

## Recovery Board Minutes

**27 February 2026, 14.00 – 15.30**

*NB: Following a request from the Council we have changed the format of these minutes*

### Attendees:

**Commissioners:** Ged Curran, Lead Commissioner (chair); Debbie Warren, Commissioner (Finance); Jackie Belton, Commissioner (Transformation); Abi Brown, Commissioner (Political Adviser)

**Members:** Jason Perry, Executive Mayor; Councillor Lynne Hale, Deputy Mayor; Councillor Jason Cummings, Cabinet Member for Finance; Councillor Stuart King, Leader of the Opposition

**Officers:** Elaine Jackson, Acting Chief Executive; Conrad Hall, Corporate Director, Resources (S151); Jenny Rowlands, ACE; Venetia Reid Baptise, Corporate Director, Sustainable Communities, Regeneration and Economic Recovery (SCRER); Annette McPartland, Corporate Director, Adult Social Care & Health (DASS); Stuart Collins, Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Education (DCS); Susmita Sen, Corporate Director, Housing; Kevin Kewin, Local Government Association; Ella Hullett, Strategic Support Officer

**Chief of Staff Team:** Lindsey Lewis, Chief of Staff to the Commissioners; Laila Ward, Chief of Staff to the Commissioners (minute taker)

### Apologies:

#### 1. Item 1. Minutes, actions and updates

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate account of the **16 January 2026** meeting.

#### 2. Item 2. Progress on the Council's Transformation Plan

The Mayor thanked Jackie Belton (JB) for her work on the January workshops and noted that responsibility now sat with the Council to demonstrate how it would respond to the feedback and drive the Transformation Programme forward. He also noted that the Budget had been approved at Full Council on 25 February.

Elaine Jackson (EJ) outlined how the Council had responded to Commissioners' feedback and summarised the key themes from the Transformation workshop.

She confirmed that detailed delivery plans would be finalised for discussion at the **Mayor's Advisory Board on 10 March**.

Kevin Kewin (KK) added that the LGA would undertake a rapid diagnostic on followership behaviours.

Directors reflected on JB's observations and set out immediate steps to strengthen delivery. Directors confirmed that work was underway to finalise their relevant directorate delivery plans.

Jenny Rowlands (JR), ACE discussed identifying areas of work to pause; aligning transformation saving with MTFs savings; and working with Newton's to support transformation profiling, including digital enablers.

Annette McPartland (AM), CD Adult Social Care & Health highlighted the service was developing an evidence-based case for change and finalising restructure plans. She noted they were considering the appropriate level of consultation and communication and ensuring sufficient support from departments like HR and finance.

Venetia Reid Baptise (VRB), CD SCRER stated the service developed a savings and income tracker. If savings were not realised by May/June, the directorate would then revise their plans.

Stuart Collins (SC), CD Children, Young People & Education highlighted they were agreeing the scope of the Spans and Layers activity with Newtons, and a dashboard was being developed to align Synergy and Oracle. He noted that savings would be banked from day one, with Newtons supporting planning for year-two improvements.

Susmita Sen (SS), CD Housing highlighted positive progress since the Housing Transformation Lead joined in January 2026 including work to correct overestimated digital solutions benefits. A robust governance system had been established, and work was underway to realign the phasing of the homelessness tool.

Conrad Hall (CH), CD Resource & S151 Officer stressed the need for credible savings plans and stronger benefit realisation, warning against optimism bias. He noted improved organisational buy-in but stated contingency planning was required for potential slippage and called for frequent and early reporting.

#### **Further points made in discussion by CMT**

JR also discussed aligning the operating model with the Transformation Programme; programme and project management capacity; improving digital and service delivery alignment; the need to focus on both cashable savings and reducing growth pressure; and the importance of transparency and simple staff messaging on the impact of Transformation change.

EJ confirmed that people-related work had been separated from the Chief People Officer (Dean Shoesmith) role. Dean would manage the day-to-day delivery with Peter Gadsdon leading on people-related change.

CH acknowledged the need to invest in HR capacity and improve digital capability, including in data quality and AI governance.

EJ confirmed each directorate would deliver plans, which would then be consolidated into a single comprehensive plan.

#### **Commissioners Reflections**

JB stressed that plans could not depend on individuals, noting that some slippage had resulted from staff turnover. She emphasised the need to finalise realistic and deliverable timelines. She reflected on the positive engagement from the Transformation Workshops, however, reiterated the significant volume of work required over the next six months.

Debbie Warren (DW) welcomed the progress but emphasised the priority was now *delivery* and ensuring results. She urged for clarity on what would be delivered, when, and by whom. She noted the importance of distinguishing between cashable savings and cost avoidance. DW asked CMT to consider whether there were policy changes, now or beyond May, that could unlock additional savings while maintaining service quality.

