

Thurrock Coalition



Powerful Partnerships - 8/03/12

Event Report and Recommendations

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.

Thurrock Coalition has a contractual remit to build the capacity of the Partnership Boards:

Working with the Council Thurrock Coalition will help to shape and inform the future development of Partnership Boards (Council led meetings involving people who use services focused on strategic planning) ensuring that these have a strong and purposeful user and carer voice capitalising on the key principles of Big Society and Localism agenda's. Thurrock Coalition will increase representation on the Boards from people who use services including those from black and minority ethnic communities and to strengthen the outcomes of each respective Board.

The Powerful Partnerships Event was held on 8th March 2012 at The Beehive from 10am to 1pm. The name for the day was devised by Thurrock Coalition to emphasise the importance of building and sustaining partnership working between the Partnership Boards Thurrock citizens and Thurrock Council and to begin to develop principles for the future operation of the respective Boards.

Format of the day

We invited residents and service providers, council officers and members. We set the main hall up in a “café style” with group tables of 5-6 for the various delegates.

The event engaged key organisations in the Third Sector as well as Council Officers and Members around the Health and Well-Being and Partnership Boards agenda.

It provided an opportunity to explore the strengths of the relationship between Citizens and Thurrock Council and included discussions around what has worked/is working well presently and what has not worked so well and how to remedy this moving forward.

There were several keynote speakers, followed by a chance for attendees to get involved with some solution-focused discussions and group work.

The day was the result of 6 weeks of planning and was co-ordinated by Ian Evans at Thurrock Coalition. We wanted to use the day as a platform for the voices of the residents of Thurrock and then to inform the process to build the capacity of the Partnership Boards going forward.

Event attendees

There were a total of 37 attendees including citizens of Thurrock and Third Sector representatives at the event, 11 attendees were Council Officers.

The following organisations/representatives were invited to attend the event but could not attend due to prior commitments on the day:

Cllr, John Kent	Leader of Thurrock Council
Cllr. Phillip Anderson	Leader of the Opposition at Thurrock Council
Janice Forbes-Burford	Project Director (Health Transition)

Joel Eastaugh	– Chair of Thurrock Centre for Independent Living (TCIL)
Cllr. Yash Gupta	Chair of Thurrock Asian Association

What was said

The day started with a welcome and introduction by Neil Woodbridge as a Director of Thurrock Coalition. Neil discussed the need for powerful partnerships in the borough and covered the following areas:

Building the capacity of Council led Partnership Boards. Helping to shape and inform the future development of Partnership Boards. Ensuring that these have a strong and purposeful user and carer voice capitalising on the key principles of Big Society and Localism agenda's, and increasing representation on the Boards from people who use services including those from black and minority ethnic communities and to strengthen the outcomes of each respective Board.

The next speaker was Jo Olsson, Director of People Services, Thurrock Council. Joe began by talking about the essence of partnerships and the role of the Third Sector as a “Critical Friend” to the Council in the context of the Partnership Boards and that Healthwatch and the Partnership Boards will only be as strong as the networks that support them. Furthermore that partnerships between decision-makers and citizens are key.

Jo then focused briefly on the health and social care reforms, specifically HealthWatch, its intended purpose, role and remit. Jo concluded with a piece on the Local Account whereby councils will have to publish an annual statement on the quality and performance of adult social care. This will enable local people, service users, carers and other stakeholders to judge how well or not so well Thurrock Council is performing. The Local Account will also provide a mechanism for scrutiny and review by local partnerships and organisations, HealthWatch, Health and Well-Being Board.

The event then moved to focus upon the Partnership Boards operating in Thurrock, what they are, the work they do and how they function in practice.

The first speaker was Ian Evans, Secretary of Thurrock Diversity Network, a registered Co-operative.



