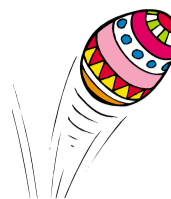




Football crazy – Page 3



Naturally Thurrock – Page 4



Join our Easter egg hunt – there's one on each page

STREETS AHEAD

A lesson in good health

GO to school for a health check-up... That's what pupils at The Aveley School will be doing soon as they access a range of health services.

A health and welfare centre could open at the school as early as Easter, after getting the go-ahead from staff, students, parents and governors at the Nethan Drive secondary school.

Teacher Doreen Stringer said: "It will be the first ever school health centre in Thurrock. Letters were sent to parents and a number of pupils were asked to fill in a questionnaire. The response was very positive so far, with lots of interesting feedback from the pupils and no objections from parents."

The centre will provide services to pupils but eventually open up to the local community. Two professional staff will provide confidential help and advice, doctor referrals and counselling.

Melody Williams, Local Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator at Thurrock Primary Care Trust, is in charge of the project. She said:

"The drive is to provide access to health and social care for young people. It would be a parent and teacher-free zone, providing the confidentiality that young people need."

"The project is not being developed in isolation and we'll have a range of services in the community that young people feel happy to use."

In March 2004 a purpose-built nursery is due to open on the school site, providing care for up to 50 children.

It is hoped that other services, including the health centre, will be based in the same building, eventually providing a 'one-stop' centre for Aveley.



STREET wardens are proving a huge hit with local residents. And Thurrock Council is to triple the number of them on the streets.

And uniformed park wardens are also making a comeback to the borough, after an absence of more than 20 years.

The street wardens have successfully spearheaded the council's Thumbs Down campaign against neighbourhood nuisance and anti-social behaviour.

Another £200,000 is being invested to expand the scheme and ten new wardens are being recruited, bringing the total to 15.

Since the wardens started patrolling the streets last November, they have become well known and recognised as a real help towards making Thurrock a cleaner and safer place to live and work.

Not only are they helping in the clean up of graffiti, abandoned vehicles and vandalism, they are also getting involved in the community.

The wardens saw that there wasn't much for young people to do in south Grays, so they set up a football team which now meets every Saturday.

At the beginning of March, the wardens took the youngsters on a day trip to Grays Athletic Football Club on Bridge Road. And thanks to the club, they were treated to a training session, a chance to see the match against Harrow Borough and time to meet the players.

In their bid to find out what residents want and how they can help, the team has regularly attended public and

Wardens scheme to grow

community meetings. They have also set up surgeries around the borough and encourage anybody to stop them in the street and tell them their problems or ideas on how they think the wardens can help.

Franco LaTorre, Head of Neighbourhood Services at the council, said: "Now that we know we will be getting a further ten wardens, we will be able to spread their good work to most areas of the borough."

"We have had nothing but positive feedback from residents and community groups. I am very proud of their good work in reducing anti-social behaviour and fear of crime."

The council will recruit four park wardens in the next few weeks. Their duties are likely to include identifying trouble spots in the parks; enforcing civil penalties, for example for dropping litter in the parks; tackling problems in parks and play areas and carrying out minor repairs to equipment.

What the People Think – Page 3

Jobs boost for borough

MILLIONS of pounds in investment, thousands of new jobs and a new way of looking at the future of Thurrock...

The Government's Developing Communities plan maps out an exciting future for the borough.

But what does it mean for everyone in the borough? Council leader Andy Smith explains on Page 7.

Cash injection for vital services

EDUCATION and Social Care in Thurrock have received a huge boost, with over three-quarters of Thurrock Council's budget for 2003/4 spent on these two vital areas.

The council's spending on education will be £3.5 million higher, while spending on social care will rise to a record £32.5 million.

Leader of Thurrock Council, Cllr Andy Smith, said: "This year we received a lot less Government funding than we had hoped."

"But we're determined not to compromise on essential services which give a

good quality of life. That's why we're investing a further £3.5 million into education and increasing the total budget for Social Services by 22 per cent compared to last year.

"In addition, the successful Street Wardens scheme will be extended from five to 14 people to cover the whole of the borough."

Last month, councillors voted to increase council tax by 19.63 per cent, a rise of £150.39 on a Band D property.

Cllr Smith said: "The increase is significantly higher than previous years but it means that residents living in Thurrock will still pay less council

tax than in the neighbouring boroughs of Havering and Basildon."

The council recognises that the increase may cause problems for some residents in the borough and has promised to help those in financial difficulties.

Council Tax Benefit is available for eligible people on low incomes or pensions and details of how to apply for this will be widely advertised. A leaflet explaining the benefit system will be sent to every resident with their council tax bill.

The total budget to provide services in Thurrock for 2003-2004 is £155.65 mil-

lion. The grant received from the Government is £111.35 million. The council tax will generate the rest.

"It's not possible to receive better services without paying for them," added Cllr Smith.

"And I am confident that our plans for the coming year will bring huge benefits to local residents."

"We consult widely to find out what residents value most, and base our decision-making on what we are told. That's why we're prioritising education, social services and community development."

Where your money goes – Page 2

News in brief

Just the job

THE first-ever Thurrock Key Workers Recruitment Fair, held at the Civic Offices, Grays, this month, attracted more than 200 local people.

The fair was a partnership between Thurrock Council, Essex Police, Thurrock NHS/Primary Care Trust and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.

Each organisation had an information stall at the event and members of staff provided help and advice to jobseekers. Presentations were also held throughout the day, giving detailed information about the types of jobs on offer.

Easter treats

ARE you stuck for something to do during the Easter break? Thurrock's Tourist Information Centre at the Moto Services at junction 31 of the M25, has dozens of suggestions.

The centre will be open for last minute Easter information and advice on Good Friday (9am to 3pm), Easter Saturday (9.15am to 3pm) and Easter Monday (9am to 3pm). You can also find out what's going on by visiting www.thurrock.gov.uk/touristinfo

Free information on UK holiday destinations is also available at the centre. Call 01708 863733 or 862418, or email: touristinformation@thurrock.gov.uk

Flooding back

HUNDREDS of people attended an exhibition in January to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the floods of 1953.

The exhibition at Tilbury Library featured pictures and cuttings from the archives and a blue line around the room to show where the water came to at the height of the flood.

For further information about the floods, visit www.thurrock.gov.uk/flood

Telling tales

CREATIVE writers of all ages still have time to pen a short story or poem for Thurrock libraries' writing competition.

Every library in the borough is displaying a painting. Residents should write a story of no more than 2,000 words or a poem of no more than one side of A4 paper about one or all of the paintings. The closing date is 17 April.

For further information and to obtain an entry form please contact Rosalyn Jones on 01375 383611.

Get involved in your neighbourhood

WE don't always get it right, so that's why it's important that everyone gets involved in making decisions in their own areas.

Now Thurrock Council is making it easier than ever before for residents, community and voluntary groups to play their part and help decide what happens in their neighbourhoods and the borough as a whole.

● Visit the web page at www.thurrock.gov.uk/democracy/areas.

This gives details of area assembly and community forum meetings, from when and where the next meetings are to what's going to be discussed. Community forums give everyone

to chance to influence what happens in Thurrock.

They can also have funding of up to £10,000 every year to help finance these changes.

