

13 January 2021		ITEM: 15 Decision: 110549
Cabinet		
Collaborative Communities Framework 2021-2025		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Councillor Deborah Huelin, Portfolio Holder for Central Services and Communities		
Accountable Assistant Director: Les Billingham, Assistant Director Adult Social Care and Community Development		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This paper sets out proposals to embed a pan council approach to how we work with communities. The council is committed to supporting communities and encouraging residents to drive and contribute to local improvements and has recently agreed a new priority project to consider community level transformation. The Collaborative Communities framework covers three key distinct areas – Engagement, Equalities and Empowerment. All three areas are interdependent and gain strength and momentum by coming together into one Framework to support a pan council approach to collaboration.

Under the umbrella term “Collaborative Communities”, the scope includes co-design and influencing decisions as well as working together to address societal challenges. The Framework includes our Corporate Equality Objectives.

The vision for the Collaborative Communities (CC) Framework is:

‘We are committed to creating a fair, accessible and inclusive borough where everyone has a voice and an equal opportunity to succeed and thrive, and where community led ambitions are supported and actively encouraged’.

The principles of the CC framework can be summarised as:

- A) Engagement – Involving residents in the decisions that affect their lives, using co-design and co-production methods to address the issues facing residents, as well as the solutions.

- B) Empowerment - Supporting resilience within communities and voluntary sector networks through asset based community development, supporting communities to champion change. The council aims to enable communities to make a difference and to flourish.
- C) Equality - Ensuring services are free of prejudice and that council services enable all to have equal opportunities to prosper and contribute to building a diverse and inclusive borough.

Achieving the ambition of the CC Framework will require all council services to consider how they can enable communities to achieve local ambitions including devolving power, reducing bureaucracy and enabling different ways of working. Our ambition is to reduce the red tape that communities often experience when taking community led action so they are more enabled to achieve local outcomes.

The Framework is intended to support new ways of working within existing resources. Given the financial climate facing councils and communities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, implementation will be phased with individual projects identified with both services and communities over the next four years 2021 – 2025. Any financial impact of new proposals will be considered as they are developed. However, the ambition is to redirect resources to help ensure the values of this Framework are embedded across all council services.

1. Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet approves the draft Collaborative Communities Framework at Appendix 1.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report and Framework builds on the successful transformation experience of Adult Social Care to working differently with communities. In order to effectively manage increasing demands, innovative approaches have been developed and implemented to address how health and social care is redesigned in Thurrock. Fundamental to the programme has been a commitment to a shift in thinking from a deficit model (a focus on 'what is wrong?') which creates dependency, to a strength based model (a focus on 'what is strong') which can open opportunities for collaboration, placing the citizen at the centre of opportunity for change. This transformational programme has included testing new ways of working including Local Area Co-ordinators, Thurrock First, community led support in Tilbury and Chadwell St Mary and challenging funding-silos to create new opportunities. It builds on the principles of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). Evaluation of projects to date demonstrate the added value and investment potential that can be realised by diverting funds into prevention rather than costly, statutory services.
- 2.2 Using ABCD effectively can help to change our relationship with communities, encouraging a less paternalistic approach to work and helping to empower

community led solutions that are often better for communities and more sustainable than public sector organisations providing a local service.

- 2.3 Many services across the council are already committed to working differently with residents to enable community led action, and to collaborate on ideas for improvements posed by residents. The CC Framework looks to embed collaboration as a key value across all services and future strategies. It highlights certain actions that will help us to be a strong partner alongside communities, working for shared aspirations.
- 2.4 A draft approach was shared with Corporate Overview and Scrutiny in September 2019. This was well received and subsequent engagement with stakeholders has helped to shape the CC Framework. A key event that helped to shape the Framework was a joint conference with CVS in October 2019, attended by over 150 people. Internal meetings with services have developed further thinking about the Framework and its ambition. Corporate Overview and Scrutiny considered the Framework again November 2020; the Committee welcomed the development of the Framework as an opportunity to actively engage a broad section of residents in the decisions that affect them, as well as building bonds with services through conversation and collaboration.
- 2.5 Development of the Framework was delayed in March 2020 with the need to prioritise our response to COVID-19. The strong partnership and relationships already in place and the ability to trust and collaborate across sectors allowed Thurrock Council and Thurrock Community and Voluntary Services (CVS) to quickly and successfully establish a highly effective community response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Thurrock Coronavirus Community Action (TCCA). TCCA has ensured that thousands of residents in Thurrock are getting the help and support they need, and this help continues for those without friends and family who need to self-isolate. Our experience of mobilising as we did to respond to COVID-19 is a practical example of all we aim to achieve through this Framework into our day to day encounters with communities.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Community engagement is an essential component of any policy development and underpins all council work. Good community engagement tends to increase how positively people feel about where they live as a place and whether they are valued as active citizens. All services are required to demonstrate they have considered, and where necessary, consulted upon the impact of changes before taking decisions. This Framework seeks to explore and use digital engagement opportunities as well to support co-design and co-production, exploring ideas and solutions through inclusive dialogue.
- 3.2 The term 'citizen' demonstrates the commitment to ensuring council processes and procedures work to enable communities to achieve their ambitions to improve quality of life. Often, council processes can create unintended barriers that prevent, or deter, communities from taking control of