Ian focused on the role of the Partnership Boards as one of the main ways in which the Council can learn about and gather the views of Thurrock citizens. Furthermore that Partnership Boards exist in order to help the Council make significant decisions about the future of services. Thurrock Council and Thurrock Diversity Network work together to ensure the smooth running of the Disability Partnership Board.

Ian emphasised the central importance of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Public Sector Equality Duty - Section 149 which contains the duty to advance equality of opportunity (which is proactive in nature). In addition, the effective performance of the duty can be evidenced by (as according to the Discrimination Law Review GEO 2009):

Consultation and involvement of employees, Service Users and other interested parties, allowing people to see the progress authorities are making (transparency), strong leadership and high-level commitment.

The Disability Partnership Board takes place quarterly and is chaired by the Head of Adult social Care. The agenda of the Disability Partnership Board is informed by the views gathered from, individuals, carers, older people and service providers at the Monthly TDN meetings.

Ian concluded by talking about the involvement and inclusion of disabled people and that once involved they can use their personal

experience, thoughts and ideas to work together with others to improve things for everyone.

Some examples of the work of TDN and the Disability Partnership Board:

- Accessible Transport in Thurrock
- Advocacy Peer to Peer Project which directly influenced and shaped the Advocacy Service Specification
- Housing Allocation Scheme consultation and feedback

The next speaker was Anne White, Co-Chair of the Thurrock Learning Disability Partnership Board.

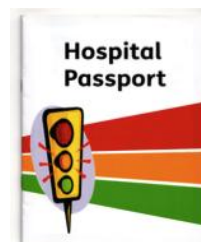
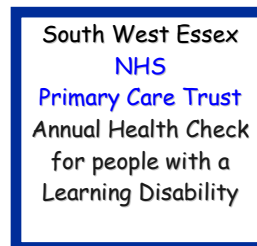
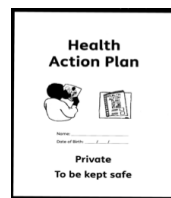


Anne talked about the history of the Learning Disability Partnership Boards, how it works in practice and some examples of the types of work the Board has been involved in:

- *The Council, professionals and people with learning difference come together every three months to talk about important issues that affect them.*
- *Where does one begin, back in 2001 the Government set up Learning Disability Partnership Boards around the country. As a Thurrock Learning Disability Partnership Board we looked at*

the priorities that were identified in the Government white paper 'Valuing People I have been a co/chair since 2006

- *Consultation at the beginning not at the end: I do believe that everyone should be able to understand the process that has been written in a document and no abbreviations. Summaries and Easy Read are a good thing which makes things a lot easier to understand*
- *The agenda setting for our Board happens by discussing what's important to us to make lives better and what the Council wants to say and what the Government wants.*
- *Thurrock Learning Disability Partnership Board's Health Sub Group have identified that there was a need for Easy Read information and Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions are giving out a letter to give to your GP about Annual Health Checks.*



- *Other projects of the Learning Disability Partnership Board include: the issuing of "999" Cards to people with Learning Difference in Thurrock*

The third speaker was Trevor Howard, Vice Chair of Thurrock Mental Health Forum.

Trevor welcomed the developments around getting all the Boards in one place for an event such as this and then talked about the Mental Health Forum and the importance of fostering a closer working relationship between all the Partnership Boards to ensure that the people of Thurrock had one strong, focused voice. This could take the form of better information sharing.

The Mental Health Forum is currently supported by LINK and is attended by individuals, representatives, service providers and a Council Officer with responsibility for commissioning Mental Health Services.

Some of the projects carried out and supported by the Thurrock Mental Health Forum include:

Improving communications between the forum and SEPT, opening a dialogue with the SEPT Director of Communication and contributing content for the "One In Four" mental health magazine.

Members of the Forum have also helped with the Kiosk at Grays Hall, which now provides an internet based information network on the services provided by SEPT. The work of the Forum has resulted in the information being updated and maintained.

