

## **Community Engagement Task & Finish Group Recommendations**

### 1. Introduction

The Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee agreed to set up a task and finish group to develop a strategic approach to community engagement, with a view to making recommendations to Cabinet. A key objective of the group is to explore how elected members can be supported to be leaders in their communities, by examining best practice models and inviting evidence from expert witnesses including other local authorities. The group had cross-party representation and included; Cllrs S Gray (Chair), P Anderson, J Halden, and S Liddiard.

### 2. **Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Strategic approach to engagement  
Agree a strategic approach to community engagement by signing off the community engagement strategy.
2. Area based working  
Agree area based working along multiple ward boundaries taking into account natural communities. Officers will be asked to develop proposals to deliver area based working involving real delegation of budgets and decision making authority, which will mean the borough being divided into around half a dozen geographical areas.
3. Devolved Budgets to Councillors  
Devolve budgets to individual councillors or wards to enable local issues to be resolved. Officers to also develop governance guidelines for spend and responsibilities.
4. Participatory Budgeting (PB)  
Develop proposals to deliver PB as a way of involving more residents in the decision making process. Demonstrate the benefits by supporting a pilot in an 'early adopter' area for AB working.
5. Commissioning Services  
Ask officers to explore options for commissioning and decommissioning services, particularly around health and GP service provision; and unemployment and housing benefits; To explore the re-commissioning of local services where local residents can deliver themselves, such as grass cutting.
6. Changing Officer Attitude - Cultural Change  
Directors Board be tasked with leading the programme to create a 'can do culture' amongst staff in responding to citizens and members' enquiries.

7. Changing Member Attitude to engagement - Cultural Change  
Party group leaders be tasked to with leading a programme of change within their respective groups to engage with residents. For example, arrange regular ward surgeries.
8. Online engagement  
Officers be tasked to work with members to further develop appropriate online services to engage residents at local level.
9. Themed Groups  
Officers to identify themed groups which may be difficult to engage or have additional specific consultation needs. An approach based on facilitation and outreach to be developed, which will encourage and equip these groups to participate fully in mainstream structures.
10. Making public bodies more accountable locally  
Officers to be tasked with identifying public bodies and services that impact on Thurrock residents, which should be held to account. For example, the NHS at Basildon hospital which has a huge impact on Thurrock residents.
11. Governance arrangements  
The head of legal be tasked with ensuring that appropriate governance arrangement are in place to ensure that budgets and power can be properly devolved to the local level with suitable responsibility and accountability. Whilst also ensuring that new arrangements for area based working are properly constituted.
12. Neighbourhood profiles  
Officers to work with members of the task and finish group, to develop neighbourhood profiles for all wards that will provide elected members with detailed information about their wards.

End