If you are interested in taking part in assemblies or forums, contact Democratic Services on 0800 10 01375.

● If you want to be involved, but feel you haven't got the right skills, On a Learning Curve is for you.

Free training sessions and workshops are run by the ACE (Active Citizens Entitlement) partnership to support and help people who want to contribute to community forums, community

groups and voluntary organisations.

The sessions include book-keeping, organising public events, running effective meetings, how the council works, equal opportunities and much more.

The ACE was formed by Thurrock Council for Voluntary Services, Thurrock Residents Action Group, Thurrock Adult Community College and Thurrock Council.

For further information about the courses, or to recommend a course that would help you, call 0800 783 7733 or contact the Adult Community College on 01375 372476 or email tacc@thurrock.gov.uk

Where your money goes

THURROCK'S BUDGET 2003/4

Education – Spending up £3.5 million

Social services – Spending up 22 per cent

Managing director's	£7.44m
- Recruitment	
- Financial services	
- Organisational Development	
- Members Support	

Regeneration and support	£3.52m
- Audit	
- e-Government	
- Legal	
- Procurement & Property	
- Regeneration	
- Regulatory Services	
- Customer Services	

Community Services	£20.66m
- Community Development	
- Engineering Services	
- Libraries, Heritage & Cultural Services	
- Neighbourhood	
- Waste Services	
- Works Administration	

Housing and Social Care	£32.54m
- Children & Family Services	
- Housing	
- Social Care & Health (Adults)	

Education	£89.39m
- Primary schools	
- Secondary schools	
- Adult & Continuing Education	
- School Effectiveness & Pupil Services	
- Special Schools	
- Thurrock Learning Partnership	

Area Governance	£0.29m
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Street wardens – Rising from five to 14

Foster care - £250,000 to pay for a rise in allowances



Property Band	Council Tax Rate set by Thurrock	Council Tax Rate set by Essex Police Authority (£)	Total (£)
A	611.04	61.98	673.02
B	712.88	72.31	785.19
C	814.72	82.64	897.36
D	916.56	92.97	1,009.53
E	1,120.24	113.63	1,233.87
F	1,323.92	134.29	1,458.21
G	1,527.60	154.95	1,682.55
H	1,833.12	185.94	2,019.06

World Cup winner Chris meets Sven

KEEN footballer Chris Kemsley Smith got the chance recently to tell England football coach Sven-Goran Eriksson how it felt to win a World Cup.

Chris, 19, a former pupil of Treetops School in Grays, was a member of the England squad that beat Holland 2-1 in the finals in Learning Disability World Cup in Japan last summer.

He rejoined the squad to visit FA headquarters at Soho Square, London, to collect his England cap from Sven, who admitted to being "a little jealous" at the team's success.

Chris also enjoys coaching and recently received the grade one FA coaching badge.

He said: "Meeting Sven was great. I really enjoyed playing in the World Cup and I will continue to train and hopefully make it to the 2006 competition in Germany. When I stop playing football I want to become a professional coach and pass my skills on to other young people."

Treetops School Headteacher Paul Smith added: "Chris visits the school regularly to help with football training sessions. He has achieved a great deal and we are all very proud of him."



Spanish trip for Nicola



THURROCK'S Youth MP Nicola Key has attended a high-profile international conference in Barcelona, as one of her first acts in the job.

Between 12 and 16 March Nicola met a number of representatives from different countries to talk

about equality between men and women.

Last year's Youth MP Amy Cox also went along to find out more about how MPs work with other countries.

Thurrock councillor Val Liddiard, another member of the Barcelona group, said: "Nicola and Amy were ambassadors for

the UK Youth Parliament. They set a great example and shared a wealth of information and knowledge with representatives at the conference.

"I think it was an invaluable experience for them and I hope they can take part in similar events in the future."

Back in Thurrock, Nicola, 17, from Palmers College, Grays, works alongside the Deputy Youth MP Katie Vear, 15, from Hassenbrook School, Stanford-le-Hope.

During the next year the pair will represent young people at a variety of events, visit local youth groups and schools and talk to fellow pupils about their opinions.

For more information about the Youth Parliament contact Mags Ball on 01708 670033.

WHAT'S your image of a drug user? Could you spot them in a crowd? Many people think they can, but they'd be wrong.

Drugs affect anyone from any walk of life – the young, old, rich or the poor.

In Thurrock, help is at hand for anyone with a drug problem or to find out more about the issues surrounding drug and alcohol misuse.

The Thurrock Drug Action Team, made up of Thurrock Council, Essex Police, the Thurrock Primary Care Trust, Health Authority and Probation Service, plays a major role in helping people learn more about drug misuse and the ways in which they can get help.

Recently, the team sent a Family Factfile to all children of secondary school age in the borough highlighting the dangers of drugs. The pack helps parents identify signs of drug use in their children, and gives tips on how they can talk to young people and break down the taboo surrounding drugs.

But sometimes, a more professional approach is needed to tackle problems and a variety of services are on offer to provide help where it is needed. The Network Project, at the Open Door

Back-up when it's needed to tackle the drugs trauma

centre in Orsett Road, Grays, provides services for people who misuse substances, from professional counselling to information leaflets.

The project links with any organisation in Thurrock such as schools, colleges, the Youth Service and the Thurrock Community Drug and Alcohol Service. The team concentrates on working with young people aged between 11 to

24 and goes into schools and colleges to offer young people help and advice about drugs.

Mike Forrester, Network Project worker, said: "We are often invited into schools to talk to pupils about the real issues surrounding drugs and provide an expert, independent service. Talking to us isn't always the same as talking to a teacher so many teenagers feel more comfortable.

"If necessary, we refer people to more formal counselling to help tackle their problems, but we're always here for a chat. If we can make one person's life better as a result of being here, then we've done our job."

As well as going into schools, Network Project workers are also available for one-to-one sessions with young people.

The Network Project has run for two and a half years and will soon be setting up three information drug resource units in youth centres at Stanford, South Ockendon and Tilbury. The team, funded by Thurrock's Drug Action Team, also offers training to youth workers and anyone who



works with young people about drugs advice. Danny Murphy from Thurrock's Youth Service praised the project. "It offers many benefits to young people and provides a consistent message about drugs across the borough," he said.

The Network Project workers have run drugs awareness evenings in the borough's youth centres and have given one-to-one advice to pupils in schools as well as by the hundreds in assemblies. Open Door is a free information service for local young people between 11 and 25. It also operates a mobile bus service which takes information to young people at various venues across the borough. Just drop in for advice or contact 01375 396038/408403.

SARAH is 14. She contacted one of Thurrock's services to help people stop taking drugs after she realised she had a problem sniffing glue.

A drugs project worker arranged to meet her after school and explained that whatever she told them would be confidential.

The project worker was able to talk to Sarah to build up a picture of what was going on in her life to find out the type of help that would best suit her.

Over time, they helped Sarah to look at ways of coping with life without resorting to sniffing glue.

A lot of trust has been built up between Sarah and the project worker who helps her. By having someone to talk to about her addiction, she has been given all the support she needed to help stop sniffing glue.