The Forum has provided feedback on information leaflets that were to be sent to G.P. surgeries, this ensured that the information was clear and concise, particularly relating to SEPT memory services, hospital services, the services at Grays Hall as well as services for older people.

As Vice Chair of the Mental Health Forum, Trevor is working closely with Essex LINK Workshop, looking at quality improvement priorities, including quality account timetables and to agree engagement activities going forward. The Mental Health Forum recently received a commendation from SEPT for the work it has done.

The final speaker from the respective Partnership Boards was Gerry Calder, Chair of Thurrock Over Fifties Forum (TOFF). Gerry highlighted some of the events hosted by TOFF including attendance at the National Pensioners Forum and hosting large events for Older Peoples Day with speakers from Local and National government, including the Department for Work and Pensions. Gerry also made reference to the Older Peoples' Parliament in Thurrock which meets quarterly in the Council Chamber and is attended by Council Officers and Heads of Service who are invited to speak on contemporary issues such as the Dilnot Report. Gerry also emphasised the 50/50

balance between providing a social outlet for attendees as well as a forum for debating the issues relevant to older people in Thurrock.

Below is a link to the Thurrock Over Fifties Forum YouTube channel, which has a number of videos detailing the work of the group and the Older Peoples' Parliament:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uP40al_8Vu4&feature=youtu.be

Issues raised by residents for the Question and Answer Panel

This was then followed by break out group session, facilitated by John Paddick at which all attendees (including citizens, council officers and members) were asked to think about and discuss what has worked well and not worked so well with the Partnership Boards in their current form, these are listed below.

Breakout Groups

What has worked well with the Partnership Boards

- Boards offer a good social outlet for people with similar lifestyles and issues
- It is good for information sharing between people
- The work of the Disability Partnership Board has resulted in small improvements to the transport system
- Gets people together- allowing everyone to be represented
- Gives people a chance to share their views and to get their voice heard
- Provides useful information
- It is making a difference to people
- Takes in different views from health, social care, service users, carers and the working sector. Working together in order to meet needs
- Gives out a positive influence upon decisions of Thurrock Council at senior management level.
- Creates awareness of other services, in different areas
- Opportunity for both service users and carers to be part of the boards

- Have achieved practical results and outcomes
- Joins a range of groups together
- Brings people together as equal value partners
- Improving communication

What has not worked so well with the Partnership Boards

- There is not enough representation of service users on some Boards.
- There is a lack of two-way communication and information sharing with the public, on what it is that partnership boards are doing
- The Partnership Boards need to make sure that every voice is heard
- Not enough local residents are involved- there needs to be more awareness for local people, including non-disabled people.
- Different formats are needed to gather information, some people do not enjoy the meetings, or have time to attend
- Consultation fatigue e.g. people can not see improvements
- A lot of people still don't know about the boards, there needs to be more representation for them
- Many issues are raised but there is very little, if any, change e.g. transport issues
- There are communication issues- things are not always made clear for all to understand
- Lack of presentations that are understood by the audience, with a lack of easy-read information
- Not enough knowledge of what other boards are doing, making working together hard
- Trouble finding out who to go to regarding certain issues e.g. dementia
- A need for more action, people can not see what happens after issues have been raised, making people feel as though their efforts have been wasted
- Mental health forum should become a partnership board
- Too many groups result in a duplication of efforts

There were then 2 presentations from LINK and Thurrock CVS respectively.

Kim James, the Project Manager for LINK gave a presentation on the transition from LINK to HealthWatch

It was explained that CVS will host LINK until March 2013 and that a new LINK staff member is to be recruited in April

As a background note Kim explained that Local Authorities in England have been placed under a duty to commission a local HealthWatch organisation for their area. This must be established, fit for purpose and ready to operate by April 2013. HealthWatch will be the new consumer champion for both health and social care, an organisation representing local voice with a seat at the decision-making table.

