

Recovery Board Minutes
Friday 19th December 2025
13.00 to 14.00

1.	<p>Minutes and actions update</p> <p>No amendments were requested to the draft minutes of the Recovery Board meeting of 14th November</p>
2.	<p>Updates on the Council’s response to the Secretary of State’s directions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progress update towards finalising the Council’s report by 20th January.• Presentation of the first draft of the Council’s improvement indicators, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ A review of the Council’s current financial position○ A current assessment of the Transformation Plan○ Key next steps <p>GC invited the Mayor to speak.</p> <p>The Mayor thanked commissioners for the opportunity to have this discussion.</p> <p>He had been working with EJ on the approach to the transformation programme. There would be a more focused approach with the corporate management team from the New Year, with weekly catchups over the ownership of the transformation programme and individual conversations with corporate management to make sure we are all buying in and reprioritising the transformation programme.</p> <p>This mirrored the approach he had taken on public realm work being done in the town centre about 10 months ago. This had initially been scattergun, but refocusing on what matters and reprioritising helped to avoid the risk the project would not deliver what we wanted to achieve</p> <p>This would help to make sure that the Council deliver the many things they need to deliver to get the best results for residents.</p> <p>GC commented that he was aware that post Christmas there would be the run up to the local elections in May which would put pressure on politicians’ time, so to hear that the Mayor will still focus on this is good.</p> <p>EJ said that since last Recovery Board meeting, the Council had been doing a lot of detailed work. This had included accepting and owning that we all need to own the Council’s financial recovery and transformation work, which perhaps hadn’t been there over the last few months.</p>

In this spirit, EJ asked Corporate Directors to share what they have been doing to progress this work over the last 4 weeks.

EJ discussed the Best Value Improvement Indicators Assessment circulated by the Council. This had been a quick review of previous work to prepare for the submission to ministers in January, but this needed to be done more fully. She wanted to understand whether commissioners thought the Council's assessment correct. If so, she would like to focus on reporting on progress against indicators assessed as red and amber in a transparent way going forward.

EJ reported that to create a wider spirit of leadership in the organisation, she was working with directors on specific issues, to set the tone for the New Year and to change the way the Council works. The Council will need to focus on a smaller number of things to deliver.

EJ committed to send a draft of the report to be submitted to ministers with commissioners on 8th January.

EJ also reported that JW is moving on and that Conrad Hall will be seconded to Croydon, starting on 5th January, and JW has prepared a detailed handover plan. There was however still a gap in Assistant Chief Executive role – EJ was still covering both this and the Chief Executive role.

Finances

JW set out that the whole of the financial position month 7 monitor had been agreed for publication. This showed an underspend of £24.4 million, which was good news and showed progress towards the target of £27.3 million.

External audit seems to be going well – the 4 external auditors are happy with what they are receiving from across the organisation and are on track for signoff on 28th February.

It had been a big week this week with MHCLG and other government departments publishing provisional funding settlements over 3 years. This represented a complete review of the system, meaning the papers received on this are complicated. The Council has commissioned LG Futures to model the impact for Croydon, with figures expected from them on Monday 22nd December.

However, the headline was the outcome was more or less in line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), but work still needed to be done to understand the implications of the details of the settlement.

JW expected the Council's Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) request to be unchanged from the request submitted the previous week.

JW would be working over the Christmas period on the budget report. This would incorporate CIPFA guidance on the handling of s25 statements. She would be working at Croydon until 8th January and would be able to hand over the work to Conrad Hall.

Over last few weeks JW had been carrying out a final annual review of growth figures to ensure they would be up to date by 8th January. She has also been carrying out assurance of existing savings commitments, holding detailed meetings with each directorate to discuss what it means for them. This would put the Council in a better place to understand how savings will be allocated out across the directorates.

JW now had input on additional savings but had not yet reviewed them all. This would provide some money, but this was unlikely to be a significant amount. She had also been doing detailed work on the Council Tax base. Here the news was not as good. Assumptions were based on the trend. There had been a drop off in the Council Tax base over the last 2 years, and this would drive a small downward revision.

JW would also review the capital programme. This would allow her to work out capital receipts and then to calculate debt charges.

Transformation

EJ said that we all know that we have had a gap in progress, so the last few weeks had been spent on re-energising the transformation programme. She thanked JB for her input, and for agreeing to spend time with the transformation team in January – this was really appreciated by the team.

There was a need to step back and simplify to enable the understanding of the Council's wider staff. Current messaging makes the transformation programme seem much more complicated than it is. The programme needs to be done with staff, rather than to them.

The team has looked at prioritising the work to focus on areas with greatest return on investment (ROI).

Work would continue with the Adults Social Care and Health programme, which had an estimated £15m ROI.

In Children, Young People and Education, the Helping Families Thrive programme would also be prioritised.

The workforce transformation piece would focus on culture, on spans and layers to simplify organisational structures, and on Shared Services – a piece of work moving teams so that people doing the same kind of work, work together.

Work was also being done on the Commercial Excellence Programme to review the contracts the Council has, to reduce their number, and to stop some contracts.