parts of their lives or social issues where the state, or council, should have a limited role. The inclusion of empowerment in this Framework seeks to drive change so that we can reduce red tape and enable more collaborative processes that support communities achieve the change they seek.

- 3.3 The Framework includes the council's Equality and Diversity Statement and four corporate equality objectives. By including the objectives within this Framework, we are able to recognise the interconnection of community engagement and empowerment while setting out our ambition to create a fair, accessible and inclusive borough where everyone has a voice and an equal opportunity to succeed and thrive.
- 3.4 The four corporate equality objectives seek to address the issues where dialogue around equality has focused most consistently across numerous consultation and engagement outcomes and surveys to understand the needs of those with protected characteristics. They are:
- Access to services
 - Supporting community integration and cohesion
 - Improving resilience
 - Workforce development

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Community engagement is an essential component of any policy development and underpins all council work. At a time of financial pressures, effective engagement helps to make the best use of our widest range of resources, supporting decisions that are sustainable and build on community resource.

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

- 5.1 This Framework has developed following a number of meetings and conversations with key stakeholders including Thurrock Community Forums, and Thurrock CVS and the Voluntary Sector. As covered at 2.4, the Framework has been positively received and commented on by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny.

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

- 6.1 The proposal to review our approach to engagement reflects the council's vision 'An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future'. The Framework supports the delivery of the corporate priority project of Community Level Transformation – designing out demand, redefining role of council and achieving better outcomes for our residents and local communities through collaboration and co-design.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Strategic Lead: Corporate Finance

Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, implementation of the proposed Framework may generate financial implications. These will be considered as the Framework and implementation plan is developed alongside options for using existing resources more efficiently to meet any new costs.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Law and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Whilst there aren't any direct legal implications arising from this report, the proposed Framework, amongst other things, addresses the legal requirements and principles in relation to consultation and engagement including the (common law) doctrine of legitimate expectation and Gunning Principles (1985). Certain functions of the Council, including planning, have statutory requirements to consult. Failure to consult or inadequate consultation could leave the Council in breach of its legal requirements and open to challenge through a judicial review application.

Other specific legislation, including the Local Government Acts (including the 1972, 1999 and 2000 Acts), the Localism Act 2011 and the Equality Act (2010) must or can be taken into account when appropriate and relevant. The Framework sets out the council's corporate equality objectives for the next four years.

The proposed strategy will be reviewed every four years or sooner to comply with changes to the law or policy and practice or as otherwise required.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager, Community Development and Equalities

In recent years, the council's approach to engaging and empowering local communities to design and deliver community-led solutions has evolved significantly with the introduction of Asset Based Community Development. This practice has been successful in a number of areas although only through close joint working with the voluntary, community and faith sector to enable

and facilitate the involvement and participation of residents and specifically protected groups who may also be users or beneficiaries of the sector.

The proposal for a 'Collaborative Communities Framework' will consolidate learning and best practice associated with consultation and engagement including those associated with ABCD and Your Place Your Voice.

A community equality impact assessment (CEIA) will be completed for this Framework which sets out the council's equality objectives for the next four years. This CEIA will not however alleviate the responsibility of individual services to understand and respond to the specific needs of communities and individuals with protected characteristics by actively seeking them at the outset of designing and then implementing policies, programmes and services at a borough and neighbourhood level.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children)

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):

- The proposed Framework will seek to refresh Thurrock's Joint Compact between the statutory sector and the council. The current compact can be viewed here <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/strategies/thurrock-joint-compact>

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1: Draft Collaborative Communities Framework 2021 - 2025

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