

**Thurrock
Community Engagement Strategy**

2011 – 20xx

Revision History

This document will be subject to amendments during the review period and will be updated during this time using formal change control procedures.

Version	Date	Reasons/Summary of Changes	Author
Draft v.1	22/09/10	Creation / complete revision <ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Coalition Government Priorities• Input of the OSC Task Group• Retaining input from partners	Tasnim Shawkat
Draft v2	26/10/10	Second draft with <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Input from the OSC Task Group• Consultation with the Chief Executive	Tasnim Shawkat Lorna Payne

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INTRODUCTION

This strategy is designed to change the way Thurrock Council and its partners engage with our communities to shape Thurrock's vision. Our vision is to be the dynamic heart of the Thames Gateway, a place of ambition, enterprise and opportunity, where communities and businesses flourish. To achieve this vision, we have identified five priorities:

- To improve the education and skills of local people
- To encourage and promote job creation and economic prosperity
- To ensure a safe, clean and green environment
- To provide efficient, customer-focussed and accessible public services
- To build pride, respect and responsibility in Thurrock communities and its residents

We recognise that Thurrock Council and its partners can only achieve this vision and deliver these priorities together. We need to work with our communities to realise the vision and in doing so we will engender greater pride in Thurrock as a place.

This strategy is about changing people's lives, lifting people's aspirations and horizons and empowering our communities. This strategy is also about localism and creating a smaller government and a big society.

There is a risk that this strategy could be seen as either a "to do" list for council officers and partners or a "wish list" for elected councillors. However, it is neither. Rather this strategy represents an opportunity to articulate how, in Thurrock, we are working with our communities to deliver or commission services.

This strategy will develop further as we get better at listening and responding to our communities and as we hand over more control to our communities and increase their independence from public services. This strategy is about finding new ways of

empowering communities to take decisions and actions to help themselves. Our strategy for community engagement could be seen to signal our ambitions and commitment to this.

THE SHAPE OF THURROCK

Thurrock is emerging as a dynamic community with high ambitions. Thurrock has a strong local identity. Located close to London with good housing, transport links and iconic landmarks, it attracts new people – people want Thurrock to be their home. Services in Thurrock are working more closely together to support residents to realise their ambitions.

AIMS OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The aims of this strategy are to ensure that elected councillors and staff in Thurrock council and its partners work together to:

- Ensure that all available resources in the local area are used for the benefit of the community
- Increase involvement in communities and enable people to be more independent of public services
- Enable people to better shape their communities for the future

We will achieve these aims by devolving power to the local community and at the same time by strengthening local democracy and the role of elected councillors within a new governance structure.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The following key objectives identify how this strategy will contribute to the Thurrock vision and how we will improve community engagement in Thurrock.

1. **Develop and support communities and local people to get involved.** This means that we will provide practical opportunities for people to influence decisions about services in their area.

Local arrangements will be developed which engage our communities and empower them to improve their quality of life. We will work with voluntary community and faith sector organisations and develop learning programmes for people to build knowledge of decision-making processes, which will enable them to participate in civic activities and take more control of local services.

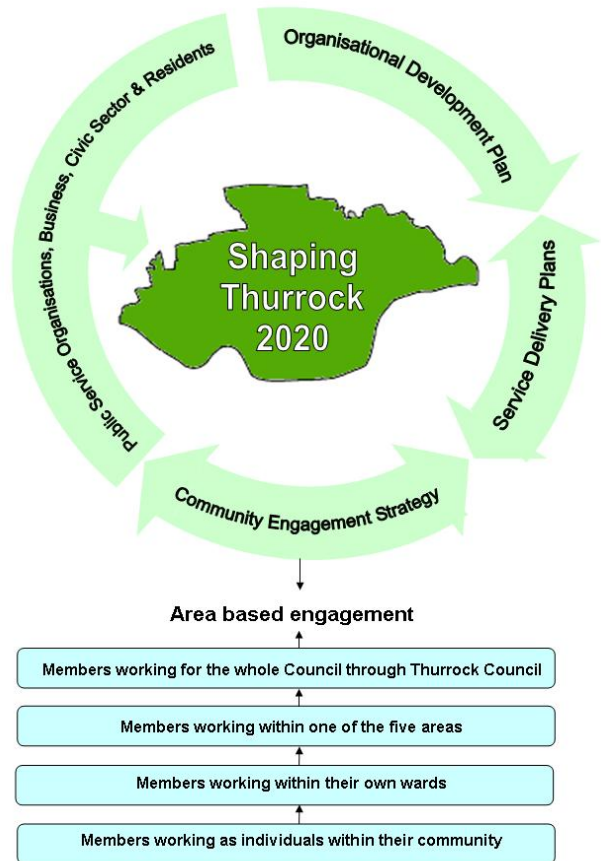
2. **Support Councillors to be leaders for their communities.** This means that we will ensure that our Councillors have up to date information about their locality; are made aware of forthcoming issues in their area; have the skills they need to engage with and capture the views of constituents; and have appropriate officer support for area based engagement activities.
3. **Establish a coordinated, efficient and value for money partnership approach to community engagement.** This means we will identify and work with voluntary community and faith sector organisations that are already working and engaging with our communities. We will work to join up our efforts, share resources and provide value for money. This will help to avoid duplication and achieve a more effective use of resources.

