

<b>8 November 2011</b>		<b>ITEM</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>			
<b>COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</b>			
<b>Report of:</b> Community Engagement Task and Finish Group			
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All		<b>Key Decision:</b> Not applicable	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Steve Cox, Assistant Chief Executive,			
<b>This report is</b> Public			
<b>Purpose of Report:</b> To request that Corporate Overview and Scrutiny support the Community Engagement Task and Finish Group's intention to recommend the Community Engagement Strategy including Area Based Engagement to Cabinet.			

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up a cross party Task and Finish Group to develop a Community Engagement Strategy reflecting recommendations agreed at Cabinet January 2011. The recommendations agreed by Cabinet were also developed by a cross party Task and Finish Group 2010/11.

The key recommendation to Overview and Scrutiny is to support the intention of the Task and Finish group to recommend the Strategy to Cabinet. The key objectives of the strategy are to support local communities to be actively involved with their communities; support councillors to be effective community leaders, and support an effective approach to partnership working.

#### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1.1 That Overview and Scrutiny support the Task and Finish Group's intention to recommend the Community Engagement Strategy and Area Working to Cabinet (Appendix A).**

#### **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:**

- 2.1** In January 2011, Cabinet agreed a set of recommendations intended to support community engagement. These recommendations were prepared by a previous Task and Finish Group established by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2010/11. Cabinet resolved that officers further develop a community engagement strategy, based on all or some of the

recommendations agreed and that the recommendations be considered in the order of priority agreed at Cabinet.

- 2.2 Since that time, officers have further developed a Community Engagement Strategy. In August 2011 a new Community Engagement Task and Finish Group was established by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny to support the development of this strategy. This reflected the wish of Cabinet that Overview and Scrutiny were further involved in the development of the strategy, and in particular, that Overview and Scrutiny helped to further scope plans for area engagement including multi ward areas and the role of senior staff in supporting Councillors as Community Leaders in their area through Community Councils.

### **3. ISSUES AND/OR OPTIONS:**

- 3.1 The Task and Finish Group met on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2011, 16 September and 14 October 2011. Terms of Reference are attached at Appendix B.
- 3.2 Devolved Councillor Budgets – The Task and Finish group gave comments on the pilot scheme announced by Cabinet in June 2011. This scheme was launched in three wards September 2011.
- 3.3 A key element of the recommendations agreed by Cabinet, and the draft Community Engagement Strategy, is area based engagement. Thurrock intends to recognise a number of multiple ward areas to assist with future community engagement. There is a desire to ensure that areas reflect natural communities, as well as common characteristics.
- 3.4 The Task and Finish Group has considered a potential area map (included with the strategy at Appendix A). This has been shared this with all Councillors – once by hard copy and twice electronically with a request for comments. Officers offered to meet with Councillors in one area where some concerns were raised, but the broad consensus from Councillors who responded to this request was to give the current proposals a try as a starting point. The Task and Finish Group did not consider that the comments received warranted any immediate changes to the proposed map. The Group recognised however that the strategy and area working would change and evolve over time. The recommendations to Cabinet therefore include that Cabinet delegate responsibility for delivering the implementation plan to the Portfolio Holder, and that significant changes be discussed in advance to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The implementation plan is included at Appendix C.
- 3.5 The Community Engagement Strategy and Area Engagement will help to ensure that residents are able to influence the decisions that affect their lives, and that elected councillors are supported as effective community leaders. The strategy takes full account of the role of partners including the voluntary, community and faith sector, and the need to engage partners to achieve effective community engagement.

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

4.1 The Task and Finish Group has invited councillors and officers to comment on the draft strategy. The strategy has also been shared with key partners including the voluntary and community sector.

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

5.1 Strengthening Community Engagement in Thurrock will support each of the Council's priorities, in particular 'To Build Pride, respect and responsibility in Thurrock's communities and its residents'.

**6. IMPLICATIONS**

**6.1 Financial**

**Implications verified by: Meinir Hall**  
**Telephone and email: 01375 652147**  
**mhall@thurrock.gov.uk**

The Community Engagement implementation plan has identified some additional costs for which funding will have to be identified from within existing Council budgets.

**6.2 Legal**

**Implications verified by: David Lawson**  
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**dlawson@thurrock.gov.uk**

This is an area of the law where recent legislation has adopted an enabling approach. This enabling trend is set to continue, as confirmed by the Coalition Government's legislative agenda. Local Government Public Involvement with Health Act 2007 (2007 Act) Section 236 of the 2007 Act gives powers to authorities to formally delegate powers to individual councillors to carry out any function of the authority. Section 100EA of the Local Government Act 1972 requires decisions made by councillors (under these delegated powers) to be formally recorded. It will be noted that many councils already make provision for councillors to be able to deal with local issues – however s236 could make these systems more attractive - as s236 goes beyond the delegation of budgets and allows ward Councillors to make decisions which might previously not have been open to them and could be used to allow councillors to play a more active role in a wide range of policy areas

**6.3 Diversity and Equality**

**Implications verified by: Samson DeAlyn**  
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**sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk**

All Council decisions should reflect the level of engagement and consultation taken to reach that decision. Strengthening the way in which the Council engages will have a positive impact on social inclusion and it will improve opportunities for engagement for all communities, including marginalised groups. As a key delivery mechanism for community engagement Community Councils - as well as other engagement mechanisms - need to be supported to develop into fully representative and inclusive bodies that reflect the communities they serve. Ways of further enabling elected members to understand the needs of diverse groups and minority communities should also be considered. An Equality Impact Analysis (EqIA) will be conducted on the Community Engagement Strategy

6.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

There are no other implications.

**7. CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The committee are requested to comment on the draft Community Engagement Strategy and Area Engagement and support the intention of the Task and Finish Group to recommend the Strategy to Cabinet.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:**

- Cabinet report January 2011 'Community Engagement'.

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:**

- Appendix A - Community Engagement Strategy
- Appendix B - Terms of reference O+S Task and Finish Group
- Appendix C - CES Implementation Plan

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