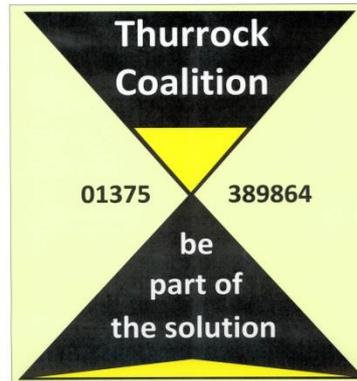


Thurrock Coalition



www.thurrockcoalition.co.uk

Informing the work of the Overview and Scrutiny review into Fairness in Thurrock

Introduction

Thurrock Coalition offers advice and support for disabled and older residents of Thurrock and their carers. We are a wide network of individuals and groups aiming to inform people about their rights and entitlements and to improve the quality and choice of services that might assist them. Our main role is to engage, consult and listen to the views of Citizens of Thurrock.

To this end, we are involved in co-productive activities with Thurrock Council, building upon our positive and constructive relationships with Directorates, Heads of Service and Managers, particularly Adult Social Care and Housing.

As the User-Led Organisation for the borough we have a meaningful strategic and operational input into consultations, strategies, policies and work streams. Thus helping to ensure the voices of people who use services, their families and their carers are heard, listened to and implemented, with the aim of achieving more positive outcomes and change for Citizens of Thurrock.

We have noted an increased recognition on the part of the Council of the importance and added value of early engagement with the people who have lived experiences of using Council services. It is clear that increased consultation and co-production has enormous potential to create a "fairer" Thurrock for all.

Addressing the questions of fairness in Thurrock:

General observations

Fairness is an inappropriate tenet upon which to base such a Review. “Fairness” is inherently subjective and open to broad interpretation, thus making measuring effective implementation of any recommendations difficult. We submit that Equality is more appropriate in this context. The principles Equality are defined in Law. Equality is absolute; people are either treated equally or not, whereas “Fairness” can be interpreted in degrees. The focus should be upon achieving Equality through empowerment for choice and control for all in the community.

Current focus and examples of inequality that Thurrock Coalition (The User-Led Organisation – ULO for Thurrock) Partners are addressing:

- The World of Work (WoW) initiative - supporting individuals with learning difficulties to gain equal access to employment opportunities and the employment market
- Third Sector multi-agency work is being carried out to increase the fair access to BSL interpreters and similar reasonable adjustments for people with sensory impairments when accessing Adult Social Care and Health Services.
- Third Sector multi-agency work is being carried out to highlight issues around the scope of advocacy funding and service provision in Thurrock.

Examples of the wider work streams and impact of Thurrock Coalition (The User-Led Organisation – ULO for Thurrock)

Some examples of the work of Thurrock Coalition and its partner organisations aimed at addressing issues of inequality and access to services through various strategy input and work streams are as follows:

Work stream: Sensory Confrontation Event

People with sensory impairments, including members of the Thurrock Unsighted People’s Society (TUPS), have told us that there is a gap in the provision of services and equipment being offered to Thurrock residents by the council. We saw that the gap in service provision needed addressing.

What was the outcome of this work stream?

As a result of the day, Thurrock Council now wants to Co-produce its sensory strategy alongside local people. As the User-Led Organisation for Thurrock, Thurrock Coalition is keen to provide input in a comprehensive and strategic manner and to ensure that the process is informed by the views and concerns of residents of Thurrock.

Examples of the impact of the work stream

There is currently no strategic statement on sensory impairment in Thurrock. To approach this omission co-productively, Thurrock Coalition initially held a Sensory Confrontation event to identify some relevant issues. They then asked people with sensory impairment about their experiences to date using a solution focused approach which emphasises what has worked and why. This does not avoid problem talk, but does concentrate on what could happen that would make things better and thus sets a firmer basis for the initial vision for both Council services and for current and potential customers.

Thurrock Coalition then held a series of consultation and engagement workshops with people who have sensory impairments. The report and recommendations were drafted to help to inform a sensory strategy for Thurrock.

There is now a text phone, a Sensory Development worker and Visual Rehab Worker at Thurrock Council as a direct result of this project
We are awaiting the draft of the Thurrock Sensory Strategy from Thurrock Council.

