

4 November 2011		ITEM 4
Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT		
Report of: Lorna Payne, Corporate Director of Community Well-Being		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Accountable Head of Service: Tasnim Shawkat, Head of Legal Services and Corporate Governance		
Accountable Director: Lorna Payne, Corporate Director of Community Well-Being		
This report is Public		
Purpose of Report: To advise the committee of the results of the community engagement review.		

Comment [sj]: Please leave this for completion by Democratic Services

Comment [sj]: PLEASE CLICK THIS BOX ONCE and enter the name of the Committee you are reporting to (in font 16, not capitals)

Comment [sj]: PLEASE CLICK THIS BOX ONCE and enter the title of your report (in font 16 and in capitals) – a Cabinet Report should be consistent with the wording on the Forward Plan – see Guidelines 2.3

Comment [sj]: Please enter details of any Wards and Communities affected by the report. If this section is not applicable, you should enter “none”.

Comment [sj]: Yes/No/Not Applicable – a ‘Key Decision’ is generally one affecting more than 2 wards or above £50,000 expenditure – see Guideline 2.7

Comment [sj]: Please state the Head of Service’s name and job title

Comment [sj]: Please state Director’s name and job title

Comment [sj]: State whether your report is Public or Exempt. If Exempt (i.e. not to be given to the public or discussed in

Comment [sj]: Briefly set out the purpose of your report

Comment [sj]: Please provide a summary of the key points in your report

Comment [sj]: The recommendations should be set out in bold in the form of the decision that the decision-

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up a cross-party Task and Finish group to review the community engagement strategy and propose recommendations for Cabinet that would support Councillors to be leaders in their communities.

The Task and Finish group met several times over the summer to listen to expert witnesses and receive evidence from other authorities.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 Agree the recommendations of the Community Engagement Task and Finish Group as set out in appendix A**
- 1.2 Endorse the approach to community engagement as set out in the draft Community Engagement Strategy in appendix B**
- 1.3 Submit the recommendations and draft Community Engagement Strategy to Cabinet on 8 December 2010.**

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 2.1 The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny appointed a Task and Finish Group on Community Engagement. Task and Finish Group comprised four Members, Cllr Anderson, Cllr Gray, Cllr Halden and Cllr Liddiard. The Task and Finish Group met four times over the summer months to review community engagement in Thurrock with a view to developing a strategic approach to engagement and propose a number of recommendations that would support Councillors to be leaders in their communities. The minutes of the meetings are available from Democratic services.
- 2.2 The recommendations of the Task and Finish Group are set out in Appendix A, attached to this report. Also attached to this report is Appendix B, the draft Community Engagement Strategy, which has been drafted taking into account the recommendations in Appendix A and previous consultation with partner organisations.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES:

The issues and options, which were discussed by the Community Engagement Task and Finish Group, and the views expressed by the Group are set out below.

- 3.1 Community Leadership role
The Council should look to their communities for direction and priorities for the future. There is a real opportunity to re-position the relationship with community organisations and to become truly effective community leaders. The leadership role includes understanding how money is spent in a particular ward, and being able to influence not only council spend, but also being aware of the aggregate spend from other public agencies such as Health, Department of Works and Pensions (DWP). Elected members need to demonstrate clear leadership by engaging with citizens on the local issues that matter to them most, and have the biggest impact on their lives.
- 3.2 Commissioning and decommissioning services
Some Councils are moving towards developing their commissioning role. For example Central Bedfordshire are looking to offer GP surgeries, commissioning health care, and therefore leading to a combined back office function for payroll and other HR functions.

With diminishing resources the Council should consider new ways of delivering services to the jobless. The approach to the jobless could combine centralised services currently delivered by DWP with the council's revenues and benefits service, through a more localised benefits service. The customers who claim unemployment benefit and housing benefit are very often the same people. The Council should enable other organisations to undertake services and even commission expert proficient third sector providers to take on some of its services.

Comment [s]: You should briefly explain why the report is on the agenda - See para. 5.3 and 5.4 of the report writing guidelines.

Comment [s]: Other headings may be appropriate. The report should outline the reasoning that leads to its recommendations and **must** include:

1. a brief summary of options considered;
2. consultation outcomes
3. a risk assessment.
4. Whether the responsible cabinet members have been consulted/contributed to the report (NB professional and political advice must be clearly distinguished)

- See para.5.5 of the report writing guidelines.

3.3 Localised approach to Service Delivery

As resources become more scarce, it will be increasingly important to ensure that services are targeted to where they are needed most and a localised approach to the provision of services will need to be adopted. The priorities within individual wards are different. The Council can deliver greater added value to citizens by listening to them more and involving them in working with us to find solutions.

3.4 'Do it yourself' services

The role of leaders should also be about moving people away from mind sets that are about what the Council can do for them to thinking about what they can do individually and collectively to support their own communities. Examples might include removing snow from minor roads in the winter or running local libraries.

3.5 Cultural shift – 'can do attitude'

There is concern about the lack of response from officers to enquiries or concerns from elected members. There was a general feeling that the organisation does not have a culture of responding to citizens or representatives of citizens. Members quite often do not know who to contact to get things done, and when they do contact an officer the response is often negative with a list of reasons why they can't do things. It was acknowledged that officer attitudes need to change to a more 'can do culture', and that there would inevitably be some people in the Council and partner organisations who would create barriers to some of the proposed changes. Area based working will also provide an opportunity for officers and heads of service to become more involved in the community by supporting members in designated areas.

