

Thurrock Council

Statement of Community Involvement, November 2023

Community Equality Impact Assessment

The Equality Act 2010 states that public bodies must have "due regard" to a variety of Equalities objectives (Equality Act 2010, Section 149) and consequently, Equality Analysis must be carried out to demonstrate that decision-makers are fully aware of the impact that changes may have on stakeholders.

The concept of 'due regard' was reinforced in 2012 during the review of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which "requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities".

'Due regard' is dependent on the relevance and potential impact of the decision being considered. The greater the relevance and impact, the higher the regard due.

As an authority, we have made a commitment to apply a systematic screening process to new policy, strategy, functions or service development including reviews or changes to existing policy, strategy, functions or services.

This is to determine whether the proposals are likely to have a significant impact on different groups within our community.

This process has been developed, together with full guidance, to support officers in meeting our duties under the:

- Equality Act 2010
- Public Sector Equality Duty
- The Best Value Guidance
- The Public Service (Social Value) 2012 Act

In addition, the guidance supports officers to consider our commitments set out in the [Thurrock Joint Compact](#) with the voluntary sector.

About the service and reason for the development or review process

Name of service	Place
Lead Officer	Laura Bage
Contact Details	Laura.Bage@thurrock.gov.uk

Why is this policy, strategy, function or service development/review needed?
<p>The Council is required by national legislation to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), as set out in Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended).</p> <p>The SCI sets out how the Council will engage and consult with the local community and other stakeholders on planning matters by defining how and when they can get involved in the preparation of planning documents and in determining planning applications.</p> <p>Local planning authorities are required to review and update their SCI every five years. Thurrock's previous SCI was adopted in December 2015. Work on an update was started in 2019, however, progress was halted in 2020 due to the Council focussing its resources on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>As a consequence of the pandemic, the Council, like Thurrock's residents and businesses, has adapted and established new ways of working and communicating effectively with others, including through our partnerships with the voluntary and community sector. These new methods incorporate useful engagement tools which weren't considered in the 2019 draft SCI. The pandemic also brought about temporary changes to how Councils could consult on planning matters, which was in direct conflict with the approaches to consultation set out in SCIs published prior to 2020. Whilst restrictions and temporary changes to consultation have ceased, it is important that any SCI update allows the Council to adapt its approach to consultation, should the need ever arise.</p> <p>The Council carried out a full review of the SCI, taking into account the changes proposed within the 2019 draft SCI and representations to the consultation, as well as subsequent legislative changes, revised national guidance and the Council's Collaborative Communities Framework to produce a draft revised SCI. This was subject to public consultation for a period of 7 weeks during July, August and September 2022. This was supported by Thurrock CVS.</p>

1. Community impact (this can also be used to assess impact on staff although a cumulative impact should be considered)

<p>1.1 What impacts will this policy, strategy, function or service development/review have on communities and workforce? Look at what you know? What does your research tell you?</p> <p><i>Consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National and local data sets – please see guidance • Complaints • Consultation and service monitoring information • Voluntary and community organisations

- The Equality Act places a specific duty on people with 'protected characteristics'. The table below details these groups and helps you to consider the impact on these groups.

