



COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

A Strategy for Thurrock

INTRODUCTION AND VISION

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. The Council and other Shaping Thurrock Partners have agreed a vision for Thurrock:

‘We want Thurrock to be at the dynamic heart of the Thames Gateway, a place of ambition, enterprise and opportunity, where communities and businesses flourish and the quality of life for local people is continually improving.’

This strategy focuses one of the five priorities identified to achieve this vision: to build pride, respect and responsibility in Thurrock’s communities and its residents.

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, and builds on our shared values and aspirations. Communities Together reflects a Thurrock in which all people get on well together, respect and value difference, share responsibility for each other’s wellbeing and are proud to be part of this borough. It is about celebrating differences across age, faith, race, gender, ability/disability, culture, background, neighbourhood, economic or social standing and sexual orientation, and lies at the centre of safe, strong and vibrant communities in which people feel engaged and able to influence decisions.



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.

The following have been identified as positive predictors of community cohesion (Laurence and Heath 2005/08):

- Formal volunteering
- Having friends from different ethnic groups
- People pulling together to improve their neighbourhood
- People willing to help neighbours
- Trust in institutions and local people
- Satisfaction with local services
- Perceived ability to influence local decisions
- Improved local services

STRATEGIC DRIVERS

In his foreword to 'Guidance for Local Authorities on How to Mainstream Community Cohesion into Other Services' (Communities and Local Government, 2009), Secretary of State John Denham says: 'Promoting cohesion should be a central objective of all that we do – never an optional extra'.

Cohesion is one of Thurrock's cross cutting Local Area Agreement indicators (National Indicator 1), with links to key strategies:

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

Delivering Communities Together impacts on four key strands of Thurrock's wellbeing:

Economic and social regeneration

Our Economic Development Strategy states that 'cohesive, healthy neighbourhoods are fundamentally important to the future economic development of Thurrock'.

One of the key aims of cohesion is to build social networks. Data from the UK Labour Force Survey suggests that in 2008 10% of individuals found jobs through job centres whereas 26% were via social networks.

Laurence and Heath's Predictors of Community Cohesion: multi-level modelling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey (Communities and Local Government 2008) found that both living in social housing, and feeling that social housing allocation is unfair, were strong negative predictors of cohesion. In 2007/08 25% of white people thought that Council housing departments or housing associations would discriminate against them on the basis of their race (Guidance for Local Authorities on How to Mainstream Community Cohesion into Other Services, Communities and Local Government, 2009).

There are clear links between regeneration and cohesion:

- Regeneration and new developments provide opportunities to encourage more interaction to reduce social segregation
- Consultation on regeneration is a way of bringing different people together
- Building local social structures alongside physical structures helps ensure that improvements are owned and protected by local people
- Good design helps build people's sense of belonging

However, the Regeneration and the Race Equality Duty (Commission for Racial Equality, 2007) 'found no evidence that consultation events were being used to promote good race relations and community cohesion' despite the fact that 'coming together as a community to discuss the future shape of an area can be a powerful, uniting force. After all, all people want the best for themselves, their family or their community.

'Economic and social regeneration' is managed through Shaping Thurrock's Sustainable Communities Programme Board.

Safer place and crime

Studies that have looked at the relationship between cohesion and crime suggest that more cohesive areas have lower crime levels, and that fear of crime and fear of a racist attack have a negative impact on people's opinion of the cohesion of their neighbourhood. Analysis of the national Place Survey shows a strong negative correlation between measures of cohesion and perceptions of drunk/rowdy and anti-social behaviour being a problem.

In 2008/09, 35.9% of reported racial incidents in Thurrock occurred in Grays, 23.9% in Tilbury and 16.3% in Ockenden. This correlates with casework undertaken by Thurrock Racial Unity Support Task Group between March 2008 and April 2009, with 48% in Grays, followed by 28% in Tilbury and 15% in South Ockenden.

'Safer place and crime' is managed through Shaping Thurrock's Community Safety Partnership.

Health inequalities

A number of studies have shown that the environment in which a person lives, such as how cohesive it is and the social networks a person keeps, can impact on the likelihood of them suffering certain types of health ailments. 'Health tends to decline (...particularly in stress related

conditions) in communities where levels of interaction are low and where people feel insecure' (Institute of Community Cohesion: www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk).

'Health inequalities' is managed through Shaping Thurrock's Healthier Communities Programme Board.

Children, young people and attainment

Schools help different groups interact, both internally and externally through inter-school links. Young people can be trained as peer mentors, facilitators, mediators and leaders to support education, and influence other young people and the wider community (Building Cohesive Communities, Communities and Local Government, 2009). Thurrock schools now have an audit toolkit for cohesion. It is recommended that a comprehensive action plan is developed for young people's contribution to cohesion in Thurrock.

'Children, young people and attainment' is managed through Shaping Thurrock's Children's Trust.



Thurrock Place Survey 2008/09

Cohesion 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.

- 54.3% of people in Thurrock think that the local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together, compared with 75.8% for the unitary average and 76% nationally.

People are less likely to think that people from different backgrounds get on well in Tilbury St Chads (16.7%), Tilbury Riverside (25.6%), Stifford Clays (40.9%) and Grays Riverside (44.4%).

- 52.4% of Thurrock residents say they have a strong feeling of belonging to their immediate neighbourhood. This compares to 57.2% for the unitary average and 59% nationally.