Workforce Planning and Development

Thurrock Council engaged Thurrock Coalition to consult with people who use adult social care services in Thurrock and gather their experiences, views and opinions on what training should be given to adult social care staff to further the implementation of the Personalisation agenda.

What was the outcome of this work stream?

Residents will have expressed and elaborated upon the skills, qualities, competences and qualifications they feel the workforce should have and what would make a "good social care worker. *Their views will be analysed and collated to inform the Council's workforce strategy.*

The views, experiences, issues and identified outcomes from all 4 Focus Groups were analysed for commonality from which the following were extrapolated:

Agreed outcome – A - I feel I have choice and am in control of the services I receive and they meet my needs

Agreed outcome – B - I feel I have been listened to and understood and am in control of the assessment process

Agreed outcome – C - I feel confident that social care staff know what they are doing Social care policies are clear and understood by everyone.

Agreed outcome – D - I feel all relevant information about me is shared appropriately and with my knowledge.

Agreed Outcome – E - I understand what is available to me both in my community and from health and social care.

Agreed outcome – F - I feel recognised as an individual, able to make decisions for myself and my own contribution to society.

Examples of the impact of the work stream

A consolidation event was held in order to provide a further opportunity for feedback on the draft strategy to see that it accurately reflected the outcomes developed by the people of Thurrock. These outcomes now appear in the Thurrock Council Workforce Strategy and have potential over-arching application across all of Thurrock Council's Adult social Care strategies now and in the future.

Thurrock Coalition and Thurrock Council then worked co-productively to develop processes and procedures for an observation of training programme to be User-Led, its membership drawn from interested individuals who were involved in the initial Workforce Planning project. This work is ongoing as of November 2013.

Informing a Transition Strategy for Thurrock

It was recognised that a new, refreshed, over-arching Transition strategy was needed. Thurrock Council already has a transitions pathway with which they are already working. The overarching strategy document must be simple and easy for people to understand.

It was agreed that to start this process Thurrock Council needs to know what young people, parents and carers want their transition service to look like. What are their hopes and wishes for the future, and how can we help them get there.

With this in mind Thurrock Coalition produced a plan of service user consultation events - including what funding was needed and for the Transition parents support group to be involved.

The second phase involved Thurrock Council Officers gaining the views of professionals working in the field

It was intended that Phase 3 would involve commissioning and a local offer

What was the outcome of this work stream?

The intended outcomes of Phase 1 are as follows:

We appreciate that the experiences (past, present and future) of individuals, parents and carers embarking on the transition process are varied and wide-ranging and we explained exactly of what it comprises to each focus group. By the end of the process:

a) Residents will have a better understanding of what the Council does and does not provide in terms of its Transition service and therefore what they can legitimately expect from it

b) Residents will have expressed and elaborated upon the Transition service experience that they should expect to have and what would improve the experience further. Their views will be analysed and collated to inform the Council's Transition strategy.

Examples of the impact of the work stream

The outcomes and themes identified on the day will help to shape and influence the work of the Transition Strategy Group (of which Thurrock Coalition is an active member). Thurrock Coalition also facilitated a Workshop between practitioners, individuals and parents in January 2013. Third Sector, Parent, Carer and individual involvement in the Transition Strategy Group is ongoing.

Housing Hurdles Event

The Housing Hurdles Event was held in order to engage key organisations in the Third Sector including as well as Citizens of Thurrock, and Council Officers to explore and discuss issues around housing specifically affecting disabled people in Thurrock. The issues covered included: accessibility, assessments, experiences, delays, homelessness, equipment, adaptations and priority within the allocation system.

What was the outcome of this work stream?

The event provided a valuable opportunity to explore the strengths of the Housing service in Thurrock and included discussions around what has worked/is working well presently and what has not worked so well and how to improve this moving forward based upon the lived experience of Thurrock Citizens. Further engagement events in the form of Issue Specific Focus Groups are planned in Co-production between Thurrock Coalition and Thurrock Council's Housing Directorate.

Examples of the impact of the work stream

Thurrock Coalition has been asked by the Director of Housing at Thurrock Council to attend a forum to discuss the deficiencies in training provision for housing staff – specifically around disability equality awareness and provision of aids and adaptations in housing services.