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	What are the positive and negative impacts?	How will benefits be enhanced and negative impacts minimised or eliminated?
Local communities in general	✓			<p>The SCI was prepared considering the Council's Collaborative Communities Framework, which aims to give local communities a greater role in shaping the borough, by enabling them to co-design and influence decisions, address challenges and realise ambitions.</p> <p>The SCI sets out that when undertaking planning consultations, the Council will ensure engagement occurs at the earliest opportunity, planning terms will be explained and plain English used. Engagement methods will be used that are relevant to the community being consulted and information will be provided in an accessible format, encouraging involvement from groups that are not usually involved in the planning process.</p>	<p>We will aim to schedule consultation events for all times of the day, including daytimes, evenings and weekends to ensure that the working population of Thurrock have their chance to participate.</p> <p>All consultations will be available to view and comment on 24 hours a day online. Research behind the Council's Health & Well-Being Strategy identified that round 20% of Thurrock's population are digitally excluded. We will continue to provide support within communities for those at risk of digital exclusion, by offering computers and online access from libraries with 'digital champions' and the forthcoming 'Digital and Customer Experience'.</p> <p>We will continue to work with Thurrock CVS and the wider voluntary and community sector to ensure that we engage with community interest groups throughout the Borough.</p>
Age	✓			<p>ONS Mid-2020 data shows that in Thurrock 23.5% of the population were aged 0-15 years; 62.8% were aged 16-64 years and 13.7% were aged 65 years plus.</p> <p>The increased reliance on technology for community involvement practices could</p>	<p>We will endeavour to hold consultation events in areas which are easily accessible to all members of the community, including the elderly.</p> <p>We will try to encourage participation in consultations by the younger population of Thurrock by contacting youth</p>

			<p>have a negative impact on those most likely to be digitally excluded. This includes older people. The SCI identifies that the Council will seek to engage with those groups of the community who are generally under-represented in consultations and planning, including young people and the elderly.</p>	<p>groups in the Borough and by involving Youth Cabinet, where appropriate. We are aware that social media is a popular means of interaction for young people and the Council is committed to the use of online platforms to engage younger people on planning matters.</p>
Disability	✓		<p>The Census of 2011 shows that in Thurrock, 31% of households had one or more people with a long term health problem or disability.</p> <p>The SCI identifies that planning consultations are open to all and the Council will seek to engage with those groups of the community who are generally under-represented in consultations and planning, including people with disabilities.</p> <p>The SCI also identifies that during planning consultations, information will be provided in an accessible format.</p>	<p>We will ensure that the buildings we use for consultation events are accessible for all, including those with disabilities.</p> <p>Upon request, we will try to provide consultation information in different formats, including large-print and in braille.</p>
Gender reassignment		✓	<p>Planning consultations are open to all and the Council will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say on proposed planning policies.</p>	
Marriage and civil partnership		✓	<p>Planning consultations are open to all and the Council will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say on proposed planning policies.</p>	

Pregnancy and maternity		✓		<p>Planning consultations are open to all and the Council will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say on proposed planning policies.</p> <p>Where people are required to care for children, it may be difficult for them to engage in consultation events and meetings.</p>	<p>We will ensure that the buildings we use for consultation events are accessible for all, including those with prams/pushchairs.</p> <p>A number of the planning policy consultation events take place within and outside of usual working hours to try and ensure residents and businesses are able to engage in the process. Planning applications are available for public inspection online and can be accessed at any time of the day.</p>
Race (including Gypsies, Roma and Travellers)	✓			<p>Planning consultations are open to all and the Council will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say on proposed planning policies.</p> <p>The Council will seek to engage with those groups of the community who are generally under-represented in consultations and planning, including Gypsies and Travellers.</p>	
Religion or belief		✓		<p>Planning consultations are open to all and the Council will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say on proposed planning policies, no matter their religion or belief.</p>	
Sex		✓		<p>Planning consultations are open to all and the Council will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say on proposed planning policies.</p>	
Sexual orientation		✓		<p>It is estimated that 4,738 residents of Thurrock are identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual.</p>	