People less likely to feel a sense of belonging include those living in West Thurrock and South Stifford (31.7%), Grays Riverside (37.0%), South Chafford (43.2%) and Ockendon (45.5%).

- In Thurrock, 27% of respondents believe that they can influence decisions affecting their local area. A similar picture holds true for the unitary and national averages (Unitary: 28%, National: 29%).

People are less likely to agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area in South Chafford (15.8%), Stanford-le-Hope West (18.6%), Stifford Clays (18.8%), and Chadwell St Mary (20.3%).

- 63.9% of respondents say they are satisfied with their local area as a place to live, compared with 79.2% for the unitary average and 80% nationally.

People living in Tilbury St Chads, Tilbury Riverside (50%), Grays Thurrock (51.1%) and Grays Riverside (55.6%) are less likely to be satisfied with their local area as a place to live.

- 18% of respondents say that they have given unpaid help to groups, clubs or organisations over the last 12 months, compared with 22.7% for the unitary average and 23% nationally.

Residents in Tilbury St Chads (6.5%), Stifford Clays (10.9%), Chafford and North Stifford (11.0%) and West Thurrock and South Stifford (12.2%) are less likely to have given unpaid help in the past 12 months.

Contributory factors

The 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment summarised the cohesion challenges for Thurrock as:

- 54% of people feel that people from different backgrounds do not get on well together
- 47% think that not treating one another with respect and consideration is a problem
- Not many people take part in community activity
- Few people feel that they can influence decisions in their locality
- Community relations in some neighbourhoods are weak
- There are other areas of discrimination such as sexual orientation and gender

There are a number of contributory factors to poor community cohesion in the borough:

- Rapid change in the borough's demographic profile, particularly the 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

In addition, 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.

So how do we develop a sense of belonging? 'Building Cohesive Communities' (Communities and Local Government, 2009) suggests:

- Identifying who needs to develop a greater sense of belonging
- Identifying the historical stories of place and the current stories
- Developing a shared 'story of place' that takes into account the history of the locality and all its communities

- Helping people to learn and practice English
- Promoting understanding between individuals and groups



Deprivation remains a major influencer of poor cohesion, particularly in certain neighbourhoods, 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

Tackling extremism

We face a serious and long term threat from terrorism across the country, but as we have seen repeatedly in the last few years, people of every community and background are ready to resist those who threaten both their safety and cohesion in their areas.

We need to work in partnership with communities to challenge and expose the ideology that sanctions and encourages indiscriminate violence. We need to work together to stop people, especially young people getting drawn into illegal activities associated with violent extremism. We need to expose and isolate the apologists for violence and protect the places where they operate.

We along with the partners have a critical role in preventing violent extremism. We are in a position to talk to local communities, hear their concerns and enable people to stand shoulder to shoulder confident in their rejection of violence. This supports the Counter Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST), which includes PREVENT, which aims to work with communities supporting them around all forms of violent extremism.

PEOPLE AND PLACE

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.

Each community itself encompasses many communities. For instance the black and minority ethnic community also consists of women, parents, people of Asian origin and more. We should be aware of 'boxing' groups for convenience rather than defining groups as they wish to be identified. Young people are our future citizens and have their own views on how to bring communities together.



In particular there is an intergenerational gap – resulting from families moving/living apart and less socialising between children and grandparents. We need to work with young people via Connexions, schools clusters, Royal Opera House Creative Partnerships, Thurrock Youth Cabinet and other agencies. We will also need to ensure that harder to hear groups are included:

- Older people – working with Adult Social Care, Age Concern, Thurrock Over Fifties Forum (TOFF) and others
- Travellers – for example via the Travellers Achievement Service
- Disabled – linking into umbrella agency Thurrock Disability Network
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual community – this has traditionally remained underground, but there is now an emerging support network
- Non-English language speakers – common barriers include lack of information and recognition, making it difficult to engage

The Council's Corporate Diversity team's review of the most requested interpretations/translations over the last few years resulted in a revised the Language Plate from December 2009: Bengali, Cantonese, Dari (from Iran), Farsi (also from Iran), Hindi, Igbo (from Nigeria), Kurdish, Pashto (from Afghanistan), Punjabi, Romanian, Spanish, Tigrinya (from Somalia), Urdu, Vietnamese and Yoruba (from Nigeria). An easily accessible, friendly and flexible format for learning the English language will help maximise its cohesion potential. Informal language support, for instance via groups held at community centres, children's centres and libraries, where people can not only learn English but also befriend others, share activities and other languages, would be useful. Bilingual households could also be supported to host non-British visitors to the 2012 Olympics/Paralympics as a way of further embedding language learning and cohesion.

A recent report by Thurrock Disability Network highlighted a number of valuable points, including good engagement practice that would benefit all harder to hear groups, such as:

- Facilitated face to face meetings, held during the day at fully accessible venues
- Postal surveys, including a stamped addressed envelope for responses
- Word of mouth communications, for example via Police Community Support Officers
- Up to date information on Community Forums
- The importance of feedback on issues raised

Thurrock's demographic make-up has changed dramatically, with the non-white population of Thurrock thought to have increased from 4.7% in 2001 to 9% in 2007. The average black and minority ethnic student population in Thurrock's primary and secondary schools is now 20.8%, with dramatic increases in some schools in the last year. In one school 66.4% of students are from a black and minority ethnic background. Concern about resources is often therefore aimed at ethnic minorities who have recently moved to Thurrock, especially people from Black

African and East European communities. Communities Together is not solely about race relations but there is no doubt that this is a key area of our work when considering how to support people from different backgrounds to get on well together.