It is intended that HealthWatch will give people real influence over decisions about local services e.g. through it's seat on the statutory health and wellbeing board; As part of that board, HealthWatch will be integral to the preparation of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and joint health and wellbeing strategies on which local commissioning decisions will be based.

Thurrock LINK currently has a seat on the shadow Health and Wellbeing Board and also sit on the Overview and Scrutiny Board, attends the Partnership boards, has a seat on the Safeguarding board and sits on both the Clinical Commissioning Groups at present covering Thurrock

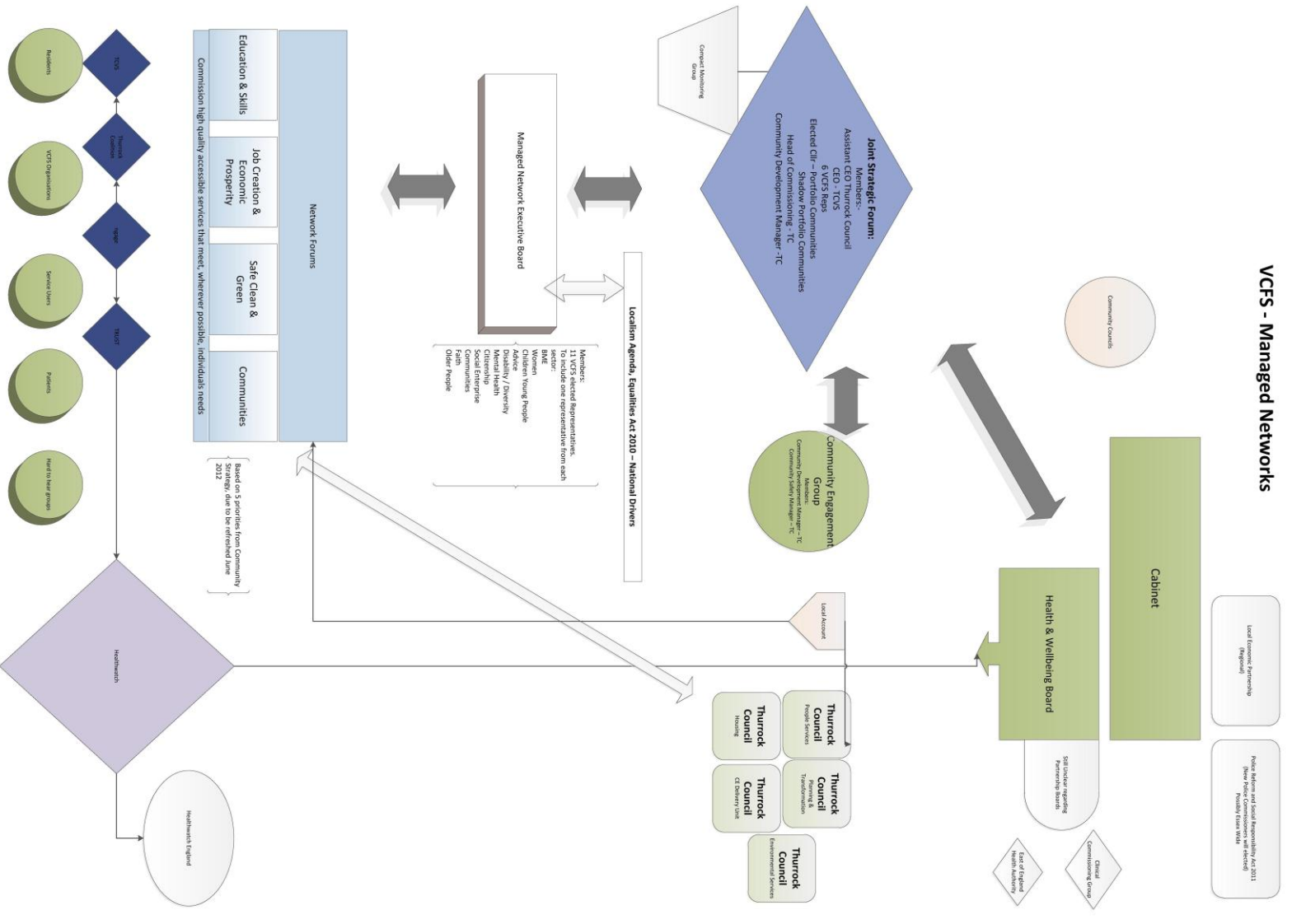
In terms of the future, Kim emphasised that the partnership boards need to use the current LINK seat at the Health and Wellbeing board as a way of ensuring their voices are heard at that level. Furthermore, groups and organisations representing both service users and patients need to have an active role within either the LINK or the HealthWatch steering group, to ensure that those voices are heard and that they are involved in the decision making processes.