The strategy places local people and Councillors at the heart of community engagement. We feel that these objectives will help us to embed a culture of engagement and empowerment across the Council and its partners.

DELIVERING OUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Area based engagement

The diagram below shows how we envisage working with our community through area based governance structures.



The over-arching strategy that drives the partnership vision for Thurrock and the priorities is the Shaping Thurrock Sustainable Community Strategy 2020. The sustainable community strategy has been informed by 108 partner organisations and community groups including health, the police, community and voluntary sectors, local businesses and the council.

Around that strategy the Council and each of its partner organisations will have firstly an organisational development plan, secondly their service delivery plan and thirdly this community engagement strategy.

We envisage a greater role for elected members with greater support working individually, within ward level with better intelligence and information about their communities. We will also create a governance structure with a cluster of wards around natural communities supported by Heads of Services each with

an area, so that elected members can be better supported locally. So there will be xx areas, the boundaries of which will be drawn along ward lines including several wards as follows:

[Insert the five areas following consultation with Members]

These areas are drawn along ward boundaries so that they can be administered more easily but the boundaries also take into account natural communities that we are aware of.

In addition, the Community Forums, remain invaluable as a mechanism for community engagement and we want to encourage more Forums, associations, community groups, action groups.

Engagement on cross cutting issues

We recognise that area based engagement will be unlikely to involve all the communities we serve and especially not hard to hear groups. Therefore, in addition to the xx areas we will engage with our communities on cross cutting themes across the whole of the borough through the Local Strategic Partnership themes, which are as follows:

- Thurrock Safety Partnership
- Children's Trust
- Healthier Communities Partnership Board/Health and Wellbeing Board
- Community Involvement
- Sustainable Communities and Regeneration

Councillors need to be supported by officers to carry out our community leadership role both in their areas and on cross cutting issues across the borough. We need to understand and take the lead on responding to key community issues in our wards, area level and across the whole borough. Councillors need to know what is going on locally in order to engage with their communities locally.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Recently, with the development of the local strategic partnership, other partnership bodies, local area agreements and the increasing role of the community and voluntary sectors, locally elected councillors have felt what is described as a "democratic deficit". We accept that only Members of Parliament and elected councillors have the democratic mandate to lead our communities. Therefore elected members should be at the heart of any community engagement activity and in deciding on the priorities of our communities locally.

We have reducing resources. Services will need to be better targeted to meet clearly identified needs. Public services will shrink and communities need to become more self-reliant, do more for themselves and their neighbours. Only elected members will be able to lead a dialogue with our residents about what they can expect from the public services, to identify and clearly communicate what we will do and, perhaps more importantly, what we will or others will do differently or what we will no longer be able to do.

As resources become scarcer it will be more 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. Even during a time when we will be reducing some services, we can still deliver greater added value to our residents by listening to them more and involving them in finding solutions for themselves.

As elected representatives of our communities, members will need to demonstrate clear leadership by engaging with our citizens on the local issues that matter to them most, and that have the biggest impact on their quality of life. Our communities need to understand that they may need to take on the responsibility to carry out a number of local services for themselves. We need to engage with our communities about the method of delivery

of services, but also whether some of those services should be delivered at all.