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. In addition to demographic change, Thurrock is facing unprecedented physical and social change through new housing growth. Many people feel that services are already stretched and that adding more homes will worsen the situation. Long established communities often feel left behind and perceive this change as a threat rather than being of potential benefit. It is important that we acknowledge these concerns and ensure that established communities and others do not miss out on opportunities.

In 'Community: The Structure of Belonging' (2008), Peter Block sets out some important concepts for building community:

- We are a community of possibilities, not a community of problems
- To transform the community we need to build the social fabric
- The overriding characteristic of a stuck community is the broadcasting of all the reasons we have to be afraid. This fear is then used to justify the retributive (extremist) agenda
- Focusing solely on the needs and deficiencies of the most vulnerable in the community substitutes labeling for welcoming. This is isolating, in that they become a special category of people defined by what they cannot do
- A citizen is one who is willing to be accountable for and committed to the well-being of the whole community
- No vision, detailed plan or committed leadership can achieve success without the continued engagement and involvement of citizens



If we are to achieve Communities Together, we need to start viewing the community as co-pilots on this journey, trusting their views and valuing their contributions.

RESEARCH AND UNDERSTANDING

Data from a range of local research conducted in 2008 and 2009 shows that:

Equality strand	Statistical Evidence	Potential Adverse Impact
GENDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 61% of victims of racial hate crime were male¹ ▪ 81% of perpetrators of racial hate crime were male¹ ▪ Almost twice as many women (34%) as men said that their feelings of safety stopped them from doing things² 	<p>If we focus attention on males as the main perpetrators and victims of hate crime, we will be overlooking the fact that feeling unsafe has a greater impact on females</p> <p>Some women in particular, may not be in a position where they feel able to engage as a result of trauma or control issues in the home</p>
RACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 25% of victims of racial hate crime were Black Africans¹ ▪ 87% of perpetrators of racial hate crime were White British¹ ▪ 40% of African community respondents felt that Thurrock is not a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together³ ▪ 49% respondents from the African Community felt that Tilbury was not a place where people 	<p>Overtly concentrating on race issues in terms of cohesion may well exacerbate existing tensions</p> <p>Travellers may feel intruded upon if we try to get them to engage more with other communities</p> <p>Non-English language speakers face a number of barriers including a lack of information and recognition, making it difficult to engage</p>

¹ Understanding Community Cohesion in Thurrock – report by Chris Ochular (Thurrock Community Cohesion Task Group), 2009

² Thurrock Community Safety Partnership's commissioned research, 2009

³ 2008 Peer to Peer Research in the African Community

	<p>from different backgrounds get on well together³</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ White British pupils were identified as perpetrators in 77.1% of racial incidents in school; African pupils were identified as the perpetrators in 9.5% of incidents⁸ ▪ Black African pupils were victims in 40% of racial incidents in school; White British pupils were victims in 22.8% of incidents⁸ 	
DISABILITY	Around 9,000 adults in Thurrock may have a disability ⁴	Current engagement practices may not always meet disabled people's needs and therefore their views may not be fully represented
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There were 17 civil partnerships in Thurrock between April 2007 and March 2009⁵ 	The gay, lesbian and bisexual community in Thurrock has traditionally remained underground, therefore their views may not always be represented
AGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 39% of 35-54 year old tenants disagreed that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together⁶ ▪ 55% of young people in Tilbury felt that Tilbury was not a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together⁷ ▪ 32% of young people in Purfleet felt that Purfleet was not a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together⁷ ▪ 55% of respondents from the African Community aged 16-24 felt that Thurrock was not a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together³ 	If we concentrate only on young and middle aged people (who feature most strongly in terms of negative views) we will miss out on the fact that older people are most likely to be stopped from doing things because of feeling unsafe

⁴ Thurrock Disability Network

⁵ Thurrock Knowledge Centre

⁶ 2009 Housing Tenants Survey

⁷ Youth Peer to Peer Survey 2008

⁸ Analysis of racist incidents across all Thurrock schools during the academic year 2008/09

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 36% of victims of racial hate crime were aged 26-40¹ ▪ 49% of perpetrators of racial hate crime were aged 16-25¹ ▪ People aged 65+ (45%) and young people aged 16-18 (31%) were most likely to say that feeling unsafe stopped them from doing things² 	
RELIGION OR BELIEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 36% of tenants who stated that they do not have a religion and 46% of tenants who preferred not to state their religion disagreed that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together⁷ 	If we focus largely on communities of faith we will be neglecting those who feel more strongly that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds do not get on well together

Consultants commissioned by Shaping Thurrock in 2008 placed the borough in the 'amber zone' for how well our communities get on together. Key issues identified, particularly in certain neighbourhoods, include:

- Crime rates are relatively low, but fear of crime is high
- The population is changing rapidly over a short period
- Most people do not actively dislike the Council and its partners, but there are pockets of serious discontent
- Perceived unfairness about being 'forgotten'
- Myths about preferential treatment of immigrant groups are fairly widespread
- There are some outright expressions of racism (often accompanied by genuinely meant denials of being racist); although a sense of latent fear and prejudice is more common, and hate crime
- Official communications are poor, so it is hard for the Council and its partners to spread positive messages
- Although there are many areas of good practice and valuable services, local residents do not always know about them
- Intergenerational issues
- Commuters not feeling part of the community
- Insufficient engagement
- Mute button is on – people are not listening