Although all drug use is risky, some can be more dangerous than others. Sniffing volatile substances like glue, lighter fuel, petrol and nail varnish is one of the most dangerous of all types of drug use. It accounts for 1 in 50 of all deaths in young people aged 15 to 19 in the UK.

■ The name of the user has been changed.

'A friendly, positive attitude'

Your say on our Community Wardens...



Jay Mander of Grays

I heard about the wardens through the football team they have set up for the children in south Grays. My five-year-old son wanted to join in, so I took him along. Before the wardens set up the team, there was a real problem with the kids hanging around the streets, simply because there was nothing better for them to do. Now they have something to focus on and have made new friends into the bargain.

Tom Troughear of Riverside Residents Association and Thameside Community Forum



Knowing the wardens are about is giving people a greater feeling of security and because of their presence, graffiti and vandalism seems to be reducing quite dramatically. They have started a very good system for dealing with abandoned shopping trolleys in Grays, so much so that residents are now helping to clear them up. Each of the wardens has a friendly and positive attitude and because they go to the trouble of talking and listening to people, both on the streets and by attending public meetings, they know what the residents, both young and old, want and how they can help.



Sue Knight, warden at Mulberry Drive older people's complex, Purfleet

After suffering two break-ins at our complex I talked to the wardens and told them about my concerns. They immediately wrote a letter to the relevant department at the council, recommending they fit an alarm.

Thanks to their help, the alarm was fitted almost immediately and both the residents and myself now feel much safer. The wardens are always popping in to see how we're doing and if there's anything they can do to help they will. Since they started their patrols the streets in Purfleet have become much cleaner and safer.

Eve Diamond of The Young at Heart Walking Group, South Ockendon

The warden scheme is one of the best things to come to South Ockendon and I think the team are all brilliant. They have already helped with vandalism and anti-social behaviour in our area, but whatever the problem is, they listen and help to sort it out. The wardens are a real asset to this area; they've got our full backing and I hope they will continue to expand.

Youngsters go football crazy with Grays Athletic



TWENTY lucky youngsters from Grays South football team helped Grays Athletic Football Club celebrate their 4-1 victory over Harrow Borough during a trip to the club on Saturday, 8 March.

The street wardens, who helped set up the youngsters' team and helped to organise the visit, were on hand to help the kids enjoy their fun-packed day full of football treats.

WARDENS' SURGERIES

South Ockendon Community Forum
Derwent Parade.
Every Tuesday, 10am to 12pm

Purfleet local office
57 Marine Court.
Every Wednesday, 10am to 11am

Golden memories

AFTER months of research and trawling the archives, Thurrock The Golden Years is finally on its way.

The pictorial history of the past 50 years in Thurrock by Jonathan Catton and Dawn Gutteridge in association with the Thurrock Gazette, will be published next month. The book is a commemoration of last year's Queen's Golden Jubilee. It will go on sale in all of Thurrock's libraries for just £3 each and proceeds will go to the Thurrock Community Chest charity.



Naturally Thurrock...



Thurrock residents:
A robin and, right,
a shrill carder bee

FROM a window box to a towering oak tree in one of our country parks... biodiversity is all around us in Thurrock.

What is biodiversity? It's all living things, from the tiny garden ant to the giant redwood tree.

Because of its warm, southerly location, Thurrock is home to a surprisingly large number of plants and animals, some of them extremely rare.

Many by their very presence improve the quality of people's lives in the borough. What would it be like without the sounds of birds singing or the sight of a butterfly on a warm summer day?

Did you know that the numbers of both songbirds and butterflies are on the decline all over the UK and the country lost over 100 types of animals and plant during the last century? Many more species are at risk and could eventually disappear altogether.

So what can we do to protect them?

The Thurrock Biodiversity Action Group (TBAG) is a partnership that brings together lots of different wildlife groups to share ideas, knowledge and work together to promote and protect wildlife and wildlife habitats.

TBAG has been looking at important species and the many wild places in which these plants and

By Clare Lambert
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

animals live, but it's not just wild places that make good homes for animals. Gardens, parks and open space make ideal homes for birds and other animals.

TBAG wants to know which birds live in the area. To help us find out, why not join in the Thurrock Bird Survey. If you're under 16 you can enter our competition too.

All you have to do is watch your garden, local park or school grounds for five minutes each day for a week, at the same time each day. Fill in the survey form with the number of birds you see, return the form by free post or drop it in to your local library, housing office or school.

If you are under 16 you can send in a bird photo, drawing or bird based project with your survey.

Prizes include: Best Overall Photo – a camera worth £100; Best Overall Drawing – art equipment to the value of £100; Best Project – £100 WH Smith vouchers. There will be prizes for first, second and third prizes in each category for three ages groups, under 5s, 5 to 11, 12 to 16.

The best entries from both junior and senior schools will receive a first prize of £500 and a second prize of £200 to be spent on an environmental project, and free class activities at Thames Chase, Davy Down, Langdon Hills Country Park or Grangewaters. Look out for entry details in the local press.

■ *Members of TBAG are: Davy Down Trust; Essex Field Club; Essex Mammal Group; Essex Wildlife Trust; London, Essex and Herts Amphibian and Reptile Trust; National Farmers Union; RSPB; Thames Chase; Thurrock Council; Thurrock Ranger Service; Thurrock Wildlife Concern; Thurrock Wildlife Society.*

Wildlife facts

Bats – There are 12 varieties of bat in Essex and eight of these can be found in Thurrock

Water voles – The 1990 survey estimated that water voles had disappeared from 67 per cent of sites where they used to be found

Song thrush – Populations have halved in recent decades

Glow worms – Numbers of populations had halved in the UK by 1980 but they you can join a glow worm walk at Langdon Hills Country Park

Shrill carder bee – There are only a handful of areas where these bees remain in the UK, but there are two sites in Thurrock where they can be found

Broadleaved cudweed – This plant is only found in only 10 sites in the UK, two of these are in Thurrock.

Gardening for wildlife

One place where wildlife can find a safe home is in our gardens, you can encourage birds and other wildlife into your garden by four easy steps

- 1 Don't use chemicals to kill insects and slugs, as birds feed on them
- 2 Provide some water for a bird bath
- 3 Grow plants with berries and seeds for them to eat or give extra food in a bird feeder
- 4 Grow climbers or put up bird boxes to give them nesting sites

If you have a wildlife-friendly garden enter the Thurrock in Bloom Gardens for Wildlife Competition in the summer.

Healthy travel

IF you have views about transport to hospitals or day clinics, we want to hear them.

Thurrock Council is working with Essex County Council to monitor the quality of local health-care for residents and looking at how to improve transport for people needing to get to hospitals and day clinics.

The panel is particularly interested in hearing about how you think improvements can be made to:

- Transport arrangements
- Claiming back travel costs
- Accessing community or voluntary transport
- Making your own way to your appointment.

If you have ideas or views, please make contact before Thursday, 10 April by writing to: Health Scrutiny Team, Democratic Services Unit, Essex County Council, PO Box 11, County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1LX, or email patienttransport@essexcc.gov.uk

We are unable to deal with complaints about treatment. Please direct these to your local Community Health Council.

Repair care

COUNCIL tenants across Thurrock will soon be able to report and make appointments for repairs on a call centre line – 01375 413636.