	<p>Abi Brown (AB) highlighted the importance of Member engagement, noting potential opportunities for political input on policy proposals. She stressed that officers should support Members effectively and avoid placing them in difficult positions.</p> <p>GC commended the capability of CMT but cautioned against <i>paralysis by analysis</i>, urging CMT to prioritise action over further diagnostic work. He expressed concern about optimism relative to on the ground experiences and warned that aligning transformation with day-to-day operational realities would be challenging.</p> <p>The Mayor agreed with the emphasis on clear accountability for <i>what, when and who</i>. He noted the importance of firm deadlines and acknowledged that dependencies on particular individuals required addressing. He reiterated the need to drive work through to completion.</p> <p>Cllr Jason Cummings (JC) reflected on the challenge for Members, who were not operationally involved and had limited visibility of the work underway. He felt reassured by the 60-page plan and officers’ awareness of it. He reminded officers that any future Mayor would face similar decisions and urged the organisation to be ready for the tough policy choices required in the first year of a new administration.</p>
3.	<p><b>Item 3: Review of the current management of the financial position</b></p> <p>JC reported that the Period 9 position showed the Council edging towards its target and expressed confidence it would be achieved, noting that no significant new pressures emerged in the General Fund. He welcomed the positive outcome of the Budget Council meeting and positively reflected on the collaborative tone within the Chamber. He stressed the importance of accurate early year financial modelling to identify issues from the outset.</p> <p>CH provided an update on the financial position and outlined the priorities for the new financial year. He noting the budget had been passed with a substantial Exceptional Financial Support component. He highlighted the need for earlier visibility of budget performance and for clearer codification of how core cost drivers would be monitored. He emphasised the scale of the Transformation Programme within the 2026/27 budget, the importance of clarifying growth pressures and mitigation strategies, and the need to accelerate work on high-risk areas such as Housing and the Town Hall campus. He also noted the agreed budget included substantial savings targets and that difficult decision may be need post May elections. CH reflected on organisational culture, stressing the need to rebalance centralised finance controls with greater department accountability.</p> <p><b>Commissioners Reflections</b></p> <p>DW noted a positive step-change in the Council’s approach but assurance in Croydon’s ability to delivery action and their agreed savings was still required, rather than further analysis. She explained that although Croydon’s debt had not reduced outside of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), this did not preclude further borrowing where robust business cases demonstrated that investment would lead to savings. Reducing the overall debt would also lower the cost of servicing the EFS.</p> <p>DW highlighted the significance of early indicators in 2026/27, which would show whether growth forecasts and assumptions were accurate and would be a critical signal of the Council’s scope to bear down further on the deficit.</p>

	<p>GC stressed that Quarter 1 would be a major test for Corporate Directors. He warned that other pressures could distract teams but emphasised that future MHCLG engagement required sustained attention from all directorates, not only finance. He suggested a robust business case would be needed to justify any investment-led savings.</p> <p>GC reflected on the recent Council meeting, noting concerns about the level of barracking and lack of discipline in the chamber. He stressed that budget debates required seriousness given their impact on residents' lives and that stronger chairing and meeting discipline would be essential, particularly in a more fractured chamber post-May. He encouraged further discussion on expectations of standards and transparency in political behaviour.</p> <p>The Mayor, Stuart King (SK) and JC challenged this assertion, noting member behaviour represented an improvement from previous years and was comparable to normal political theatre. JC welcomed a further discuss with Commissioners on expectation and boundaries relation to the standards applied by MHCLG.</p> <p>SK also noted a risk that referring to the coming year as a “transitional year” could imply reduced pace and stressed that delivery at speed remained pivotal.</p> <p>The Mayor noted that the transition year should not signal a slowdown but rather an increase in pace. He clarified that discussions around the Town Hall campus referred to optimising its use, not potential sale. He also noted the challenge of balancing necessary borrowing against political narratives.</p> <p>JR agreed that ambition and commitment across the organisation were strong but stressed that realistic planning remained essential. She discussed balancing ambition with deliverability and realism and urged CMT to be honest about what was achievable in the next three months.</p>
4.	<p><b>Item 4: Recruitment</b></p> <p>GC discussed plans for recruitment in the immediate post-election period and urged preparedness. Scenario planning was already underway to reflect potential outcomes of the May elections, including the possibility of a hung or balanced council. He suggested that the next Recovery Board should review the Council's readiness for the post-election environment.</p> <p>He highlighted stabilising the senior leadership team through permanent appointments would need to be a priority. Significant political change across London and nationally post May could create additional movement in the market.</p> <p>GC outlined that before launching external recruitment the Council needed to confirm organisational structure, determine how roles would be presented, and agree an appropriate remuneration package. Commissioners would support this preparatory work. He also recommended that constitutional arrangements and Member induction plans were ready for the new Council.</p> <p>The Mayor noted that Croydon was already operating in a politically balanced environment. GC clarified the distinction between a balanced and a hung council.</p>

	<p>JR added that post-election planning must consider the challenges with Members with little or no prior experience and early work had already begun to support new candidates from varied backgrounds.</p> <p>KK confirmed that the LGA was anticipating increased political plurality and was preparing support for newly elected Members from emerging political groups.</p>
<b>5.</b>	<p><b>Item 5: AOB and Date of the next Board</b></p> <p>The date of the next Recovery Board was noted as 27 March 2026, 14:00. GC recommended standing down the April Recovery Board as it sat within the pre-election period.</p>