



Quality Assurance Report



Thurrock Children's Plan 2007-2010

Consultation Summary September 2007



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Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thurrock Children's Plan Consultation Summary
Author	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mike Sinden
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To outline the process of consultation with children, young people and families undertaken in developing the new Children's Plan for Thurrock's Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership To summarise the key findings emerging from the feedback of children, young people and their families To indicate how children and young people's feedback has been used to shape the new Children's Plan

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1 Thurrock's Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership embarked on a range of consultation exercises to support the development of the partnership's first Children's Plan. As part of that exercise, feedback from children and young people indicated that they welcomed the opportunity to contribute their views and opinions on goals, priorities and actions that might be taken within the borough to improve the lives of children and young people.

1.2 The first Children's Plan was a short term one-year plan, designed to be aligned with national inspection framework which would see all of Thurrock's Children's Services being inspected in early 2007. This inspection was called the Joint Area Review and is sometimes referred to as the JAR. The one-year plan allowed Thurrock to use the key judgements and findings of inspectorates during this Joint Area Review to help shape its longer-term Children's Plan.

1.3 In addition to the outcomes of the comprehensive Joint Area Review inspection, all statutory and voluntary partners within the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership were determined to place the views and thoughts of children, young people and their families at the heart of their new longer-term Children's Plan. They were equally determined to place the thoughts, needs and desires of Thurrock's children, young people, parents and carers at the centre of the process for developing the Plan - after all, this new Children's Plan was to be "their" plan – developed about them and for them. Therefore the Partnership set out to ensure that as much as possible, it was developed **by** them.



2. THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 2.1 To make sure that all key actions address the needs of Thurrock's children and young people, the strategic partnership conducted a wide-ranging and varied consultation programme with children, young people and their families. The consultation used a range of strategies to gather large quantities of information on their views around the quality of the services delivered by the partnership and their judgements on the extent to which those services have had a positive impact on their lives. The consultation gathered qualitative judgements and opinions through a dialogue and debate with children, young people and parents about the contents of the emerging Children's Plan; reviewing and refining the strategic partnership's intended direction of its priorities and its planned actions.
- 2.2 On behalf of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, Thurrock Council's Children, Education and Families Directorate held a series of face-to-face meetings with groups of young people, school councils and parent representatives. It also conducted large-scale surveys of their views through the use of on-line questionnaires, with over 1000 responses from children and young people in Thurrock.
- 2.3 The consultation process intended to reach as wide and as representative a range of children and young people as possible. The partnership wanted to know about issues faced by the groups and their peers; in their local area, their school and just as importantly about issues affecting children, young people across the whole of Thurrock.
- 2.4 A small group of young people were assembled because of their passion for young people's rights and keen interest in accessible information. The group met weekly to discuss specific details within the plan. They had a direct input into the wording of the plan, the validity of the goals and the vision. They also questioned the extent to which some of the proposed targets were realistic or achievable and equally the extent to which some of the targets were not challenging enough in their view. Their input and review of the plan's targets and goals led to several changes.



- 2.5 Over 53 days, 22 school councils, representing infant, junior, secondary and special school pupils were consulted. The sessions were all run as open debates, with pupils being asked for their view about life in Thurrock, services in Thurrock, what they disliked about the borough and, most importantly what they thought were the priorities for action to improve their life and outcomes in the future – covering each of the Every Child Matters' five outcomes. During the middle and later phases of the consultation some schools' pupils were asked to comment on the design of the plan and summary leaflet.
- 2.6 As well as school councils, several groups of young people met with officers to have face-to-face discussions on their perception of services in Thurrock and suggestions on how to improve them. This included representatives from some ethnic minority groups, youth clubs, faith groups and groups of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- 2.7 A focus group of parent representatives were consulted regarding parental issues of concern within the borough. These mothers belonged to community forums and offered a support network for other parents. Their breadth and understanding of parenting issues crosses the borough's cultural and economic boundaries. Key discussions focussed on how to: make the plan achievable; raise aspirations; improve and extend Thurrock's infrastructure through the current process of regeneration; cater for the growth in our children and young people population, to cater for the increasingly diverse nature of our young population and to ensure that we harness the potential of regeneration to meet the needs of our children and young people now and in the future.
- 2.8 In each case, other than in the on-line surveys, the participants were reassured that there was 'no such thing as a wrong answer' or a 'preferred answer' and that the intention was to have an open and frank discussion between young people and the officers delivering the consultation activities.