The rollout of transcription would continue, the Council would support the development of a digital solution to assess homelessness applications and there would be work to improve complaints management.

EJ thinks these strands of work will deliver the most and get people in a transformation mindset.

Corporate directors had agreed to a financial handshake to deliver transformation savings in their respective directorates.

The right resources were needed to support the programme. Digital support was in place but there was not enough transformation support. The programme needs the right engagement plans to deliver this. The Council was working on a plan on a page for the programme.

Directors wanted to own this work, be involved and set the priorities. EJ and the transformation team need to work closely with them to do that.

Updates from Corporate Directors

Adults Social Care and Health

EJ explained that unfortunately the Corporate Director of Adults Social Care and Health, AM was unwell, so EJ would provide an update.

The 26/27 programme business case had been approved.

Newtons were moving into sustainability – this means that the use of the monitoring tools put in place are now commonplace with managers.

The project is on track to deliver the £15m savings target set.

Feedback is due in January on what the future savings programme will look like and this will inform the report to the Secretary of State.

AM had identified a risk from inflation in the care market. This meant that local providers were starting to struggle.

GC asked for clarification on whether financial handshakes had been agreed for 26/27 only, or also for future years. JW confirmed that agreement was for 26/27 only.

Children, Young People and Education

SC reported that the Helping Families Thrive programme was making good progress, including reducing residential placements 18%, creating financial savings.

He had also submitted a Family proposal to DfE.

There had also been a meeting this week to sign off 26/27 numbers to meet the Target Operating Model (TOM).

Newtons' have agreed the scope of their work in Children, Young People and Education. The process is now in the procurement pipeline. Boots on the ground were expected in mid-late January.

A new director of Children's Social Care, Risthardh Hare had been recruited and would be starting in the role on 12th January.

SC expressed concern that Precious House, a residential care home hadn't been registered by Ofsted, despite submitting an application in good time.

Ofsted had admitted they were behind in processing registrations. SC asked if commissioners had any influence over this process to expedite the registration. SC reported that a Minimum Viable Product version of a Children, Young People and Education dashboard had been delivered. SC asked Newtons to focus on developing this further.

GC commented that he had understood that the Council was trying to share learning across the organisation, and in particular the experiences of Adults Social Care and Health in achieving transformation by working with Newtons. He asked whether AM was engaged with the work in Children, Young People and Education. EJ confirmed that both AM and DW were engaged, and that she was open to hearing any thoughts and concerns on this.

Housing

SS explained that the Housing function was preparing for inspection and had taken as decision to set up a Housing Assurance Board to help with this, replacing the Housing Improvement Board. Membership included councillors, external experts and residents. A forward plan had been developed to identify what is good practice and where the Council is against this. The next meeting would focus on homelessness.

The independent chair, Eamonn McGoldrick brings enormous experience, which will bring extra value not just to the Housing function but to what we are trying to do across the Council.

SS also mentioned that scrutiny will be on the Council to manage sickness effectively.

SS identified homelessness as a big area of challenge and this was one of the elements of the directorate's improvement plan.

Over the last 6 months, the directorate had identified the need for a digital solution for applications.

Day to day cases were being managed better, but the backlog is a big issue.

SS was not getting the traction she wanted to reduce this. Its size mean that this had to be a digital solution. The technology is there, but this needed to be resourced properly, so this was a big issue for SS.

	<p>The Housing transformation star chamber had identified specific areas for focus, including care leavers and adults.</p> <p>There was also a focus needed on reducing voids and Temporary Accommodation costs, and a need to have a closer connection to the TOM team, to cost proposed changes and to understand what it will actually save. There was also a need to develop financial modelling of homelessness which would be more agile and informative rather than backward looking. SS was talking to CIPFA and MHCLG to understand who does this well.</p> <p><i>Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery (SCRER)</i></p> <p>VRB outlined plans for recruitment to key posts, including to Director of Culture and Community Safety, Director Streets and Environment and Head of Parking roles.</p> <p>She set out that she would focus next year on driving inward investment. Bringing in businesses could increase Business Rates and also bring Croydon residents into employment, supporting the council tax base.</p> <p>SCRER had accepted the allocated savings figure – now SRER needed to ensure they identified programmes to deliver this.</p> <p>This would include the Commercial Excellence Programme. VRB gave the example of parking enforcement where she believed that SCRER can improve the value of this in the next 3 months.</p> <p>In the Additional Savings group, they were talking about how to create savings and how to give financial assurance to the Council’s Finance function.</p> <p>The question was how can the Council sweat its assets. For example, Electric Vehicle (EV) charging providers make use of Council assets but do not transfer income to the Council. This was not about innovation, but identifying where the Council has ability to sweat assets and negotiate better.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Updates from Commissioners</p> <p>DW said that it was positive to hear about the work being done to create savings, but not good news that this hasn't been reflected in the financial ask to government from the Council. This was based on a view that there was no change from the November budget after savings work, a 5% Council Tax rise and extra grant from government – the position stabilises but doesn't improve, in fact the debt charge is increased by 40m.</p> <p>This position is not tenable - costs need to be brought down further.</p> <p>There are other things that can be looked at – the level of growth wasn't mentioned. DW thinks the current assumption is high and could be trimmed.</p> <p>DW thinks it is still unclear who is accountable for the delivery of savings.</p>

Putting a line in directorate budgets for growth is a mistake and doesn't make budget holders accountable for the delivery of savings.