Thurrock Diversity Network, as a member of Thurrock Coalition has informed the contents and drafting of the Thurrock Council housing allocations policy and specifically how it relates to and provides for disabled people and their families. The suggested amendments have been implemented and are now reflected in the strategy.

Workstream: Sport For You Event

Thurrock Coalition was invited by Senior Officers at Thurrock Council to look into ways of sustaining the interest and momentum behind the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, focussing upon increasing participation, inclusion and involvement in sports, activities and recreation in Thurrock for individuals of all impairment types.

One of the main issues that needed to be addressed was access to information and awareness of: what sport/activity related opportunities are

actually available in Thurrock and how people can be encouraged to get involved within the local area.

The “Sport For You” event was held in order engage Citizens of Thurrock, parents, carers and families and Council Members Officers and Third Sector groups to explore, map and discuss current and potential future provision of Sport and Activity for Disabled people in Thurrock.

What was the outcome of this work stream?

- a) The event informed the development of networking, information sharing and increased communication between individuals and organisations to improve availability of opportunities for sport and activity for Disabled people in Thurrock.
- b) Thurrock Coalition is working closely with Thurrock Council’s Sports Council, partners and individuals.
- c) Thurrock Coalition is helping to ensure that the Pledges made at the event are fulfilled wherever possible.
- d) Thurrock Coalition has developed an Opportunity Database for Thurrock that effectively and accurately reflects the consultation feedback and includes the views of individuals their parents, families and carers
- e) Thurrock Coalition is continuing to support and strengthen the partnership between local government and the people of Thurrock.

Examples of the impact of the work stream

The Steering Group that was established to support the event has developed an action plan, with the aim of improving access to opportunities in sport and activity for Disabled People in Thurrock. The actions taken since the day are as follows:

The Thurrock Coalition Sports Opportunity Database is now active – detailing a broad range of accessible sports and activity opportunities for disabled people in Thurrock. The Thurrock Coalition Disability Sports page is now live (<http://www.thurrockcoalition.co.uk/sport.html>) – to be updated periodically when new information is received and the Steering Group will review every 6 months

Thurrock Coalition will draft periodic press releases and speak to Thurrock Council Communications Department in relation to maintaining the profile of the Sports initiatives for disabled people in Thurrock

Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions (TLS) have seconded a member of staff into the role of Sports Champion/Community Sports Connector.

Steering Group members have met with the Funding Officer at Thurrock Council re: funding – Thurrock Coalition is now receiving the funding Bulletin and forwards information to TLS.

Transport solutions (accessible buses) have been pledged by: TLS, Thurrock Mind and Grangewaters.

An A4 TDN Guide to accessible transport has been created – it includes Buses, trains, taxis and Trans-Vol (and accessible telephone numbers for Thurrock companies).

Thurrock Coalition has located existing “free” resources e.g. school halls, sheltered accommodation complexes: Frederick Andrews Court, Davy Down. Frederick Andrews Court (Sheltered Housing Complex) is now used (in partnership with Sheltered Housing Residents and Managers, for a monthly activity and social event and opportunities, including Table Tennis, Bowls, Darts, Table Cricket and Horseracing. Football opportunities are now in place in Thurrock as well as Archery (standard and soft archery). In terms of swimming – The Steering Group Members plan to liaise with Impulse Leisure to increase the number of inclusive and accessible opportunities for swimming and request an inclusive sports leaflet/information bulletin, which lists the available opportunities in the borough.

Work stream: Highlighting Violence Against Women and Girls in Thurrock

Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions (TLS) – one of the constituent partners of Thurrock Coalition has undertaken work in noting the particularly 'unfair' way in which women with Learning Disabilities are disproportionately represented in the official and unofficial statistics relating to sexual violence.

What was the outcome of this work stream?

A film was made to highlight this inequality as part of Thurrock Council's violence against women and girls strategy.

Examples of the impact of the work stream

The specific impact is yet to be seen. However, senior managers of Social Care have pledged to support further strategies to minimise this inequality in future.

Thurrock Peer Challenge

Thurrock Coalition was invited to play a key role in informing the Thurrock Council Adult Social Care Peer Challenge. To this end, Thurrock Coalition designed, developed and facilitated a number of “Pre Challenge” Focus Groups in order to engage Citizens of Thurrock, people who use services, parents, families and voluntary sector colleagues to explore and discuss Thurrock Council's progress in terms of the Transformation agenda and the Building Positive Futures programme in a solution-focused manner.

