

Recovery Board Minutes
Friday 14th November 2025
13.45 to 14.45

Attendees:

Ged Curran – Lead Commissioner (chair)
 Debbie Warren – Commissioner (Finance)
 Jason Perry – Executive Mayor
 Councillor Lynne Hale - Deputy Mayor
 Councillor Jason Cummings - Cabinet Member for Finance
 Councillor Stuart King – Leader of the Opposition
 Elaine Jackson – Acting Chief Executive
 Jane West - Corporate Director, Resources (S151)
 Venetia Reid Baptise - Corporate Director, Sustainable Communities, Regeneration and Economic Recovery
 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
 Lindsey Lewis – Chief of Staff to the Commissioners
 Laila Ward – Deputy Chief of Staff to the Commissioners

Apologies:

Jackie Belton – Commissioner (Transformation)

1.	<p>Minutes and actions update</p> <p>GC noted that since this was the first meeting there were no minutes or action points to review.</p>
2.	<p>Terms of reference</p> <p>No comments were made about the proposed Terms of Reference for the Recovery Board.</p> <p>GC noted that the Terms of Reference were not set in stone and asked board members to raise any issues that emerged with them in the future.</p>
3.	<p>Updates on the Council’s response to the Secretary of State’s directions</p> <p>EJ introduced the Council’s report to the Recovery Board as a baseline statement to deliver the Secretary of State’s directions and Best Value criteria. It outlines achievements to date and where further work is required to deliver financial sustainability. She spoke about the CMT’s commitment to collaborative leadership, and to working in collaboration with the Commissioners. In particular</p>

she noted a wish to agree a clear direction with Commissioners to ensure no ambiguity.

- Process to produce a report by 20th January

EJ explained that she had established a Recovery Board task group, meeting twice a week, membership including the Corporate Director of Resources, Director of Transformation and Director of Policy, Programmes and Performance to drive forward production of the report. EJ wanted to share drafts of the report with commissioners as the process moves forward. A high level Best Value assessment had been done earlier this calendar year, which needs to be refreshed. Directors have been asked to update this by 21st November. This would be used to support self reflection and to develop an action plan. EJ expected to have outputs they could start to share at the end of November.

The Executive Mayor noted that this was the first time the board had met. This was the first time that the Council was drawing together this information for Commissioners and were on a learning curve to respond in the right way. He highlighted that the Council and Commissioners were building a good working relationship.

JC noted that this year there had been lots of change in the intervention. Commissioners were welcome, but there had been confusion about priorities. He called for 1 clear plan, focusing on delivering change rather than looking back.

- Current assessment of the management of the financial position

EJ set out that the Council's assessment of the management of its financial position was outlined in paragraph 6.2.3 of the MTFS report submitted for discussion at the Cabinet meeting on 19th November.

JW noted that a government policy paper setting out the position on the Fair Funding Review 2.0 was expected next week. She was not expecting it to be different from what's already in the MTFS report. Next steps would be discussion at Scrutiny and Cabinet committees next week, forming part of public consultation. There is also an email address to allow members of the public and Council staff to comment. Specific engagement with businesses was planned for early February.

- Current assessment of the Transformation plan

ER acknowledged that the transformation had been delayed, but was now moving to delivery at pace.

There had been some successes – work in Adults services showed that delivering lower cost and better quality services can be done.

The Council had also rolled out an AI system which would be the bedrock for a future unified front door, although it was noted that there was a need to

demonstrate the benefits of this. There is also a plan to further roll out transcription in January.

Children, Young People and Education directorate were talking to a strategic transformation partner and a meeting was taking place today.

EJ noted the importance of collective leadership and that AM (Corporate Director, Adults Social Care and Health) would work with SC (Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Education) to support this work.

The leadership team was also looking at the resource needed to support this, including from HR, procurement, legal and IT, allowing the work to go at a quick pace.

The aim was to simplify the organisation and create a shared service model, stopping working in a siloed way.

A digital solution for homelessness applications could help manage immediate demand but also improve the service for those who are owed a duty.

Children's, Young People and Education

SC outlined work to reduce costs in Children's Services

The baseline number of children in care had been reduced from 444 to 424.

Numbers of children in residential care had been reduced as a number and as a percentage.

Placements costing over £3,000 had been reduced and the number of foster carers had been held static.

Unit costs of residential care remained a challenge, nationally and in London.

A staff member is looking at brokerage, and how the Council can reduce the unit cost, working with other Directors of Children's Services in London to take a collegiate approach

Housing

SS highlighted the backlog of housing applications the Council has and explained that the digital assessment tool could be a helpful tool to get clients through the front door. LH added that it was very distressing for clients to have to wait, so the tool has exciting potential to see benefits.

Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery

VRB identified opportunities to drive revenues and make savings.

Regeneration of the town centre should be viewed as not just about creating an enjoyable space, but about attracting businesses to increase business rates.

The Council could develop a more commercial strategy for procurement, including introducing systems for affordability targets.

She would also look for opportunities to provide services while leveraging grants and considering how best to use assets to drive income and use the Voluntary and Community Sector to deliver services.

Adult Social Care and Health

AM explained that she was focusing on delivering savings that had already been committed to. Next steps were to horizon scan - statistics and national data would arrive this week. There would be a discussion with the team to see where there are further opportunities to make savings.

Reflecting on JC's earlier comments, SK noted that there had been unforeseen events, changes in the intervention and changing personnel and asked how the Council could build resilience to known and unknown challenges. How could the Council also make sure Croydon is ahead of Local Authorities who are competitors?

JC suggested that SK being here as the Leader of the Opposition gives us a chance to build resilience.