It is important to delve further into existing research to identify the core issues:

- Why people feel they don't get on
- What are the issues around jobs, housing, benefits – particularly those that can be collectively tackled
- Attitudes around new arrivals/earlier arrivals/ indigenous population; what are the 'dividers' and why
- What support mechanisms would facilitate better relationships between new and existing communities

- What are the common issues across communities - commonality around real life issues is regarded as having significant value to cohesion (What works in Cohesion, Communities and Local Government, 2007)
- What sources people rely on for information on what is happening or available locally

A Communities Together conference was held in October 2009, bringing together representatives from the voluntary, community, faith and public sectors. The main barriers identified around bringing communities together were:

- Communication
- Feeling judged
- Assumptions
- Self-esteem
- Cost of interpreters
- Childcare
- Meeting venues/facilities
- Working hours
- Fear of new communities
- Lack of understanding of cultural differences
- Some people can't see a need to be involved
- People have different abilities to engage in consultation

In addition, a number of insightful points were made about the links between community wellbeing and community spirit:

- Lack of economic wellbeing leads to a fear of crime and newcomers being suspected of posing a threat to livelihoods, which in turn create barriers to building relationships and therefore community
- Once people feel part of a good community, they feel able to solve other people's problems, not just their own
- Once people feel part of the whole community, they feel able to express and nurture basic human values for example love, caring and understanding
- Safe streets equals active people, which means community spirit, which in turn equals looking out for each other and the neighbourhood, which results in a sense of belonging

We all have a part to play in bringing and building Communities Together – together everyone achieves more.



COMMUNICATION, ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL MARKETING

Communications and engagement are key factors in ensuring that the delivery efforts of all partners reach residents in ways that are well received and embraced. South West Essex Primary Care Trust's experience with social marketing has set a useful precedent. Their Vitality programme was born out of research into why people were not engaging with vital health and wellbeing services. Vitality's informal image and friendly programme style has had a marked effect on take up of services.

'Communications are of vital importance in driving overall perceptions...we see time and time again the clear relationship between satisfaction with a Local Authority and the extent to which resident feel informed about the services it provides' (Understanding Society: The Perils of Perception, Ipsos Mori, 2009). It is clear that people act on their perceptions so we need to work with perceptions as reality – sending out literature saying people's perceptions are wrong can ingrain their negative views, especially if the source of the message lacks credibility. Involving taxi drivers, hairdressers, twitter, Facebook, emerging/community leaders and others to take forward positive messages can be an advantage. Trained and informed frontline staff will help to reinforce this.

Conflict can be healthy – alternative views provide an opportunity to enhance services and methods of engagement or communication. We need to deal with conflict constructively, focusing on the common ground rather than on differences. A programme of useful tips and training will help to boost staff confidence in dealing with challenges around bringing communities together. It is natural for people to be concerned about change and the 'unknown', particularly in economically challenging times. We need to create an environment that can allay these fears: if somewhere is seen as a nice place to live, and services are seen to be easily accessible and meeting needs, community partnership is more likely. In the 2008 Quality of Life Survey, 53% of respondents disagreed that Thurrock is a thriving and attractive place to live and work. Changing how residents feel about Thurrock as a place to live is therefore integral to achieving Communities Together.

To tackle extremist views we need to home in on 'bread and butter' issues – what underlies concerns about jobs, housing, school places, benefits and youth activity, for instance. Existing minority ethnic communities can also be opposed to newcomers. We can reduce anxiety through accurate information about resource allocation, by ensuring that processes are transparent and fair, and by talking to established/existing communities about changes in the community and the part they can play. Population mobility will also have implications for

engagement. Although it is important to challenge negative or wrong perceptions, how we do it depends on how well local people will receive the message:

- A low-key approach that minimises tension but may be diluted
- An incremental approach that builds as community confidence in the message grows
- A high profile approach that will get people talking

In Thurrock, a prevailing, negative narrative has been identified among some sections of the local population, which has created a virtual 'mute button'. Any facts presented that contradict a certain world view are likely to be dismissed or even exacerbate the sense of distrust – houses built, jobs created and improved services will still be seen to benefit 'someone else'. This 'mute button' needs to be tackled through congruent messages that acknowledge current emotions around bringing communities together. Therefore it is likely that Thurrock will use an incremental approach that builds as community confidence in the message grows.