The new line is designed to streamline and speed up Thurrock Council's repair service. It should also free up time for estate staff to deal faster with tenants' other queries more quickly. Tenants can still report repairs in person at their local office.

The line was launched a year ago to deal with repairs in Chadwell, initially taking 300 calls per month.

Since then it has been extended and successfully piloted in Tilbury, Grays and Stanford and in January took 1,706 calls.

'It takes a special person...'

DO-GOODERS is a term often unfairly levelled at social workers. But there's a lot more to working in this area than most people realise. Local police officer Pc Adrian Ranson shadowed Thurrock Council's Leaving Care Team for a day to find out what a day in the life of a social worker is really like...

LESSON one: No two people will ever be the same.

It's something that Pc Adrian Ranson (pictured, right) already knows from his own work on the beat, but the point was pressed home as he joined a group of Thurrock social workers for the day.

Adrian has worked in Thurrock for eight years, covering Grays, Tilbury, South Ockendon and Corringham. "I joined the force because I wanted a career where I could help people," he said. "I love being a Pc on the street. Every day is guaranteed to be different. I could be called to a variety of situations from car crimes to domestic violence or neighbour and youth nuisances."

While he has no plans to change careers, Adrian was interested in finding out what social workers really do.

"It's always good to know how other people work, and since we are often handing cases over to social services it's a good opportunity to find out what pressures they may be under.

"After all, we are all on the same side and a better understanding between the police and social services as a whole can only be good for the people we both help."

During his day with the Leaving Care Team, which deals with young people about to leave care and live independently on their own, Adrian was given a taster of what social care is really about.

The day started with an introduction to the team by Frances Leddra-Chapman, team manager. She explained the work carried out by the team, and the need for cases to be dealt with individually.

"We are helping young people who may have been in care all their lives, or who have just come to need help for whatever reason. From finding them somewhere to live, to helping with finance or careers advice, everyone needs different help and we have to deal with whatever comes our way."



Adrian also met some of the young people who the team work with.

"I never realised the depths that social workers go to to help people," he said. "Many of us had our own parents to help us stand on our own two feet, but for those that don't, the people that fulfil that role are invaluable. It's certainly important to be dedicated in this job. And there's a real need for patience and understanding. I don't think I could do it."

Adrian told Tmail that the police often become involved in cases where they need to contact social services. It could be any time of the day or night that they call in a social worker to take over.

"As police officers, we can only deal with issues that affect the law," he said.

"We have to pass a lot of cases on for long-term work. Social workers have no-one to pass that work on to and having seen the pressures they are

under, I really admire what they do."

The majority of social workers' case-work has no connection with the police, and Adrian's past experiences really are just the tip of the iceberg.

Sometimes there are people who don't want to be helped and it can be frustrating. Yet social workers remain a small group of people who are there to help others at all times. So why are such negative images portrayed?

Bad news often hits the headlines when good news does not. Everyone hears about a tragic mistake, yet few see the thousands of people whose lives are dramatically improved as a result of caring social workers across the country.

The image doesn't help when it comes to recruiting more people to the profession. "Social work definitely has a raw deal from the media," said Adrian at the end of his day with the team. "If social workers are not around to help these people, who would be?"

"I thought I knew what their job involved before I spent a day with them but now I appreciate the lengths they go to. I really admire anyone who can do this job. It's stressful, hectic and thankless. It takes a special person to become a social worker. It's not a job to do if you expect a pat on the back, but it offers great job satisfaction by helping those in need."

THERE'S a national shortage of qualified social workers and Thurrock Council is keen for everyone to see what the job is like in the hope that more people will consider it as a possible career option for them. If you are interested in a career in social care and want to find out more, contact Thurrock Council on 01375 652664.

Taking up local issues

Tmail spends a day with Cathy Kent to find out about the workload of a typical ward councillor



Which part of Thurrock do you represent?

West Thurrock Ward. The ward covers West Thurrock, South Stifford and Purfleet.

All of which are totally separate communities with different issues in each area, we therefore hold ward surgeries at the following venues: St Clement's Church Hall, West Thurrock, and St Stephen's Church Hall, Purfleet, so that hopefully we cover as much of the ward as we can.

Why did you want to become a councillor?

It was when I became a mother – my children are now four and five – and I found myself struggling with a double buggy. It was amazing the places you couldn't get into.

I couldn't get into the library and one year I couldn't get through the front door of a polling station because the entrance wasn't wide enough. It started me thinking about the issue of access for other

people, such as those in wheelchairs – and I realised I wanted to do something about it.

So do you specialise in access issues?

It's still a big interest of mine, trying to see things through other people's eyes, but I've also broadened my interests.

As I am still a relatively new councillor I am trying to get around as much of the ward as I can and to take up issues on behalf of

the residents.

Isn't it difficult to juggle the demands of a young family while playing an active role as a councillor?

Very difficult! Though it's a little easier now that my youngest is at playgroup in the mornings. I try to arrange meetings at the council for that time – there are always people I need to see. But getting to as many evening meetings as possible is very tough. Sometimes my husband and I have as many as three evening meetings each a week to attend.

What are the big issues in your ward?

Most people come to me about traffic problems. The use of London Road, West Thurrock, by huge lorries has been an issue for many years. It's about noise, pollution and safety.

We met with a group of mums with their young children recently, crossing London Road, and you could see the terror on the children's faces as HGVs were passing just inches away. There is light at the end of the tunnel; the West Thurrock marshes relief road is being built which will take passing traffic away from London Road. But it has been much delayed – for a number of reasons – and I don't think local residents will actually believe in it until they see it open and London Road returns to what it should be, a residential street.

Anything else?

In Purfleet, the big

issue of late has been the building of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. It's caused lots of disruption, noise nuisance and pollution. I am particularly disappointed because CTRL gave a very glossy presentation at the start of the project and said that this wouldn't happen. But it's something we are just going to have to make the best of and monitor closely. Home-building is another issue in Purfleet with a couple of fairly big developments happening at the moment and more to come. It is vital that we study the plans carefully to make sure people in the area get the best deal possible.

What is the best thing about being a councillor?

Helping people with their individual problems and working with colleagues and seeing things change for the better. There was a recent development plan that threatened the future of the play area at Purfleet Recreation Ground, but with the ward councillors and local residents working together it was saved.

And the worst thing?

Two things actually. The frustration of not being able to help people in need and the length of time it takes to get some things done!



Bringing the arts to you

KEEP your eyes peeled around Thurrock this summer, as the first signs of a huge investment in the arts will be seen... maybe where you least expect it.

About half a million pounds has been given to Thurrock to develop arts in the borough, after a successful bid by the council to Arts England East.

Project manager Nicky Adamson said: "We are going to bring local arts alive by working with local people. We hope to show Thurrock in a different light to residents and visitors."

The Arts Generate project will fund major works of art and help boost job opportunities and tourism.

Thurrock has received the largest amount of funding of five successful projects across the country. Over the next three years, art in many different forms will rebuild and transform the community.

The project aims to help local people get involved with artists in the borough and take part in activities.

Across the Eastern region, the Arts Generate project promises many benefits to local communities, including:

- Opportunities for people to enjoy high quality arts activities
- Thriving new arts businesses contributing to the local economy
- Major arts events and attractions contributing to cultural tourism
- New public works of art that enhance town centres, seafronts and communities
- A new image for urban and coastal areas as vibrant cultural centres
- Opportunities for career development and redeployment through creative businesses.