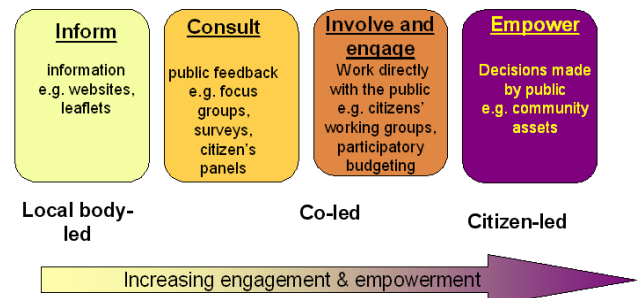
This community engagement strategy outlines a range of specific actions and initiatives. However, at its heart it is about how councillors work in our communities to enable them to be more engaged.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

What do we mean by community? A community is a group of people who hold something in common, such as where they live, an experience, interest or identity. Communities are not homogenous and people can belong to several different communities such as:

- Communities of place – people who share a geographical area or locality
- Communities of interest – people who share a particular interest or experience. For example, user groups, residents' association, tenants' groups or local businesses.
- Communities of identity – people who share a particular identity or characteristic. For example, the youth, older people, disabled people, black and minority ethnic groups or faith groups.

There are different levels of community engagement, which is often referred to as the 'spectrum of engagement'. They range from information giving at one end of the spectrum to collaboration and partnership working at the other end.



Source: Communities and Local Government 2009

It is recognised that Council staff will need support to engage effectively with communities. An organisational development programme will be developed to this end..

DELIVERING THE STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

The following is list of actions we will take in order to meet the objectives of this strategy. Each of these actions is further explained in an appendix to this strategy.

Objective 1 - Develop and Support communities and local people to get involved

We will:

1. Work with Thurrock Community Engagement Network (TCEN) to empower local people to have their say in decision making
2. Improve services through community led planning.
3. Work with the Active Citizens Entitlement Partnership (ACE) to develop a learning programme to help local people understand the decision making process
4. Provide practical opportunities for local people to influence decisions in their community, e.g. participatory budgeting and asset transfer
5. Improve community development
6. Pilot a learning programme for local people interested in civic participation – Take Part
7. Redress issues through effective handling of complaints
8. Support community involvement in the Sustainable Communities Act
9. Develop a joint E-Panel
10. Develop social networking
11. Support the development of a Third Sector Strategy
12. Allow the public to engage with the Council's decision making process through the new Constitution

Objective 2 - Support Councillors to be leaders for their communities.

We will:

1. Provide ward based area profiles
2. Establish and maintain a Thurrock Local Information System
3. Support community engagement at ward level
4. Develop proposals for area based working along multi ward boundaries taking into account natural communities
5. Support Councillors in overview and scrutiny to involve the community in their work
6. Support Councillors to respond to call for action and respond to petitions
7. Support member development of community engagement skills
8. Devolve budgets
9. Build a culture of engagement within Thurrock Council

Objective 3 - Establish a coordinated, efficient and value for money partnership approach to community engagement

We will:

1. Develop a consultation and engagement portal
2. Publish a diary of key community engagement events and activities that local people can get involved in
3. Establish a joint Citizens' panel if funding available
4. Review the community engagement toolkit including guidance on hard to reach
5. Co-ordinate a joint consultation and engagement plan
6. Coordinate representation at community events
7. Develop a shared community engagement database
8. Set up training events and workshops to improve skills and raise awareness
9. Share resources and expertise across the partnership to promote community engagement
10. Develop and progress new ways of working through existing networks such as the CIB.
11. Rationalise publicly funded engagement activities.

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT¹

These principles are at the centre of community engagement in Thurrock. By following these principles, all sections of Thurrock's diverse communities should feel engaged and involved, and that their contribution is making a difference to the quality of their lives.

There are three stages of community engagement and within those stages there are standards for community engagement activities.

- Planning and Preparation
- Engagement
- Evaluation and Feedback

Planning and Preparation

- Clear and Agreed Purposes - We will be clear about why there is a need to engage with our community
- Co-ordinated Approach - We will ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken to engaging with our community
- Timing - We will ensure that where possible, engagement with our community is timely in accordance with their requirements
- Methodology – 'Fit for Purpose' - Unless circumstances dictate that engagement should take place via specified methodology, methods taken to engage with our community should take account of different needs

¹ For a complete list of the Principles of Community Engagement, please visit www.shapingthurrock.org.uk/

- Justify Target Audience - We will justify and communicate why specific audiences have been targeted for engagement
- Involve - We will involve and seek advice from our community when seeking to engage with them

Engagement

- Transparency – being ‘Open and Honest’ - We will be open and honest when engaging with our community and ensure that the processes we use are transparent
- Inclusive - We will aim to be inclusive by enabling all groups within our community to participate and/or their views to be represented when engaging on issues relevant to them
- Inform and Communicate Effectively - We will ensure that our community are given information about why they are being engaged with and that the information supplied is tailored and accessible by all

