

# **THURROCK COUNCIL – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DIAGNOSTICS REPORT**

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Inspire East (part of East of England Development Agency EEDA), in conjunction with Thurrock Council and the Regional Empowerment Partnership commissioned Donald McIntosh, Local Improvement Advisor (LIA) January 2010 to support the Council in undertaking diagnostic work on empowerment and participation in Thurrock and identify what interventions are required to improve empowerment and participation across a range of services .
- 1.1.2 The commission sought to respond to National Indicator 4 (NI4) which measures the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area, and is the indicator of empowerment that is part of the new performance management framework for local public services. NI4 measured from recent survey data in 2008, showed that only 27% of the population in Thurrock agreed that they can influence decisions that affect their local area.
- 1.1.3 In order to identify areas for possible intervention it was proposed that the IDeA Network of Empowering Authorities (NEA) Framework Diagnostic Tool would be used.

## 1.2 Structure of the Report

- 1.2.1 This report provides the evidence base to identify potential interventions which if implemented could improve empowerment and participation. Its structure follows the objectives agreed with Inspire East and Thurrock Council.

Chapter 2	Provides the context for community engagement
Chapter 3	Describes the methodology and how stakeholders have been engaged throughout the process
Chapter 4	Provides a descriptive report of the consultation findings and analysis into key themes
Chapter 5	Provides the conclusion to the report and makes recommendations for improving community engagement
Chapter 6	Outlines potential next steps

## 2.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONTEXT

### 2.1 National Context

2.1.1 The Government is committed to promoting community engagement through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). This was set out in the Local Government White Paper: Strong and Prosperous Communities, published in October 2006. It outlined the Government's commitment to empowering citizens and communities and to public sector reform. Its principal aims were to enable effective local services and to create better places, through new relationships and better governance, by:

- promoting more responsive services and empowered communities
- advocating a stronger role for local authorities as community leaders
- promoting stronger and more stable local authority leadership
- supporting councillors in their role as democratic champions
- fundamentally rebalancing the central-local relationship
- promoting community cohesion; and
- developing the economic prosperity of our towns, cities and regions

2.1.2 A key expectation of Government is that Local Authorities and their partners within LSPs will develop strategies empowering citizens to help them acquire the confidence, skills and opportunity to control and influence their local services. The White Paper: Communities in Control: real people, real power, published in 2008 encouraged local authorities to generate more vibrant local democracy and give more control to local communities over decisions and services.

2.1.3 Many Councils and their LSP partners have looked to engage with service users and empowering communities, with less top down regulation, communities, councillors and partners working together to improve well being, guided by local priorities and a shared sense of what matters locally.

2.1.4 There are a wide range of engagement practices undertaken by different partners and services and organised by neighbourhood or theme. Where good practice exists there is recognition by LSPs and their partners for the need to streamline and co-ordinate community engagement activity and a number of areas are working on joint approaches.

## 2.2 Thurrock Context

- 2.2.1 The recent Thurrock Area Assessment and Annual Audit letter made a number of observations which provide an overview of community engagement within Thurrock. The most significant comment was that engagement at community level is not strong, the Annual Audit Letter (2009) stated “Thurrock is below average for people feeling that people from different backgrounds get on well or the Council treats them fairly and there is a significant proportion of people who feel that they cannot affect decision making”. There have been genuine approaches to reach out, such as through the establishment of community fora, but these are not all representative of the communities they serve and have not been fully effective. A lack of systematic analysis of minority needs and ineffective local engagement has limited the Council's progress.
- 2.2.2 Community relations between people from different backgrounds in some neighbourhoods continue to be weak and community tensions, although relatively localised, can quickly occur. LSP partners have been committed to working together to address low levels of cohesion and engagement. This has been evidenced by the LSP agreeing “Communities Together” strategy (2009), the aim of which is to bring people together on issues common to them rather than focusing on differences. Despite this commitment to working together the partners do not consider that it is having the desired impact on communities in Thurrock.
- 2.2.3 A number of other developments have taken place which will provide support to community engagement. Of note are the new Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (NRS)(currently in draft) the Thurrock Economic Development Strategy (published by Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation in 2007) both strategies seek to compliment the Sustainable Community Strategy developed by the LSP’.
- 2.2.4 The goal of the NRS is that within ten years no resident of Thurrock will be seriously disadvantaged by where they live and the gap between the target neighbourhoods and the rest of the borough will be narrowed. To achieve this the following priorities have been identified:
- **Prosperity** – To improve the quality of life in the targeted neighbourhoods by having lower worklessness; less crime; better health; higher attainment; improved physical environment; and easier access to services
  - **People** – To involve and empower people in their cohesive? community

- **Place** – To develop a better understanding of the key issues and priorities affecting communities

2.2.5 The NRS identifies four neighbourhood renewal areas which are: -

- Grays Riverside & Central
- Chadwell & Tilbury
- South Ockendon
- Purfleet

2.2.6 These, however, are different from those focused on housing, education and community safety by other service providers within Thurrock. The strategy is yet to receive wide sign up and a consultation exercise will shortly take place.