The event concluded with a presentation from Kristina Jackson, CEO of Thurrock CVS.

Thurrock CVS is currently looking at the wider Council remit in terms of engagement between the Third Sector, Thurrock Council and Citizens of Thurrock to increase focus and reduce duplication of work. Whereas, the Partnership Boards are specifically about the relationship with the Peoples Directorate and the Local Account contained therein and so their continued existence is of vital importance.

Whilst acknowledging the value of the Partnership Boards and their work, Kristina suggested that engagement could take place via a system of Managed Networks comprising of representatives from a variety of Third Sector organisations in Thurrock. These representatives would be able to bring thematic issues to the Networks for consideration and possible action by the Health and Well Being Board. This system is currently in draft diagrammatical form (see below).

VCFS - Managed Networks



What next and recommendations

Thurrock Coalition has developed a Partnership Board Charter which captures underlying principles of good practice that are working well in Thurrock to support and strengthen the partnership between local government and the people of Thurrock.

The importance and centrality of a strong third sector is succinctly noted in the following excerpt:

The third sector is key to delivering ambitions to strengthen the involvement of the community in shaping better places. It has an essential role in decision-making and in delivering services which meet the needs and aspirations of those who use them. The Government wants the best local partnership working with the third sector to be the rule not the exception.¹

The discussion document goes on to note the vital nature of the involvement of individuals in decision making processes:

...when people are involved in decision making processes they are more likely to understand how and why decisions are made and consequently retain a greater faith in those who make them. It may even motivate them to become more directly involved in the process.²

Therefore it can be said that there is a valid basis for maintaining and developing the Thurrock Partnership Boards to build upon existing good practice, disseminate the elements and principles that already work well and to address shortcomings.

Thurrock Coalition recognises that all of the work streams that the Partnership Boards are involved in happens between each quarterly board meeting, however, the work and associated outcomes wouldn't happen without the instigation of the Boards. It is also important to realise the importance of agenda setting as a key element of the Partnership Board process, to ensure that the content of the meetings is meaningful and owned by the citizens of Thurrock.

¹ Principles of Representation - A framework for effective third sector participation in Local Strategic Partnerships – Department of Communities and Local Government (August 2008)

² Ibid

With this in mind, below are 10 key principles which we propose form the basis of a Thurrock-wide Partnership Board Charter.

Proposals which may ensure the full inclusion, better co-operation and information sharing between the Thurrock Partnership Boards

1. To promote and select for board membership among people living in Thurrock, moving towards a comprehensive representation by people representing a wide range of groups including (but not limited to):

- People with complex needs
- Physically disabled people
- People with Learning Difference
- People with mental health issues
- Older people
- People with sensory impairment
- People with acquired impairments
- Carers
- People from traditionally harder to reach and BAME communities

Thurrock Coalition recommends the merger of the Disability Partnership Board and the Learning Disability Partnership Board. Whilst the wide range of issues dealt with at each board is valuable, there is sufficient commonality of interest and membership to warrant combining the two Boards. This would also reduce duplication, time and workloads involved.

