



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

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Commissioners
Thurrock Council

By email

5 October 2023

Dear Gavin, Nicole and Dave,

Thank you for sending your second report of 7 July on the progress of the intervention in Thurrock Council. The report highlights some welcome areas of progress, such as in financial leadership and capacity. The Council should also be commended for producing an enhanced Improvement and Recovery Plan, although there is clearly significant work ahead to ensure that this plan can be resourced and delivered. I understand that the Council is reviewing the plan now, and I look forward to an update on this important milestone.

As you highlight in your report, it is now vital that the Council focuses on what it needs to do and, as you indicate, the pace of change needs to accelerate. Further slippage on key issues, such as the review of the capital programme and the implementation of a robust delivery risk assessment for savings, cannot happen. It is also critical that the Council takes all necessary steps to improve its financial position and builds on the early work undertaken to improve governance.

More broadly, as we move from a 'discovery' to a 'transformation' phase, we have taken the opportunity to review the intervention approach. As discussed with you and Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader of Essex County Council, we will now move to a model of three standalone Commissioners and allow Essex County Council the opportunity to exit from their formal support as a corporate body. The support provided by Essex County Council has been invaluable in allowing detailed diagnostic work to be completed on the finance and governance issues at the Council and in the immediate response to the findings of the Best Value Inspection. I have written today to Councillor Bentley to thank him and his Council for the support they have provided. This was a significant piece of work and one that Essex stepped up to provide. We are grateful for all their work.

Gavin and Nicole, you will have today received appointments letters appointing you as Lead Commissioner and Finance Commissioner respectively. I will therefore rely on the newly formed Commissioner team's continued reporting to assess Thurrock

Council's recovery. The Secretary of State and I look forward to receiving your third report in December 2023.

At the time of the Best Value Inspection report's publication on 15 June I announced that the Secretary of State and I were minded to move Thurrock Council to Whole Council Elections, to bring stability to the Council, and to encourage greater consistency and longevity in decision making. I have decided to proceed with the proposal on which I sought representations and therefore intend to make an order under Section 86 of the Local Government Act 2000 to move Thurrock Council to a scheme of Whole Council Elections from May 2025 onwards. The May 2024 elections of one third of members will go ahead as planned, to ensure residents have the opportunity to have their say.

This decision was taken after careful consideration of the representations received on our proposals, including the representation received from Thurrock Council on 30 June, and the representation received from Commissioners on 29 June.

I have today written to Councillor Andrew Jefferies to communicate my decision to the Council, and I have instructed officials in the Department to copy the Local Government Boundary Commission for England into that letter. I expect that the Commission will want to consider the timing of a future boundary review for Thurrock Council, and that the new context of a Whole Council Election in May 2025, and my rationale for this decision may prove relevant to their work.

Yours sincerely,



LEE ROWLEY MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE FOR LOCAL
GOVERNMENT AND BUILDING SAFETY