

Thurrock Coalition



Response to the Thurrock Joint Compact 2012

About Thurrock Coalition

Thurrock Coalition is the User-Led Organisation for Thurrock. We are a company that has been set up to ensure that people who live in Thurrock have access to all the information they may require to get the support and care that they need.

Thurrock Coalition is an 'umbrella' company that consists of 4 organisations, all of which follow the Social Model of Disability and aim to improve the lives of disabled and older people living in Thurrock by seeking to remove environmental, attitudinal and physical barriers that exist in society. We connect to over 1500 individuals and organisations with an interest in disability issues. Thus, we have a legitimate and direct interest in the development of the Thurrock Joint Compact 2012.

Observations on the Draft Consultation Document

There is certainly value in having this type of agreement between the Local Authority, Partners and organisations within the Third Sector and codification of the five principles is useful in mapping out the vision for better communication, co-production, consultation and engagement to improve outcomes for the people of Thurrock.

A strong, diverse and independent Third Sector

It is important that any support offered to the Third Sector organisations be effectively co-ordinated, through capacity building, joint projects and representation. Whilst duplication should be minimised, the key is productive multi-agency co-operation between all parties rather than top-down management of the entire sector. Whilst accountability is vital, independence of the Sector is also paramount to allow organisations to thrive and we welcome this approach in the draft Compact.

Effective and transparent design and development of policies, programmes and public services in Thurrock

The following statements:

Work with VCFS organisation [sic] from the earliest possible stage to design policies, programmes and services. Ensure new programmes and services uphold jointly agreed outcomes, providing scope for innovation wherever possible. Ensure those likely to have a view are involved from the start and remove barriers that may prevent organisations contributing.

And:

Give early notice of forthcoming consultations, where possible, allowing enough time for VCFS organisations to involve their; service users, clients, beneficiaries, members, volunteers and trustees in preparing responses. Where it is appropriate, and enables meaningful engagement, conduct 12-week formal written consultations, with clear explanation and rationale for shorter time-frames or a more informal approach.

Are particularly positive provided that any consultation, engagement and co-production is purposeful and consistent with the active participation of individuals, stakeholders and the Local Authority.

The tenets of effective co-production were succinctly discussed by Dr Catherine Needham, (SCIE 2009):

The term 'co-production' is increasingly being applied to new types of public service delivery in the UK, including new approaches to adult social care. It refers to active input by the people who use services, as well as – or instead of – those who have traditionally provided them. So it contrasts with approaches that treat people as passive recipients of services designed and delivered by someone else. It emphasises that the people who use services have assets which can help to improve those services, rather than simply needs which must be met. These assets are not usually financial, but rather are the skills, expertise and mutual support that service users can contribute to effective public services. In the words of Cummins and Miller, co-production is about how services 'work with rather than do unto users'.

Furthermore, the provision of feedback detailing how the participation of people has influenced service design is welcome. We suggest that the Local Authority also provide feedback with detailed reasons for deferring or not acting on a specific issue.

Overall, the commitments contained within Section 2 have the potential to be very solution-focussed and offer positive opportunities for sector wide joint workings on both local and national consultations.

Responsive and high-quality programmes and services for the residents of Thurrock

The principles of income maximisation and recognition of the difficulties faced when attempting access mainstream funds is encouraging, further details are required on the proposed funding strategy (including input from all VCFS groups, consultation, drafting, implementation, transparency and oversight) and, specifically how any such strategy would fit in with existing commissioning and procurement procedures.

Further details are also needed around the co-ordination of information, publicity and awareness-raising of any available funding streams including, grants, contracts etc.

In terms of funding, contract compliance and outcomes, it is of paramount importance that the monitoring shifts focus from quantitative/numerical data to qualitative data, and develop indicators around well-being/quality of life improvements of people as a result of utilising a service rather than the mere numbers of people who have accessed any given service. For example advocacy, advice and information for disabled people, older people, people with mental health issues and carers. We suggest that qualitative data is one of the more effective ways to demonstrate the social, environmental or economic value of the programmes and services provided, where appropriate.

The inclusion of the requirement for multi-year funding wherever possible is good.

Clear arrangements for managing changes to programmes and services

The references to the Equality Act, associated Protected Characteristics and the promotion of Social Inclusion are to be applauded. This section would benefit from provision for training, awareness-raising and jointly run programmes in order to aid the better development of contingency planning, particularly in terms of impact assessments.

An equal and fair society

This commitment could be couched in more positive language to include the "Promotion of Social Inclusion". The support for people with Protected Characteristics and other seldom heard groups is also a positive step towards achieving an equal and fair society but it is the implementation which is important to ensure that the vision is achieved, embedded and maintained as good practice by all parties.

Conclusion

The Commitments contained within the Draft Compact are useful principles that can be used to improve the well-being and experiences of people living in the borough.

The active, positive co-operation, engagement and meaningful co-production between Third Sector groups, the Local Authority and other Stakeholders can only serve to achieve better outcomes for the people they represent and support (including those with Protected Characteristics) and those who are seldom heard.

However, it must be noted that a failure of the last Thurrock-specific compact was the absence of and adherence to a set of operational guidelines that clearly bring concrete actions to the stipulated principles. More work is needed around the development and provision details surrounding issues such as contractual and payment tenets, tendering timelines and expectations and a common contractual framework around service definition/TUPE for all parties involved. There also needs to be subsequent monitoring of the adherence to the Compact, dealing in particular with whom, when and how compliance is reported.

Thurrock Coalition - August 2012

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