



COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

A Strategy for Thurrock – Summary



INTRODUCTION

Thurrock is a unique place to live and work. The borough is home to many long-established communities as well as a rich diversity of newer communities. Some have moved here to raise their families because it is “a nice quiet place compared to London”. The borough is changing economically, too, with the potential for new jobs and other opportunities as part of Thurrock’s Economic Development Strategy.

Everyone who lives here wants the best from the borough and some people are worried about things moving too fast. We want everyone to be able to benefit from the changes. The Council and all the other organisations that make up Shaping Thurrock (the Local Strategic Partnership) will be working hard to make sure that services keep pace, and that everyone is treated fairly. We all have a role to play in Thurrock’s future. Together we can help build a strong, welcoming Thurrock where all people get on well, respect and value each other’s differences, and are fully engaged in all that is on offer.

COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

Community cohesion, the concept behind Communities Together, has been described as the ability of communities to function and grow in harmony rather than in conflict.

Communities Together is about respecting each other, valuing our diversity and celebrating differences across age, faith, race, gender, ability/disability, culture, background, neighbourhood and sexual orientation. It is about recognising and building on the common values and aspirations we share, and lies at the centre of safe, strong and vibrant communities in which people feel engaged and able to influence decisions.

Integration and engagement are key contributors to building cohesion and achieving Communities Together.

Here is a simplistic way of understanding equality, diversity and community cohesion in action. Say there is a community hall that is fully accessible to local groups – that is equality. Say the hall is used at different times by an Eastern European group, a white English group, an African group and an Asian group – that is diversity. Now, say the people from all these different groups use the hall at the same time for a partnership event – that is community cohesion. Community engagement makes cohesion possible, and together with equality and diversity, helps create strong, sustainable communities.

PEOPLE, PLACE AND PROSPERITY

We all understand community differently and many of us identify with more than one community – our neighbourhood, faith group, school, people who speak the same language or dialect. This Communities Together strategy works towards delivering Thurrock’s vision, creating a place where everyone – no matter their background or circumstances – feels a sense of belonging, with shared values based on respecting our differences and appreciating everyone’s contribution to the Thurrock experience.

STRATEGIC DRIVERS

Cohesion is one of Thurrock's cross cutting Local Area Agreement indicators (National Indicator 1). It is assessed through a bi-annual Place Survey which measures the percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area. According to the 2008 Place Survey in Thurrock, 54% of local people believe that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area, compared to an England average of 76.4%.

There are a number of contributory factors to poor community partnership in Thurrock. Thurrock has its own unique blueprint: communities are bound geographically into distinct 'urban villages' with strong family ties. However, wider community networks are generally poor and there is little identification with Thurrock or a shared sense of belonging – a key driver for Communities Together. This is exacerbated by:

- Rapid change in demographic profile, particularly growth in African and eastern European communities
- Imposed and rapid housing growth through new housing developments, targeted at 18,500 new homes by 2021 (over 30% growth)
- Deficit in physical and service infrastructure even before the expected growth
- Little awareness among residents of the potential benefits of this change, particularly regeneration and new jobs
- Perceived inability to inform or influence this change

Deprivation remains a major influencer, but the fact that some places have high deprivation and strong community partnership shows that local action can build resilience to this. Thurrock Council and other Shaping Thurrock partners will be working hard with residents to achieve a more promising future for all. Our overarching aim for Thurrock is to achieve sustained, annual improvement in the National Indicator 1 cohesion index, to reduce the gap across wards, and aspire to a Thurrock in which:

- everyone values our changing diversity
- there is a feeling of unity among people of all ages and all backgrounds
- everyone participates freely and knows that their contribution is valued
- we are all proud to live, work and learn

LINKS TO COMPLEMENTARY STRATEGIES/PROGRAMMES

These include:

- Sustainable Communities
- Economic Development
- Engagement
- Diversity and Equality
- Delivering Safer Communities
- Anti-bullying
- Neighbourhood Renewal

ACCOUNTABILITY

All Shaping Thurrock partners have signed up to improving cohesion in the borough, and this is how accountability is structured:

- Shaping Thurrock Partnership and Executive Board
- Shaping Thurrock Programme Boards with the Community Involvement Board providing critical challenge through performance management
- Shaping Thurrock Sub Groups e.g. Promoting Tolerance Group
- Thurrock Council 's Directors' Board Strategic Sub Group on Community Engagement, Equality and Social Cohesion
- Communities Together Reference Group

