

Corporate O&S Recommendations Tracker

No	Meeting Date	Report Title	Summary of O&S discussion	O&S recommendations	Open / Closed	Assigned to	Progress of O&S recommendations
1	30 July 2024	Developing Thurrock Council's Communication and Engagement Strategy 2024-25	<p>The Committee's initial thoughts were sought as part of the consultation stage for the Communication and Engagement Strategy.</p> <p>Rebuilding trust with residents was a key theme, however the Committee felt the focus should be more on identifying previous mistakes and how these will be remedied. This takes into the consideration that residents perceive the council to be incompetent and uncaring.</p> <p>The Strategy will be evaluated using a variety of metrics as part of the Corporate Plan and the strategic objectives of the organisation.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreed the inclusion of previous specific communications mistakes within the Strategy as part of systematically remedying this (where possible); 2. Agreed that pre-intervention customer satisfaction is not the goal as this has always been relatively low and requires improvement; 3. Agreed a corporate approach is need across all communications, i.e. standardising the tone of letters, posters, emails. 	Closed	Louise Neilan	Following engagement and feedback from Committee, the draft Communication and Engagement Strategy was presented in October 2024 (see recommendation 8).
2	30 July 2024	Workforce and Culture Task and Finish Group	<p>The changes in workforce planning were highlighted, including the refresh of policies and procedures. This is captured within the wider People Strategy and the new performance arrangements.</p> <p>A staff survey was conducted in April / May of this year and the high level results were highlighted to staff during a recent briefing session. There will be significant work on the results in the coming months due to the challenging results.</p> <p>Proportionate responses to low-level matters were also discussed, particularly resolving these outside of the formal Full Council meetings.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreed not to establish a Task and Finish Group at this time as the remit would be too broad. 	Open	O&S Officers	Action remains open to allow Members to revisit the establishment of a Task and Finish Group in future if necessary.
3	17 Sept 2024	Q1 Forecast Revenue and	<p>The overspend in Q1 was highlighted, which although not ideal, is manageable at this stage.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreed to add the quarterly finance performance reports 	Closed	Dawn Calvert /	Work programme updated. The

		Capital Outturn Report	<p>The Finance Team is continuously reviewing the financial forecasting and applying a consistent methodology. Ongoing work includes working with directorates to mitigate the overspend, with monthly budget monitoring and refreshing the MTFS as part of the budget setting process. The draft budget position is due to be present to Cabinet in December.</p> <p>The pressures driving the overspend need to be tackled, however some are national problems such as temporary accommodation and therefore outside of the Council's control.</p>	to the work programme for the remainder of the year.		O&S Officers	quarterly reports will be reviewed by scrutiny post-Cabinet.
4	17 Sept 2024	Digital and Customer Progress Update	<p>The Contact and Digital Transformation Programme is a key element of the Improvement and Recovery Plan.</p> <p>The Committee raised resourcing for the technological changes as a key area, including ensuring the right skills and capabilities of staff to support the digital transformation. Business cases for individual technologies will include costings and resource implications, as well as return on investment.</p> <p>There is ongoing mapping work by service designers and researchers to understand the specific needs of residents, including the barriers preventing them from interacting with services digitally such as poverty and language barriers.</p> <p>The programme will look to centralise simple queries in a standardised way therefore a review of contact handling resources across service areas such as the Contact Centre and Thurrock First will take place.</p>	1. Agreed time frames and milestones for the Digital Transformation Programme to be shared with the Committee, including what aspects are already in train.	Closed	Marta Poczowska	The time frames and milestones were sent to the Committee on 24 th October.

			Best practice across other Councils has been explored, with digital sessions held for Thurrock staff with different Councils such as Westminster, Edinburgh, and Caerphilly. These sessions included demonstrations of AI, CRM, and Robotic Process Automation.				
5	17 Sept 2024	Q & A Session: Members Enquiries Process	<p>An overview of the current Members enquiries process was provided, and the recent changes to the information governance tracking system ('Infreemation') which is more advanced than the previous 'Respond' system.</p> <p>The 'Infreemation' system is currently being used by Croydon Council and officers are liaising with them directly to review their experiences. A Members app is available at no extra cost which is being explored.</p> <p>It was highlighted that engagement of Members to improve the service was key, particularly as a Members group had previously been set up to review the process but was paused due to the digital transformation programme.</p> <p>A key theme raised by the Committee was the quality of responses, with some complaint responses being defensive and poorly written. An analysis and sampling of responses have already begun therefore improvements in this area are expected.</p> <p>Time frames for responses was also discussed. 94% of enquiries were responded to within the 10 working day timeframe, with the average response time of 5 working days. The Committee discussed if this could be reduced in certain instances, depending on the nature of the enquiry.</p>	1. Agreed to convene a Members Enquiries Working Group to review service improvements.	Closed	Tracie Heiser / O&S Officers	<p>Following an email from O&S Officers regarding the broadened scope of the Group, Members indicated their interest to join the Working Group. The Group will now include updates on digital progression following the review of the Members enquiries process.</p> <p>The first meeting was held on 6th November and Terms of Reference agreed.</p>

