| 26 June 2012 | ITEM 9 |
|---|---|
| **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny** | |
| **COMMUNITY COUNCILS AND AREA WORKING** | |
| **Report of:** Natalie Warren, Community Development Manager | |

| **Wards and communities affected:** | **Key Decision:** |
|---|---|
| Alll | Non-key |

| **Accountable Head of Service:** Steve Cox, Assistant Chief Executive Officer |
|---|
| **Accountable Director:** Steve Cox, Assistant Chief Executive Officer |
| **This report is** Public |
| |
| **Purpose of Report:** This report sets out how the council intends to develop community councils in support of area working. |

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Community Engagement Strategy was adopted by Cabinet November 2011. A key ambition of the strategy is to support area working through the establishment of multi ward community councils. The strategy set out seven community council areas reflecting natural characteristics and common communities across the borough. This report sets out how the council intends to develop community councils in support of area working.

1. **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1.1 **That Overview and Scrutiny recommend that Cabinet adopts the proposed Draft Terms of Reference and Scheme of Governance for Community Councils.**

1.2 **That Overview and Scrutiny comment on the planned implementation including public promotion of Community Councils, the involvement of Ward Councillors and the role of lead officers.**

1.3 **That Overview and Scrutiny comment on the proposed dates for September meetings.**

---

**Comment [s]:** PLEASE CLICK THIS BOX ONCE and enter the date of the meeting (in font 16, not capitals)

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

**Comment [s]:** 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

**Comment [a j]:** Please enter the name and job title of the person who will be presenting the report

**Comment [s]:** Please enter details of any Wards and Communities affected by the report. If this section is not

**Comment [s]:** Yes/No/Not Applicable – a 'Key Decision' is generally one affecting more than 2 wards or above £50,000

**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 [s]:** The recommendations should be set out in bold in the form of the decision that the decision

## 2.    INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

2.1    The Community Engagement Strategy was adopted by Cabinet November 2011.  The Strategy has three key priorities

   1. Develop and support communities and local people to get involved.

   2. To support Councillors to be leaders for their communities.

   3. To establish a co-ordinated, efficient and value for money partnership approach to joint working.

2.2    The development of Community Councils as a mechanism to support multi ward area working is a key objective of the strategy supporting each of the priorities.  Overall, community councils will provide an opportunity for residents to take part in conversations about local issues facing their area with officers and ward councillors.  Community Councils provide an opportunity for local people to get involved and influence the decisions that affect them.  The Community Councils also provide a platform for ward councillors to work collectively across a multi-ward area therefore taking a more strategic approach to common concerns and opportunities.  In addition, community councils provide a mechanism for partners to improve their direct engagement with communities.  A baseline audit of public sector engagement February 2012 identified this as a need felt by public sector services working in Thurrock.

2.3    The Community Engagement Strategy recognises Thurrock as a borough with contrasting, individual areas that are geographically and socially distinctive.  In support of the Localism agenda, we are keen to recognise that different areas have different priorities so we can better enable local services to be provided, with public sector support when most needed.  The Council has already held a number of 'Lets Talk' events to help connect the leadership of the Council with local people get a better feel of the key issues within different parts of the borough.  Also, the Council is exploring a number of community hub buildings across the borough to support a more joined up approach to service provision.  Furthermore, the Council is scoping implementation plans for the Community Regeneration Strategy which includes five key growth hubs – Tilbury, Lakeside, Purfleet, London Gateway and Grays.  This locality focus will enable the Council to ensure that local people and local areas benefit from local regeneration. Community development underpins each locality initiative – the aspiration to support local communities to support themselves in building stronger neighbourhoods

2.4    The Community Engagement Strategy provides a long term platform for the Council to develop its approach to localism.  The strategy defines the Council's role as place shaper, becoming more of an enabler than a doer, and helping our communities and local organisations succeed.  The call to action to the Council is clear:  if we are to truly develop communities that care for each other and are publicly spirited in their networks and support, therefore reducing the call on public services, we need to provide the leadership and culture that nurtures that approach. Community Councils are a key step in

supporting the mechanisms to support more empowered communities who can shape, influence and potentially delivery local services.

2.5 A Draft Terms of Reference and Scheme of Governance is attached as Appendix 1. The Community Council areas agreed through the Community Engagement Strategy November 2011 is attached at Appendix 2 for ease of reference. Appendix 3 is an initial attempt to put dates to each of the Community Council meetings. These occasions should be as inclusive as possible, and although final times will be negotiated between lead officers with the ward councillors in each Area, the draft programme reflects the intention to facilitate family events which are open to all.

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

3.1 Governance – the proposed Terms of Reference build on the responsibilities set out in Thurrock Council's constitution. These make provision for the appointment of Chair, Vice Chair and ensuring a quorum at each meeting.