What was the outcome of this work stream?

At the end of the 3 day on-site visit, the Peer Challenge Lead and colleagues attended a meeting of Thurrock Diversity Network to feedback findings from the Review to those organisations, groups and individuals who had contributed to the “Pre-Challenge” Focus Groups. A further example of how the user and carer voice is encouraged and included in the work of Thurrock Council is that the Peer Challenge focused upon this topic as a key element of the scope and that Thurrock Coalition was an important member of the Peer Challenge Team.

Examples of the impact of the work stream

The impact of the work stream is yet to be measured, but it is hoped that implementation of the Recommendations from the Peer Challenge will be undertaken with partners in the continued spirit of co-production.

The above examples are not exhaustive, but are intended to provide an indication of the increased co-productive partnership-working in Thurrock in recent years with a view to increasing equality of opportunity and access to services for disabled people, older people, their families and carers in Thurrock

Further detailed information including local and national co-production, consultation and engagement reports and recommendations are available at: <http://www.thurrockcoalition.co.uk/reports.html>

Thurrock Diversity Network – “Fairness in Thurrock” Engagement Workshop – January 2014

We recently ran an engagement workshop through our Thurrock Coalition partners – Thurrock Diversity Network (TDN) – a registered Co-operative, set up in order to benefit disabled adult residents of Thurrock through the development of inclusive communities, citizenship, active participation, promotion of independent living and the advancement of human rights, equality, diversity and the Social Model of Disability.

Thurrock Diversity Network has a broad membership base of 45 individuals and organisations with an interest in disability issues and a connection to Thurrock. Through a series of group work, feedback and discussions, the following answers were collated in terms of Fairness in Thurrock:

When asked if there was one thing that people could change in Thurrock to make the borough fairer, the key issues included: Widening the accessibility of all documents produced and distributed by Thurrock Council, thus making having a universal Easy Read Policy. Secondly that Commissioning should keep a local focus, to support knowledge, skills and specialist expertise in Thurrock. There should be a broad choice of advocacy, advice and information services, available to all, which should include form filling available to all through a “one stop shop”

Further issues identified the lack of a Central Post Office in the borough as well as the need for a re-think on hospital car park availability and charges. The approach to access to information and after-care following discharge from hospital would benefit from being more joined up so as to provide continuous and seamless support. Participants also took the view that Council Tax liability for people on low incomes should be abolished.

Transport was a vital issue that was raised across the breakout groups: Individuals were also concerned about a need for greater parking enforcement and respect for the Blue Badge system, along with increased

access and availability of appropriate spaces. The number of routes and frequency of service for trains and buses should be increased across the whole of Thurrock.

Participants also highlighted the need for greater understanding and awareness of the specific needs of individuals with mental health issues and/or sensory impairments.

Participants felt that work is needed to address the digital divide in Thurrock, which leads to inequality as more and more methods of accessing services are only available online and not everyone has the internet, or access to it.

When asked “Do you feel people living across Thurrock have fair access to services and fair access to opportunities?” Overwhelmingly people felt that people living across Thurrock do not have fair access to services or opportunities, specifically people took the view that there isn’t currently a *consistent, transparent, borough wide easily accessible information or advice service – particularly relating to form completion and form filling.*

Furthermore, there is a perception around an inequality in obtaining information/advice/statutory services for disadvantaged groups. Several participants shared the concern that there are still too many barriers to fairness and equality. A participant raised the question of how the Council is currently implementing the Social Model of Disability. How this is monitored, to ensure that its use has a real, tangible and positive effect for vulnerable people in Thurrock?

Discussion also took place around the issue of employment training and opportunities for vulnerable groups. The group were of the view that any such opportunities should be linked to the local developing work market and economy. For example: the new “DP World” port and local colleges should be engaged with and available to all vulnerable people. These institutions should focus upon vocations and skills that can be used to benefit Thurrock and to empower local communities.

The issue of transport was also raised and it was recognised as an overarching and multifaceted concern, moreover, it is a key enabler or barrier to inclusion and participation in communities and wider society.

A lack of information and knowledge sharing can also contribute to reduced and/or poor access to services and opportunities (particularly if individuals are not supported to find out about which services are available and then how to access relevant services).

