

Report to Council

Report Title	Progress on Thurrock Council's Improvement and Recovery
Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 29 January 2025
Report Author	Luke Tyson, Chief Intervention Officer – Interim Head of PMO
Corporate Director	Assistant Chief Executive
Lead Cabinet Member(s)	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Change and Improvement
Wards Affected	(All Wards);
Appendices (if any)	1. List of Outcomes and Success Criteria 2. Detailed IRP Outcomes Reporting

1. Executive Summary

This report provides Members with a progress update on the work to date to deliver the council's Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP). In order to reflect the stage of the intervention the Council has now entered, the reporting of progress has shifted from the reporting on the activity carried out to assessing the impact the improvement plan is having on the road to becoming a well-run council. The basis for making that assessment is the 12 outcomes detailed in the IRP and their associated success criteria.

This report provides the position on council's response to intervention and the required improvements, and therefore the primary audience of the report are the Commissioners and government. The council's broader improvements as part of 'A fresh start for Thurrock' are set out in the Performance Management and Assurance Framework (PMAF).

This report has been previously considered at the December meetings of the Improvement and Recovery Board and Cabinet – the latter referring this report to Full Council for all Members to consider.

Recommendations

For the reasons set out in this report, the Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 **note the progress made on the Council's improvement and recovery within the context of the Outcomes Framework**

2. Commissioner's Comments

2.1 The report presented has been reviewed by Commissioners and further oversight took place through December's Improvement & Recovery Board. There are no further comments.

3. Proposals – the rationale and evidence for the recommendations

3.1 On 2 September 2022, the then Secretary of State for Levelling-up, Housing and Communities made directions under section 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999 to implement an intervention package for Thurrock Council. This package was in two parts: the first is that the Council's functions over managing its financial resources, exercise of the statutory requirement to arrange for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs, and all functions associated with the strategic financial management of the Authority would be overseen by Essex County Council (ECC), in the role of Commissioner.

3.2 In December 2022, the Commissioners submitted their first update to the Secretary of State, reporting on the Council's progress against the specific Directions as well as their reflections on the culture, governance and capacity. The Best Value Inspectors also provided an update on the progress of their inspection.

3.3 Following a period of consultation, Secretary of State expanded the directions to:

- transfer further powers to Commissioners in areas such as governance, the way the Council delivers services and the senior structure of the Council.
- require the Council to produce an enhanced Improvement and Recovery Plan to go further into particular areas.
- appoint a Managing Director Commissioner in order to strengthen the intervention model, and to support the Authority's capacity to deliver against its improvement plan.

3.4 The Commissioner Team as well as the governance and oversight they lead on is as follows:

- Gavin Jones – Lead Commissioner and Chair of the Improvement and Recovery Board
- Nicole Wood – Finance Commissioner and Chair of the Finance Recovery Board
- Dr Dave Smith – Managing Director Commissioner and Chair of the Governance Recovery

3.5 Following the expanded directions, an enhanced Improvement and Recovery Plan was produced to the satisfaction of Commissioners and agreed by Full Council in October 2023. It is this plan which forms the basis for the Council's recovery and charts the course back to being a well-run authority.

3.6 From the outset of the intervention, Commissioners have worked constructively with Members and Officers to ensure proactive engagement, meaning that in practice decisions continue to be taken by the Council with

Commissioners powers held in reserve and used where they deem necessary.

Milestones and Outcomes

3.7 Key Recovery milestones to date include:

- New Corporate Plan agreed confirming the Council's priorities and new operating model
- Officer leadership of the Council embedding following the recruitment of Executive Directors and Assistant Directors
- New model for Overview and Scrutiny in place
- Governance Review undertaken by Monitoring Officer
- New systems and templates for reports in place to improve decision making
- Financial strategies and policies comply with all relevant rules and guidelines
- Detailed debt reduction plan in progress, including the disposal of assets

3.8 As is recognised by all parties, achieving these milestones should be celebrated as progress made, but accompanied by an assessment of what impact these improvements is making to the organisation and residents. The outcomes framework (below) is the method of making that assessment.

Improvement in the quality of decision making	Improvement in value for money	Improvement in corporate capability	Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise
Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members and officers	Improvement in responsiveness to poor performance	Improvement in risk management	Improvement in assurance and audit
Improvement in the transparency of performance information	Improvement in Member and officer confidence	Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council	Improvement in responsiveness to the public

3.9 Through a method of moderated self-assessment by the senior officers leading each element of the recovery, a detailed report on progress can be found at appendix 2 of this report.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 Alternative options are not considered as this is a progress update report.

5. Consultation

5.1 Engagement on the Success Criteria for the IRP has taken place with senior officers, Members and Commissioners.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 This report provides a progress update on the Council's Improvement and Recovery Planning with respect to the Outcomes Framework.
- 6.2 There are no direct financial implications arising from this update report.
- 6.3 Additional costs associated with any of the individual elements of the Improvement & Recovery Plan workstreams (as set out in Appendix 2) are subject to established governance and reporting arrangements including, but not limited to, the Expenditure Control & Strategic Approval panel processes. This ensures appropriate scrutiny and value for money considerations are taken into consideration prior to the approval of any spending decisions.

Implications Verified by Sima Khiroya,
Assistant Director Financial Management & Procurement
Date 8 January 2025

7. Risks

- 7.1 As this is a progress update report to note, there are no direct risks associated with the decisions within this report. However, delivery risks are monitored within services conducting the recovery work and are actively managed and escalated where appropriate.

Implications Verified by Kelly McMillan
Chief Risk Advisor
Date 13 January 2025

8. Legal and Governance Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendation in this update report.

Implications Verified by Helen Nicol
Assistant Director Legal & Governance
Date 8 January 2025

9. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

- 9.1 There are no direct diversity and equality implications from the recommendations in this progress update report.

Implications Verified by Roxanne Scanlon
Community Engagement and Project Officer
Date 7 January 2025

10. Other Relevant Implications

- 10.1 None.

11. Background Documents

- Documents relating to the intervention in Thurrock Council, DLUHC - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/intervention-at-thurrock-council>
- Improvement and Recovery Plan, Full Council 25 October 2023 - <https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MID=6349#A119348>

Relevance Check



Budget Reduction/Service Area: Chief Executive's Office

Service Lead: Luke Tyson

Date: 07/01/2025

In what ways does this Budget reduction have an impact on an outward facing service? How will the service feel different to your customers or potential customers?

N/A

If not, how does it impact on staff e.g. redundancies, pay grades, working conditions? Why are you confident that these staff changes will not affect the service that you provide?

N/A

Is a Customer Impact Assessment needed? No