How much can be delivered through transformation and who will be responsible is unclear.

It is essential that other savings, including from Business As Usual (BAU) are looked at urgently.

The budget still reflects a centralised approach – It is essential that we see a plan with savings allocated to directorates and plans for efficiency savings. DW called for the recognition that the budget is a plan, not a certainty about what will happen.

DW commented that despite all the good work being done and all the energy going into transformation, a step change was still needed to enable a conversation with central government. A no change budget is not going to be tenable for Croydon

Outside of BAU, progress on Adults Social Care and Health has been very commendable, and DW could see SC following the same path in Children, Young People and Education.

But Housing needs focus, especially on what can be done on Temporary Accommodation (TA). This was a big ticket item needing urgent review.

JB supported the review of transformation that EJ had outlined. There was a lack of clarity and ownership of delivery of the programme. Staff don't believe in this but have been nodding along. The goals and priorities of the programme needed to be set out clearly, together with a clear line of sight between actions and benefits, and a way to track whether benefits were being delivered.

JB also identified TA as a real opportunity - investment put in here had the potential to save money and improve services.

JB was looking forward to this programme moving forward, with changes to the project management approach. So far, projects were being RAG rated as green, even when they were not generating the expected savings. That could not be considered to be a green rated, on track project.

JB pointed out that investment money can only be spent once. The Council need to make sure it spends it in the right place. She didn't think there was an agreed programme of investment that focused on impact yet.

JB noted that she had been talking to Council officers for a while about HR capacity. This meant that delivery takes too long. Even with HR capacity in place, capacity is also needed in services to deliver change. This means that the Council will need to consider the sequencing of transformation activities.

JB also observed that 50% of agency workers in the Council are covering sickness, which offered an opportunity to make savings. There had been a Deep

Dive in August amongst corporate directors on sickness. JB was not sure what has happened on this since then.

JB said that she was happy to work alongside the Transformation team. She believes that they have the right skills but are not yet focused on the right things.

JB commented that services needed to predict and plan accordingly. Despite work to drive savings, costs could still go up. Data and information should drive the way that services work.

JB wanted to see clarity on plans to make savings through BAU and clear plans for the transformation programme. She expressed concern that financial handshakes were only in place for 1 year and encouraged the Council to work on agreeing this for the next 3 years.

AB commented on the recent recruitment exercise to appoint the new Director of Children's Social Care, Ristardh Hare, whose experience can bring value to the whole organisation. The high quality of the candidates applying to the post demonstrated that people want to come and work in Croydon, and that it is great to work here.

AB had seen strong governance in the Council, but at times the process can overshadow the appropriate speed and common sense. A review of this is good – it needed to be done with an eye on assurance and risk.

AB encouraged the Council to look up and out, which is already embedded in some areas of the Council. Looking out at what else is going on in local government could help in Croydon's aim to become the most efficient Local Authority in London.

GC said that inevitably the commissioners had focused their comments on what needs to be done, but he highlighted that commissioners also recognise the great efforts the Council had made to change, as well as recognising the work that had been done to support the commissioners' work. He also recognised the growing cohesion in the Corporate Management Team, but observed that the financial challenge remains where it was – this can't be where we end up in these conversations.

There are significant challenges in delivering what the Council needs to deliver and its optimism does not always serve it well.

There is a significant followership problem within the wider Council staff. It is hard to get staff to do what you need them to, and they appear to see some critical things that are required as optional. You can't claim that Croydon's leadership is fantastic if your staff aren't following the leadership.

GC referenced 'Radical Candour'; (Kim Scott, 2017), commenting that this was relevant in this context, and to the Council's relationship with commissioners. He had observed 'Ruinous Empathy' – people are so busy being understanding

	<p>and nice that nothing gets done. Leaders do need to make the organisation feel heard and respected, but that cannot get in the way of delivery.</p> <p>GC committed that the commissioners would try to operate with radical candour, but also told board members that they also need to work like that.</p> <p>GC asked for future Recovery Board meetings to be extended to 90 minutes.</p> <p>The Mayor commented that the conversation had given the Council lots to think about and to discuss. He was looking forward to the reset in the New Year.</p> <p>GC reiterated the commissioners’ recognition that the Council had already done a lot of work to try and improve itself.</p>
4.	<p>AOB and date of next meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The next recovery board is scheduled for 16 January 2026
<p>Apologies: Annette McPartland - Corporate Director, Adult Social Care & Health (DASS)</p>	
<p>Invitees and Circulation List:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ged Curran – Lead Commissioner (chair) • Debbie Warren – Commissioner (Finance) • Jackie Belton – Commissioner (Transformation) • Abi Brown – Commissioner (Political Adviser) • 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 	