Importance of media

Where there is an information vacuum, myths may flood in to fill the gap. The Local Government Information Unit advocates persistence with building relationships with the local media – even when difficult, as well as greater attention to new forms of communication. Government research found that the media can have a positive impact on improving people's attitudes and reducing prejudice and discrimination (Getting the message across: using media to reduce racial prejudice and discrimination, Communities and Local Government, 2007), and the Improvement and Development Agency has developed a 10-tip toolkit on building a relationship with the media (2006). Media can be used to welcome new communities, keeping people up to date with changes in the area. Good liaison between the Council, or community representatives, and the media can result in:

- Stories that break down stereotypes
- Information that challenges or limits rumours/myths
- A reduction in reporting extremist views

Key messages coming out of the 2009 Communities Together conference workshops include:

- Publicise services better – new and wider information sources and formats are needed to engage and inform the whole community (*this point was highlighted repeatedly*)
- Jargon free communications
- Recognise the range of people's contributions
- Consult to make a difference, not for the sake of consulting
- Identify and build on common issues - groups that come together because of strongly held beliefs about a particular issue, for instance drinking in the park, tend to overlook differences among members of the group
- Encourage mixed ability/disability groups
- Concentrate on different people's/communities' positives

- Include same sex parents in parenting/child care programmes
- Promote a 'can do' attitude
- Simplify processes
- More awareness of and education around different languages
- Volunteering – in a study of volunteer refugees and asylum seekers in Wales, 100% of respondents felt it helped towards their integration
- Make information available through a range of media including word of mouth

Examples of this are:

- Community newsletters
- Events that promote meaningful interaction between people from different backgrounds
- Volunteer celebrations
- Community problem solving activities based on common issues such as jobs, safety
- Living Books – local people sharing life experiences
- Online blogs and social networking sites
- Trained community ambassadors
- 'Communities Together' themed promotions



Community events/activities

At workshops hosted by Shaping Thurrock in 2008, activities were identified as a good way of developing a shared sense of belonging. Activities can act as bonding agents – boosting community confidence, and as bridging agents – building understanding between different groups. The 2006 Department for Culture Media and Sport Taking Part survey showed that those participating in cultural activities were 20% more likely to know 'many people' in their neighbourhood and around 40%-60% more likely to believe that 'many of their neighbours can be

trusted'. Those who participate in sports are more likely to vote, contact a politician, sign a petition, and have higher levels of social trust and life satisfaction (Sport and Social Capital in the United Kingdom: Statistical Evidence from National and International Survey Data, Delaney and Keaney, 2005).

In Thurrock, civic pride and community wellbeing could be enhanced through:

- Advocacy – signposting /‘welcome’ briefings/news updates for new arrivals and other vulnerable groups, via community ambassadors
- Language clubs – informal English Language clubs can be a valuable starting point towards formal lessons, as well as a way of breaking down the social isolation felt by non-English speaking residents
- Sewing/cooking clubs
- Community mediation/conflict resolution
- Community researchers
- Peer to peer supporters
- Community involvement in ‘greening’ their neighbourhood
- Community hosts for Olympics/Paralympics visitors
- Improving access to community facilities
- Buddy/Befriending scheme – invite someone new
- Tea/coffee mornings
- Training opportunities
- Opportunities for the economically active to meet
- Enhancing community forums via Ngage – meeting times, formats, as a base for consultation and feedback
- Using faith as a bridge across communities via social projects such as. Waltham Forest’s Health Preachers
- Improved transport – enhancing movement of people between different parts of the borough

Young people also saw transport as a barrier to accessing opportunities in different parts of the borough (Children’s Trust Board: Collated Face to Face consultation responses and next steps, academic year 2007/08)

Working with existing and emerging voluntary, community, faith and business leaders is an essential route into the community. Grass-root organisations are closer to issues in the community, are more likely to have the trust of vulnerable communities and can react faster if effectively resourced. However it is important that the community leader acts as a gateway into the wider community, and not as a gatekeeper through which all contact with the wider group is passed. The latter would result in limited engagement and the leader’s own views rather than those of the group. Faith groups often provide services to the most vulnerable members of society, and should be encouraged to explore ways of working closer together to strengthen Communities Together.

We need to actively promote good news and opportunities for engagement so that residents can make the most of what is on offer. Capacity building may also be needed in order to develop trust and build community confidence. Local events provide good opportunities for informal consultation, but whatever format of consultation is used we need to be open about the possible extent of community input, and feed back on progress. In Ngage’s 2009 Your Community – Your Voice survey, 67% of Thurrock respondents who said they had not taken part in any consultation cited the fact that they had never been asked as a reason for this. Moreover, 39% of those who had taken part in consultations and

had been told that feedback would be provided said this had not been done. It is crucial that residents are actively involved in service planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation if we are to effectively meet their needs.

A wise proverb says 'Tell me, I'll hear you; show me, I'll remember; involve me, I'll understand'. We are much more likely to be successful if we work with the community to identify and resolve shared challenges. To this end, a community grants scheme was run between January and March 2009 to stimulate opportunities for meaningful interaction over the year. Over £48,000 was awarded through 39 grants to voluntary, community and faith organisations to provide sports, street parties, eat and meet events, cultural activities and engagement opportunities, to name a few. As the projects are community driven, they provide a wider variety of opportunities to bring people together than would otherwise be possible. Much of what needs to be achieved is reflected in the Cultural Olympiad's stated aims and values – inspiring and involving the widest range of communities, excellence, respect and friendship. Future grants will therefore reflect Thurrock's preparation for the 2012 Olympics/Paralympics and embrace Thurrock's very apt motto: 'By Thames to all the peoples of the world'. Grant programmes in 2009/10 and 2010/11 will support groups to play an active role in strengthening Communities Together around the theme of the Cultural Olympiad, with events from October 2009 forming a 1000-day count down. The 2009 Thurrock Festival, organised by the Council's Diversity team has also been registered as part of the London 2012 Open Weekend in celebration of the forthcoming Olympics/Paralympics.