6	22 Oct 2024	People Strategy	<p>The People Strategy will be a live document, aligned to the Council's priorities.</p> <p>Draft KPIs have been considered such as reviewing the turnover of staff and how fast this happens as part of ensuring the right people are in the right roles. This is then compared with other local authorities of a similar size. There is also a KPI related to 100% completion rate of performance reviews</p> <p>An update was provided on the recent staff survey. There was a 51% response rate, and colleagues are working with directorates to review their results and develop local level and corporate action plans. Draft KPIs have been. The initial results highlight the positive responses regarding pay and line management relationships, with areas of improvement including the purpose and clarity of the organisation.</p> <p>The values and themes were produced through engagement with staff and these are also based on the priorities of the Council. It is important to get things done right and hold the organisation to account for this.</p>	1. Provided feedback on the development of the Council's People Strategy.	Closed	Tina Dempsey	
7	22 Oct 2024	Draft of Thurrock Council's Communication and Engagement Strategy	<p>The strategy sets out Thurrock Council's corporate priorities for communications and engagement.</p> <p>In-person engagement opportunities were highlighted such as the use of roadshows and working with the CVS to promote help and support for those in need. This includes writing to those who are claiming Pension Credit ahead of the winter months. This helps to engage with the 8% of residents who do not use online services</p>	1. Progression on the Strategy was noted, and previous recommendations taken into consideration.	Closed	Louise Neilan	The report was presented to Cabinet on 13 th November and comments from O&S were included as part of the agenda and Cabinet discussion.

			<p>The resident survey is completed by an external company and uses a range of avenues to speak with residents – this is predominately done via telephone calls.</p> <p>Delivery of services was discussed, and it was highlighted the importance of staff being realistic about the pressures the Council faces as part of being honest and transparent.</p> <p>The Strategy contains information regarding easy read materials, however responses to resident communications also needs to be reviewed. This includes communicating in a courteous manner.</p> <p>The Committee commented on the tone of the foreword and the need to distinguish between Thurrock as a place and the Council and to look ahead. This will take a while to gain trust with residents, however the foreword acknowledges the current starting base.</p> <p>Young people and ethnic minority groups are underrepresented within consultations therefore the Strategy outlines the aim to engage with these cohorts further.</p>				
8	22 Oct 2024	Performance Management Assurance Framework (PMAF)	<p>Cabinet expressed their keenness that Corporate O&S suggest improvements to the suite of milestones and metrics ahead of their agreement. Going forward, performance will be presented as a suite of documents, including finance.</p> <p>As part of developing the milestones and metrics, benchmarking was completed with CIPFA comparators. The use of timelines against milestones shows any slippage on</p>	1. Endorsed the PMAF – there were no alternative recommendations made to Cabinet.	Closed	Patrick McDermott / Sarah Brown	<p>Corporate O&S will review performance data on a quarterly basis – work programme updated.</p> <p>The PMAF report was presented to Cabinet on 13th November, and O&S comments were</p>

			<p>projects and the direction of travel to mitigate this. This in term builds and system and culture that learns from good practice.</p> <p>Contract management and procurement was an area highlighted by the Committee as requiring earlier engagement with scrutiny.</p> <p>Performance Development Reviews (PDRs) will focus on how the work of individuals contributes to the aims and objectives of the Council. This includes how staff model the values contained within the People Strategy.</p> <p>The report cycle was discussed which was highlighted as an iterative process. There are different roles and responsibilities within the governance areas such as Cabinet, officers and Internal Audit. The membership of the Insights and Performance Board is being considered and will bring together the business intelligence functions from across the organisation. The reporting cycle will be reviewed following the local elections in May 2025.</p> <p>The Committee were reassured that the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has taken direct ownership for the metrics and the wider performance of the Council. Quarterly SLT meetings will be held to review and the data and are individually responsible for their own directorate service data.</p> <p>Finance will continue to have oversight of the organisation's financial sustainability and via the Improvement Recovery Plan reporting.</p>				included as part of the agenda and discussion.
9	20 Nov 2024	2025/26 Budget Savings Proposals	The report and presentation set out the proposed savings for the 2025/26, broken down	Cabinet to: 1. Present a report outlining in further detail the business	Closed	Dawn Calvert	The budget was presented to Cabinet on 11 December. A