3.6 Localised budgets

Councillors should be involved in making decisions on the delivery of services in their wards to enable a more localised approach. In order for this to happen, small budgets would need to be devolved either to individual members or to ward level, to enable each ward councillor to use to support local communities in resolving local issues or carrying out some local services for themselves.

3.7 Ward information

Councillors should be supported by officers to carry out their community leadership role. In order for members to take the lead, they need to understand and be able to respond to key community issues in their wards. They need to know what is going on in their wards; not taken by surprise when attending ward meetings or whilst having discussions with partners and constituents about their wards. This will mean providing neighbourhood profiles about each ward and regular briefings about key issues.

3.8 Community Forums

There are currently no formal mechanisms for area based working in Thurrock. Community forums are the main network used to engage at the local level, however, the structure and set up of Community forums does not

allow democratically elected members to lead on community engagement activity and resolve local issues at the ward level. It is fair to say that community forums work well in some areas and perhaps not so well in others. Community forums are non-political voluntary groups made up of representatives from the local community including residents, schools, local businesses, health representatives, and voluntary, community and faith representatives. Very few Councillors attend their local forum.

Comment [j]: This should include any consultation with Ward Members and Shadow Portfolio Holders, as well as any public or statutory consultation

3.9 Area based working

Developing area structures is a key part of localism and would be necessary in order to effectively engage the community. It can be transparent and also adds greater democratic legitimacy and is more likely to engage communities. Various models have been tried ranging from area assemblies to community councils. Natural communities are difficult due to divergent views about where boundaries should lie, whereas boundaries along a cluster of wards will be easier to manage; more effective at engaging elected members (including involving opposition members in the decision making process); and more likely to promote effective working with other agencies (NHS, police, fire, DWP, etc).

It should be acknowledged that some segments of the community, for example young people might not identify with a local area and may prefer to use other methods such as social media. Similarly, we should consider how to engage and support people that may need support such as families with special needs. The committee was against creating separate engagement routes for these segments as this adds complexity and can damage community cohesion, but did recognise the need to consult directly on issues of particular interest and to carry out outreach or facilitation work to help these groups integrate into the mainstream.

3.10 Devolved power and Budgets

The Council would need to decide the amount of power it was prepared to devolve to communities and the level of budgets. It was felt that the level of devolution could be organic or developed as we went along. The pace may be different in different parts of the borough as capacity is developed, and we should encourage 'early adopters' to create models for other areas to follow.

3.11 Participatory Budgeting (PB)

PB is recognised as an effective means of involving citizens in the decision making process.

4. **CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 4.1 The review of community engagement has had cross party involvement, and listened to expert witnesses and evidence from other local authorities and the voluntary community sector.

4.2 Partner organisations were also consulted during 2009/10 and those views are incorporated in the draft Community Engagement Strategy.

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

5.1 This report supports the Council’s fifth priority which is to build pride, respect and responsibility in Thurrock’s communities and its residents. The recommendations suggested in this report will support Councillors to be leaders in their communities.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Leroy Richards**
 Telephone and email: **01375 652175**
lerichards@thurrock.gov.uk

There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report. The cost of implementing this plan will be funded from existing resources. Any resource implications will only be identified once the recommendations are agreed by Cabinet.

6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Leroy Richards**
 Telephone and email: **01375 652175**
lerichards@thurrock.gov.uk

The Council has a duty to involve their local community. The recommendations in this report support the discharge of Councils legal obligations. The legal implications arising from this report are positive.

6.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Leroy Richards**
 Telephone and email: **01375 652175**
lerichards@thurrock.gov.uk

The evidence provided in this report suggests that the Council does not have adequate structures in place to engage with marginalised communities. This approach to improve community engagement will enable the Council to develop a draft community engagement strategy that will improve opportunities for engagement for all communities in Thurrock.

Comment [a]: Please refer to Section 5.7 of the Report Writing Guidelines

Comment [sj]: This section should always be completed – if they are dealt with fully in another part of the report, they also need a brief cross reference here. The names and job titles of the officers providing the implications should be provided in full – see Guideline 6.1 and please note Democratic Services Deadlines and ensure that officers providing implications are given 5 clear working days to work on the report. Authors can write implications but they must be signed off by the appropriate officers

Comment [sj]: See Guideline 6.2

Comment [sj]: See Guideline 6.3

Comment [sj]: See Guideline 6.4

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 It is important that elected members are involved in shaping the Council's approach to community engagement as they have a legitimate political mandate to represent citizens and communities at ward level. This report and the draft community engagement strategy articulates a strategic approach to engagement whereby all Councillors will be supported to be leaders in their community.

Comment [sj]: This should inform the recommendations in the report

Comment [sj]: See Guideline 8. If any Papers are to be placed in the Members room that relate to this report, you should also list them here

Comment [sj]: List the Appendices referred to in the Report

Comment [sj]: Insert the full contact details of the author of the report

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:

- Minutes from the task and finish group meetings
- Draft community engagement strategy

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Recommendations from the task and finish group
- Draft community engagement strategy

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