When asked about whether there any areas where individuals living and working in Thurrock need extra support, the following issues were raised: Older people will increasingly need extra support (particularly in terms of the ageing population). People with Sensory Impairments need extra support Young people also need extra support (people in transition and young adults).

Work needs to be done to increase aspirations, learning, knowledge and employment opportunities in Thurrock.

Conclusion

It is evident that a great deal of work has been carried out to ensure that the voice of local vulnerable, disabled, older people, their families and carers are heard, listened to and acted upon to improve the quality of services available to them. These include, but are not limited to: Sensory Service Development, Workforce Planning, Housing Adaptations, Transition, and Accessible Sport.

However, issues of inequality are a concern for citizens of Thurrock, for example: a need for readily accessible, easy to understand information, advice and advocacy, form filling, a need for commissioning to have a focus upon local providers, problems around health and social care and hospital support upon and after discharge, the digital divide, education, employment and training opportunities, transport, parking availability, cost and enforcement, environmental and urban planning (disability equality and awareness), the lack of a central post office in Thurrock, accessible toilets, council tax, improving access to services for BME groups and carers.

It is hoped that the information contained in this report will be used to inform the work of the Overview and Scrutiny review into Fairness in Thurrock.

Thurrock Coalition – January 2014.

Appendix: Informing the work of the Overview and Scrutiny review into Fairness in Thurrock

If there was one thing you could change in Thurrock to make the Borough 'fairer' what would it be?

- *ALL documents from the Council (across all Directorates) should be in Easy Read*
- *Commissioning of services for the local population should be kept local (not national). Greater weight should be given to the value of local knowledge, skills and specialist expertise throughout commissioning cycles. People who use services should be routinely involved throughout the commissioning process.*
- *People should have choice and control over which services they wish to access, for example there should be a range of commissioned provider for people when they require advice, information and advocacy.*
- *There should be a form filling service for all*
- *Communication to and from Thurrock Council has too many layers – A solution would be to offer a “one stop shop”*
- *Thurrock should have its own Central Post Office*
- *The cost and availability of hospital parking is currently unfair.*
- *Access to after care information and services after hospital discharge.*
- *Council Tax for people on a low income should be abolished*
- *Create equal access to transport (increase the number of routes and frequency of service across the whole of Thurrock). Use of the phrase: “Lakeside is close by” should be discouraged. It is not close to (or easily accessed by) a large proportion of the population of Thurrock.*
- *Parking Enforcement should be tightened up (particularly around abuse/lack of respect for Blue Badge parking spaces). The proportion of Blue Badge parking spaces in car parks should be increased in line with the needs of the local population.*
- *Planners should consider the needs of individuals with Sensory Impairments with regard to Highways.*
- *Employers have insufficient understanding of the different needs of*

people with Mental Health issues.

- *There is a digital divide in Thurrock and this leads to inequality as more and more methods of accessing services are only available online and not everyone has the internet, or access to it.*
- *There is insufficient numbers, availability of accessible toilets and changing facilities in Thurrock.*

Do you feel people living across Thurrock have fair access to services and fair access to opportunities?

- *No – people don't have fair, consistent, transparent or easy access to advocates and support information.*
- *People with Protected Characteristics do not have fair access to opportunities or services or social opportunities.*
- *There is an inequality in obtaining information/advice/statutory services for disadvantaged groups.*
- *There are still too many barriers to fairness and equality. How is the Council implementing the Social Model of Disability in a way that has a real, tangible and positive effect for vulnerable people in Thurrock?*
- *No, all employment training and opportunities should be linked to the local developing work market and economy. For example: the new "DP World" port – local colleges should be available to all vulnerable people and should focus upon vocations and skills that can be used to benefit Thurrock and to empower local communities.*
- *No, because access to transport and parking is currently not fair.*
- *There is poor access to services and opportunities (particularly if you don't know how to access services) if you're:*
 - *a carer*
 - *a member of a BME group*

Are there any areas where you believe individuals living and working in Thurrock need extra support?

- *Older people will increasingly need extra support (particularly in terms of the ageing population).*
- *People with Sensory Impairments need extra support*

- *Young people need extra support (people in transition and young adults)*
- *Work needs to be done to increase aspirations, learning, knowledge and employment opportunities in Thurrock.*