

BEST VALUE COMMISSIONERS

Governance Board

Wednesday 20th March 2024, 2:00pm – 4:00pm

Council House

Board Members

John Coughlan, Commissioner and Co-chair
John Biggs, Political Advisor to Commissioner team and Co-chair
Max Caller, Lead Commissioner
Pan Parkers, Commissioner
Lord John Hutton, Political Advisor to Commissioner team
Tom Smith, Chief of Staff
Marie Rosenthal, Interim Monitoring Officer
Councillor John Cotton, Leader
Councillor Sharon Thompson, Deputy Leader
Councillor Robert Alden, Leader of Conservative Group
Councillor Roger Harmer, Leader of Liberal Democrat Group
Graeme Betts, Interim Chief Executive
Rishi Shori, Director of Intervention Response
Amerdip Kaur, Head of Special Projects, Improvement and Delivery
Julia Lynch, Assistant Director
Deborah Carter-Hughes, Assistant Director
Mollie Sheehy, Minute Taker

1 Welcome & Introductions

John Biggs (Political Advisor to Commissioner team and Co-chair) and John Coughlan (Commissioner and Co-chair) made introductory comments outlining their roles, experience in governance and the issues the Board is established to address. Commissioners underlined the significance of governance as vital to the council's improvement journey and stressed the importance of developing a shared understanding that poor governance had been at the heart of BCC's problems for some years (since at least the 2014 Kerslake Review). The has been resistant to change for too long, and other workstreams of improvement activity rely upon past mistakes not being repeated, and blockages being freed. This will require concerted political and officer leadership. Though the board will be responsible for overseeing this work, the change must be led by the City Council, with the unequivocal leadership of Leader and Chief Executive.

2 Terms of Reference

Marie Rosenthal (Interim Monitoring Officer) introduced the Terms of Reference for the board.

The Commissioners:

Max Caller CBE, John Coughlan CBE, Chris Tambini, Pam Parkes FCIPD, Jackie Belton, Myron Hrycyk, Lord John Hutton, John Biggs.

- 2.1 Legal and Governance are progressing the work of the Stabilisation plan which will feed into the Board.
- 2.2 There are over 50 activities in Scrutiny at present, addressing the initial 13 recommendations for the Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP) with actions being monitored. The purpose of this Board is to steer this activity and address the current officer Code of Conduct which has not yet been amended through the stabilisation plan.
- 2.3 Marie Rosenthal (Interim Monitoring Officer) advised that the Co-chairs may wish to keep the Terms of Reference under review as it could be beneficial to involve Katy Fox (Director of People Services).
- 2.4 Marie Rosenthal (Interim Monitoring Officer) advised that she and Max Caller (Lead Commissioner) had a meeting with the Chair of the Standards Committee last week and recognise that there will be a relationship between this board and Standards Committee.
- 2.5 Marie Rosenthal (Interim Monitoring Officer) advised that this Board should also aim to work closely with group whips and it may be useful to invite them to some future meetings.
- 2.6 Councillor Robert Alden (Leader of Conservative Group) considered that it may be useful to add members of the Scrutiny Committee into the TOR at some point and to invite them to future meetings.
- 2.7 Councillor John Cotton (Leader) recognised that it the Board should also work to improve both officer/officer relationships alongside improving member/officer relationships.
- 2.8 Councillor Sharon Thompson (Deputy Leader) advised that she is concerned that this Board should keep a close eye on methodology involved in the work to engage the workforce.
- 2.9 Marie Rosenthal (Interim Monitoring Officer) advised that the work carried out by this Board should be done at pace because of its link with the 6 months Stabilisation Plan.
- 2.10 John Biggs (Political Advisor to Commissioner team and Co-chair) recognised that it may be useful to invite Ed Hammond to some future meetings as his work with CFGS has helped to shape Governance work within the Council.
- 2.11 Max Caller (Lead Commissioner) remarked that he has been able to observe how BCC operates and that he has seen a breakdown in member/officer relationships.
- 2.12 Graeme Betts (Interim Chief Executive) advised that it may be useful for the TOR to include the improvement of member/trade union relationships.
- 2.13 Pam Parkes (Commissioner) noted that the TOR should include descriptions of what makes "good" governance and queried how progress for this can be monitored.

3 Governance Stabilisation Plan

- 3.1 Amerdip Kaur (Head of Special Projects) presented the governance stabilisation plan and outlined the background behind it and that the changes required are deep rooted in the DNA of the Council with some issues identified including: a lack of trust, a blame culture, defensiveness and lack of transparency. Furthermore, there are unwritten rules which are undermining corporate processes leading to inconsistencies throughout the Council.
- 3.2 The Stabilisation Plan is joint work carried out by Ed Hammond and the Council and outlines 13 recommendations of which the Council has 50 lines of activity aiming to respond to these recommendations. This plan is a first step toward a better Council.

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- 3.3 There are 6 activities which are “at risk” and 1 action which is “off-track”. The “off track” action relates to activity three which needs to gather pace.
- 3.4 Pam Parkes (Commissioner) asked if the Corporate Plan is a focus for governance within the Council.
- 3.5 Marie Rosenthal (Interim Monitoring Officer) responded that one of the findings is that the Council needs a Corporate Plan.
- 3.6 Councillor Roger Harmer (Leader of Liberal Democrat Group) noted that member training is required in the context of this plan. He noted that as a member he receives numerous invitations to attend training but no guidance on which training is actually relevant to their roles.
- 3.7 Pam Parkes (Commissioner) queried again how progress will be monitored throughout this work.
- 3.8 Marie Rosenthal (Interim Monitoring Officer) noted that an important test for progress is whether Audit professionals feel comfortable in the Council House and not “afraid” as they have documented previously.

4 AOB and Conclusion

- 4.1 All board members confirmed to understand the aims of the Governance Board.
- 4.2 John Biggs (Political Advisor to Commissioner team and Co-chair) and John Coughlan (Commissioner and Co-chair) concluded the meeting with no actions as it was in introductory conversation.

The Commissioners:

Max Caller CBE, John Coughlan CBE, Chris Tambini, Pam Parkes FCIPD, Jackie Belton, Myron Hrycyk, Lord John Hutton, John Biggs.