Volunteering

Engagement has a key role to play in bringing communities together. People who are active citizens are more likely to have positive perceptions about where they live. Low levels of volunteering, active citizenship and participation have an adverse effect on community partnership. The Council's Community Development team is supporting a full range of activities to address these areas and build capacity – generally in partnership with the voluntary, community and faith sector – in order that local people have the knowledge and confidence to participate as well as opportunities to practise these new skills. Thurrock Council is a Pathfinder for the Take Part initiative, empowering communities to participate more in active, civic roles. This encourages communities to increase their skills, confidence and opportunity to take up civic roles from volunteering at a day centre to lay governance. Action to empower communities to influence decisions is a specific commitment in the Local Area Agreement (National Indicator 4). Working in partnership with voluntary, community and faith organisations will also support a Thriving Third Sector (National Indicator 7).



MAINSTREAMING

Our long term agenda must be to achieve a seamless integration of Communities Together into all that we do, rather than develop specialist activities. All Shaping Thurrock partners have a crucial role to play in achieving Communities Together. We are therefore concentrating on embedding it into Shaping Thurrock culture and existing programmes, and delivering services in partnership with the voluntary, community and faith sector wherever possible, to promote sustainability. If we all take account of cohesion in service delivery, those services will be more customer-focused, efficient and effective. Other local authorities that have undertaken a cohesion review with their services suggest:

- Holding workshops on community cohesion for senior staff
- Asking each service area to set out how it promotes community cohesion
- Service areas impact assessing their work

As part of the process of mainstreaming Communities Together, we need to ask ourselves some key questions:

- What training and support is given to frontline staff to adopt behaviours that make all people feel welcomed and valued?
- Do our engagement mechanisms bring people from different backgrounds together or do we deal with each group separately?
- What are we doing to help people manage the fear of change and difference?
- Do we involve residents in welcoming and supporting new arrivals?
- Do we promote positive images of the diversity of people and places within our borough?
- How is the broad diversity of local people reflected in each of our borough-wide events?
- Do we make the most of community spaces/venues and co-location of services to promote positive messages?

ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITIES

'Community Cohesion, Seven Steps, a practitioner's toolkit' (Community Cohesion Unit, 2005) identifies seven steps to developing community cohesion:

- Leadership and commitment
- Developing a vision and values for community cohesion
- Programme planning and management
- Engaging communities
- Challenging and changing perceptions
- Community cohesion and specialist areas
- Ensuring sustainability of programmes

All Shaping Thurrock partners have signed up to improving cohesion in Thurrock – leadership buy-in and support are crucial to the successful implementation of measures to achieve Communities Together. This is how accountability is structured here:

- Shaping Thurrock Partnership and Executive Board
- Shaping Thurrock Programme Boards for example Community Involvement Board and Community Safety Partnership
- Community Involvement Board providing critical challenge through performance monitoring
- Shaping Thurrock Sub Groups for example Promoting Tolerance Group
- Thurrock Council Cabinet Member with responsibility for cohesion
- Thurrock Council 's Directors' Board Strategic Sub Group on Community Engagement, Equality and Social Cohesion
- Communities Together Reference Group

In the Council, operational responsibility for the Communities Together strategy is situated in the Community Development Department of Culture and Communities, within the Community Well Being Directorate. This is because much of the work required to strengthen Communities Together depends on helping communities to work together on common issues of concern – whether via established, non-traditional or short-term groups, using meaningful interaction as a way of breaking the barriers that can exist within communities. This does not mean we should neglect the uncommon ground, however – we will need to be alert to what might happen next.

The Directors' Board Strategic Sub Group on Community Engagement, Equality and Social Cohesion will provide corporate responsibility for the Communities Together strategy, with multi agency engagement secured through relevant Shaping Thurrock sub groups such as Promoting Tolerance and Neighbourhood Renewal. In addition, a bi-annual workshop delivered through the Community Involvement Board will be convened to share progress, and to network across agencies to ensure that Communities Together is informed by grass-roots knowledge and woven into all service delivery values.



Elected members have crucial responsibilities, too, in terms of leadership and ward level engagement. 'Members have a very important role to play in championing community cohesion, and demonstrating that this is part of how the council goes about its day to day business and not just another initiative' (Community Cohesion, Seven Steps, a practitioner's toolkit, 2005). There is much to be gained by high visibility of ward Councillors, for instance through regular attendance at Community Forums, involvement in hands-on community projects such as graffiti removal, and ongoing community conversations.

As the borough's primary employers, Shaping Thurrock partners have an essential role to play in ensuring a corporate approach to Communities Together. Employees can impact on how well people get on together through the way policy is implemented, through interaction with members of the community as part of their jobs and, for the many who also live in Thurrock, the impressions given to family and friends.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE – PERFORMANCE, OUTCOMES AND RENEWAL

Overarching aim:

Achieve a **5% improvement in the Place Survey rating for National Indicator 1 in Thurrock by March 2011**, through:

Objective 1: Ensure that a robust performance management framework for Communities Together is in place

- 1.1 Embed Communities Together performance management across Shaping Thurrock
- 1.2 Keep track of changes in communities and perceptions

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

- 2.1 Mainstream Communities Together values into Shaping Thurrock and partners' corporate communications strategies
- 2.2 Mainstream Communities Together values into all consultation and engagement activities across Shaping Thurrock
- 2.3 Mainstream Communities Together values into all events across Shaping Thurrock
- 2.4 Mainstream Communities Together values into project appraisals, bids and procurement across Shaping Thurrock
- 2.5 Support existing programmes to integrate good practice in relation to Communities Together

