

Developing Thurrock Council's communications and engagement strategy 2024-25

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Date July 2024 v1

Why do we need a clear communications and engagement strategy?

Our communications and engagement strategy will set out how the council can most effectively talk and listen to our residents about the things they care about.

It matters for many reasons including:

- To demonstrate honesty and transparency to residents
- To rebuild trust with our communities
- To ensure we use our limited resources to focus on what matters
- So that we are speaking with one voice to residents, businesses and other important audiences

Effective communications and engagement don't just publicise the council's achievements, they actively help the council achieve its objectives.

The current context

How is Thurrock currently seen?

- Thurrock is best known nationally for its financial mistakes that led to Government intervention.
- Many people locally are unhappy with the council, particularly due to increases in council tax and changes to services, following intervention.
- Trust in the council is low.

How do we want to change that?

- We would like to rebuild trust with local people so that we are seen as being on the side of residents.
- We want people to feel hopeful about Thurrock's future, and to grasp the many opportunities that are on their doorstep.
- We want to show we have a clear plan for the future, set out in the Corporate Plan, that will set us on a new path, working with communities to deliver excellent services despite our financial challenges.

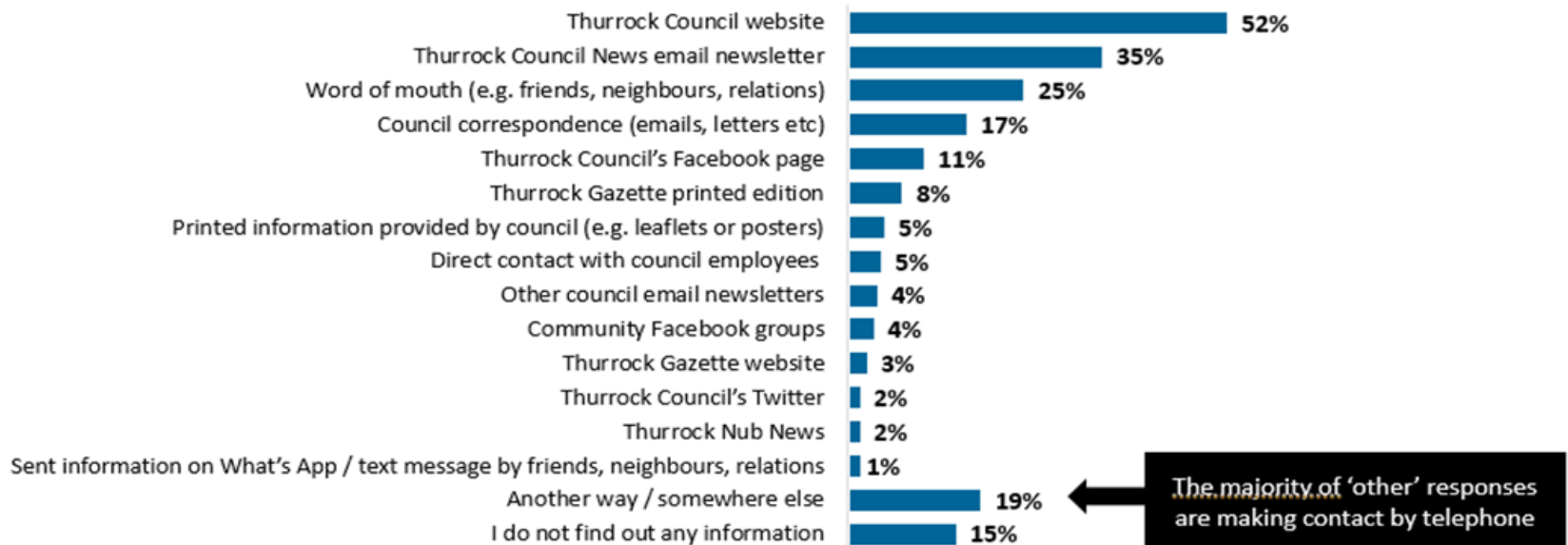
What do we know about our residents?

- We serve 175,900 residents, according to the 2021 census.
- The average Thurrock resident is 36 years of age, with 13.6% of our residents aged over 65, and 27.2% aged under 20.
- 76.8% of people in Thurrock identified their ethnic group within the White category, 11.9% as Black and 6.99% Asian .
- 16.7% of our residents are living with a disability.
- 63.3% of residents are homeowners, 18.3% rent privately and 17.7% are social tenants.
- Council data shows that 92% of our residents use the internet.

How do Thurrock residents receive information from the council?

Our most recent resident survey that asked about communications preferences, in 2021, found that our website and newsletter were the most popular sources of information about the council

From which of the following, if any, do you currently find out about Thurrock Council and the services it provides?



Our proposed focus for the coming year

- Rebuilding trust with residents through honesty, transparency and clear messaging
- Ensure we are speaking to all parts of our community, especially young people and those from different ethnic backgrounds
- Explain our approach to budgeting and getting our finances in order
- Communicate clearly about the services people care about (eg bin collections, cleanliness, services for the most vulnerable)
- More visibility in the community, talking to residents and businesses
- Real engagement and co-design of services
- Celebrate every council and community success – rebuilding positivity
- Inspire and empower our communities to get more involved in local projects
- Position Thurrock as place for inward investment and great place to live and work

A fresh start for Thurrock – our draft key messages for staff and residents

- We know we've made mistakes and the impacts have been felt across the community and our workforce
- We are putting all our energy into finding ways to keep providing the services residents want and need, within the serious financial constraints we face
- With challenge comes opportunity – we must grasp the opportunity do things differently, working as one community to support each other, and help Thurrock thrive
- There is so much to celebrate and look forward to in Thurrock – it's time to reset and look to the future

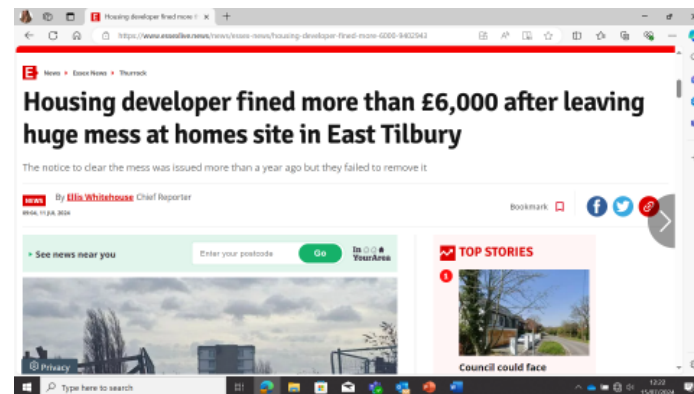
Campaigns

Each year most councils run campaigns linked to community and council priorities. These often support services to achieve their objectives – this might include encouraging responsible behaviours; improving health outcomes; encouraging participation or raising awareness about available information and support.

We want to do more of this impactful comms and engagement, with clear objectives and outcomes. We will need to identify a small number of campaigns - possible areas of focus include:

Promoting volunteering; cost of living advice and support; budget engagement, health awareness campaigns informed by local health priorities; place-shaping campaign delivered with partners; a joint campaign with the Youth Cabinet, and staff campaigns to boost morale, celebrate success and encourage new ways of working.

We will also continue to share useful information, advice, events, and news



Questions for Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Do you recognise the view of the council described here?
2. Do you agree with the broad direction of travel set out here?
3. What do you think the council should be prioritising in its communications and engagement?
4. If the council could only run one campaign this year, what should it be and what objective would it help us achieve?

 thurrock.gov.uk