			<p>by directorate and accompanied by risk management and mitigation information.</p> <p>As part of the budget process, Corporate O&S invited Place and People O&S to attend to discuss the proposals, discuss recommendations and present alternatives.</p> <p>The Committees discussed all aspects of the savings proposals and the risks associated and developed recommendations which will be presented to Cabinet on 11 December.</p>	<p>case for CS02 'Grangewaters: Business Opportunities' to the relevant O&S Committee for consideration.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Consider other revenue generating activities, across services, with a view to increasing income for the Council. 3. Review PLA02 'Energy Management' to give assurance and further justification that the proposal will deliver projected savings. 4. Review the feasibility of introducing a 50% reduction in brown bin charges for pensioners (PLA09). 5. Review PLA18 'Reduction in Highways Operational Maintenance Budget' to ensure the proposed saving represents an efficiency saving and not a cut to service. 6. Take into consideration the comments and suggestions of the O&S committees on other savings proposals as part of its future budget considerations. 			<p>report has been written outlining Corporate O&S discussions and recommendations.</p>
10	14 Jan 2025	Budget scrutiny: Grangewaters Business Case	<p>The business case highlighted that Grangewaters is currently underutilised and would benefit from its own website and automated booking system as part of modernising and helping to increase sales. An investment of £70k is required to support the proposals outlined, for an approx. £150k net income generation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed and commented on the Grangewaters Business Case. 	Closed	Michele Lucas	<p>As the business case is part of budget proposals, progress will be monitored via quarterly finance reports.</p>

			<p>The proposals were welcomed by the Committee. Areas of discussion included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The potential entrance to the site from North Stifford. • Investing in Grangewaters as part of the wider devolution discussions, particularly around resources and use. • Improving the site for local communities is key, along with maximising its use and capacity of personnel. • Marketing to residents will be the first stage, with the intention to extend to outside the borough i.e. businesses and schools. • Use of technologies to expand its customer base through an integrated booking system. • Following approval of investment, progress on works will be made quickly as web domains have already been purchased. • Grangewaters is currently on the list for asset disposal but had been paused due to the proposed development. • Discount for residents i.e. year pass to be considered. 				
11	14 Jan 2025	Corporate Plan Performance Management and Assurance Report, Quarter 2, 2024/25	<p>The reports provide a good starting point for accountability and transparency on the Council's performance. There is a need to focus on those metrics not on target, with the data continuing to be developed and refined to reduce gaps in target and tolerance.</p> <p>The Q2 report was welcomed by the Committee as mitigation and route to green is included within the narrative.</p>	<p>The Committee reviewed and commented on the Cabinet recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the quarterly performance update report and progress made up to the end of the second quarter of 2024/25 in delivering the Year 1 priority milestones and metrics of the Corporate Plan. • Consider recommending any areas of concern within the 	Closed	Patrick McDermott / Sarah Brown	The Q3 report is due to be presented to the Committee in March 2025.

		<p>Some of the red metrics were highlighted and discussed, such as those within Children's Services (Education, Health and Care Plans and high cost placements). The reasons linked to performance were raised by officers, for example the national shortage of Educational Psychological and the small proportion of children with complex needs pushing the average cost up. Both elements are monitored by the service to improve the position.</p> <p>The performance management approach is supported by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) as it enables data to be available in one place and to support discussions around resources and key focus areas.</p> <p>It was recognised there should be a balance of reporting on both green and red indicators. Concerns were raised that 94% of indicators are green which may be linked to low targets. Good service delivery and the timelines were set in line with resources to deliver these.</p> <p>Clarification was received on certain metrics including report writing and street cleanliness.</p> <p>Refuse collection and recycling targets were discussed at length as the target is set based on previous years. This is potentially not ambitious, with financial constraints being referenced. Capacity is already a considerable issue across the organisation, however this indicator mainly related to residents not recycling rather than financial matters.</p> <p>For performance data overall, failure to be ambitious with targets invalidates the process but there is a need to be realistic</p>	<p>remits of the Place and People Overview and Scrutiny Committees to the chairs of those respective committees.</p>			
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			The Chairs for the People & Place O&S Committees may wish to look more in depth in certain areas but is not for Corporate O&S to determine.				
12	14 Jan 2025	Q2 Forecast Revenue and Capital Outturn Report	<p>The report highlights a £2.722m net overspend position against a general fund budget of £172.398m at the end of Q2 (Period 6) for 2024/25. The movement between Q1 and Q2 2 is a reduction in net service expenditure of £0.348m.</p> <p>There are significant pressures in Place (£1.919m overspend) and Corporate Services (£1.181m overspend).</p> <p>Members welcomed the move in the right direction between Q1 and Q2.</p> <p>Some of the savings in red will be added onto 25/26 savings, with the expectation they are still delivered. The report included current mitigations.</p> <p>The S151 Officer is confident that unachievable savings will not grow and there is sufficient focus on those at risk. Expenditure on those with non-recourse to public funds is within statutory duty parameters and is maintained within current budgets.</p> <p>The Grays and Tilbury Town Funds were referenced to ensure these are utilised – Place O&S reviewed these in detail at its meeting on 8th January 2025.</p>	<p>The Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted and commented on the council's Service position and forecast overspend position as at quarter 2 of £2.722m, representing a reduction of £0.348m on the position presented at quarter 1. 2. Noted and commented on the council's overall position and forecast overspend position at quarter 2 of £1.896m, representing a reduction of £0.209m on the position presented at quarter 1. 3. Noted the approval of the transfer of £1.381m reserves to a MTFS Delivery Reserve and £1.5m to an Adult Social Care & Children's Social Care Demographic Risk Reserve approved at Cabinet 11th December 2024. 4. Noted and commented on the progress made on delivery against the savings target for 2024/25 and the remaining red (unachievable) rated savings. 5. Further to an in-depth review and re-profiling of the General fund capital projects, noted and commented on the capital programme, and the anticipated General Fund Capital Programme slippage 	Closed	Dawn Calvert / Sima Khiroya	