Cracking fun

BRING the kids to Grays Beach on Easter Sunday and let them run off some of that chocolate at the Mini Easter Egg Hunt.

Aimed at three to ten-year-olds and taking place from 1pm to 2pm, there is no need to book and it's totally free. Join your kids for the fun or leave them in the capable care of fully qualified beach staff.

Grays Beach on Thames Road is open seven days a week, including public holidays, from 9am to 6pm. Facilities for children include mini obstacles, pedal go-karts, crazy golf, a children's driving school and skittles. There is also a café serving reasonably priced hot and cold snacks and drinks.

● Avoid the noise and washing up associated with children's parties and leave it to the professionals. Grays Beach now organises supervised private parties throughout the year for children of four years and over. At just £6.50 a head, the price includes all food, music and decoration, a gift for each child as well as access to the children's driving school and crazy golf.

To contact Grays Beach call 01375 386759.

£21m says that we mean business

LOCAL businesses have grabbed more than £20 million worth of contracts offered by Thurrock Council in the last year.

There will be even more opportunities for the borough's companies in the future as the council encourages firms by offering training opportunities and tips on winning contracts through the Local Business Initiative (LBI).

Paul Soltys, company secretary of Holly Systems, which won last year's LBI award for innovation, value for money and customer services, is backing the plans.

"Council money is local people's money and the Local Business Initiative puts money back into the community. I support it all the way," he says.

By the end of March about £21 million of council business will have gone to local companies this financial year, amounting to 22 per cent of the value of all council contracts. Five years ago, it was just 10 per cent.

The LBI was developed in 1997 by the council with Thurrock District Association of Industries, Thurrock Chamber of Trade and Commerce and the Thurrock Local Enterprise Agency to help give businesses a competitive advantage and win lucra-

tive council business. And the stakes are being raised. Rather than sending out short-term and one-off tenders, the council is moving to long-term contracts, which means more business and a stable income for successful contractors and suppliers.

While much of the business going to local companies is construction related, the council is work-

In April Thurrock Council will launch a new page on its website www.thurrock.gov.uk called How to do Business with Thurrock Council.

It will explain how the council finds suitable contractors or suppliers, how it maintains its Select List and the best way to qualify for and succeed with tender applications.

ing to expand across other sectors, according to Andrew Flood, Head of Procurement.

Holly Systems, for example, provides equipment for online projects at Chadwell St Mary and Tilbury Libraries.

Working in partnership with LBI is the Thurrock Local Enterprise Agency which helps local businesses bid for work with the council by acting as a

facilitator, putting them in touch with the appropriate councillor or member of staff, according to manager Graeme Lovelace.

TLEA also coordinates training sessions geared at supporting local businesses as well as seminars specifically educating them as to the best way to win council business. Around 70 per cent of the businesses it helps are start-ups.

Upcoming seminars include Employment Law Update on Thursday, 3 April and Managing a Growing Business on Wednesday, 9 April, its training room at 1 New Road, Grays. Businesses interested in sending a representative or in suggesting topics for future seminars should call the agency on 01375 374362.

TLEA will also launch its new website, www.thurrockenterprise.co.uk shortly, which will include a page listing seminars and a link to Thurrock Council.

● Thurrock Council invites tenders for works, goods or services on its own website www.thurrock.gov.uk/lbi/tenders, in the Thurrock Gazette each Thursday and on The Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC) website, <http://simap.eu.int/EN/pub/src/welcome.htm>.

Councillors' surgeries

LOCAL residents are invited to have their say at surgeries held by their local ward councillors. If you are unable to attend a surgery but would like to contact your local councillor, log on to the Thurrock Council website: www.thurrock.gov.uk

Aveley: Councillors Leon Rudman, Colin Churchman and Neil Pearce.

The first Saturday of every month between 10.30am and 12pm at Aveley Library, Purfleet Road, Aveley.

Belhus: Councillors Peter Maynard, Margaret Jones and David Hooper.

The third Saturday of every month between 10am and 12pm at The Forum, 28 Daiglen Drive, South Ockendon.

Ockendon: Councillors Michael Canavon, Barrie Lawrence and Charles Curtis.

The third Saturday of every month between 10am and 12pm at The Forum, 28 Daiglen Drive, South Ockendon. (Belhus and Ockendon are combined surgeries worked on a rota basis by the councillors).

Chadwell St Mary: Councillors Alan Warren, Tony Fish and Gordon Barton.

The first Saturday of every month between 11am and 12pm at Chadwell Library, Brentwood Road, Chadwell.

Chafford Hundred: Councillors Earnshaw Palmer and Martin Healey.

The second Saturday (10.30am to 12.30pm) and third Monday (6.45pm to 7.45 pm) of every month at the Chafford Hundred Learning Campus, Mayflower Road.

Corringham West: Councillors Nigel Barron and Clinton Sear.

The first Saturday of every month between 11am and 12pm at Corringham Library, St John's Way, Corringham. This surgery is worked on a two-monthly rota.

Grays Thurrock: Councillors Yash Gupta, Rosemary McMahon and Tim McMahon.

GraysThurrock: Yash Gupta/Rosemary McMahon

The first Saturday of every month between 10am and 12pm at the Thameside Complex, Orsett Road, Grays. Also, the third Saturday of every month between 10am and 12pm at St Thomas of Canterbury Parish Hall, East Thurrock Road, Grays.

Grays Riverside: Councillors Carl Morris, John Kent and Pearl Betts.

The first Saturday of every month between 10am and 12pm at the Thameside Complex, Orsett Road, Grays. Also, the third Saturday of every month between 10am and 12pm at St Thomas of Canterbury Parish Hall, East Thurrock Road, Grays.

Little Thurrock Blackshots: Councillor Dave Gooding.

The first Saturday of every month between 10.30am and 12pm at The Pavilion, Blackshots Field, Blackshots Lane, Grays.

Little Thurrock Blackshots: Councillor Ben Maney.

The third Saturday of every month between 12pm and 2pm at The Pavilion, Blackshots Field, Blackshots Lane, Grays.

Little Thurrock Rectory: Councillor Valerie Cook.

The first Friday of every month between 6pm and 7.30 pm at the Civic Offices, New Road, Grays.

Stanford-le-Hope (East): Councillors Peter Cooper and Eunice Southam.

The third Saturday of every month between 10.30am and 11.30am at Stanford-le-Hope Library, High Street, Stanford-le-Hope.

Stanford-le-Hope (West): Councillors Arthur Clarke and Alphonse Nuss.

The third Saturday of every month between 10.30am and 11.30pm at Stanford-le-Hope Library, High Street, Stanford-le-Hope.

Stifford: Councillors Allan McPherson, Gerard Rice and George Watts.

The last Thursday of every month between 7pm and 8pm at Harty Close Hall, Stifford Clays. No surgery in December.

The Homesteads: Councillors Ronald Sharp, Denise Cooper and Tony Benson.

The first Saturday of every month between 11am and 12pm at Corringham Library, St John's Way, Corringham.

Tilbury: Councillors Rick Southam, Andy Smith and Val Liddiard.

