

26 March 2015		ITEM: 7
Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Fairness Commission Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non key	
Report of: Karen Wheeler, Head of Strategy and Communications		
Accountable Head of Service: Karen Wheeler, Head of Strategy and Communications		
Accountable Director: Steve Cox, Assistant Chief Executive		
This report is public.		

Executive Summary

In March 2015 Cabinet approved a recommendation to establish a Fairness Commission for Thurrock. This report provides a summary of progress to date.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Note the contents of the report.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed on 12 September 2013 to establish a Task and Finish Group to look at ways other local authorities deploy equality commissions within budgetary constraints and progress equality issues within their localities. The panel's overall aim was to make recommendations on the relevance of a commission for Thurrock, other alternatives, as well as any costs involved.

2.2 The Fairness in Thurrock Review Panel was subsequently established and undertook this investigation, reporting to Cabinet in April 2014. Cabinet approved recommendations to establish a Fairness Commission to progress equality issues within the Borough, and agreed that a Thurrock Fairness Commission Annual Report is received by Cabinet to review and monitor progress.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Fairness in Thurrock Review made a number of recommendations to progress a Fairness Commission as the most relevant mechanism for progressing equalities in Thurrock.
- 3.2 The review provided a draft Terms of Reference with suggested members for a steering panel. An open nomination process was held from November 2014 to identify suitable and willing candidates. This included two articles in the local press, as well as contacting target organisations and partnership groups. The final membership list is as follows:

Membership Criteria	Commissioner
Chair, Voluntary Sector and resident	Demus Lee
Voluntary Sector and resident	John Rowles
Voluntary Sector and resident	Diane Lee
Voluntary Sector and resident	Len Orpin
Disability Group Representative	To be confirmed
Head teacher	Dr Asong, Gable Hall School
Health	Len Green, Thurrock CCG
Economist	Andrew Sentence
Local business and industry	Matthew Johnson
Housing Tenant Representative	Carol Purser
Youth Cabinet	George Wright
Labour Councillor	Cllr Oliver Gerrish
Conservative Councillor	Cllr Shane Hebb
UKIP Councillor	Cllr Graham Snell
Assistant Chief Executive, Thurrock Council	Steve Cox

- 3.3 Whilst it has not been possible to fill the post for a disability group representative to date, Thurrock Diversity Network has responded to say they will be willing to provide evidence to the Commission. The post will remain vacant pending any interest from disability groups.
- 3.4 Thurrock Fairness Commission held its first meeting on 12 March 2015. Work prior to this concentrated on the recruitment of Commissioners according to the recommendations set out in the review report.
- 3.5 The first meeting of the Commission focused on reviewing the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Review and discussing the detail to inform a work plan for future meetings. Key areas of focus were agreed including child poverty, employment, education, housing, and access to health services.
- 3.6 The discussion at the meeting also highlighted the need to understand more about the reasons behind key examples of inequality, and how residents are supported to help themselves stay healthy, budget well and increase aspirations. The commission is also keen to capture more information about

how community organisations are already working to meet local need, and how funding can support more community led action in the future.

- 3.7 A work plan will be prepared to allow consideration of the key issues alongside a public engagement plan and communications plan. A commitment was made to ensure the Fairness Commission meets people in communities in the places where they are already living their lives, rather than expecting people to come to specific events. The Commission recognised that many people remain silent on the issues they feel impact on fairness, and their voices need to be heard if the commission is to make a difference.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To update Overview and Scrutiny on the progress made towards establishing a Fairness Commission for Thurrock.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The nomination process to recruit commissioners was open to all to apply and coverage was included in the local press. The work of the commission will be based on a wide public engagement programme which will invite responses from members of the public as well as local organisations.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 A Fairness Commission for Thurrock will have a positive impact on all of corporate priorities as outlined.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Management Accountant

There are no financial implications relating to this report. The Fairness Commission will be funded through existing resources, facilitated by existing staff and incorporated into current workloads and priorities.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Deputy Head of Legal and Governance

There are no legal implications arising from this report beyond the fact that this recommendation will contribute towards good and informed governance as to our equality duty.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Teresa Evans**
Equality and Cohesion Officer

The Council is under a statutory duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and promote good relations. The Fairness Commission will provide a good mechanism for meeting our equality duty.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/diversity-and-equality/thurrock-fairness-commission>

The Fairness in Thurrock Review and related information can be accessed via the above link.

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

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