Thurrock Coalition recommends the establishment and development of a Carers Partnership Board that could help to influence and shape the provision of services for carers in Thurrock.

A “Senate” style board consisting of representatives from each of the respective partnership boards (perhaps the Co-Chair and a secretary from each board) could be created to foster good communication, provide project and progress updates and information sharing. Specific issue, time limited Task and Finish groups could also be

created (replacing the existing sub-groups) to build the capacity of each board.

2. For each board to be jointly chaired by a named senior Council Officer (with relevant experience, knowledge and understanding as required for the specific board) and an individual citizen of Thurrock (who may be in receipt of Services or a family member of an individual who is). The named senior Council Officer should act as the formal liaison between the respective board and the Thurrock Council Peoples Directorate. To provide a facilitator (perhaps a secretary) before/at/after the meetings to ensure that members are fully aware of and engaged in meetings.

The Partnership Boards to be seen as the starting “portal” for all consultations via the liaison leads to provide advanced notification of upcoming proposals.

3. Where necessary provide an adequate level of resource to board members (for example the provision of advocates with relevant training) and/or a support person for each board member to enable full participation.

4. To provide a research and information gathering resource for the members of the board who cannot carry out this task

5. To provide a level of training to the board members that results in either accredited or officially recognised qualification specifically for Board members (including, but not limited to) such matters as:

- Chairing the Partnership Board, Managing of meetings and roles of Board members.
- How to be an effective and assertive representative of others, including acting in the best interests of those involved.
- Local structures of social/health care and decision making processes
- Valuing People
- Human Rights

- The Equality Act and any other relevant legislation relating to Protected Characteristics³
- Reporting Hate Crime
- HealthWatch developments/projects
- Social Model of Disability
- Age related disability/ impairments
- Mental Health Awareness
- The Public Sector Equality Duty
- Access to Services Issues (across the Protected Characteristics)
- Direct Payments/ Individual Budgets

6. To provide board members with any necessary support to present issues to the board, participate in sub groups and develop performance and quality ratings as required.

7. To provide board members with support to present to the main board research proposals, areas for improvement where further representation or consultation is required, contributions to consultation exercises.

8. To provide board members with support and encouragement to engage in consultations and planning of consultations and ensure fair representation of all views expressed.

9. To ensure that the board members have sufficient information including minutes, agendas and action points (where necessary) in appropriate formats from all the Thurrock Partnership Boards available by electronic or other means, including support to ensure a reasonable understanding of local and national sector interests and have an understanding of budget issues sufficient to undertake formal responsibilities in questioning/agreeing proposals with financial implications.

³ The 9 Protected Characteristics provided under The Equality Act 2010 are as follows: Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and civil partnership, Pregnancy and maternity, Race, Religion and belief, Sex, Sexual orientation

10. To support Board members to understand their representative role and provide support to enact it within the local community. For representatives from each Board to be in contact with each other and to attend the other boards to provide periodic updates on activities and involvement in projects and consultations in Thurrock.