The second and last Saturday of every month between 10.30am and 11.30am at

Andrew MacKinlay MP's Constituency Office, Civic Square, Tilbury.

West Thurrock: Councillors Cathy Kent, Rob Williams and Peter Harris.

The second Saturday of every month between 10.30am and 12pm at St. Clements Church, London Road, West Thurrock and the fourth Saturday of every month between 10.30am and 12pm at St Stephens Church, London Road, Purfleet.

Andrew MacKinlay MP: *The first and third Friday of every month between 5pm and 7pm at the Civic Offices, New Road, Grays.*

There are no surgeries for residents living in Corringham and Fobbing. However, Councillor Anne Cheale can be contacted on 01375 652002 and Councillor Ian Harrison can be contacted on 01375 672796.

There are no surgeries for residents living in Corringham and Fobbing. However, Councillor Anne Cheale can be contacted on 01375 652002 and Councillor Ian Harrison can be contacted on 01375 672796.

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There are no surgeries for residents living in Corringham and Fobbing. However, Councillor Anne Cheale can be contacted on 01375 652002 and Councillor Ian Harrison can be contacted on 01375 672796.

There are no surgeries for residents living in Corringham and Fobbing. However, Councillor Anne Cheale can be contacted on 01375 652002 and Councillor Ian Harrison can be contacted on 01375 672796.

Please note that surgeries are not held on weekends before a Bank Holiday Monday.

INFORMATION STATION



New season of entertainment

ALL these events are at the Thameside Theatre, Grays, unless otherwise stated.

Friday, 4 and Saturday, 5 April at 8pm. **Talon – Best of Eagles** The cool sounds of The Eagles, recreated by tribute band Talon. Book early. Tickets £12 each - FOT £11 each – under 16s and students £8 each.



Wednesday, 9 – Saturday, 12 April at 7.15pm. Sat matinee at 2.15pm. Thurrock Scouts and Guides present **Stride On 2003**. Tickets £6.50, concs. £4.50; Sat eve £7.50 no concs.

Wednesday, 16 April at 7.30pm. **A Viennese Strauss Gala** featuring the music of Strauss, Lehar and other contemporaries. Tickets £13 FOT £11.70 12 or more £11.

Thursday, 17 April at 1pm and 3.30pm. **A Day at Old Macdonald's Farm**. A fun-filled 90 minutes of dance and song for children aged three to nine. Tickets £6 each – four or more £5.50 each.

Monday, 23 April at 7.30pm.

Saltmine Theatre Company presents **The Vigil**. When a body goes missing, questions arise and the corpse is the most controversial figure in history. Tickets £7, concs £5.

Thursday, 24 April at 8pm. **Bobby Davro in Not In Front of the Children**. One of TV's favourite and most famous faces takes to the stage for his first tour in four years. Not for children – or the fainthearted. Tickets £14 each – FOT £12.50

Friday, 2 May at 7.30pm **The Barron Knights'** unique brand of humour and music. Tickets £13 each – FOT £11.70 each.

Saturday, 3 May at 7.30pm **Quimantu – Latin American World Music**. Quimantu bring the history of South America alive through their music. Tickets £11.50 each – under 16 and students £7 each – FOT £10.35.

Wednesday, 7 May at 2pm. **Silver Stars** – the Essex heat of the Yours Magazine Silver Stars Talent Competition (where every star is 60 or over). If you fit the bill, call for further details on 01375 383961. There is a £10 entry fee. Tickets to see the show £3 each.

Thursday, 8 May at 7.30pm **Stars on the Rise**. Are you a dead-ringer for Elton or Britney? Do you sound like them too? If so, why not enter Stars on the Rise? Call 01375 383961 for details. Tickets to see the show £5 each – children/



Bobby Davro
students £3 each.

Friday, 9 May at 7.30pm **Mugenkyo – Taiko Drummers** The only professional touring Japanese drumming group in Europe, performing over 120 concerts a year at theatres, concert halls and festivals to rapturous acclaim. Tickets £11.50 each – under 16 and students £7 each – FOT £10.35.

Saturday, 10 May at 7.30pm and Sunday, 11 May at 7pm **Joe Brown In Concert** Two hours of Joe performing many of his all-time favourite songs. Tickets £13.50 each.

Tuesday, 13, Wednesday, 14 and Thursday, 15 May at 7.30pm New musical **The Biz!** produced for the first time by talented drama students. Twenty original songs and plenty of laughs. Tickets £8.

Saturday, 17 May at 7pm and Sunday, 18 May at 2pm. The Emery School of Dance present **That's Jazz**. For tickets contact 0208 597 4307.

Thursday, 22 – Saturday, 24

May at 7.45pm. Thurrock Courts Players present **Albert Make Us Laugh** by Jimmy Chinn. Tickets £6 OAP/CH £4.

Saturday, 7 – Friday, 13 June at 7.30pm. **Thurrock Drama Festival**. The best of the region's amateur theatre. Tickets £6, concs £4.

Thursday, 19 and Friday, 20 June at 7.30pm. Playhouse Theatre Productions present **Midnight Slayer**. A new theatre piece bringing the terror and excitement of the teen slasher movies to the stage. Tickets £7.50, concs £5. Playhouse Box Office 0845 6024676.

Saturday, 21 June at 7.30pm **Songs of the Night - with Mark Rattray** Top vocalist Mark Rattray brings an intimate evening of music to the Thameside, backed by his own orchestra. Tickets £12 each - FOT £10.80 each.

Friday, 27 June at 8pm. **The Searchers** are as successful as ever and in demand throughout the world. Tickets £14 each – FOT £12.50 each.

Tuesday, 1 – Saturday, 5 July at 7.30pm – Sat Mat 2.30pm Thurrock Thameside Musical Society present **Oklahoma!** Tickets £9, concs. £7.50.

Saturday, 12 July at 8pm **Sweet Home Chicago** Back by popular demand - Eddy Stacy and Pete Tobitt. A show capturing the music of The Blues Brothers. Tickets £13 each – FOT £11.70 each.

Visit Langdon Hills Country Park

Open Your Senses

Saturday, 5 April

A chance for younger children to get back to nature, this walk in the countryside encourages them to use all their senses with games to see, hear, touch and taste. Meet at 2pm at One Tree Hill information room. Bring drinks and snacks.

Easter Egg Extravaganza

Saturday, 5 April

Bring your kids to the Junior Nature Club for a morning of fun activities. Aimed at seven to 11-year-olds, the extravaganza takes place at 10am to 12 noon at Westley Heights and costs £1. Please book in advance.

Sculpture Surprise

Sunday, 13 April

Use your artistic skills and resurrect a monster from the past. This event takes place from 10am to 4pm at Westley Heights.

Tree Art for Easter

Sunday, 20 April

Get ready for Easter by making your cards, table decorations and painted eggs in a perfect Easter setting. Watch out for rabbits and listen to chicks in nests while you make your goodies from our park's natural materials. Meet at 2pm at Westley Heights. The cost is just £1 for materials.

Guided Bike Ride

Sunday, 27 April

Roam the park with a ranger from the com-

fort of your bicycle. All abilities welcome. Meet at 2pm at the One Tree Hill Information Room. Call the rangers if you have any queries.