				<p>Planning consultations are open to all and the Council will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say on proposed planning policies, no matter their sexual orientation.</p>	
<p>Any community issues identified for this location?</p> <p><i>See above link to ward profiles.</i></p> <p>If the project is based in a specific location please state where, or whether Borough wide. Please include any detail of relevance – for example, is it an area with high unemployment, or public transport limited?</p>				<p>Not applicable</p>	
<p>Workforce</p>		✓		<p>Planning consultations are open to all, including employees of the Council.</p> <p>Employees of the Local Plans Team may be requested to work outside their normal working hours to cover consultation events, for example, during the evening and at weekends.</p> <p>Employees from other services may be required to</p>	

				attend meetings outside of their normal working hours, for example, during the evening.	
Health and wellbeing outcomes	✓			<p>Planning Policy documents are prepared in collaboration with Public Health and in alignment with the priorities of the Health and Well-Being Strategy.</p> <p>Health Impact Assessments will and are also undertaken in the preparation of the Local Plan and also for large-scale planning applications.</p>	
Socio-economic outcomes		✓		It may be difficult to contact low income groups if they have limited access to the internet and transport.	The Council will use a range of methods to inform and consult the community and stakeholders when preparing planning documents. Where additional support is required to improve levels of engagement and overcome barriers to participation this will be considered in detail taking into account the subject matter and geographical scope.

2. Consultation, data and intelligence

2.1 Please highlight the steps you have taken, or plan to take, to consult the whole community or specific groups affected by the policy, strategy, function or service development/review – for example, online consultation, focus groups, consultation with representative groups?

Producing the SCI

The Local Plan Team of the Council prepared a draft of the revised Statement of Community Involvement, in coordination with other Council departments, including Development Management, Public Health and Communities. It was subject to public consultation from Friday 15th July until Monday 5th September 2022. During this time, the revised document was available to view online on the Council's consultation platform and in hard copy at libraries throughout the Borough. All groups and forums on the Council's consultation database were informed that the consultation on the revised SCI had commenced and were invited to comment. Those wishing to provide comments could do so through the Council's online consultation platform, by downloading a copy of the response form, or by completing a hard copy of the response form available at the libraries.

In total, we received comments from six different individuals and ten organisations, which included three other local authorities. Following public consultation, the Council reviewed all the comments received and made amendments to the draft SCI before finalising it for adoption.

Implementing the SCI

Preparing Planning Documents

The SCI identifies that planning consultations are open to all and that the Council will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say on proposed planning policies.

National legislation requires the Council to consult a number of 'specific consultation bodies', which are recognised as statutory organisations, when preparing planning policy documents.

The Council will also consult 'general consultation bodies', which includes residents, landowners, interest groups and businesses. If a consultation is on a specific topic, or relates to a specific area within the borough, the Council may target the consultation towards those most likely to be affected. Where a consultation is on issues that affect the whole borough, the Council will adopt consultation methods that seek to notify and engage as many individuals and stakeholders as possible.

In addition to 'specific' and 'general' consultation bodies, the Council will seek to engage with those groups of the community who are generally under-represented in consultations and planning, including 'hard to reach' groups. These include, but not limited to young people, the elderly, BAME, people with disabilities, Gypsies and Travellers and those with other protected characteristics.

The Council will use a range of methods to inform and consult the community and stakeholders when preparing planning documents. These include:

- Council's Website – Information will be published on the website including documents that make up the Local Plan and documents that support it.
- Consultation Hub – All plan-making consultation events will be hosted on the Council's 'Have my say' consultation hub.

2.1 Please highlight the steps you have taken, or plan to take, to consult the whole community or specific groups affected by the policy, strategy, function or service development/review – for example, online consultation, focus groups, consultation with representative groups?

- Documents – During consultations, a hard copy of consultation document will be available at the Civic Offices and at other locations across the Borough.
- Email/letter notification – Key stakeholders and members of the community who have signed up to the planning mailing list will be notified of upcoming events by email or letter.
- Social Media – Consultations and events may be advertised on the Council’s social media pages such as Facebook and Twitter.
- Local Media – Press releases may be released about consultations and events. Public notices and advertisements may be placed in local newspapers, such as the Thurrock Enquirer and the Thurrock Gazette.
- Thurrock News – eNewsletters may be used to inform the public of consultations and events.
- Workshops – Virtual or in-person workshops may be organised with community groups and stakeholders.
- Exhibitions – Virtual or in-person exhibitions may be held providing specific information on consultations and events related to the preparation of planning documents.
- Meetings and community forums – We may attend/host local meetings and forums to engage with communities and make them aware of consultations and events.
- Your Place Your Voice Events – Different teams within the Council work together at these events to raise awareness and provide information on a range of matters or Council services. This may include hosting joint consultation and engagement events.

