

Thurrock Collaborative Communities Framework

"Alone, we can do so little; together we can do so much" – Helen Keller

Overview

Thurrock is distinctive in so many ways. Undiscoverable on a road map – but within its numerous towns and villages is a wealth of local history, community assets and resident networks galvanised by the pride they hold for their area.

Place is of huge significance to Thurrock, as is the commitment to supporting **People** to lead the way in making the borough a great place to live while having the power to influence issues that affect them the most. As a council, we often hold the resource and responsibility to make a huge difference to our communities, working towards **Prosperity** for all. Doing this well, ensuring that all we do enables our residents to thrive, requires a different relationship with residents as citizens.

The aims of this framework reflect the issues that have evolved in consultation with a wide range of residents, voluntary and public sector organisations active in Thurrock. Setting out our ambition will help to further develop new ideas, and new relationships, for the future.

Progress on developing this framework has been delayed due to the unprecedented need to respond to COVID-19. Since March 2020, our plans for co-producing the framework were replaced with developing and mobilising Thurrock Coronavirus Community Action (TCCA), providing support to people self-isolating or shielding at home. The speed by which we were able to implement an effective response with the voluntary sector evidences the commitment that exists across the borough to collaborate in order to achieve the best local solutions for local residents.

Thurrock's voluntary, community and faith sector supported communities throughout lockdown, either via TCCA or their immediate community. Nationally, the sector suffered disproportionately from the economic impact of COVID-19.

In Thurrock, we recognise the value of a strong voluntary sector and will be working closely with our partners through the development of a Recovery, Resilience and Return to Growth Strategy for Thurrock, as well as supporting sustainability through the implementation of this framework.

Vision

Core to the success of this framework is a commitment from the council to achieve an organisational shift to the culture of how we work and enable communities to co-design and influence decisions, address challenges and realise ambitions.

Our vision for this framework is:

We are committed to creating a fair, accessible and inclusive borough where everyone has a voice and an equal opportunity to succeed and thrive, and where community-led ambitions are supported and actively encouraged.

Working towards this vision will require aligning our policy and practice accordingly by reducing the red tape that hinders community-led action, devolving power and enabling different ways of working so communities are better enabled to achieve local outcomes.

The business case for the council to lead change at this time is clear. Co-design and co-production not only makes the best of our widest range of resources, but it leads to decisions that are sustainable and work for communities. Prevention in itself saves money.

Embedding a commitment to social value, and commissioning with economic, social and environmental outcomes in mind, favours local spend. Joint budgets for shared outcomes helps to break silos and enables integration – in short, better outcomes for local people.

Our priorities

To achieve the vision set out in this framework, our priorities are set out within three key themes:

Engagement

Involving residents in the decisions that affect their lives, using **co-design and co-production** methods in the issues facing Thurrock as well as the solutions.

Empowerment

Supporting resilience within communities and voluntary sector networks through **Asset-Based Community Development**, supporting communities to champion change. We aim to enable communities to make a difference and to flourish, being clear about the role of public services.

Equality

Ensuring services are free of prejudice and that our services enable all to have equal opportunities to prosper and contribute to building a diverse and inclusive borough, underpinned by 4 core equality outcomes:

- access to services
- supporting community integration and cohesion
- improving resilience
- workforce development

Our approach

Our approach depends on place based, **co-design and co-production**. This recognises the resources that citizens already have and the benefits of delivering services **with** rather than for people. It is an equal and reciprocal relationship between citizens and agencies with an inherent respect between all parties based on the skills, knowledge, experience and creativity they each bring forward.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) has already informed much of the transformation in the council's Adult Social Care team and is a principle we will carry over into our everyday engagement with residents and communities. All council services will embed ABCD to improve and inform their approach to service planning and delivery. This requires a commitment to a shift in thinking from a deficit model (a focus on 'what is wrong?'), which creates dependency, to a strength based model (a focus on 'what is strong').