Land Art

Sunday, 27 April

Collect your own natural materials and let your creative juices flow. Meet at 2pm at One Tree Hill.

Dawn Chorus

Sunday, 4 May

May is the best time of year to hear bird song. Join us on a gentle walk around Westley Heights and listen and watch out for the birds. Meet at 7am at Westley Heights.

Bluebell Walk

Sunday, 11 May

Let the Ranger

guide you around the carpets of bluebells in Coombe Wood and some of the best sites in the country. Meet at 2pm at Westley Heights.

Orchids and Wildflowers

Sunday, 18 May

Meander in the meadow in search of colourful wildflowers and some of the best sites of summer. Meet at 2pm at One Tree Hill information room.

Guided Bike Ride

Saturday, 24 May

See the sights of Langdon Hills from the saddle on this eight to 12 mile ride. All abilities welcome. Meet at 2pm at the One Tree Hill Information Room. Call the rangers if you have any queries.

Pond Dipping

Saturday, 30 May

A chance for seven to 11-year-olds to find out what lives beneath the waters. From 10am to 12pm. Meet at Westley Heights. The cost is just £1 per child.

For information about any of these events or to make a booking, call Thurrock Ranger Service on 01268 542066. To find out more about Langdon Hills Country Park, log on to www.thurrock.gov.uk/langdonhills



20-year plan for Thurrock



LAST month, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott paved the way for a more prosperous Thurrock, with the potential for millions of pounds of investment in the area. It's a 20-year plan, but what does it all mean for the average person in the street? Tmail asked Thurrock Council's leader, Cllr Andy Smith, for some answers...

This is the plan where what's left of Thurrock's countryside is covered in new homes, isn't it?

No! There will be no building on Green Belt land. New homes will be built, but they'll be on often unsightly brownfield sites. We value our green spaces in Thurrock and will protect and improve them, not build on them.

How can Thurrock Council afford this development?

Quite simply, it can't. That's why this is such excellent news for us. The idea is for an urban development corporation (UDC) just for Thurrock. This is a partnership between the private and public sectors, with the Government ploughing in millions of pounds to kick-start it. Once it's established, we expect millions of pounds in investment to come flooding into the borough.

So is the council handing everything over to private developers?

Not at all. In the past, UDCs have perhaps given too much control to the private sector developers, but that's not the way things will work in Thurrock. Councillors will take a full role in the corporation's planning board process. Local people will help shape the development of our borough over the next 20 years through Area Assemblies and Community Forums.

But what's in it for local people?

Firstly, it will mean thousands of new jobs for the area, and not just construction jobs, but supporting new services. Secondly, there will be superb new facilities for everyone – new schools, for example – and affordable homes for local people. Thirdly, and most importantly, we will also use the inward investment to revitalise our existing communities. And this is what I find so exciting about the whole Developing Communities plan.

Why did the Government choose Thurrock?

It didn't, we went to them and lobbied hard for it over many months. One of the key areas for the Government's Developing Communities plan is the Thames Gateway, of which Thurrock is a vital part. We lobbied the Government to consider Thurrock as a special case, and it's excellent news that we've been successful.

So what happens next?

Don't be surprised if it all goes quiet for a while. We have to sit down with the Government and thrash out how it's going to work. This is a 20-year plan, and its effects will be felt for decades. It's vital that we get it right for the sake of our children.

HOLD THE FRONT PAGE

BUDDING reporter Fiona Vowles has been showing the Mayor of Thurrock, Cllr Gordon Barton her interviewing skills.

The 14-year-old pupil from St Chad's, Tilbury, works on the school magazine 'ave it and has also had her written work published in the About Tilbury magazine.

Fiona visited the council offices on Friday, 7 March, where she talked to Cllr Barton about his role as Mayor. The result of her work will be printed in the school magazine, which is written by the pupils for the pupils and includes reviews, quizzes, jokes and competitions.

Fiona has been reporting for the monthly magazine for about two months and says she has always wanted to be a journalist. Her previous work includes features on the dangers of internet chatrooms and children on the run.



Parents with a vital role

JOYCE Gardiner lives in Tilbury, has four children and works part-time on the deli counter at Asda, as well as in the canteen at Torells School. Kenneth Batt lives in Grays, has three children and is an area sales manager for a manufacturing company.

At first glance, you wouldn't think they had much in common, apart from having children, but they are both parent governors in Thurrock schools.

Joyce has been a LEA governor at Lansdowne Primary School in Tilbury for six months and a parent governor at Hassenbrook School in Stanford-le-Hope for three years.

She said: "Being a school governor is about putting parents' views across and working to provide the best possible education for our children. You don't need a degree, or even have children, it's simply about being interested in what's happening at the school and caring about the future of the children."

Ken is the Chair of Governors at

Quarry Hill Infants and Junior Schools in Grays. He has been a governor for around nine years and Chair for four years. He said: "It's so important that pupils feel comfortable and happy. As a parent governor I have a responsibility to ensure that things run smoothly. I even helped to appoint the school headteacher at the infant school and deputy head at the junior school."

Ken also organised a construction week, inviting local schools to paint a mural. "The point of the project was to involve the local community and get children working together on something fun."

"It was so rewarding to see the final product and eventually we hope to include the building blocks from the mural in a school building."

Joyce has also played an important role at Hassenbrook School, where she was responsible for helping to change the school's admissions policy. She has also been responsible for helping to



appoint staff, including the headteacher.

So what exactly are school governors responsible for?

- Plan the future direction of the school and make sure the school sticks to Government guidelines
- Work in partnership with the headteacher
- Visit the school regularly and maintain contact with pupils and teachers
- Make decisions on the school's budget and staffing
- Attend meetings, including full governing body meetings (normally termly)
- Contribute to and work with the selection and recruitment panel
- Make sure the school follows the National Curriculum
- Decide how the school can encourage pupils' moral and cultural development
- Make sure that the school provides for all of its pupils, including those with special needs.

If you think you have got what it takes to be a school governor or if you would like more information, please call 01375 652533 or write to Peter Bates, Governor Support Officer, Education Department, Thurrock Council, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, or email governors@thurrock.gov.uk

World of choice for school leavers

SCHOOL leavers in Thurrock have never had so much choice. So whether you are looking for a headstart in the job of your choice or to enter higher education such as university, it is never too early to start planning.

Thurrock and Basildon College and Palmer's College offer a wide range of courses for school leavers, as well as for adults and international students. All that's left to you is to choose your subjects and put your application in.

A-Levels are a traditional gateway to higher education but can also lead to many different careers. They are split into two stages with the first year of study leading to an AS qualification and the second year to A2, the full A-Level.

AVCEs, or vocational A-Levels, are more practical in the way they are taught and are designed to give you the skills for a particular industry. They are equivalent to either one or two A-Levels depending on the course.

Entry requirements for A-Levels are usually five GCSE passes above grade C and four for AVCEs. Some courses require passes in specific GCSEs

such as mathematics or English. Students disappointed with their GCSE results shouldn't panic. Palmer's College runs a one-year improver course for around 150 students which gives them a second chance to be accepted onto the A-Level or AVCE course of their choice.

Palmer's College last year celebrated a 97 per cent pass rate at A-Level, much higher than the national average, says Vice Principal Peter Thomas. It runs A-Level courses in 19 subjects including accounting, communication studies, computing, economics, modern language, photography, physics, psychology and theatre studies.