ACTION PLAN

Our aim is to achieve a 5% improvement in Thurrock's Place Survey rating for cohesion (National Indicator 1) by March 2011. Here are examples of what is being planned towards achieving Communities Together:

<p style="text-align: center;">Objective 1: Ensure that there is a robust performance management framework for Communities Together in place</p>
<p>Why this is important:</p> <p>Leadership accountability and support are crucial to the successful implementation of the measures needed to drive forward and achieve Communities Together.</p>
<p>What we want to see:</p> <p>Communities Together performance management is embedded across Shaping Thurrock</p>
<p>How we will know it is happening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Communities Together reference seminars are held twice yearly, starting October 2009▪ Frontline staff training starts January 2010▪ Good practice around Communities Together is incorporated into the Council's Equality Impact Assessment by February 2010▪ Communities Together leads are identified for all Shaping Thurrock partners by April 2010▪ Good practice tips around Communities Together is disseminated within the Council by May 2010▪ Focus groups, particularly with established communities, are held by May 2010 to further inform Communities Together

**Objective 2:
Embed Communities Together into Shaping Thurrock's culture/ethos**

Why this is important:

Within Shaping Thurrock we have a significant resource in our bid to embed Communities Together, as the primary employers in Thurrock. This means we are able to impact how well people get on together in a number of ways: how policy is implemented, interaction with members of the community as part of our jobs and, for the many who also live in Thurrock, the impressions given to family and friends. Shaping Thurrock partners have an essential role to play in ensuring a corporate approach to Communities Together.

What we want to see:

Communities Together values are mainstreamed into the Shaping Thurrock and partners' corporate communications strategies, consultation, engagement and event activities

How we will know it is happening:

- All new Council engagement, consultation and events are impact assessed in relation to Communities Together April 2010
- Good practice around Communities Together is integrated into Take Part activity by July 2010
- A Communities Together campaign is in place by July 2010
- A Communities Together web portal is launched by July 2010



**Objective 3:
Establish a social marketing and engagement campaign to promote
meaningful, community interaction across Thurrock**

Why this is important:

In Thurrock, an overwhelming issue affecting Communities Together is that people often feel 'done to' – that decisions taken do not reflect their opinions or the needs of long term residents. Communications and engagement are key factors in ensuring that the delivery efforts of all partners reach and involve residents – including harder to hear groups – in ways that are well received and embraced.

What we want to see:

- Volunteer Communities Together ambassadors are identified and enabled to enhance their skills
- Stories and experiences from around Thurrock are celebrated
- 'Welcome' initiatives are developed for new residents
- A faiths forum is developed for Thurrock
- '1,000 days to go' community grant scheme is launched for 2009 and 2011

How we will know it is happening:

- Identified community ambassadors take up development opportunities from February 2010
- First Living Books session is held by May 2010
- Positive vox pox messages are publicised from June 2010
- First mobile museum session is held by June 2010
- Harder to hear communities regularly take part in at least three Walking for Health walks and the programme is broadened to include heritage trails by June 2010
- Interactive/film projects developed with young people are ready for sharing from July 2010
- Residents Information Pack is distributed by November 2010
- New tenant 'welcome' initiatives are piloted by December 2010
- Options for an inter-faiths forum are explored by December 2010
- Residents have been identified and developed as hosts to Olympics/Paralympics visitors by March 2011
- A variety of community-led events bringing people from different backgrounds together have been held by March 2011



**Objective 4:
Support targeted interventions across identified communities
and communities of interest**

Why this is important:

- Data indicates that to really impact on Communities Together, a specific focus on identified neighbourhoods is needed. These areas correlate with the borough's main areas of deprivation. Shaping Thurrock recognises that more targeted engagement and programme activity is needed to support community needs in these areas.

What we want to see:

Targeted interventions within key groups and areas, incorporating good practice around Communities Together

How we will know it is happening:

- Healthy Café is operational by October 2009
- Thurrock Physical Transport Scheme is operational by December 2009
- Good practice around Communities Together is integrated into Hate Crime response events from April 2010
- A local engagement centre is in place by May 2010
- PCSOs are providing the community with updates on a range of information from May 2010
- Active groups are involved in a partnership event by June 2010
- Community-led solutions to anti-social behaviour are in place from July 2010
- Good practice around Communities Together is integrated into at least two Thinking Families projects by September 2010
- Good practice around Communities Together is integrated into first neighbourhood renewal initiatives by March 2011