Enabling people from different backgrounds to come together to share their ideas and channel how they feel about life in Thurrock builds strong, cohesive communities. We will work together with a diverse network of residents and community organisations to drive forward our commitments to achieve equality, diversity and inclusion implementing a strengths-based approach.

Delivering our priorities

The following section sets out how we will work collaboratively to deliver our priorities in alignment with the 3 themes of:

- engagement
- empowerment
- equality

Engagement

Dialogue

Involving residents in the decisions that affect their lives, using **co-design and co-production** methods in the issues facing residents, as well as the solutions. We will:

- explore an integrated approach to place based engagement, increasing the number and diversity of residents who contribute their ideas, building synergy with primary care networks, community forums, and 'Your Place, Your Voice' to shape the Local Plan
- develop the use of our consultation portal alongside direct engagement with communities when formal consultation is required, building on what is known from previous engagement – participatory budgeting is an example of where the portal can improve how local budgets are spent by ensuring communities influence decisions – this will improve decision-making and the impact for those affected
- build on existing partnerships to maximise the opportunity for collaboration – we will work with the Stronger Together Partnership to promote opportunities for engagement, recognising that dialogue with partners engenders trust and collaboration, placing citizens at the centre of opportunity for change

Recent achievements:

- dialogue arising from Black Lives Matters, and a new BAME community forum facilitated by Thurrock CVS
- environment and waste management projects with community forums – and work to support Friends Of Parks groups who play a key role in creating safe spaces for recreation and connecting communities
- joint conference held in October 2019 with Thurrock CVS to explore how we improve working together to build stronger communities – *"A fantastic event showcasing Thurrock as a community and how we all have a part to play to ensure we continue to keep Thurrock great"* – participant quote

Transformation and organisational change

Around 62% of Thurrock Council staff live in the borough. We will build on this to embed the commitments in this framework, and encourage staff to support community priorities through service planning and delivery.

We will:

- implement a learning and development plan underpinned by the enablement of cultural change supporting services review how they operate to deliver this agenda
- support elected members to play an effective community leadership role, helping to ensure that varying local needs and aspirations are considered and understood within the context of council policies

- review our policy framework to embed our commitments and to challenge unnecessary bureaucracy, empowering staff to support communities to make quick progress when there is a shared ambition to deliver

Recent achievements:

- staff and councillors played a key role in supporting communities through TCCA with a variety of roles including collecting prescriptions, shopping and delivering essential food parcels
- staff networks have led on a number of events and initiatives to champion equalities across our workforce, the most recent examples include International Women's Day and flying the Rainbow Flag to mark Essex Pride to recognise and support LGBT+ staff and residents
- we have recruited change-leads across the council to work with Directorate Workforce Groups to support new ways of working and to help embed the cultural change that underpins success

Empowerment

Resourcing social action

We value the impact of community assets and associations to Thurrock and recognise the need to target investment to achieve the greatest social value.

We will:

- complete a review of our Social Value Framework and increase the opportunity for maximising social, economic and environmental outcomes from how we spend all local budgets by exploring place-based commissioning and community asset transfer
- take an asset-based approach to resources by celebrating what we have available at our disposal as a borough, ensuring value for money, local investment and the best use of resources when spending so that community assets are sustainable and have the capacity and freedom to do what they do best – supporting communities
- explore new ways to use our resources fairly across partners, repurposing where appropriate and valuing the collective resources we share – for example, mapping how and where money is spent – and considering the opportunity of our buildings, knowledge, time, skills, commitment and data
- maximise local investment through collaboration, and recognise the need to support communities to engage fairly by having adequate time and capacity to participate – we will seek to reward and recognise active citizens supporting the development of our borough

Supporting a sustainable Third Sector

Voluntary sector organisations evolve as people come together and choose to make a difference to their community, be it area-based or a community of interest. Many charities and voluntary organisations perform essential work that contribute to the fabric of our society. Often, they act as a vital referral resource for public services.

COVID-19 has severely impacted the third sector. Losing their services in either the short term or after the country emerges from the crisis will cause untold damage to individuals and communities. Now more than ever, it is imperative that we support a sustainable third sector in Thurrock.