Nearly a quarter of Palmer's students are now working towards AVCEs, such as retail and distributive services, leisure and recreation, health and social care and science.

Students at Thurrock schools can apply to Palmer's College direct or through their school. The college runs talks for Year 11 parents and pupils from September to November each year and open evenings in October and January.

Application forms are available from your

School Careers Department or direct from the college (call 01375 370121 or email enquiries@palmers.ac.uk) and need to be submitted by March 1st although the college can extend the deadline if places are available.

Thurrock and Basildon College runs A-Level courses in business studies, chemistry, English literature, human biology, information and communication technology, law, mathematics, media studies, physics, psychology and sociology although this will be expanded with new subjects from next year.

It runs a variety of AVCE courses including Hospitality and Catering, Art & Design and Business along with numerous National Vocational Qualifications which require passes in one to three GCSEs. If you would like an application form or need help choosing a course contact Thurrock and Basildon College's Enquiries Officer on 0845 6015746 or email rhoad@tab.ac.uk or clogan@tab.ac.uk. Full-time courses are free for under 19s, though students may need to pay for some materials.

Getting in on the act

YOUNG drama enthusiasts can at last get in on the act now that Thurrock Youth Theatre has been reborn.

A group of 14 teenagers started rehearsing the play Too Much Punch for Judy, at the end of February, and already they are well on their way to stardom.

The revival of the group is due to Vic Gray, a long-time member and well-known funny man of Thurrock Courts Players and with support from Thurrock Council's Thameside Theatre.

The group, which meets for rehearsals weekly at Grays School in Hathaway Road, will put its acting skills to the test by entering the Thurrock Drama Festival in May and will be part of a full-scale production in November.

"Thurrock Youth Theatre is what started me performing 40 years ago," says Vic. "I can still remember the thrill of being in a real theatre, on a stage, in front of a large audience. Now I have the support, skills, rehearsal space and the theatre, these talented and enthusiastic youngsters can experience the same as me."

If you are aged 14 to 18 and interested in joining the group, please contact Vic Gray on 01375 644390 to arrange an audition.

PUTTING YOURSELF IN THE MIDDLE

VOLUNTEERS are needed to help an independent mediation service that works to sort out arguments between neighbours in Thurrock.

Basildon Mediation, part-funded by Thurrock Council, gets involved when neighbours fall out over noise, pets, children, parking, boundaries and many other reasons. The service,

set up with a grant from the National Lottery's Community Fund, is a registered charity.

Residents can either refer themselves to the service, or be referred by officers from their local housing office.

The mediator will encourage the two sides involved in the dispute to sign an agreement.

Basildon Mediation is based at the Parklands Centre in Gloucester Park, Basildon, and has two members of staff and uses several volunteers.

However, it is in need of more helpers in the Thurrock area.

If you would like to find out more or to have help resolving a dispute, call them on 01268 294372.

Building higher standards

MOST people know they need planning permission when carrying out building work, but some forget that once work starts Thurrock Council's Building Control team steps in.

The department is responsible for ensuring that national standards and regulations are met from the first foundations to the complete building and from small extensions to entire housing estates.

John Pledger, Thurrock's

Building Control Manager, said: "Many people find that when they come to sell their property, there are problems because they've had building works done without building control. If homeowners contact us before they start any work, then this will be avoided."

"Not all buildings require building control, however, the majority do, so please contact us for more information or if you are unsure."

If you are building or extending a property, the first step is to contact the council's building control

department for an application form.

Once plans are approved, regular site inspections are made at certain stages of the project to ensure the work meets all regulations. Once the work is finished, a completion certificate is provided.

This should be kept safe with other household documents as it will be required if the property is sold. For more information call 01375 652289/ 652056, email buildingcontrol@thurrock.gov.uk or log on to www.thurrock.gov.uk/buildingcontrol



Did you know?

Since April last year, all replacement doors and windows need to comply with thermal performance standards. The building control department or the company installing the windows can provide a certificate, as long as they are registered under FENSA (Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme). Concern is growing that some installers are ignoring the regulations and homeowners should check whether they are FENSA registered.



Wrongdoers caught on camera

THERE'S nowhere to hide for people up to no good in Thurrock, following the installation of more than 200 CCTV cameras across the borough and a new concierge unit in Tilbury.

The project, helped by £845,000 in Government funding, forms a vital part of the council's Thumbs Down campaign. Most parts of the borough are now linked to the CCTV system, which can beam pictures to a monitor at Grays police station.

The high-tech concierge unit on the Broadway estate comes as the result of many months of talks with local residents.

Not only will the unit act as an access point for residents and their visitors in the three tower blocks, but it also houses the monitoring centre for the CCTV system.

Monday - Friday
9.00am - 5.00pm

TCTM/27

For translation phone

للترجمة الرجاء الاتصال على هاتف
"Per perkthime telefono".
Za prevod nazovite

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आवांनर माटे फोन करे
अनुवाद के लिए फोन करे
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Training to break down the barriers

STAFF from Thurrock Council's highways department have experienced the difficulties faced by wheelchair users in the borough, following a practical exercise and training session.

The team were sent out into Grays town centre in groups of two, one with a wheelchair and the other to observe. The idea was to find out for themselves the types of difficulties faced by a wheelchair user, including negotiating dropped kerbs, seeing past parked vehicles and getting up steep ramps.

The training programme will be offered to other members of staff at the council. It aims to raise their awareness of the obstructions which, not only those in wheelchairs face, but also parents with pushchairs, elderly people and those with sight and hearing impairments.

Maureen McPherson, Thurrock Council's Access Officer, said: "The purpose of the training is to give staff first-hand knowledge of the types of barriers faced by wheelchair users. This knowledge can then be used and taken into consideration when public highways are designed."

Sign on at the library

DEAF and hard of hearing residents are urged to take advantage of a variety of information, support and services at Grays Library.

Drop-in sessions are held every Thursday, between 11.30am and 2.30pm and every Friday between 9.30am and 4.30pm.

People with hearing difficulties can come along with their friends and families to share experiences, find out more about the facilities available to them and receive help with day-to-day things such as, filling in forms.

There is also a collection of children's videos and CD-ROMs produced in British Sign Language. Subtitled and closed caption videos are also available.

Hearing people can also borrow these to help them to

learn British Sign Language.

Residents, whether hard of hearing or not, can also come along to the drop-in and use the minicom, type talk and videophone.

For further advice or information about any of the library services, call 01375 383611, videophone 01375 380282, textphone 01375 398275 or email grays.library@thurrock.gov.uk



IT'S nearly Easter and the Youth Arts and Art Development team are at it again. This time they've introduced an exciting programme of music and dance. Four days, two specialists and a lot of helpers will create a stilt dancing, junk samba band and a programme you won't forget in a hurry.

Adele Thompson, the choreographer for the central Millennium Dome show, is returning after leading the Sound Off Summer project last year. The course is suitable for nine to 19 year olds. Sessions will be held between 10am and 3pm from Monday 14 to Thursday 17 April at the Culver Centre, Daiglen, South Ockendon. Cost for the four days is £24 (£19.50 if on jobseekers allowance). For information and booking call 01375 383961.