2.2.7 The Economic Development Strategy has the following vision, “To secure the comprehensive and sustainable housing and economic growth of Thurrock, through the structured development and regeneration of the Borough for the benefit of new and existing communities and for visitors to the area”. The strategy identified five economic hubs which are

- Purfleet
- Grays
- Lakeside & West Thurrock
- Tilbury
- London Gateway Port at Shell Haven

2.2.8 The development of the hubs will provide a new mix of housing which will allow new and existing residents to stay and grow. The production of five Masterplans has been seen as a key mechanism for achieving the Community Strategy vision. The ambition for employment and investment growth is that it is long term sustainable and generates direct benefit to local communities

2.2.9 The other significant development is the development of a comprehensive engagement strategy. The strategy has been developed with the overarching aim of supporting an environment in Thurrock where people feel informed, involved and empowered to influence and make decisions that affect and improve their local area. The three key objectives are to: -

- Develop and support communities and local people to get involved

- Support Councillors to be leaders for their communities
- Establish a coordinated, efficient and value for money partnership approach to community engagement

2.2.10 The drivers for the strategy have come from recent survey data (Place Survey 2008) which show that: -

- Around three quarters of residents in Thurrock, 73% feel they have no influence over the decisions that affect their local area;
- Only 27% agree that they can influence decisions that affect their local area;
- More than a quarter, (28%) said they would like to be more involved in decisions that the Council makes that affect their local area;

2.2.11 The Engagement Strategy sets out the :

- Key principles for community engagement;
- Identifies the role of key stakeholders;
- Identifies what success should look like through monitoring a number of key performance indicators.

2.2.12 The strategy is currently in draft and provides a useful platform for gaining a shared understanding and approach to community engagement. Its early adoption by the Council and launch with its LSP partners and the widest possible audience would be beneficial.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

The consultation methodology for this project consisted of three phases.

### 3.1 Phase 1 - Preparation

Phase 1 objectives included –

- understanding how community engagement is structured and delivered within Thurrock;
- reviewing the NEA framework diagnostic tool;
- identifying key elements to be used from the tool;
- agreeing the approach to gain participation in respect stakeholder involvement in the assignment
- designing the fieldwork methodology – sample, consultation formats and consultation tools.

### 3.2 Phase 2 – Consultation

The objective for the fieldwork was to gather the views from key stakeholders. To achieve this whilst retaining a manageable sample, in consultation with Thurrock Council, parameters for the sample frame were agreed as: -

- Representatives from LSP partners;
- Representatives from Voluntary and Community Sector
- Members and Officers from Thurrock Council

A contact list of 17 potential respondents was provided by officers from Thurrock Council, and was supplemented by 5 additional referrals from respondents.

Twenty two completed interviews were achieved over a three week period in February and March; most were done as face to face interviews with only 2 completed by telephone. Details of the respondent sample are included in appendix.

On average interviews took longer than 30 minutes and in some cases continued for up to an hour. There was great willingness by respondents to participate in the consultation even when interviews needed to be rescheduled. No interviews were terminated prematurely.

### 3.3 Phase 3 - Reporting

This phase included feedback to Inspire East and Thurrock Council. In addition a workshop was held where a presentation of the results of the stakeholder consultation

was made to respondents who had been interviewed, also at the workshop a session was held to test out preliminary options for future community empowerment and participation. Feedback from these discussions has helped to shape priorities recommended.

## 4.0 CONSULTATION FINDINGS

Consultations were undertaken through semi-structured interviews. The questions were based upon the themes and pillars of the NEA Framework diagnostic tool. Whilst these gave a structure for conducting the interviews it was felt that they would be unwieldy and not get the best out of potential respondents. Respondents had been notified in a written consultation briefing that they had an option to focus the interview on a selection of questions rather than attempt to answer them all. This was particularly appropriate for those who were subject to tight time constraints or had limited experience of community empowerment and participation.

The consultation was designed to identify issues that might be affecting community engagement along with Thurrock Council and LSP partners' ability to encourage community cohesion. Inevitably this is likely to lead to a one-sided report in focusing on barriers to community engagement, but where respondents cited good practices these have been reproduced in the findings reported below.