An election is coming - we all need to make sure that that doesn't derail the transformation process.

EJ said that the focus needs to be on adding value and removing the hassle factor – this eats up valuable officer time. She asked members to support officers' work – when you feel valued and that you have a part to play this makes work more enjoyable. This work is tough – understanding and thanks makes a huge difference.

EJ committed to recovering the Council's work life balance, highlighting the risk of organisational burnout. Urgent things will be dealt with out of hours, but other things won't.

GC invited DW to comment.

DW said she could see officers' effort and energy - there was plenty to demonstrate change. She was trying to be challenging, but this was not meant as criticism.

She could also see the risk of burnout – a centralised approach was putting too much pressure onto far too few people, and this was a key part of the change that was needed.

The report the Council had tabled includes lots of good things but would benefit from an adjustment of balance.

A greater focus on learning from what's happened would be helpful, not just in terms of direction but also how to deliver.

AM had given a good example of what the report needs to do when she described her plans for horizon scanning – learning from what you've done, using this to find

a new approach, understanding what that means in practice and building a game plan for how you deliver it.

She welcomed the explanations that corporate directors had given but challenged them to think about where it would make the most impact.

It would be in the prevention offer, and in delivering new supply as cheaply and effectively as possible.

A Temporary Accommodation delivery plan was needed to manage and minimise demand, and there was an opportunity to learn from Adults Services' experiences.

Similarly for Children's Services – there were fewer looked after children, but they were more expensive - how do you stop them from coming into care and use kinship care effectively? Special educational needs and disability (SEND) hadn't been mentioned – this needed to be included in a wider plan, especially transport costs.

The financial fragility of the Council is still as it was in 2020, but the nature and scale of this has shifted.

The Council is vulnerable to financial shocks - plans are needed that can withstand those shocks.

At the moment, there are no clear plans for some aspects of this.

There is lots of good work but there is still a challenge. This needs to be addressed in the round in a coherent, joined up way rather than just happening amongst the senior management team.

JC commented that most of us have been working on this for 5 years. One of the hardest things is not knowing where the finish line is. He asked for a clear path and clarity that we are not going to be on the same path forever.

GC responded that while an intervention does need an exit strategy, it is not clear where austerity ends for the public sector. Constant struggle and striving is the reality.

KK suggested that the 6 month report to the Secretary of State could act as a staging point providing a view on the MTFs and an update on Best Value in January.

AB agreed with the remarks DW had made earlier. She also highlighted that time spent together between Commissioners and the Council is valuable to building an understanding of each other – the more time we spent together, the better.

The Executive Mayor commented that there had been a good meeting last week with commissioners before the publication of the MTFs report, but that the Council had not yet had the chance to respond to what the commissioners were bringing.

He commented that commissioners were bringing greater transparency and openness than the Improvement and Assurance Panel. Now the Council need to respond to the challenge, and the organisation is ready to do that.

GC said that this speaks to the calibre of the elected members and senior officers that this meeting has progressed in a positive way with openness to what might need to change and people have participated.

This isn't what normally happens in intervention – normally there is a sullen silence and few people speak. This has felt qualitatively different.

JC said many of us have been here a long time - if we were all new, our focus would on priorities and delivery – for those of us who have been here a long time there could be a focus on justifying and the past. There needed to be a balance of backward and forward focus. We need to accept that we did the best that we could at that time. But there is a challenge to get our energy towards the future.

GC asked what might get in the way of what we are trying to achieve.

AM talked about the stabilisation of the adult care market - if a care home went down that would cause a significant problem. She also highlighted staff loss as a risk.

JC said that big shocks had already been identified through the Opening the Books process. This had found a lot more financial problems. Then demand changed suddenly and the plan wasn't effective any more.

Legislation outlawing no fault evictions risked creating a spike in eviction and a big demand influx.

He also identified that losing the people in the room would be a risk – the Council has a high quality leadership team - it would be hard to recruit to these posts and get as good quality people.

SS highlighted demand as a risk, the need to learn from the past, and to test some of our assumptions. She also highlighted the risk of officer fatigue and burnout.

JW said that the Council had been going through audit since the 2019/20 accounts. At present there was nothing new to see, but there's a risk something will emerge.

LH was concerned about potential increasing homelessness, but mentioned that the Council has a risk register, which also includes cyber security. All we can do is be as resilient as we can, make sure we are doing horizon scanning, and that we have the skills we need. Occasionally things come out of the woodwork - Oracle has been in place since April - this will bring things out as we tighten controls.

SC pointed to risks caused by the impact on SEND of both increasing demand and costs, he also highlighted partnerships, especially with health as a risk.

- Key next steps

GC asked what the next steps were for Croydon.

	<p>EJ said that we need to understand what the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) view is of what the product needs to look like. She said that she needs a clear view about what we need to deliver, and that she would welcome a discussion to be clear.</p> <p>GC remarked that MHCLG were more impressed by actions, it's about delivering – we would need to continue that conversation.</p> <p>He discussed the idea of an Exit Strategy – there was a danger of having fixed criteria that do not move as circumstances change. This risked the Council hitting the target but missing the point.</p> <p>EJ and GC both thanked everyone who has participated in the meeting.</p> <p>JC appreciated the clarity that had been given by commissioners during the meeting and asked for more. He found this helpful so the Council can judge for itself whether it is succeeding or failing.</p> <p>GC asked that if commissioners are unclear or giving conflicting messages that Council officers and members let them know.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Updates from Commissioners</p> <p>Commissioners concluded that there were no additional updates to give.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>AOB and date of next meeting</p> <p>N/A. The date of the next meeting was not discussed but has now been scheduled on 19th December.</p>