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

- 3.1 Launch small grant schemes for 2009/10 and 2010/11
- 3.2 Identify, train and develop volunteers as Communities Together ambassadors
- 3.3 Identify and develop residents as hosts to Olympics/Paralympics visitors
- 3.4 Develop positive vox pox for use in promotions

- 3.5 Build up stories and experiences from around Thurrock
- 3.6 Develop a 'Welcome to Thurrock' programme /Residents Information pack
- 3.7 Develop a faiths forum for Thurrock
- 3.8 Broaden the Walking for Health programme
- 3.9 Involve children and young people in developing and sharing positive messages around Communities Together

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

- 4.1-4.4 Work with programmes to integrate good practice around Communities Together

These objectives will impact on four central themes (please see Appendices B and C for further information):

- Economic and social regeneration
- Safer place and crime
- Health inequalities
- Children, young people and attainment

Expected outcomes

- Communities Together is embedded in Shaping Thurrock's culture, resulting in greater understanding and management of issues affecting cohesion
- Communities Together is integral to service development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation in Thurrock
- Social marketing and engagement have increased meaningful interaction and positive relationships, especially between long standing communities and newer groups
- Targeted interventions have reduced the gap in perceptions, between identified neighbourhoods and the borough average, around how well people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area

Appendix A: Exploring the Four Central Themes

Economic and Social Regeneration

Data indicates that to really impact on Communities Together, a specific focus on identified neighbourhoods is needed. These areas correlate with the borough's super output areas or areas of deprivation. The Shaping Thurrock recognises that neighbourhood renewal is an area that needs addressing. To that end, the Sustainable Communities Directorate is leading the development of a Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy on behalf of the partnership. This would enable targeted engagement and activity within key areas of concern to help support sets of outcomes reflecting community need. Delivery of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy depends on the ability of all agencies to place local need at the core of their objectives. The Duty to Involve, which became a statutory responsibility of the Council in April 2009 underpins our commitment to ensure that services meet local need as identified by residents. Neighbourhood Action Plans will reflect this duty as a result of the strategy. The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy will link with the large-scale outcomes of Thurrock's wider regeneration programme as part of the Thames Gateway. Communities Together will be one of a number of issues that the Strategy will explore.

Safer Place and Crime

Thurrock's Community Safety Partnership oversees Thurrock's Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy 2008 - 2011. People's perception of how safe Thurrock is as a place to live, and of levels of vandalism and graffiti, all impact on their feelings about how well people get on. The Thurrock Community Safety Partnership strategy has a huge role to play in strengthening Communities Together in Thurrock. Some examples of this include Community Pay Back (involving offenders in community improvements), engagement activities (addressing the fear of crime and the true extent of local crime), and promoting tolerance/fighting Hate Crime (for example, using multi agency groups to investigate issues of concern and incidents of hate crime). Incidents of race hate crime are increasing in Thurrock although it is difficult to ascertain whether this is due to an increase in attacks or confidence in reporting due to increased outreach work. Race Hate crime is most evident in certain identified neighbourhoods – Grays, Tilbury and Purfleet.

Health Inequality

Just as the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy aims to reduce inequality and improve living standards, so too will our focus on health. Reducing health inequalities will help many vulnerable people live healthier lives, which in turn is likely to increase their capacity for engagement and interaction. South West Essex PCT's Public Health promotion through Vitality, which includes healthy cooking classes, weight management and expert patient care will help strengthen Communities Together. Adult social care is also a key player in ensuring that we remove health inequalities. Two examples of current activity include 'Connect and Care', targeting vulnerable older people for referral to appropriate services, and a volunteering and work experience strategy to help adults with learning disabilities to gain more opportunities and live independently.

Children, Young People and Attainment

Schools have a statutory duty to promote community cohesion, and various strands of core work aim to ensure that this duty is met. These include the citizenship curriculum, anti bullying strategies, multi-agency support when issues in school are identified, and aspirational work including music, sports and cultural projects with the Royal Opera House Creative Partnerships. Beyond school, positive activities for young people, work with NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) and vocational work programmes are all underpinned by a commitment to increasing cohesion. Working with children and young people often provides an opportunity to challenge values and perceptions that might otherwise undermine Communities Together, and to introduce new experiences to influence thinking. Targeted work with young people, especially in the identified neighbourhoods, to equip them with the skills and support to carry out further research with their peers – on life in Thurrock, will help to identify the types of interventions needed to support Communities Together.

Appendix B: Examples of Communities Together in Action

Economic and social regeneration: Grays Riverside Community Association

Led by Lesley Kirby, fondly known as Monty, Grays Riverside Community Association (GRCA) continues to be a force for good on Seabrooke Rise estate. Lesley and her team of volunteers have created a busy timetable of weekly activities as well as a variety of events open to all residents. Working in partnership with Councillors, the Council's Tenant Participation team, Be Smart, Thurrock Racial Unity Support Group, Grays Housing Association and different communities, GRCA has literally brought the Seabrooke Rise Community House to life. Projects include a Family 1st Aid Fun Day, resulting in 26 adults and children who feel more confident about helping someone who is injured or ill; a big tidy up of the estate and surrounding areas; a community 'social cohesion' evening at which anti-social behaviour and mediation were discussed alongside a children's disco and food from around the world – Britain, Africa, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and Asia; and cultural days. One recent success was East Meets West: an event organised by the local Eastern European community to share their food and culture with the wider community. This was attended by children, young people, adults and older people of Lithuanian, Russian, English, Polish, Indian, Latvian, Nigerian, Rhodesian and Zimbabwe origin.