We will:

- ensure officers understand what is meant by the voluntary sector, how to engage effectively, ensuring timely communications – this will include championing the voluntary sector, ensuring understanding of the independence of charities, and respecting as equal to enable fair and effective partnership working
- review the processes that communities use when they want to lead improvements, so the voluntary sector can actively influence outcomes – this will also extend to a review of application processes related to permissions, funding, procurement, monitoring and grants protocols so we enable sustainability and are proportionate in the bureaucracy required
- recognise and actively encourage organisations to strive to be sustainable where possible, and to be able to plan for their delivery – organisations need capacity to operate and infrastructure support to be effective, including volunteer recruitment and management, so

we will seek to embed this commitment into processes relating to joint work with the sector, for example, funding agreements

- strive to ensure Thurrock gets its fair share of external funding by supporting bids and strengthening proposals – we will support the development of community fundraising through Giving for Thurrock (GiFT) as a place based focus to benefit social action and continue to promote Small Sparks as a quick and easy way to support community ideas that make a difference

Recent achievements:

- development of an action plan in response to the Fair Debt Summit held with partners from the voluntary sector – key aspects included investment in new technology and education of our younger generations
- key performance indicators within contracts were relaxed in response to COVID-19, and we will uphold the principle of at least three months' notice prior to any changes to terms and conditions impacting on the sector
- in the last year, housing contractors resourced at least 50% of their teams from local residents and were purchasing at least 60% of their supplies locally – also nine different apprenticeship opportunities were provided
- the repurposing of the Voluntary Sector Development Fund and Community Environmental Development Fund to support the sustainability and resilience of community organisations through COVID-19
- Encouraging applications to the Community Environmental Development Fund – over £1.25m has been allocated to date supporting over 50 improvements to community assets, enabling local activities to benefit residents.

Equality

We are committed to ensuring services are free of prejudice and that our services enable all to have equal opportunities to prosper and contribute to building a diverse and inclusive borough.

Our Equality Statement

We believe that the diversity of Thurrock's communities is a positive asset, reflecting our motto: **'By Thames to all people of the world'**.

The people who live, work and visit Thurrock come from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. However, the disadvantage and discrimination that some communities experience has a negative effect on the quality of their lives.

We are committed to:

- promoting equality of opportunity
- celebrating and valuing diversity
- eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation in all forms
- promoting good relations and integration

We want Thurrock to be a place where all citizens feel they are listened to and have a stake in their community – and which supports and values individual and community initiatives that bring people together.

As a community leader we will work together with our partners to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to fulfil their potential, and that our neighbourhoods are places where people come together to prosper.

How this is achieved

One of the ways we do this is by ensuring that equalities is a 'real' consideration during the formulation and development of our policies and functions. This is demonstrated through the completion of a Community Equality Impact Assessment process that takes consideration of protected characteristics in line with the Equality Act 2010.

The Equality Act 2010 has extended the protection of individuals to nine different groups. These are referred to as protected characteristics.

The protected characteristics are:

- age
- sex
- disability
- race
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation
- gender re-assignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity

We go beyond the protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010 to include socio-economic status, as we recognise that there are disparities across our communities.

Our Community Equality Impact Assessment (CEIA) process therefore takes consideration of both socio-economics and protected characteristics.

We are currently working together with our workforce, partners and the community to drive growth in our role as champions for equality, diversity, inclusion and cohesion in Thurrock and have the four equality objectives to underpin the delivery of this framework.

The following section highlights those objectives including our plans to deliver them.

Access to services

We are committed to ensuring that all council services are accessible and free from prejudice and discrimination.

