

Recovery Board Minutes

27 March 2026, 14.00 – 15.30

Attendees:

Commissioners: Ged Curran, Lead Commissioner (chair); Debbie Warren, Commissioner (Finance); Jackie Belton, Commissioner (Transformation)

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); Venetia Reid-Baptiste, 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); 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: Abi Brown, Commissioner (Political Adviser); Jenny Rowlands, ACE; Susmita Sen, Corporate Director, Housing

1. Item 1. Minutes, actions and updates

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate account of the **27 February 2026** meeting.

2. Item 2. Progress on the Council’s Transformation Plan

Elaine Jackson (EJ) updated the Board on progress to finalising the Transformation Plans, confirming that directorate plans would be processed through DMT, then returned to CMT for check and challenge ahead of sign-off on **31 March**, and would then be presented to the Mayor’s Advisory Board (MAB) on **7 April 2026**.

She highlighted the plans set out the ‘when’ the ‘whom’, the impact of resident and workforce, investment prioritisation, and high-level workforce enabling requirements.

Annette McPartland (AM) provided assurance that the Adults Social Care and Health plans had been reviewed through DMT, with delivery already underway and further progress expected from early April, although further work was still required.

Ged Curran (GC) sought clarity on governance arrangements and how the Council would present the plans to Members in a clear and digestible way.

EJ confirmed that DMTs would track delivery, supported by a small steering group, and that individual directorate plans would be submitted to MAB. She noted that Members had been engaged throughout and that MAB discussion would focus on key issues rather than line-by-line review.

Cllr Cummings (JC) confirmed that Members had seen previous iterations of the plans and were well sighted on their development.

Conrad Hall (CH) explained that plans would include additional enabling service detail to support demand planning, and ensure resources would be allocated at the right place and time.

Debbie Warren (DW) emphasised the importance of the Council understanding dependencies on different work areas and consider how they would manage those. She noted the need, following plan approval, to map savings clearly into the budget, particularly where future-year

	<p>savings lacked detailed delivery plans, to understand what remained undelivered and when action would be required.</p> <p>GC tested whether the process had delivered meaningful value or created activity without sufficient impact.</p> <p>CMT acknowledged the additional workload but agreed the process had been essential in driving ownership of change, clarifying expectations for staff, supporting workforce engagement, and providing a clear framework for delivery tracking</p> <p>AM emphasised the next challenge was to delivery, and stick to the plan, with ownership held locally and progress, risks, and future opportunities escalated through programme governance.</p> <p>GC asked if the recent Newton’s Health Check for the Adult’s directorate read across with their directorate transformation plans.</p> <p>AM confirmed the findings read across and noted the Health Check had been helpful, with Newton continuing to support delivery through advice and dashboard review. She highlighted that the review flagged expected pressure areas, including mental health, older adults, and residential placements, and they were able to emplace mitigations measure in responses to this.</p> <p>Stuart Collins (SC) updated the Board on Children’s Services, noting that developing the plan had provided reassurance about where savings were coming from. He confirmed DMT review, an imminent launch with Heads of Service on 13 April, and confidence that the plan provided a clear framework for reform, savings, and transformation.</p> <p>Jackie Belton (JB) welcomed Newton’s approach and emphasised that development of delivery plans had been critical. She highlighted that plan sign-off marked a key milestone, with the focus shifting decisively to delivery. She stressed the importance of clear communications, including the expectation that delivery would continue through the MTFS regardless of any change in administration, and emphasised that the first quarter would be critical for embedding plans, establishing robust tracking, and providing clarity on savings delivery.</p> <p>GC emphasised that delivery must be owned and embedded locally within departments and welcomed the progress made.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Item 3: Review of the financial strategy</p> <p>Councillor Jasson Cummings (JC) emphasised that the financial strategy had been worked through and aligned with political leadership, underpinned the budget for the financial year and supported debt reduction ambitions.</p> <p>CH updated the Board to provide early visibility of the emerging financial strategy, its scope and milestones, clarifying that this was not a full budget exercise but a focused approach to setting direction and identifying the main drivers of cost and growth</p>

CH explained that the strategy moved away from aggregating service led savings, instead using data to focus on the underlying drivers of growth. He noted an initial focus on Adults, Children’s Services, Housing and Temporary Accommodation, complementing existing transformation activity.

CH emphasised the need for disciplined challenge to assumptions, avoiding both pessimism and optimism bias, and grounding decisions in evidence. He explained that the work would progress in phases, separating operational changes from longer term strategic and policy choices, including those requiring political judgement, to better prepare Members and officers for difficult cost-impacting decisions.

CH highlighted a significant current year underspend alongside challenging growth assumptions for 2026/27, noting that the Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) gap remained unaffordable without action to reduce growth and deliver savings. He confirmed a further draft would be available by end April, with engagement in mid-May, and that the work would remain tightly focused.