				<p>of £30.627m and £10.157m HRA Capital Programme slippage projected in the report.</p> <p>6. Noted the approval of the addition of the DEFRA grant funding in the capital programme as approved at Cabinet 11th December 2024.</p>			
13	14 Jan 2025	Draft Revenue Budget 2025/26 and Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025/26 to 2028/29	<p>The final budget will be presented to Cabinet in February 2025. The final government settlement will be received at the end of January.</p> <p>As Thurrock will be subject to local government reform, Members would welcome an approach to look at areas of the organisation that are the strongest i.e. Adult Social Care. However, there is a need to continue to achieve savings targets until any local government reform changes are made. These are currently on track and include divestments and assets disposals.</p> <p>It was noted that Council Tax will increase to 4.99%. Benchmarking was completed and this remains lower than other councils. Council Tax collection rates were highlighted as an area of achievement.</p> <p>Thurrock will receive central government compensation for employer National Insurance (NI) increases but not for supplier NI.</p>	1. Noted and commented on the Draft Revenue Budget 2025/26 and MTFS 2025/26-2028/29, before submission to Cabinet on 12 th February 2025.	Closed	Dawn Calvert	The report was presented to Cabinet on 12 th February and comments from O&S were included as part of the agenda and Cabinet discussion.
14	14 Jan 2025	Fees and Charges 2025-26	The report highlights the increases are based on CPI percentages. Services reviewed the charges that needed to deviate from this i.e. as part of benchmarking and becoming uncompetitive. However, some are statutory rates.	1. Noted and commented on the Fees and Charges 2025-26 report ahead of its presentation to Cabinet on 15 th January 2025.	Closed	Dawn Calvert	The report was presented to Cabinet on 15 th January, and O&S comments were included in the agenda and discussed.

		<p>The approach to setting fees and charges was welcomed by the Committee as the process previously took considerable time and resource. These are more focused, and more benchmarking is being undertaken.</p> <p>It was noted Commissioners are happy with the backstop principles but requested data relating to debt.</p> <p>It was highlighted that burial costs have increased, for example the right of burial for traditional graves and for Muslim graves increased by £325 (14.94%). The increase is based on benchmarking and Thurrock is not an outlier. Officers and the Cabinet Member for Resources would review in more detail and respond to the Committee.</p>				
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Cabinet Forward Plan – Items for Corporate O&S

No.	Report Title	Cabinet Date	Information for Corporate O&S
1	Quarter 3 Corporate Performance Report	March 2025	Scheduled for Corporate O&S in March 2025.
2	Devolution	March 2025	Not on Corporate O&S work programme.
3	Quarter 3 Revenue and Capital Report	March 2025	Scheduled for Corporate O&S in March 2025.
4	Asset Disposal Report	March 2025	Not on Corporate O&S work programme.
5	South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) Accountable Body Transition Arrangements	March 2025	Not on Corporate O&S work programme.
6	Digital Programme Business Case	March 2025	Not on Corporate O&S work programme.
7	Thameside Proposal	March 2025	Not on Corporate O&S work programme.
8	Corporate Risk Register	March 2025	Falls within Audit Committee remit. A summary will be presented to the Corporate O&S Chair and Vice-Chair.