### 4.1 Key Messages

This section sets out the main messages from the stakeholder consultations. Key messages are presented under themed headings some of which contain issues that indirectly relate to community empowerment and participation which may contribute to ideas for intervention.

In some cases, work is already in progress within Thurrock that will address some of the issues. For the most part, the challenges will be within the Thurrock Council and LSP partners areas of influence.

#### 4.1.1 What is Community Engagement Like?

There are many definitions and meanings in respect to community engagement. The terms engagement, empowerment, participation and consultation were often used interchangeably. For the purpose of this report community engagement is used to describe activity and community empowerment is the objective and intended outcome of those activities. Community cohesion is a term that has become an increasingly used concept and is closely linked to other concepts such as inclusion, exclusion, community, neighbourhood and often community engagement is used interchangeably with community cohesion, however community cohesion should be seen as one possible outcome of successful engagement. In simple terms community cohesion can be seen as groups from different backgrounds who live in a local area who not only coexist

together but from time to time will get together to promote and defend some common local interest and therefore fundamentally depends upon people and their values rather than systems and structures. Community engagement in Thurrock is currently ad hoc and is very localised with little borough wide engagement. The principal vehicle for community engagement has been a network of Community Forums. The Community Forums were established over a number of years and were seen as a mechanism to encourage a two-way conversation between local communities and agencies. Through the Forums it was expected that they would: -

- Provide a way for the public to raise their own views and concerns about Thurrock Council or local issues;
- Strengthen local community networks and develop constructive and effective partnerships between local people and the Council;
- Influence the allocation of funding for local initiatives, once they had been officially recognised. Examples include park improvements, community celebrations and traffic calming.

The general consensus was that very few forums were effective in engaging with their local community and that few councillors valued them in respect to discussing local issues.

It was acknowledged that whilst there had been some work done on producing a Community Engagement Strategy this had yet to be signed off. The result of this is that there is no agreed vision or principles for engagement and limited co-ordination / consistency as to how various service providers and agencies undertake consultation exercises.

There was evidence of some good practice, notably through the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the T-FEST event, however these appeared to be one-off events and did not sit within an overall co-ordinated programme of engagement. The CSP had developed some useful approaches in engaging with communities around incidents of hate crime and promoting tolerance.

Feedback was received suggesting that within Thurrock Council community engagement was not seen as a corporate function or core business and the officers responsible for promoting and co-ordinating engagement needed to be at a more senior level in order to influence others both within and beyond the council. There appear to be gaps and weaknesses in working across departments and agencies. Closer working relationships and communications would enable more efficient engagement through co-ordinated approaches to communications and is likely to address any difficulties arising from geography, interest groups e.g. black and minority ethnic, young people, learning disability, etc and service delivery.

The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) should play a vital role supporting the Council and LSP partners in engaging with communities. However concerns were expressed that there was not sufficient capacity within voluntary and community groups to undertake this effectively. Further feedback was also given that those VCS providing infrastructure support did not do so adequately and many organisations were insular and did not always see the 'bigger picture' and required organisational development themselves. The absence of a commissioning framework / strategy for the VCS meant that there was not enough transparency and openness on how organisations received funding and what outcomes were required.

#### 4.1.2 The Role of Political Leadership

There is considerable interest in the role of effective political leadership and in some cases this is seen as the key to better community engagement. The role of local councillors is critical in improving service performance, strengthening community leadership and encouraging participation in the democratic process. They play an essential role as local representatives. This role includes advocacy on behalf of individuals and communities they represent. They also have a responsibility to lead communities. They provide the ability to forge agreements among divergent communities on ways forward and taking responsibility for tough choices. Leadership is not just about doing things on behalf of communities. It also involves encouraging and enabling communities to organise, speak up and do things for themselves.

In determining how effective local councillors have been as community leaders the following aspects can be considered as key ingredients: -

- Knowledge of their ward
- Communication and interpersonal skills and ability to work with a range of other people
- Accessibility
- Holding difficult conversations
- Willingness to listen and give feedback

The number of councillors in Thurrock is 49 representing 20 wards. Thurrock has the following elected members: -

- 23 Conservatives
- 23 Labour
- 2 Independent
- 1 British National Party

Councillors were seen as a critical link in the chain for effective engagement yet a frequent topic of concern. These concerns related to: -

- local population's perceptions

- their accessibility and visibility
- their ability to communicate at ward level and with communities of interests
- their relationship with officers

The overall feedback with respect to how councillors were involved in community engagement was mixed.. The general perception of local councillors was negative from the majority of those external to the Council, whilst those from within the council generally felt that councillors were in touch with local views and issues.