Safer place and crime: Tilbury Christmas Lights and Fayre

Every November, Tilbury enjoys a traditional Christmas lights switch-on courtesy of the volunteering and fundraising efforts of Tilbury Riverside Project. Tilbury Riverside Project works with local businesses, the police and others to deliver a much appreciated festive spirit to the local community. In addition to Father Christmas and his helpers arriving by 'sleigh', there is a grotto for younger children, fairground rides and stalls, mince pies and tea, along with entertainment from school and church choirs and local bands. Hundreds of people attend the Christmas Lights and Fayre each year, even when the weather is unkind. It is an opportunity for everyone to get together, put aside any issues, have fun and usher in the season of good will. Add a longstanding commitment to environmental regeneration, and it is no wonder that the volunteers at Tilbury Riverside Project have won numerous accolades, ranging from Thurrock Citizen of the Year to the Queens Award for Voluntary Service.

Health inequality: Thurrock Elderly Multi-Cultural Support Group and Thurrock Young People Multi-Cultural Group

Thurrock Elderly Multi-Cultural Support Group and Thurrock Young People Multi-Cultural Group have joined forces to run a variety of community initiatives aimed at enabling people to socialise, helping to boost confidence and mental wellbeing, giving young people something positive to do, and nurturing feelings of 'one Thurrock'. Every month, local people can enjoy a world-inspired lunch for £2. The groups are also working with refugees and others from isolated communities to link them into the wider community. Their music group – which involves playing instruments, singing and dancing – helps bridge intergenerational and cultural differences by bringing together people from a wide variety of ages and backgrounds including Nepalese, Iranian, Afghan, Sierra Leone and English origin. Other projects include weekly football for under 13s to adults, Tae Kwon Do – to help promote discipline and fitness, informal English and numeracy, and regular Karaoke and food evenings. All the initiatives are run by volunteers, and are open to everyone in the community.

Children, young people and attainment: About Tilbury and Chadwell Newsletter

About Tilbury and Chadwell is a partnership project between the community and the Gateway Academy, focusing on positive aspects of life in Tilbury and Chadwell. Young people from the academy are involved in planning, writing and editing the newsletter, with contributions from the community. As part of their research into the area young people go into the community to meet and interview a variety of local people. Working on the newsletter has helped broaden young people's horizons, given them new skills and inspired career choices. It has also fostered a sense of pride in the local area and an understanding of its history. About Tilbury and Chadwell has been particularly welcomed by older people who, in some cases, have been able to get back in touch with long-lost friends thanks to the stories covered. The newsletter has received acclaim from as far away as Australia and Canada, where residents have sent copies to relatives living abroad. It is delivered bi-monthly to 9,000 homes and centres in Tilbury and Chadwell, and was instrumental in earning the academy Best Business in the Community at the Thurrock Business Awards 2008.

Appendix C: Equality Impact Assessment Incorporating Cohesion

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM

Directorate	
Policy author	
Are you assessing a proposal, strategy, policy, activity, plan or function? (Indicate which one)	
Name of your proposal, strategy, policy, activity, plan or function	
Purpose and expected outcomes of your proposal	
Summary of consultation	
Method of implementation	

Purpose of the impact assessment

To test what impact (positive and negative) the project, activity, strategy, policy, plan or function you are planning (your proposal) will have on equality and community wellbeing. Equality Impact Assessments are a statutory requirement.

How to do the impact assessment

This must not be a solo effort. You will need to bring together people with differing views and backgrounds to act as critical friends. Their comments should not be taken as criticisms, but rather as a way to improve your proposal's impact on equality and community wellbeing.

For more information, please contact: Equality & Diversity team at Civic Offices, Grays, on 01375 2472, or email diversity@thurrock.gov.uk

Stage 1a: Please complete this section prior to planning your proposal

Equality area	Evidence of impact (consultation, research or statistical evidence)	Potential adverse impact
GENDER		
RACE		
DISABILITY		
SEXUAL ORIENTATION		
AGE		
RELIGION OR BELIEF		

Stage 1b: Please complete this section prior to planning your proposal

Bringing communities together	Evaluation	Potential adverse impact
How will local stakeholders and community leaders be engaged in planning your proposal?		
How will this proposal help groups to improve their understanding of and respect for each other?		
How will this proposal help bring different communities together?		
Where will contact between different groups take place?		
How will increased contact between groups affect community tension/ conflict?		
Who will be affected by your proposal, but not necessarily benefit directly from it?		
How could your proposal influence perceptions of inequality between affected groups? (e.g. between people living near a planned housing redevelopment and those that live there)		

Stage 2: Please complete this section prior to planning your proposal

	Summary of adverse impacts, from Stages 1a and 1b	Options explored to address inequality and improve community outcomes
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

Add more rows if necessary

Stage 3: Please update this section as your planning progresses and prior to submitting your form

Number from Stage 2	Actions that will address inequality and improve community outcomes	Responsible officer	Target date	Progress update
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				

Add more rows if necessary

Date submitted to (Corporate Diversity)	
Sign off (Corporate Diversity Advisor's signature)	
Review date	

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