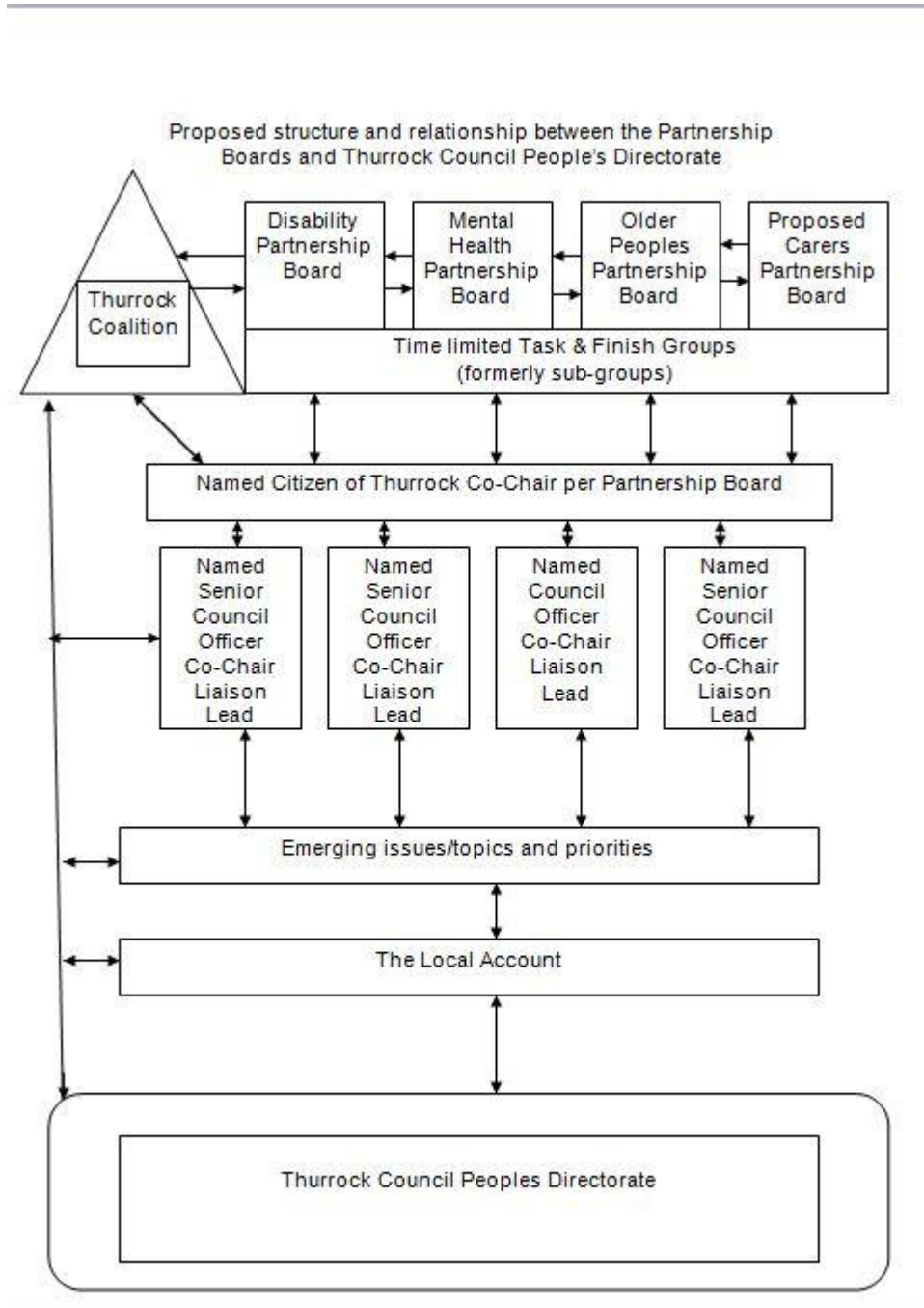
The above is not intended to be exhaustive and has been extrapolated from the information provided by attendees at the Powerful Partnerships event.

Some further examples of good practice of various Partnership Boards from across the United Kingdom can be found at:

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/26/07/2007/105278/Partnership-Board-good-practice.htm>

Thurrock Coalition recommends that all Thurrock Partnership Boards sign up to the above recommendations as a Charter for good practice in the borough.

Below is a diagram showing the proposed structure and relationship between the Partnerships Boards and Thurrock Council People's Directorate.



Conclusion

As a result of the day, Thurrock Council have agreed to work closely with Thurrock Coalition to create an online repository for all agendas, minutes and action points across all Partnership Boards to increase information sharing, clarity and consistency and to reduce duplication.

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. The Powerful Partnerships event has served as a springboard for further development and closer working relationships between the Thurrock Partnership Boards and Thurrock Council.

Thurrock Coalition - March 2012