A number of the current councillors had previously been very active within the network of community forums, but it was also noted that many councillors did not see them as useful mechanisms to engage with their local area or communities. A number of comments were made about councillors' lack of understanding of their role to provide community leadership particularly through bringing partners together, joining up services, engaging with local people and interest groups and creating a vision for their locality.

Feedback was also given in respect of the accessibility of councillors with many respondents citing that significant number of councillors did not hold surgeries. Also the work of local councillors in some localities has not always created the environment where other leadership roles can develop, for example there might be other champions of the area with whom people identify with.

### **4.1.3 Working with Communities, Neighbourhoods and Localities**

Thurrock is a unitary authority and is part of the London commuter belt and an area of regeneration within the Thames Gateway regeneration zone. Thurrock has number of main towns and 20 neighbourhoods. The main communities are Purfleet, Aveley, South Ockenden, Grays, Tilbury, Chadwell St Mary, Standford-le-Hope and Corrington. There are also established rural communities in Orsett and East Tilbury. Each neighbourhood has its own distinct character and history.

It was generally thought that borough wide engagement had been difficult as people did not identify with Thurrock as an area but more with the local communities and neighbourhoods within Thurrock.

The one notable event that was mentioned was Thurrock Festival (T-FEST), which brought together a wide range of events and concluded with a borough wide festival weekend centre around music and cultural entertainment. It was generally seen to promote social inclusion and celebrate diversity within Thurrock.

Successful engagement had, however, taken place in a number of the distinct neighbourhoods. For example, the Police had set up a number of Neighbourhood Action Panels. Whilst these tended to focus on community safety areas the police were

keen for them to have a wider agenda involving other service providers. However it was acknowledged that many of them could have had a wider attendance with greater representation from a cross section of the population, especially young people. With respect to young people specifically a number of individuals' feedback that in certain neighbourhoods the level of aspiration and responses to them by agencies is likely to have a negative impact on community engagement in the future.

Engagement was further hampered by the way service providers delivered their services. Many of the main service providers covering areas of housing, education, health, policing and regeneration were not geographically aligned. This meant that conversations with communities were not as constructive as it requires more joined up and service integration. For example the PCT has done a number of consultation exercises with patients to look at service re-design but this has been in isolation to the work of other agencies, particularly those which may be able to contribute to their agendas of addressing health inequalities and world class commissioning.

A point that was made time and time again was that having relevant information and data at the appropriate neighbourhood level would greatly enhance how agencies worked together to engage with communities. The development of neighbourhood profiles would enable more meaningful discussions and conversation with communities. It would also help to address the concern that many peoples perceptions of what was happening in their neighbourhood did not always match the reality.

Where people were active and attended events and meetings there was little recognition that the engagement had had a significant impact on decision making and improving the quality of life in Thurrock.

As stated earlier the Community Forums were more successful in their engagement in some neighbourhoods especially in setting priorities and spending allocated budgets, and therefore some of experiences should and could be shared with others areas who have such appetite.

The role of Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation (UDC) was mentioned on a number of occasions. It was generally felt that the various community engagement exercises that had been undertaken around Masterplanning could have been more imaginative. Invariably the consultation formats tended not to use a variety of approaches including taking plans to non-traditional venues. This had meant a level of mistrust of the UDC by a number of neighbourhoods and political leaders.

However through the UDC's Community Fund it had been able to establish links with local communities and support projects that matter to these communities. The fund had provided funding to support the work of local community groups and the voluntary sector.

#### 4.1.4 Third Sector and Community Engagement

The Third Sector is seen as a diverse range of organisations including voluntary and community organisations, charities, etc. Many of these organisations are concerned with linking disadvantaged and marginalised communities and neighbourhoods with various socio-economic opportunities. In working with local people and areas it is often linked to the effects of public policies. The Third sector is more than just encouraging volunteering but also can support national and local government in how it engages with communities and neighbourhoods.

Within Thurrock the third sector comprises of a number of organisations and structures that vary in their size and scope. In recent years a number of developments have taken place to support the sector notably **The Thurrock Compact** and the **Community Involvement Board**. The Compact was established in 2006 as an agreement between the public sector partners within the LSP and Thurrock Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) on behalf of the voluntary, community and faith groups operating within Thurrock, and represented commitment to improve joint working for the benefit of all communities in Thurrock.