Evaluation and Feedback

- Providing Feedback - We will provide our community with regular feedback when engaging with them
- Right to Challenge - Our community will be given the opportunity to comment, modify and/or complain about the engagement process and decisions made as a result of information received through the engagement process
- Measuring Success - We will evaluate the engagement process against agreed outcomes and make the results of the evaluation available to our community We will involve the community in assessing the success of the engagement
- Lessons Learned - We will ensure that any lessons learned from engagement carried out are used to develop better processes and are used to inform future engagement with our community
- Best Practice - We will recognise best practice and ensure that it is used to

inform future engagement with our community

RESOURCING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Area based working means looking at public resources spent in the area and matching the resources to local priorities. It is an opportunity to look at public service resources available in a particular area from the local residents’ point of view. Members should be able to identify priorities locally and seek to pool resources of the council and its partners or re-focus available resources on local priorities.

[It is also proposed that each area will be able to spend an additional £2 per head of population, which amounts to £300k across the Thurrock. However, this proposal will need to be reviewed in the light of the recent CSR announcement before this strategy is presented to Cabinet in December 2010]

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

In order for community engagement to be meaningful and consistent across the partnership, there must be clear ownership. The initial focus will be upon priorities that will support improvements to the quality of informing, consulting and involving activities. This will ensure that we are working in an effective way in advance of encouraging greater participation of local people.

Implementing the strategy will require the partnership to develop a community engagement action plan, which will include actions based on implementing the three key objectives and the proposals being developed by elected members.

The completed action plan will be monitored quarterly by the Thurrock Council Community Engagement Group. The Cabinet will review progress against this strategy and the Action Plan at six monthly intervals. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees may also provide their views as to the effectiveness of this strategy on an annual basis.

BENEFITS OF THIS STRATEGY

We want to realise the benefits of this community engagement strategy, which are to:

Improve the quality of services in

Thurrock: Involving people in designing and delivering services helps make them “right first time”, more responsive to the needs of the community and delivers better value for taxpayers’ money. This applies to all services.

Increase trust in public service

providers in Thurrock: Citizens need to know that public organisations are listening to them, and that their views will be taken into account when decisions are made which make a difference to their lives. This strategy will increase opportunities to influence decisions and enable people to take more control of their lives and services.

Take and justify difficult decisions:

Involving people in decisions about how local money is spent, through techniques such as participatory budgeting gives communities a better understanding of the difficult prioritisations and trade-offs that have to be made, and a stronger sense of “ownership” over the eventual results.

Promote good community relations: As individuals engage with their neighbours, with community groups and local decision makers on how to tackle shared concerns, there is more interaction between people

of different backgrounds and more emphasis on shared goals. Greater openness about decision-making and greater involvement in those decisions can also remove perceptions of injustice that can challenge cohesion.

Build resilient community networks:

Voluntary community and faith sector organisations and community groups bind communities together, giving people the means to make their voices heard and to make a positive difference.

This strategy is underpinned by the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and the priorities identified through consultation on the SCS. We will realise the benefits of this strategy through the Community Action Plan and the following plans and strategies:

- Communication Strategy
- Consultation Plan
- Thriving Third Sector Strategy
- Volunteering Strategy
- Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy
- Communities Together Strategy
- Thurrock Compact / NI 7 Action Plan

This strategy applies to all community engagement activities and processes used by the Council and partner agencies across all services, to inform, consult and involve local people and organisations within Thurrock.

Appendix to the Community Engagement Strategy

Set out below are the detailed actions we will take to deliver the objective of the Community Engagement Strategy.

Objective 1 - Develop and Support communities and local people to get involved

We will:

1. **Work with Thurrock Community Engagement Network (TCEN) to empower local people to have their say in decision making**
This involves building people's knowledge, skills and confidence and therefore a sense of empowerment. Allowing people to do more things for themselves and shape and choose the services they use on a personal basis; so they can influence the way those services are delivered
2. **Improve services through community led planning.**
This means facilitating community led planning particularly in rural areas and small village communities. This will provide communities with the means to tackle specific issues locally themselves.
3. **Work with the Active Citizens Entitlement Partnership (ACE) to develop a learning programme to help local people understand the decision making process**
4. **Provide practical opportunities for local people to influence decisions in their community, e.g. participatory budgeting and asset transfer**
Real opportunities to influence decision making such as participatory budgeting will empower citizens by enabling them to make funding decisions that affect their everyday lives. Asset transfer can lead to increased financial investment in an underused or derelict asset.
5. **Improve community development**
Disadvantaged groups will need additional support to help them to access services through the complex bureaucracy of public services and to tackle exclusion and poverty.
6. **Pilot a learning programme for local people interested in civic participation**
This will be led by the Take Part programme which will include a range of opportunities to empower local people to get involved, such as becoming school governors, e-petitions and providing information on how local government works.
7. **Redress issues through effective handling of complaints**
Complaints are managed through the corporate complaints system called RESPOND. The majority of complaint calls are directed via the call centre except for Adult and Children's Social Care. We will analyse trends in complaints with a view to change.
8. **Support community involvement in the Sustainable Communities Act**
This Act allows Councils to put forward proposals from local communities that require action from central government. Proposal scan be submitted for any activities that promote the sustainability of an area.
9. **Develop a joint E-Panel**
This will enable residents to register their interest in participating in certain consultations. It will be a more cost efficient method of consulting residents than other traditional methods such as Citizens panels.