3.2 Recommendations - The Community Councils are not decision making bodies; however the discussions held at Community Council meetings will feed into the decisions taken by relevant committees or individuals as set out in the Constitution. Community Councils will be able to make recommendations to relevant bodies as long as these are not considered in the view of the Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer to be contrary to the Council's budget and policy framework, or contrary to law, or otherwise infringe the proper conduct of local government. Community Councils will enable residents to come together around common issues of concern and this will help to develop community led solutions to key issues.

3.2 Public participation – A key aim of the Community Councils is to encourage public participation from diverse communities within multi ward areas. Where possible, an informal period of time before the start of a Community Council meeting should be provided to encourage residents to view displays, and to talk to officers and Councillors about proposals. Within meetings, the Chair will invite residents to ask questions or comment as appropriate. Community Council meetings should aim to be welcoming and inclusive in their approach – they are an opportunity for local issues to be discussed in public alongside residents. Papers should be avoided where possible, with items introduced through presentation, and discussion facilitated in a workshop style where appropriate. Events should aim to be family friendly.

3.3 Promotion – Agendas will be posted on the Council's website at least five working days before a Community Council meeting. Key partners and interested residents within each multi ward area will be invited to join an e-mail list so they can receive news about Community Council meetings and Agendas.

3.4 Ward Councillors – All Councillors are allocated a Community Council area and expected to participate in Community Council meetings as part of their role as community leaders. Training is provided in the Members Development Programme to support Community Leadership and Area Working in July and December 2012. A draft schedule of meetings is proposed at Appendix 3.

**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.

3.5 Lead Officer – Heads of Service have been allocated to each Community Council area. The role of the Head of Service will be to initially liaise with the ward councillors in each Community Council area to set the first Agenda and plan the first Community Council meeting. Once the Chair is agreed, the Head of Service will liaise with the Chair to inform future agendas. If the named Head of Service is unavailable, s/he will nominate an alternative Head of Service or an alternative senior officer to support the planning and delivery of the Community Council meeting.

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

4.1 Community Councils were developed through the Community Engagement Strategy. Two member led Task and Finish Groups supported the development of the strategy, as well as consultation with officers and key partners.

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

5.1 The Community Engagement Strategy and development of Community Councils primarily supports building pride, respect and responsibility in Thurrock's communities and its residents; however this work also impacts on the forth priority as effective engagement ensures successful commissioning.

**6. IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 **Financial**

Implications verified by: **Michael Jones**
Telephone and email: **01375 652772**
**mxjones@thurrock.gov.uk**

No specific budget allocation has been made for the Community Councils at this stage. The financial implications of the strategy represent an opportunity to consider delegated budgets in line with the Engagement strategy as the formulation progresses. Any move towards the delegation of budget will need to be agreed at a later stage

6.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Telephone and email: **01375 652087**
**dlawson@thurrock.gov.uk**

Given that the Community Councils are not decision making bodies but rather will inform the relevant decisions taken by committees or individual officers within the accepted decision making framework of the Council Constitution with their recommendations being considered by Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer then there are no direct legal implications at this stage.

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

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

However such an initiative will enable the Council to progress its community engagement agenda with minimal additional bureaucracy

6.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
Telephone and email: **01375652472**
**sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk**

Strengthening the way in which the Council engages will have a positive impact on social inclusion and it will improve opportunities for engagement with all communities including marginalised groups.  Community Councils provide an additional mechanism for supporting effective engagement.  In order to be effective, Community Councils need to consider accessibility in its widest sense to ensure all sections of the community feel enabled to participate and influence what is discussed as a local issue.

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

**7. CONCLUSION**

7.1 Community Councils are intended as a mechanism to bring Councillors and communities closer together to support an improved quality of life.  In doing so, communities will be supported to explore the key issues they face as residents. The Community Engagement Strategy is based on a community development model that recognises that strong communities need a robust community infrastructure to support their development.  Part of that infrastructure comes from recognising and using the assets within communities – local intelligence, volunteer capacity, access to external funding, the management of community buildings, community equipment and the mobilisation of residents to respond to improving communities are key ingredients to building strong, resilient neighbourhoods.  Social capital has emerged as a key term to measure the strength of communities and the extent to which these assets are valued and utilised.  Community Councils are one mechanism in supporting community solution focused dialogue.  Over time, they will support a wider understanding of the strengths within communities to solve common problems and in doing so will bring diverse communities together.

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

- Community Engagement Strategy and Implementation Plan

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT**:

**Comment [sj]:**  See Guideline 6.4

**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

- Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference and Scheme of Governance

- Appendix 2 – Map of Community Council Areas

- Appendix 3 – Draft schedule of dates

**Report Author Contact Details:**

**Name:** Natalie Warren
**Telephone:** 01375 652186
**E-mail:** nwarren@thurrock.gov.uk

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