DW welcomed the framework and emphasised 2026/27 as a key milestone indicating whether the current budget was the right size to support business activity. She called for greater transparency on growth assumptions, particularly for 2026/27, and stressed the need to interrogate significant future pressures, including the forecast £69m gap by 2029/30.

DW and Members highlighted the importance of focusing on high-cost demand areas, particularly Children’s Services, Adults, Housing and Temporary Accommodation. She noted encouraging assurance from Newton’s work in Children’s Services but emphasised that policy choices, particularly around supported housing and accommodation pathways, were significant cost drivers requiring political consideration. She stressed that the next three months would be critical in determining what action could be taken against the current deficit.

CH clarified that early in year forecasting data provided strong lead indicators of whether expenditure would track above or below budget, enabling more effective intervention if the right measures were chosen.

JB highlighted the importance of considering income, including fees and charges, and asked for greater transparency on the assumptions behind conclusions reached. She also emphasised the opportunity to better link transformation investment to demonstrable financial returns.

GC agreed there were income opportunities, particularly in environmental services, and stressed the importance of clarity on how outputs from the financial strategy would translate into delivery, including links to performance management arrangements.

CH reflected that a more data-driven approach would strengthen the link between statutory duties, financial expectations, and delivery, improving clarity on what needed to change and how success would be measured.

JC confirmed that a comprehensive review of fees and charges had already been undertaken, including deep dives on impact, and that while the Council was now aligned with peers, opportunities would continue to be kept under review through Member scrutiny.

	<p>Venetia Reid-Baptiste (VRB) noted that benchmarking and full cost recovery were being worked through as part of delivery planning.</p> <p>GC concluded that the approach was the right one and welcomed the direction of travel, noting he looked forward to seeing how the work developed.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Item 4: Election Planning</p> <p>EJ updated the Board on election planning, confirming that preparations were well advanced. The Returning Officer (RO) election group was meeting weekly, overseeing workforce preparations, staff rotas, postal voting, and agency staff briefings. Governance was being overseen through the weekly Returning Officer (RO) election group, with workstreams covering workforce preparation, staffing rotas, postal voting, and agency staff briefings.</p> <p>Jamie Baker and Lea Goddard had been brought in to strengthen the Head of Elections capacity and to remove the single point of failure.</p> <p>EJ confirmed that a dress rehearsal was planned for the week prior to polling day and a Project Manager had been assigned to ensure all statutory paperwork remained on track. The 2022 elections report was being reviewed to confirm all recommendations had been implemented.</p> <p>Post-election preparations were also underway, with a dedicated working group established covering the councillor elections, executive mayor arrangements, and civic mayor considerations. Workstreams were in place, including policy development, business planning alignment to potential elected mayor priorities, constitutional arrangements, website communications, documentation, and member induction work with the LGA.</p> <p>Ged Curran (GC) noted work to engage mayoral candidates ahead of the election to clarify the Commissioners role to support the Council. He noted the scale and challenges of the upcoming elections and the importance of the support arrangements being put in place, including clear escalation and accountability arrangements on polling and count days.</p> <p>Members reflected that the likelihood of issues experienced in previous elections had significantly been reduced and welcomed the proposed arrangements and additional senior capacity brought in.</p> <p>Members noted the potential value of an external peer review to provide assurance that actions arising from previous elections had been fully implemented. EJ welcomed this approach and confirmed the Council were in touch with the Chief Executive from Waltham Forest, the LGA and Electoral Commission for external advice.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Item 5: Mayor Reflections</p> <p>The Mayor reflect on the recent Written Ministerial Statement and Ministerial meetings as positive and fair and expressed optimism about the Council’s ambition to be an exemplar authority.</p> <p>GC acknowledged the opportunity ahead but emphasised the responsibility it carried, noting concerns about the Council’s ability to deliver consistently. He noted this was the last Board before the elections and cautioned against using the election period as an excuse for loss of focus.</p>

	<p>The Mayor emphasised the need for clarification on purdah, noting the risk of taking a hiatus on the improvement work during the period and confirmed that core Council business must continue throughout the election period.</p> <p>Members discussed the uncertainty around the political make-up of the post-election chamber and EJ highlighted the importance of robust member inductions and briefing arrangements.</p> <p>DW highlighted the importance of reviewing election manifestos to test deliverability, identify areas of commonality, anticipate potential fragmentation, and ensure Officers were ready to discuss delivery implications with Party leaders. EJ confirmed that this analysis was planned.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Item 6: AOB and Date of the next Board</p> <p>The date of the next board was noted as 26 June 2026.</p> <p>Meeting End</p>