10. Develop social networking

This will allow local residents to engage using alternative media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr.

11. Support the development of a Third Sector Strategy

This will include helping the sector to manage community assets, and funding the sector to reach out to marginalised groups.

12. Allow the public to engage with the Council's decision making process through the new Constitution

This will allow residents to become more involved in overview and scrutiny by introducing witness sessions and involving service users as key witnesses.

Objective 2 - Support Councillors to be leaders for their communities.

We will:

1. Provide ward based area profiles

This will allow Councillors to have access to key information about their wards and provide them with information about the key issues facing their ward; and inform neighbourhood action plans which can make a difference.

2. Establish and maintain a Thurrock Local Information System (LIS)

This will allow for easier and more efficient information sharing amongst partners and will create a more accurate and clearer picture of what is going on in the local area.

3. Support community engagement at ward level

Councillors play a key role as community leaders and democratic champions in their area. They will be supported by a designated head of service to represent the concerns and views of the community and to enhance the quality of life for local people.

4. Develop proposals for area based working along multi ward boundaries taking into account natural communities

Area based working is a key part of localism and delivering the Big Society agenda. It can be transparent and also adds democratic legitimacy and is more likely to engage communities. 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 and more likely to promote effective working with other agencies (NHS, police, fire, DWP, etc).

5. Support Councillors in overview and scrutiny to involve the community in their work

Thurrock Council is committed to a robust, collaborative model of scrutiny which contributes to both policy development and performance management. Overview and Scrutiny will provide councillors with further opportunities to engage with the community and involve more people to influence council decisions.

6. Support Councillors to respond to call for action and respond to petitions

Responding to call for action and petitions has not been repealed by the Coalition government. O&S will support members in CCFA which gives members powers to respond to issues of concern. Support will also be given to members in their new role to respond to petitions.

7. **Support member development of community engagement skills**
The Member development programme will include training to build on Councillors engagement skills, such as the basics of stakeholder management, stakeholder mapping, media relations and public engagement, chairing public meetings and consensus building.
8. **Devolve budgets to support local engagement activities**
It is proposed that each area will be allocated an additional £2 per head of population, which amounts to £300,000. This will allow small budgets to be devolved to Councillors or ward areas to spend on small projects agreed locally. Governance procedures and protocols will need to be set up to allow devolve budgets to happen.
9. **Build a culture of engagement within Thurrock Council**

Objective 3 - Establish a coordinated, efficient and value for money partnership approach to community engagement

We will:

1. **Develop a consultation and engagement portal**
This will help capture all planned community engagement activity across the Council and the partnership and collect it in to one place. The e-portal will also include a questionnaire survey tool to enable surveys to be managed and designed by service areas.
2. **Publish a diary of key community engagement events and activities that local people can get involved in**
The e-portal will allow the Council and partners to publish all their community engagement activities including consultations, events and public meetings.
3. **Establish a joint Citizens' panel if funding available**
Current guidance provided by Government recommends that local authorities set up
4. **Review the community engagement toolkit**
Review the engagement toolkit to ensure the guidance and tools are relevant and up to date. Improve information on advocacy, co-production and commissioning.
5. **Co-ordinate a joint consultation and engagement plan**
This will improve coordination of community engagement activity across the partnership
6. **Coordinate representation at community events**
Ensure that we have an up to date events calendar and the council's representation at events are not duplicated.
7. **Develop a shared community engagement database**
This involves bringing all key stakeholder databases to one central location.
8. **Set up training events and workshops to improve skills and raise awareness**
Provide training to improve skills and awareness across the Council and partners.
9. **Share resources and expertise across the partnership to promote community engagement**
Wherever possible pool resources across the council and partner organisations to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

10. Develop and progress new ways of working through existing networks such as the Community Involvement Board.

Ensure that we join up with Community and Voluntary Sector wherever possible.

DRAFT