We will:

- improve the use of the data and intelligence we collect and hold concerning the diversity profile and experience of Thurrock residents using our services – we will use this information to address the differences in outcomes and opportunities experienced by people in key areas of life such as health, education, community safety and housing
- we will continue to undertake comprehensive CEIAs to understand which communities experience barriers and involve them in agreeing how to resolve issues adequately – improving access to services, information, treatments and support interventions helps to reduce inequalities
- learn from new ways of remaining connected through the COVID-19 lockdown, and work with our partners to reduce the digital divide, maximising resident's skills, confidence and access to technology

Supporting community integration and cohesion

Communities may define themselves by neighbourhood, ethnicity or culture, age group, faith, sexual orientation, language, sex or other characteristics or by common interests. Community integration and cohesion describes the ability of all communities to function and grow in harmony together rather than in conflict.

We welcome and celebrates the diversity of everyone living, working and visiting Thurrock.

We will:

- work with the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership to tackle hate crime and prevent extremism – we will work with communities to prevent hate incidents and crimes, encourage reporting, and improve the quality and transparency of communications in relation to the Prevent agenda to raise public awareness of, and exposure to, Prevent
- prepare an annual calendar of events and work with residents and wider partners such as schools to demonstrate our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and pursue education, conversation and discussion to tackle perceptions of discrimination

- embed the opportunity for shared experience and connecting communities using a strengths-based approach in all we do for new and established communities – social interaction and meaningful contact with different communities builds cohesion, and we will support face to face engagement within guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19
- provide support to community and workforce focus groups that identify key issues and barriers to equality, inclusion and cohesion in Thurrock – this will build a picture of the priority challenges for each protected characteristic and wider disadvantaged groups, such as veterans and those facing economic disadvantage, and in doing so we recognise and value the diversity amongst groups, as well as between groups

Improving resilience

At a time of great economic instability as a consequence of COVID-19, it is imperative that we understand the impact it has placed on different communities in Thurrock and projected outcomes. Pooled data derived from our work with partners and comprehensive Community Equality Impact Assessments will be continually reviewed to ensure that we are able to determine what COVID-19 means for different communities in Thurrock.

We will:

- develop targeted interventions to enable joined up prevention measures that respond to evidence of need
- develop communities of practice to ensure timely information and communication regarding support programmes and emerging needs are understood and supported
- gather data in consultation with residents and partners to gain a collective understanding and develop means to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and what this means for different communities in Thurrock – we will focus on maximising potential job creation and supporting people into employment through the delivery of our Economic Growth Strategy
- adopt a preventative strength based approach to available support and getting behind community-led approaches to build resilience

Workforce development

Equality of opportunity is fundamental to maximising the engagement and performance of our people and we strive to create a positive environment through education and awareness raising of equality and diversity both within the organisation and the wider borough. The People Strategy 2020/23 sets our ambition for our workforce based on 6 key values:

- proud
- ambitious
- compassionate
- inclusive
- empowered
- collaborative

We will:

- live the standards and values we set out in our People Strategy, provide a customer first approach

- deliver a comprehensive workforce development plan for equality, diversity and inclusion put in place plans to achieve the capacity and skills to deliver what is required to support all of our communities and harness the diversity of our working environments
- create a trusted and inclusive environment where our staff are confident to disclose protected characteristics
- use data provided by our workforce to develop plans that address barriers to equality, diversity and inclusion, strive towards employing a workforce that is representative of the borough's demographic profile and publish an Annual Equality Report that highlights our progress

Recent achievements:

- 7 active staff networks, creating links with community networks
- Hate Crime Ambassador Programme and establishing Hate Incident Reporting Centres (HIRCS) in Thurrock
- challenge to Highways England to carry out a Health Equality Impact Assessment on the Lower Thames Crossing proposal
- in January 2020 council adopted the Definition of Antisemitism as set out by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
- we listened to the needs of Thurrock's Muslim community and worked with community leaders to identify a suitable piece of land to enable future burials

Next steps

A Pact for Thurrock

The Collaborative Communities Framework seeks to influence the ways we work for the benefit of communities. In taking this approach we recognise that different organisations will have varying degrees of resource, influence and power at their disposal, creating an unequal base for starting a new conversation to assist change.