The Community Involvement Board (CIB) is a partnership board made up of representatives from community and voluntary groups and aims to represent community views whilst influencing Thurrock's strategic agenda as developed by the LSP. The aims of CIB are: -

- To ensure that local communities and local people are given more say in the decisions that affect them
- To shape the consultation, participation and engagement processes with local people/communities across the LSP and to monitor/assess their impact
- To play a key role in ensuring that the community has been appropriately involved in developing the priorities and in ensuring that the vision is developed by the partnership

The CIB were responsible for developing principles of engagement and a toolkit to be used by organisations and groups that are part of the LSP in order to engage with people and communities in Thurrock. Whilst these principles exist it is clear that they are not embedded in community engagement within Thurrock as throughout the various interviews conducted the toolkit or principles were rarely mentioned. In addition certain members of the VCS felt that they had been disempowered by the CIB in respect to their relationship with the public sector, in that they were no longer able to have direct conversations with LSP partners

Most respondents saw the third sector as playing a valuable role in supporting engagement and empowerment. Despite the above developments the overall feedback was that the relationship between the Council and LSP with the third sector was poor. This was primarily due to a lack of transparency on how resources are allocated to the

various groups. This view was not accepted by those representing public sector who considered that many voluntary and community groups did not sufficiently articulate what they did and what their core business was and that this led to unnecessary competition for limited resources.

In addition, there was not sufficient infrastructure in place to support community engagement. This was down to the high expectation from LSP partners in terms of organisational capacity which required the VCS to represent communities of interest and place and to be a vehicle for consultation and encourage the drive for active citizenship.

The VCS felt that funding was primarily available for specific service delivery and not necessarily for supporting infrastructure and organisational development from LSP partners.

The VCS relationship with local councillors experienced some tension where conflicts could arise with those members who were involved in the governance of certain organisations. Also it was considered that some councillors did not always appreciate the professional role of the VCS and saw them primarily as a group of volunteers involved in local activities.

The issues identified suggest that in addition to the Compact it would be useful for either a Commissioning Framework or Third Sector Engagement Strategy to be developed by the Council and LSP partners in conjunction with key third sector organisations.

## 4.2 Summary

The interviews conducted, whilst not scientific and not covering all potential stakeholders, have provided a detailed perspective on community engagement in Thurrock. It has identified a number of the key issues that need to be addressed if community engagement in Thurrock is to be improved. The most significant issues arising from the exercise are that the Borough Council and its LSP partners need a more co-ordinated approach with a shared vision and understanding. In addition the role of local councillors and the third sector are central to effective community engagement as they often involve people who have direct experience and knowledge of issues and concerns affecting identified neighbourhoods and communities of interest.

Whilst there is a need for overarching community engagement principles this needs to be set in the context that Thurrock as local authority needs to ensure that engagement is bespoke in respect to the different neighbourhoods and communities of interest.

In light of the economic downturn and the challenges that this presents the public sector with regards to making efficiency savings community engagement will need to be

done smarter and have clear measurement outcomes. In addition the Total Place agenda which is an initiative that takes 'whole area' approach to public services leading to better services at less cost. It provides the incentive for local providers to work together in new ways for the benefit of service users and residents. However it will depend upon strong leadership, strong partnership based upon understanding the needs of residents and better engagement.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

The report has focussed on the issues affecting community engagement within Thurrock. The consultation sought to gain views from key stakeholders on what community engagement currently took place and its effectiveness; the role of political leaders; work within communities, neighbourhoods and localities and the third sector and community engagement. Stakeholders involved in the consultation were invited to attend a workshop on 30 March 2010 where the findings were shared and priorities for taking forward community engagement was discussed.

Through the consultations and workshop Thurrock Council and its LSP partners have stakeholder support in developing ideas for improving community engagement interventions.

It should be noted that work is already taking place by LSP partners to improve community engagement, and it is important that any future ideas should seek to build upon this.

The ambitions for community engagement vary from activities that encourage local communities to be involved in decision making and support neighbourhood management through to organising a series of one-off events which provide LSP partners with feedback on services and potentially enable communities to gain an increased sense of belonging.

In order to take forward the ideas and recommendations for community engagement in Thurrock the following challenges will need to be considered: -

- Addressing the gaps between perception and reality particularly in linking into opportunities
- Creating identity(ies) and focus for Thurrock
- Developing robust information flows
- Aligning service delivery and geographies
- Identifying political champions
- Capturing and learning the lessons from successful engagement
- Increasing the visibility and ensuring that community engagement has a higher priority for senior officers from LSP partners

## 5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations below seek to provide a platform for LSP partners to respond to the findings from the diagnostic and develop actions that could lead to improving community engagement in Thurrock.

