

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 for 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. Adopt a strategic approach to engagement
Agree a strategic approach to community engagement by acknowledging the community engagement strategy which is in draft form.
2. Develop 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. Devolve 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. Develop 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. Explore Commissioning and Re-commissioning of 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. Change Officer Attitude - Cultural Change
Directors Board be tasked with leading a programme to create a 'can do culture' amongst staff in responding to citizens and members' enquiries.

7. Change Member Attitude to engagement - Cultural Change
Party group leaders be tasked with leading a programme of change within their respective groups to engage with residents. For example, arrange regular ward surgeries.
8. Explore Online engagement
Officers be tasked to work with members to further develop appropriate online services to engage residents at local level.
9. Develop 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. Explore how public bodies can be made 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. Develop robust Governance arrangements
The head of legal be tasked with ensuring that appropriate governance arrangements 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. Develop 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.

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