Services can achieve so much more through collaboration rather than working in silos. Our experience of working together to support communities through COVID-19 has demonstrated the level of trust that already exists between Thurrock Council and the voluntary sector.

We recognise the vision and priorities set out in this framework are dynamic and will evolve with expanded engagement and experience.

Success is dependent on a collective agreement to deliver the priorities set out in this framework by all of our partners. Embedding these priorities into policy and action will help transform our borough so that delivery is informed by, and co-produced with local communities.

We will refresh the Thurrock Joint Compact as a Pact for Thurrock, and develop these principles so they are fit for purpose in these unprecedented times. See Annex 1 – 'Principles informing the development of a pact for Thurrock'.

Conclusion

The vision, principles and aims of this framework highlight the overarching plans for building on the foundations of strength based working to create better outcomes for local communities.

An implementation plan will be developed alongside this framework establishing the role of the council and its partners to ensure the most efficient, high impact delivery of the vision and priorities that have been outlined.

Annex 1

Principles informing the development of a Pact for Thurrock

Success is dependent on a collective agreement to deliver the priorities set out in this framework by all of our partners. Embedding these priorities into policy and action will help transform our borough so that delivery is informed by, and co-produced with local communities. We will refresh the Thurrock Joint Compact as a Pact for Thurrock, and develop these principles so they are fit for purpose in these unprecedented times.

Through the development of a Pact for Thurrock, we will:

- **be outcome-focused** – by agreeing a coherent and shared vision of the difference we intend to make, each organisation can use its strengths and resources more effectively to achieve a collective impact
- **create trust-based partnership arrangements** – working within existing relationships, creating agile and reactive solutions without the need for unnecessary time consuming governance and bureaucracy. The local system is able to respond as one, not as a series of independent entities inhibited by organisational structures. We need to capture and value this approach into protocols for the future
- **provide strong consistent leadership, enabling distributed leadership** – empowerment and proactive leadership is needed to foster the confidence of staff teams and communities to take responsibility and to use innovative and creative capacities to find solutions, free from risk of feeling unsupported
- **implement asset-based and strength-based approaches** – the concept of doing with rather than to sits at the heart of every aspect of our change journey. This has enabled communities to take action rather than having a service type solution imposed on them. The TCCA response which mobilised volunteers to help those self-isolating and shielding in our communities quickly and effectively, is a strong example of the asset based approach in action
- **value the importance of technology** – the scale of the coronavirus revealed the importance of technology. It also highlighted the challenges faced by many in gaining access to equipment and Wi-Fi, as well as having the skills and confidence to use technology
- **value the importance of human connections** – loneliness is a blight on society that risks increasing as lockdown restrictions ease, leaving some unable to enjoy their previous networks and excluded from new opportunities. Community networks play a fundamental role in combating loneliness and enabling community connections (e.g. through neighbourhoods, faith groups, clubs and societies). Shared experience breeds cohesion and we will value the assets in our borough that contribute to the quality of life of so many through their networks
- **use evidence and local intelligence** – the use of data and evidence based practice, coupled with local intelligence and the passion of communities will help to create a shared objective and the effective use of resources
- **provide a focus on prevention** – experience within adult social care transformation to move the system away from a clinical treatment model and toward a population health

approach with greater emphasis on treatment of the causal nature of poor health and well-being outcomes, can be expanded to all areas of public life. Street cleaning, anti-social behaviour and tackling obesity are just some examples

- **value the importance of place** – the importance of locality working cannot be underestimated in terms of building pride, enhancing identity and galvanising community passion to drive local improvements. Whilst some things need to be done at scale, the organising principle driving local transformation is that of subsidiarity; that the centre should only be responsible for those things that cannot be delivered at a more local level. Neighbourhoods enjoy strong networks, able to respond with agility and pace to issues as they emerge. We need to value and nurture locality based partnerships that can help bring capacity and focus to local issues, ensuring there is an equality of engagement, building consensus where difference exists
- **propose means to achieve a rebalancing of power** – away from officials and organisations and towards citizens and communities