring Officer  
Patrick Hayes - Executive Director Housing, Property and Planning

# Minutes

## 1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1 none.

## 2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 No declarations of interest expressed.

## 3. Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 25 January 2024.

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 January 2024 were approved.

## 4. Commissioner Update (Gavin Jones)

### 4.1 Fourth Report to Minister:

- a) The 4<sup>th</sup> report from Commissioners had been formally responded to and sent to Commissioners, Leader and CEx. Commissioner advice was to take some time before responding to the Minister to allow for proper thought and content. Gavin proposed a joint response as the most appropriate way, but the opposition may take a different approach, however. Commissioners would be happy to see a draft response from the Leader and CEx before the final response from the Council was submitted and would be happy to provide advice and guidance on it. CEx and Leader welcomed this offer.
- b) Gavin reported that a further report to the Minister was required for April, covering an assessment of continued Best Value failure including progress against each of the Directions and against the best value themes published for consultation by DLUHC. A view on timeframes needed for the Authority to deliver its Best Value Duty and whether the current Directions were sufficient and necessary for the Authority to meet its Best Value Duty.

## 5. Update from Finance Board (Adele Taylor/Denise Murray)

5.1 Adele reported that the budget papers were now almost all published, with only the Treasury Management paper to come. Q3 position would go to February Cabinet. The position had worsened in Q3. Particular issues around temporary accommodation had accounted for this issue as well as adult social care. Scrutiny had also had some involvement in these areas.

5.2 Denise reported the Treasury Management Strategy was the most critical report that would be included in the suite of papers for the February cabinet. This was the key area that members and Councillors would need to understand. When the training was rolled out, it would be vital that it was opened up to all Councillors. It was also important that Members and Councillors did not overlook this report. The Leader thanked the Commissioners for their hard work around this.

## 6. Operating Model: (Stephen Brown/Sarah Hayward)

## 6.1 Developing a new Target Operating Model:

- a) Stephen Brown updated on the operating model and requested feedback from the Commissioners on the operating model work the Council had done to date. Commissioners agreed to do this offline.

CEx had an initial meeting in January with the Leader and Deputy Leader, and he intended to continue with these on a regular basis to drive this piece forwards. Stephen felt it needed to be realistic. To look at what was high risk and for the work to be done at pace. The slide pack 'Building The Target Operating Model' contained the full details, which was shared with the Board. CEx felt the journey would be quicker with the assistance of Thurrock CC and would be able to start populating the model soon.

- b) Gavin explained the operating model, that each organisation had its own model. In budget terms there was only so much that could be achieved by savings and cost-cutting. What was needed for the future sustainability of the organisation was how might the Council work with the community to deliver services and exploit technology to deliver services. It was a huge undertaking, and it was expected and accepted that it would take time to complete. What is required at this stage is to start the journey and show progress. It was about how to galvanize the energy of the organisation.
- c) Ged felt the slide deck from the transformation team was very good. TOMs were very complex and took considerable time to complete, so it could be difficult to keep staff engaged. However, this would be most successful when they were kept engaged with the process and the journey. It could not be a jargon-laden piece that was rushed through, as that would have a negative effective on engagement.
- d) Denise commented that this was really about thinking about the financial constraints that the Council was operating in, but also getting that into the mix at the right time. However, in the meantime the Council needed to do the right strategic thinking to get the correct and desired model. She reminded the Council that it was vital things did not stop until the TOM was ready. The Council had to recognise it still needed to continue to deliver on the core business.
- e) Sarah Hayward hoped the team would be able to quickly define the milestones once Commissioner feedback had been received on the work done to date, as needed to sense-check the work done so far. Slide 14 was the roadmap to start thinking about this. There were 10 steps, some of which would overlap.
- f) Gavin reminded the political administration that politics played a very important role in the TOM work to be done; therefore, active engagement would be vital. Ideologically, if a community empowerment model were to be pursued for example, then it would be essential for the political leadership to be fully involved. He made a plea for ensuring they were learning and growing with the Officer team to get a good TOM in place, using the corporate plan to bring the TOM to life as well.
- g) CEx, reported the ICT peer review had recently taken place and the central message of their report was that ICT was not at the core of things, so he would be putting that at the heart of the operating model and the CEx's restructured team. Gavin had shared

the Essex CC transformation work document with the CEx and encouraged him to use it to get a good start. CEx was road testing this at the moment but felt that the Chief Intervention Officer (CIO) role needed to be incorporated rather than be stand-alone, as it was in Thurrock.

- h) Cllr Hulme reflected that she had some understanding of operating models from her time at DWP. From a staff and claimants perspective during that time, feedback was that there was not enough lead in time for the switch over. Very little marketing had happened in advance of the operating model being implemented. There was an assumption that the staff were fully aware of how this would impact them, which was not the case. Therefore, at Slough, engagement and access to IT, the equipment staff and residents had, would be essential. The safety net system would be vital. Would need to see it from the resident point of view, not the Officer, and that was key.