### **Recommendation 1 – Develop and roll out neighbourhood and community profiles.**

Having relevant and updated profiles for identified neighbourhoods and communities of interest is an essential pre-requisite for all stakeholders to be provided with a clear and accepted understanding about the level of activity being delivered and undertaken. The information would refresh the following: -

- the physical condition and tenure of the housing stock
- the condition of the environment – public open space, highways, etc
- community and business attitudes
- the levels of economic activity and educational attainment
- health provision

### **Recommendation 2 – Sign off and launch the Community Engagement Strategy and revive the Toolkit for Community Engagement.**

It is important that a clear vision is agreed for community engagement alongside setting out the principles of that engagement so that participants agree and understand the difference between information sharing, consultation and participation. If these parameters are clear from the outset the possibilities for misunderstanding are significantly reduced. Protocols on how various service providers will work with each other around community engagement should be considered and introduced. It would also recognise that there are different levels of community engagement.

### **Recommendation 3 – Review the Community Forum network**

This would provide an opportunity to understand what has worked well and identify lessons learnt. It would also highlight the different approaches required for communities of interests and communities of place.

#### **Recommendation 4 – Pilot community engagement charters**

Within any community there will be people who are at different stages in their lives and personal development and therefore able and willing to play a greater or lesser active role in influencing decision making or taking control of local services. It is also important to try to reach the silent majority in an area who do not want control or even influence other than to ensure that services are delivered satisfactorily. It is important to recognise that the different types of community groups that exist will wish to contribute in different ways to community engagement. It is likely that the representative groups will be more interested in shaping and influencing services than thematic support or area based groups that may have a geographically restricted focus or other groups where involvement will be intense on issues of particular interest to them but non-existent on other matters.

#### **Recommendation 5 – Develop a Communication / Promotional Strategy for LSP Partners**

In order to raise the profile of community engagement it needs to be seen as part of a wider communication and promotional strategy. The strategy would seek to engage residents, service users, staff and stakeholders. It would have the added benefit of ensuring that staff working for LSP partners in conjunction with the Community Engagement Strategy understood the important role they play around engagement.

This strategy should be developed as a corporate document with ownership by LSP partners. It should include: -

- internal communication
- innovative and collaborative working
- identification of target audiences
- determining communication objectives
- selecting communication channels / medium
- deciding communication mix
- stating how communication results will be measured

The strategy would encourage capturing real life stories of people living and working in Thurrock and identify those features or aspects that could give a greater sense of belonging to Thurrock and the individual neighbourhoods and communities.

#### **Recommendation 6 – Identify projects for engagement and some quick wins**

The importance of physical projects and the creation of assets within a locality can play a significant role in engaging with residents. Opportunities are likely to exist through

Building Schools for the future and the UDC. It is also important to have early wins where resident influenced priorities are delivered in a short timescale. This can build the process of trust building.

### **Recommendation 7 – Develop capacity building and organisational development programme for Voluntary and Community organisations**

In order to have an effective community engagement strategy it is important that there is a vibrant and dynamic voluntary and community sector (VCS). Government has recognised that the VCS role and profile can be boosted through the following: -

- development of compacts
- the VCS representation on the LSP
- volunteering and active citizenship
- shaping and delivering public services

However for frontline VCS to thrive support needs to be provided around capacity building and infrastructure. In Thurrock key stakeholders have made judgments on their experience with VCS especially with respect to those organisations seen as providing infrastructure support. Due to challenges that many VCS groups face they may not always recognise their organisational development needs. One to one support with business planning and risk management may be a particular need as they try to meet expectations to enable consultation with communities on limited resources.

### **Recommendation 8 – Identify community engagement sponsors and champions**

Community engagement takes place at a variety of levels and local people engage with a range of service providers. Traditional community engagement has been seen as the sole responsibility of Community Development workers. Whilst having officers with specific responsibility for encouraging and promoting community engagement is good, in the current economic climate it is unlikely to be sustainable to have resources of a huge number of community development workers.

However there are mixture of professionals who interface between local communities and LSP partners. Thurrock also have a significant number of people who are employed by LSP partners and live in the borough and therefore have extensive knowledge of the communities and neighbourhoods in the area.