3. KEY MESSAGES EMERGING FROM THE CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

- 3.1 There were a number of recurrent themes emerging from the discussions with children and young people. While there were often some differences in the specific detail behind their comments (such as placing comments within the



particular context of their local area, their personal circumstances or their school) there were also considerable similarity between their views on a number of specific topics.

3.2 While children and young people were readily able and willing to identify what they saw as gaps and problems to be addressed within Thurrock, there were some common positive themes emerging from the feedback. Foremost was the overwhelming evidence that a huge majority of the children and young people consulted *like* Thurrock. They are proud of Thurrock, proud to live here and care passionately about Thurrock. In a similar vein, there was a clear sense that children and young people were not only exercised by what might be best for them but also what might be best for others. Many respondents commented on their concerns that services met the needs of groups of young people or areas that they were not necessarily a part of. For example there were several instances of secondary pupils expressing concern about provision for very young children and equally young children identifying what bigger and older children needed. There were instances of young people without impairments prioritising the need to address gaps in provision for disabled young people and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Likewise there were instances where young people in schools in one part of the borough suggested that the priority need was in a different part of the borough.

3.3 These positive views about Thurrock do not hide that there are a number of significant and common concerns or frustrations about the quality of life, services and opportunities in Thurrock as expressed either verbally or in writing.

3.4 Children and young people continually rated their personal safety and that of their families as a high priority. Stating that tackling issues around their safety should be at the heart of the new plan. There were particular concerns about bullying and actions to address bullying, both within their schools and within the wider community.

3.5 ***How Children and Young People's Views Shaped the Plan.*** As a result of this feedback, the plan includes specific objectives to develop and promote anti-bullying initiatives, to work with schools to improve their levels of security and set



out a range of actions to improve children's safety and their feeling of safety within their local communities.

3.6 The issue of anti-social behaviour was a common theme from both the face-to-face and on-line consultation activities. Children and young people were not only concerned about anti-social behaviour – they were also concerned by adults' negative stereotyping of all young people which was made worse by the incidents reported in the local media. In addition, a number of young people stressed the need to provide activities to stop young people from engaging in anti-social behaviour as well as programmes to address those who do and actions to deal with the end result of anti-social behaviour.

3.7 *How Children and Young People's Views Shaped the Plan.* To reflect these views, the new plan has several priorities to divert young people from any risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour. Central to this diversionary strategy is extending opportunities to engage in voluntary activities, the implementation of a new play strategy and working with schools to increase the range of opportunities available to young people to engage in physical activities outside of school hours. Further actions to co-ordinate educational and awareness raising programmes about crime and anti-social behaviour and to develop a young-person specific focus within the work plans of the Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour Action Group, are in direct response to young people's views and suggestions.

3.8 A further theme during the consultation was that children and young people of all ages were critical of access to services. These ranged from comments regarding the availability and cost of public transport for young people to reach services or facilities (both inside and outside of the borough), to comments from specific groups about their particular needs such as young women, young people with disabilities and young people with impairments.

3.9 *How Children and Young People's Views Shaped the Plan.* The plan has a wide range of actions planned to respond to these criticisms. Specifically, as a result of feedback, there will be a specific focus on improving the range of care and services for young people with complex needs through a proactive community outreach programme, advocacy and signposting to appropriate to



readily available and appropriate services. Services will also be placed within communities for ease of access, such as the set-up of pilot provision for out of hours minor accident and minor illness services and in conjunction with young people, the Partnership has made a commitment to young people in its vision statement that it will work to offer “good and affordable transport to allow easy access to facilities both within the local community and to neighbouring communities.”