Slough had a multifaceted need which would have to be taken into consideration and staff would need to be well trained on the system. The governance of this change would require member involvement. The Leader responded that the terminology around the operating model was new to him, and the Deputy Leader was more familiar with it. The Leader agreed with Cllr Hulme's view that the resident focus would be the most important thing and he wanted to see that attached to the new operating model. He personally felt that if the Council was expecting the voluntary sector to do more, then they would also need to be included as important stakeholders and he was committed to do this. The Leader confirmed he would go to Thurrock to speak to them about what they were doing in this area. CEx reported that Slough needed to include the Children's Services as it was also in intervention, so the DfE Commissioner, Paul Moffat would be a key stakeholder in the process.

- i) Gavin felt it was a good start, but there was a long and challenging road ahead. Everything would also need to be married to the MTFP. Commissioners would be able to feed back to the Minister that they currently had confidence in the timeline.

## **7. Transformation Implementation Model (Stephen Brown/Sarah Hayward)**

- a) Commissioner message to the Minister was strategic focus had been lost at Slough. Therefore, CEx had considered what could be done to address that and had decided a restructure of the CEx's office. A central best value unit. 3 JDs have been prepared. CIO, Head of Programmes and Performance and Chief of Staff for CEx. He would be using the transformation team project managers to get this work completed. Would present the work formally to the Leader in due course. Was also keen to bring in Change Champions into the unit from within the organisation. Priorities would also be set out and shared with Commissioners. Commissioners to then note these priorities.
- b) Commissioners agreed to get back to the CEx on the restructure proposal from the CEx. Ged asked if PWC would be giving their comments/feedback on this, and whether everyone in CLT had had a chance to think about it. Stephen responded that PWC had not been engaged at this point, would need to see what the cost would be and would speak with Leader and S151 Officer about that.

CEx confirmed the restructure had been designed by the CLT. So, it was a group effort. It was currently being road tested by the Project Managers of the Transformation Team. Job descriptions had been completed and Expressions of Interest (EOIs) would be sent out internally in the next two weeks, if no response or not a good response received, would then go eternally. If a good response is received internally, could be up and running within a month. Gavin responded this work must include Commissioners as well as CLT, S151 and politicians.

Gavin responded it would be good to speak with Thurrock on how best to client PWC.

## **8. Recovery Plan: Stephen Brown/Sarah Hayward)**

- a) Has a strategic focus and good quality work had been done to date. The Council aimed to be an evidence-driven organisation which put the needs and experience of the residents and businesses at the heart of its decision-making. The Council's Strategic Insight Team, Public Health Insights Team, and Service Analysts will collaborate to inform each stage of this Recovery Plan.
- b) Gavin reflected that the team would need to think about the rhythm and pace of the transformation. There was also a psychological element as there was quite a different mindset from the initial one at the start of the intervention to now. The mindset would have to shift from one of saving and not spending, to one of investing in change. Would need to unleash the creativity of the staff.

Sarah Hayward reported they still needed to have an understanding of the interdependencies of the workstreams which this work would hopefully provide. Gavin asked the Council to think about what was 'above the line' and what was 'below the line'. CEx said the strategy had been to populate the top of the organisation first, then tackle the levels down. Needed a central push to ensure the intervention issues were in place and then let the Directors lead on their areas while maintaining corporate visibility.

Adele felt it was important to recognise that things may go wrong, and to be able to learn from that risk. Jane Senior had challenged the CLT the day before about the learning and being allowed to make the odd error and accept that this would happen; but to learn and develop from it. Gavin agreed and felt it was important to build the learning into the work from the very beginning.

Sue Butcher said the Board has its own views and opinions; however, as there were legal boundaries that SCF was required to operate within and to which they were tightly bound. This was an additional complexity that needed to be considered. The Company was an important stakeholder that would need to be accommodated within the process for success.

Ged said that this presentation had been rejected by Commissioners at the IRB in December 2023, as Commissioners had not agreed with the achievements brought forward in that document by the CEx. Amendments to the slide pack therefore needed to be made following the Ministerial response for Commissioners to agree.

Denise reminded the Council that **real** member engagement was essential as this had a structural impact on the organisation and the work being done more broadly by CLT.

**9. AOB:**

**9.1 SEND Update (Sue Butcher)**

- a) SEND was under significant scrutiny. A DfE review was being held today by the DfE Commissioner, Paul Moffat. One of the main themes was did the organisation know what the ambition was and how much improvement it had really made, given the low starting base. Following this review there would be a letter in April from Paul Moffat.
- b) Gavin asked whether the achievements in children's/SEND were celebrated as an organisation. Sue confirmed achievements were shared as one organisation. CEx commended Sue for breaking down the barriers between the Company/SEND and the Council. Adele reflected that at the recent CLT there were different stakeholders included, which reflected this more inclusive approach.
- c) Sarah Hayward, Executive Director of Strategy, and Improvement was leaving the organisation at the end of February. CEx thanked Sarah Hayward for her hard work over the past year and wished her well for the future. Commissioners and Leader echoed that sentiment.

**The meeting closed at 12.03pm.**

**Date of next meeting: Thursday 28 March at 11am – 12.30pm**