The Council will remain flexible with regards to consultations and will tailor the methods used to engage so that they are appropriate for the audience we are seeking comments from. The Council will also consider new ways of engaging and communicating, should they arise during the lifetime of the SCI.

In addition to formal stages of consultation, the Council will strive to maintain ongoing engagement with the community and relevant stakeholders throughout a plan’s preparation.

Development Management Process

With regards to Development Management, the SCI identifies that the Council encourages pre-application discussions for certain types of development. Whilst these discussions are normally confidential between the Council and the applicant, it is recognised in the SCI that public engagement with local communities at this stage is strongly encouraged. This enables local communities to put forward constructive comments and suggestions, which may lead to fewer objections being made further down the line. The SCI identifies that pre-application consultation should be in the form of meetings, presentations and/or exhibitions, in person and in a digital format.

2.1 Please highlight the steps you have taken, or plan to take, to consult the whole community or specific groups affected by the policy, strategy, function or service development/review – for example, online consultation, focus groups, consultation with representative groups?

Once a planning application has been received and validated, the Council will undertake public consultation. Statutory requirements for this vary for different types of application, but it may involve:

- Site Notices
- Newspaper Adverts
- Website information
- Letters to adjoining properties

Depending on the type and nature of the planning application, there are a range of statutory consultees that must be consulted. The Council also informs the general public on planning applications by publishing them on the Council’s website and in local newspaper(s), where required.

2.2 Please also provide details on the sources of data or intelligence you have used to inform your assessment of impact and how they have helped you to understand those that will be affected by the policy, strategy, function or service development/review outlined?

Statistics used to complete Section 1.1 of this assessment came from the ONS Mid-Year Review 2020, the Census (2011) and knowledge gained during previous consultations on planning documents.

This document was also prepared using resources on the Council’s CEIA intranet page.

3. Monitoring and Review

3.1 How will you review community and equality impact once the policy, strategy, function or service has been implemented?

*These actions should be developed using the information gathered in **Section 1 and 2** and should be picked up in departmental/service business plans.*

Action	By when?	By who?
Feedback from the consultation will be taken into consideration when finalising the SCI.	September 2023	Local Plan Team
Where consultation responses on planning documents raise issues with the consultation process the Council will review and respond accordingly	Following the next public consultation	Local Plan Team
The SCI will be revised every 5 years.	2028	Local Plan Team

4. Next steps

It is important to ensure that the information gathered is used to inform any council reports that are presented to Cabinet or Overview and Scrutiny committees. This will allow members to be

furnished with all the facts in relation to the impact their decisions will have on different equality groups and the community as a whole.

Take some time to précis your findings below. This can then be added to your report template and the Equality and Diversity Implications section for sign off by the Community Development and Equalities team at the consultation stage of the report cycle.

Implications/ Customer Impact
The SCI sets out how all members of the community can participate in the planning process across Thurrock. However, this CEIA identifies that certain age groups are less likely to engage in consultations, people with different disabilities have accessibility needs while lower income, and some rural households are less likely to have access to the internet causing increased digital exclusion. Measures have and continue to be put in place to mitigate this, for example, the introduction of 'digital champions' offering support, alongside computer and online access in libraries in the Borough.

5. Sign off

The information contained in this template should be authorised by the relevant project sponsor or Head of Service who will be responsible for the accuracy of the information now provided and delivery of actions detailed.

Name	Role – for example, project sponsor, head of service)	Date
Tracey Coleman	Interim Chief Planning Officer	30/11/2023