Consideration should be given to promote community engagement within the roles of the mix of professionals working in Thurrock. This would include health visitors, housing officers, waste managers, social workers, police community support officers, etc. These individuals could be seen as Community engagement sponsors who would act as an outreach arm of LSP partners, encouraging good connections with local communities along with being responsible for identifying community champions. The role would involve a menu of tasks that they could pick and choose from to compliment their main role/function. Examples of such tasks are detailed below: -

- Consultation
- Information sharing/giving
- Organising events
- Advice and Guidance
- Mentoring

## 6.0 NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 Once this document has been considered by the principal parties, namely Thurrock Council, LSP and Inspire East and the recommendations are agreed then following actions will be required: -
- Share findings of the diagnostic with a wider audience
  - Prepare action plan to implement recommendations
  - Establish a reference group to monitor action plan
- 6.2 The Reference Group would play a key role in driving forward the action plan and will ensure that key milestones are agreed and achieved, amongst all the key stakeholders and partners.

## 7.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Annual Audit Letter 2009

Area Assessment 2009

Community Involvement Board – Community Involvement Toolkit

Comprehensive Community Engagement Strategy (draft)

Communities Together Strategy

Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy Plan Draft

Shaping Thurrock

Sustainable Community Strategy 2010

Thurrock Community Empowerment Network

Thurrock Compact

Thurrock Economic Development Strategy

## Appendix

### Thurrock Council Connecting Communities – Targeted Funding Support NI 4 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

#### Introduction

Thurrock Council is part of the Targeted Support Programme managed by Inspire East (part of EEDA). The purpose of the Targeted Support Programme funded through the Community Development Foundation via CLG is to improve NI 4 (% of people who feel they can influence decisions in their local area). Underpinning this is the ethos of community empowerment and in the Eastern region; the focus is using the NEA Framework as a Diagnostic tool to find out the real issues in the area.

Inspire East have assigned a local improvement advisor (LIA – Donald McIntosh) who will work with the Council to identify what interventions are required to improve empowerment and participation across a range of services. The initial work will be to carry out a diagnostic which will help identify ideas for possible intervention

In order to identify ideas for possible intervention the LIA will use the Network of Empowering Authorities Framework diagnostic tool when conducting interviews. Interviews will be semi-structured using a series of questions to guide the discussion. As far as possible, we want to encourage respondents to inform us about issues around the empowerment and participation of the local population. You might be directly affected by these issues or you might have identified them as issues that affect others agencies and service providers. Also if you have any documents / reports that you think would assist in this work then it would be appreciated if a copy was made available.

#### Format of the interview

The interview will be conducted by the LIA and should last up to one hour. The interview will be guided by the Discussion Questions listed below. This is a fairly long list under a number of themes, so it might not be possible to tackle every question and in any event it may be that you are not in a position to answer all the questions listed. By sending you this list in advance of the interview, you have the option to choose where we focus the interview.

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STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

Discussion questions

**Mainstreaming: culture change in councils and partnerships**

- Who champions community empowerment and how?
- Can you demonstrate active buy-in by political and officer leaders and LSP partners?
- Does your LSP have a comprehensive community engagement strategy, which sets out a clear vision and definitions, and which explains how you will inform, consult, involve and empower communities?
- Do you have a work programme to take this forward?
- Do your Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA reflect priorities established by the community and community information?
- Is community empowerment activity contributing to delivering your LAA outcomes?
- How do you plan, coordinate and undertake community engagement activity as LSP partners and allocate resources to avoid duplication?
- Are any partner budgets / resources pooled or aligned?
- How are you sharing ideas and knowledge between partners?
- Can you evidence that the Compact informs your partnership working?
  
- What evidence can you provide that the culture of your LSP/organisation, your staff and your services is changing?
- How do you demonstrate that commissioning delivers community empowerment in a cohesive and inclusive way?
- How do your service plans reflect and capture community needs and priorities and how do you evidence the involvement of communities? What has the impact been on Planning, Children and Young People, and Adult Social Care services?
- How are you encouraging and managing innovation in your community involvement activities?
- How are staff skills, competencies and confidence at working with communities increasing, and how are you supporting and monitoring this?
- Do you have sustainably funded staff dedicated to community engagement and empowerment? What is their impact?