3.10 From across the borough and across every age range, children and young people felt a key priority should be tackling what they saw as a lack of activities for children and young people. This criticism about lack of activities was not restricted to views about leisure facilities and provision, although these did feature. Children and young people were also concerned about activities on offer to help them make healthy choices, activities to keep them safe from harm and learn about personal safety, activities to allow them to influence the services provided to them and activities to allow them to contribute to the life of their community and the life of others.

3.11 ***How Children and Young People’s Views Shaped the Plan.*** To reflect and directly respond to these views expressed about availability of appropriate activities for children and young people the plan has been adapted to include a number of additional priorities. There is now a priority to include Children’s Centres and Healthy Living Centres as additional ways to improve young people’s knowledge of healthy lifestyles in addition to the work of Healthy Schools. Personal safety issues will now be tackled through strategies such as targeted fire safety work, work with schools and colleges on specific road safety campaigns aimed at adolescents, and extending the development of the Youth Cabinet to set up forums to support the participation of particular groups such as Children Looked After and Children with Physical Disabilities.

3.12 ***How Children and Young People’s Views Shaped the Plan.*** To address the common criticism specifically focused on the quality and quantity of leisure facilities and activities across the borough, the plan has now been adjusted to include priorities to include the provision of leisure activities specifically for young



women and improving provision and access for places to go and things to do for young people.

4. ADDITIONAL CHANGES RESULTING FROM FEEDBACK.

4.1 In the middle and later stages of the consultation, children and young people were invited to comment on the layout and design of the plan. As a result of their feedback the colour scheme was changed because the overwhelming view was that they preferred a more prominent contrast in colour and less use of pastoral colours. There were also changes made to fonts, to page headings and to the position of key parts of the text. Specific changes were made to layout and colour in response to comments from visually impaired young people.

4.2 During the consultation, children and young people identified the need for a more comprehensive approach to consulting with children and young people. As a result a number of changes were made to the Partnerships' "Strategy for Participation and Engagement of Children and Young People" which was drafted at the same time as the work on the new Children's Plan. Most significantly, the overwhelming view of young people was that regardless of how charismatic, open and approachable the adults carrying out the consultation were, it still made a difference to what and how some young might respond. There was a clear preference for the face-to-face dialogue to be conducted by young people with other young people. As result the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership have agreed that they will recruit, train and employ a number of young people as "CYPSP Youth Champions" to act as consultation advisers.

4.3 While young people welcomed the description of key goals and priorities in the emerging plan, they were consistently were critical of what they considered to be a lack of detail in the early drafts of the Children's Plan. In particular they wanted much more information on **how** service providers would deliver on the goals and priorities – a common early remark was "but what are you going to do to make sure these things happen?" As a result the plan was significantly extended in detail, particularly with the addition of key actions planned in relation to each goal and priority.



4.4 In the course of the consultation, children and young people fed back on what was a newly agreed vision for the Children's Partnership. Their feedback was highly critical of the original version. As a result, the partner agencies agreed that the most effective way forward was for officers to develop a new vision working with a group of young people. The end result was a completely new vision statement which was welcomed by young people and agencies alike and which was subsequently agreed by the Strategic Partnership and is included in the new Children's Plan.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The process of consultation with children and young people has led to a significant number of changes to the content, layout and detail of the final version. The important changes made in developing the plan are due to the quality when expressing their thoughts and opinions. Their opinions, their ideas and their overall contribution have helped to ensure that the Partnership has achieved the objective that was set out in paragraph 1.3 – **this plan is their plan.**

5.2 Thurrock's Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership would like to thank every child, young person, parent and carer who participated in this consultation exercise, whether through face-to-face discussions or through on-line surveys. Their openness, honesty, enthusiasm and willingness to give their time and their views made the consultation the success that it became. The Partnership would like to record publicly its thanks to every single one of them.