## **Working with communities, neighbourhoods and localities**

- Are your structures accountable to communities? How do you know if communities value them? What outcomes do they deliver?
- How do you know if trust in the council and partner agencies is increasing?
- How do you know if people feel they have an increasing sense of influence over local decisions?
- How well are partners participating in your neighbourhood or locality arrangements?
- How have successful and unsuccessful initiatives informed your practice?
- What has happened and what has changed as a result of community involvement? Do communities know this and do you credit their input?
- In what ways are communities setting the agenda for their involvement?
- Can you demonstrate increased community action, and a greater sense of community?
- Can you demonstrate that citizens have access to information and know how to challenge, complain to and influence the council and partners?
- How are you helping to build the capacity of your communities to engage? How is this work funded?
- In what ways are Third Sector organisations contributing to empowering communities?
- Are partners paying due regard to the financial and other resource implications for the Third Sector?
- Is involvement and representation increasing?
- How have you used community information and issues arising from engagement activities to help identify priorities?
  - How is Member's knowledge of their ward used to inform community engagement?
- How do you communicate with your communities and how do you match communication methods to your targeted communities?
- How do you feed back to communities on the impact of their involvement and on whether outcomes have been delivered?
- How have neighbourhood/local services improved as a result of community involvement? What is the evidence and what are the outcomes?
- How do you ensure that communities of interest influence services?

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- If you have local area plans, how were priorities set? How are they being implemented and what role is the community playing? Are they informing council and partner plans?
- Have you developed any neighbourhood or parish charters? What impact have they has?
- Do you have evidence that communities are empowered to take more control over services, budgets, assets, and decisions?

### **The role of members in community empowerment**

- How effectively are elected members leading and supporting the delivery of the empowerment agenda? Do all Members get involved?
- How are Members scrutinising community engagement and empowerment strategies and delivery and what is the impact? Are they involving the community in scrutiny?
- How well are Members working together across local government tiers (where relevant).
- How well is Member's community empowerment role defined and understood, by Members themselves, by officers, by partners and by communities?
- Has there been any devolution of decisions or budgets to localities, and if so, what role do Members play? Do they facilitate communities to influence decisions? Is there accountability to communities?
- How are the council and Members actively promoting democracy?
- Does the profile of your Members reflect that of your local population?
- What is the profile and relationship of Members with community organisations? Do they value each other?
- Has the council balanced the workload of Members, recognising the importance of their role as community champions?

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- What support and resources do Members have for their role as community leaders?
- How do councillors feed community issues back to the council and strategic partners and how are these issues addressed?
- What Member development programmes do you have specifically targeted to skills in community empowerment and what is the take-up?
- Do individual Members have skills development plans which include community empowerment?
- How do Members share community engagement skills with colleagues?

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## **Building the evidence and business case for community empowerment**

- Have all stakeholders agreed expected outcomes from Community Empowerment?
- Who sees the evidence and what do they do with it?
- What protocols do you have in place for collecting and sharing information between partners, and with communities?
- Can you evidence impact on partnership outcomes as a result of community engagement activity?
- Are third sector organisations involved in giving feedback to provide evaluation of the quality of engagement?
- How do you feed back to communities with evidence of the impact of their involvement?
- Can you demonstrate cost?
- Can you demonstrate benefit?
- Can you demonstrate application of learning?
- Can you evidence improved resident satisfaction because of community involvement?
- How do you use data/indicators and information to show impact and to evaluate and improve practice?
- Does everyone know what evidence to collect and are they collecting it consistently?

## INSPIRE EAST TARGETED SUPPORT

### LIST OF RESPONDENTS

Councillor Hague	Leader Thurrock Council
Councillor Arnold	Deputy Leader Thurrock Council
Councillor Redsell	Cabinet Member Thurrock Council
Councillor Kent	Labour Group Leader Thurrock Council
Graeme Loveland	Thurrock Local Enterprise Agency
Lorna Payne	Director of Community Well Being <a href="#">Thurrock Council</a>
Ruth Juett	Manager Thurrock Racial Unity Support Taskgroup
Mark Ansell	Head of Policy South West Essex Primary Care Trust
Naya Naqvi	Chief Executive Thurrock Voluntary Sector Council
Neville Baldwin	Chairperson Thurrock Voluntary Sector Council
Tasnim Shawkat	Head of Legal Services Thurrock Borough Council
Terry Piccolo	Thurrock Community Empowerment Network
Jacqui Payne	NGAGE
Tim Rignall	Regeneration Inspection Manager Thurrock Council
Claire Lambert	Sustainable Development Manager Thurrock Council
Michelle Cunningham	Partnership Manager Thurrock Community Safety Partnership
Richard Waterhouse	Interim Director for Change and Improvement Thurrock Council
Chris Stephenson	Corporate Performance Improvement Manager Thurrock Council
Rachel Wood	Essex Police
Debbie Fordham	Essex Police
Graham Carey	Chairperson Community Involvement Board
Lucy Magill	Head of Public Protection Thurrock Council
Lois Bowser	Ass Director of Delivery Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation
Natalie Warren	Community Development Manager

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	Thurrock Council
Leroy Richards	<a href="#">Corporate Improvement &amp; Performance Team Thurrock Council</a>

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