

# Principles of Community Engagement



Community Involvement Board  
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The principles developed by the Community Involvement Board on behalf of Shaping Thurrock are split in to three sections. Each section represents a stage in the process of engagement.

The foundation of many of the principles can be found within the ‘values’ section of the Thurrock Compact. The principles were developed by looking at identified ‘best practice’ at other local authorities. In addition, members of the working group held a ‘brain storming’ exercise to identify what they felt should be within the principles. By following these principles, all sections of Thurrock’s diverse communities should feel engaged and involved, and that their contribution is making a difference to the quality of their lives and the lives of others.

The principles contained within this document should help fulfil the definition of community engagement used within Thurrock’s Community Engagement Strategy - ‘covering the entire working relationship that partners (on Shaping Thurrock) have with the community from research to supporting active citizenship’.

Shaping Thurrock’s Community Engagement Strategy Toolkit will contain detailed information about how to plan and manage community engagement activity and how to use the results. In addition, there will be measures in place to support each principle and to ensure that when partners represented on Shaping Thurrock engage the community, those principles have been adhered to.

The stages of planning community engagement in the context of this document are as follows:

- Planning
- Engagement
- Evaluation and Feedback

### **Five Levels of Community Engagement, known as the spectrum of engagement<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Level</b>	<b>What’s involved</b>
<b>1. Information</b>	We tell people about our plans and services and gather information about attitudes, opinions and preferences.
<b>2. Consultation</b>	We ask people for their views on specific policies or proposals
<b>3. Deliberation</b>	We discuss what the issues and priorities are and involve people at various stages
<b>4. Collaboration</b>	We work together to improve and design new services
<b>5. Partnership</b>	We maintain an equal and effective working relationship

<sup>1</sup> David Wilcox – The guide to effective participation. (1994)

## **PLANNING**

### **1. Clear and Agreed Purposes**

**'We will be clear about why there is a need to engage with our community'**

The community – or sections of the community – should be engaged with appropriately. For this to happen, the outcomes to be achieved from engaging with the community must be agreed. Clear and valid reasons for involving sections of the community in work being carried out must be considered prior to involvement taking place. This is essential if the involvement that takes place is to be meaningful both to those carrying out the exercise and those being consulted with – therefore allowing true engagement to occur.

### **2. Co-ordinated Approach**

**'We will ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken to engaging with our community'**

It is essential that there is a partnership approach taken to engaging with and involving the community. Part of planning to engage should be to check whether other partners – both internal and external to the organisation planning the work – are carrying out consultation and/or engagement exercises with similar outcomes. A joined-up approach ensures that the community are not overloaded. It is also the most efficient way to engage and increases the likelihood of participation.

### **3. Timing**

**'We will ensure that where possible, engagement with our community is timely in accordance with their requirements'**

Accurate and timely information is crucial for effective and inclusive engagement. It also indicates a well-planned and thought out approach. Length of time should be considered, as should the best times to reach the target audience within the community. Consideration must also be given to whether the community is already being, has been, or will be engaged with by other agencies at a similar time. It is important that the points raised under theme 2 are adhered to.

### **4. Methodology – 'Fit for Purpose'**

**'Unless circumstances dictate that engagement should take place via specified methodology, methods taken to engage with our community should take account of different needs'**

It is important that the right approach is considered – For example, one size does not fit all. To do this successfully, the target audience needs to be correctly identified and an understanding of how best to engage and involve that particular audience needs to be gained – either via previous research or through contacting members of a community or groups that represent a community. The methods used to engage also need to produce the desired outcomes and this must be considered when planning how to engage. For the reasons described, a variety of methods should be considered – such as talking/discussing with small groups where literacy is an issue.

## **5. Justify Target Audience**

**'We will justify and communicate why specific audiences have been targeted for engagement'**

If a particular section(s) of the community has been targeted, then reasons for this should be explained.

## **6. Involve**

**'We will involve and seek advice from our community when planning to engage with them'**

Even at the planning stage, unless there is a statutory obligation to engage and/or consult in a certain way, the community should be involved in an advisory capacity.

## **ENGAGEMENT**

### **1. Transparency – being 'Open and Honest'**

**'We will be open and honest when engaging with our community and ensure that the processes we use are transparent'**

When we engage with the community, there should be transparency around the reasons for engagement and what will happen with information gained as a result of engagement. It should be clear why participants are being consulted/engaged, and that the reasons given are genuine. Individuals carrying out engagement activity should be open and honest about what can and cannot be achieved – including any constraints and boundaries – with reasons for this.

### **2. Inclusive**

**'We will aim to be inclusive by enabling all groups within our community to participate and/or their views to be represented when engaging on issues relevant to them'**

Attempts must be made to ensure that groups of people whose interests are affected by the issues that the engagement will address are well represented – particularly sections of the communities that seldom participate. This will mean using a methodology that is flexible enough to be inclusive and understanding how people wish to participate. Being inclusive also means enabling people to be involved if they wish to be involved and removing any barriers to that involvement. This may be referred to as 'Equality of Access'. With reference to 'Equality of Access', the necessary support should be provided to enable participation.

### **3. Inform and Communicate Effectively**

**'We will ensure that our community are given information about why they are being engaged with and that the information supplied is accessible by all'**

Members of the community need to understand what they are being engaged about. The material used needs to be accessible, clear, understandable, and relevant. It also needs to be presented in the correct format. Again, one size does not fit all, and a variety of ways of communicating may need to be used. In the planning stage, community advice should be sought early on, and when

engaging, measures should be put in place to track how effective communication methods are employed.

## **EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK**

### **1. Providing Feedback**

**'We will provide our community with regular feedback when engaging with them'**

Results of engagement should be readily accessible to those who wish to view it – especially those people affected by the results of the consultation and/or other activity where the community have been involved. It is important that the community are aware of how their input has and will be used and what it will affect. Options considered and the decisions and actions that have been agreed as a result of the consultation/engagement process should be effectively communicated. Information communicated should follow the same principle as 'Inform and Communicate Effectively' – principle 3 under the 'Engaging' stage.

### **2. Right to Challenge**

**'Our community will be given the opportunity to comment and/or complain about the engagement process and decisions made as a result of information received through the engagement process'**

Members of the community should be given the right to challenge the results of any consultation and/or engagement exercise and the process used – including interpretations made as a result of engagement. They should also be given the right to challenge decisions made as a result of information gained. This is part of 'open and honest' engagement and can be subject to scrutiny. Through the engagement process, participants must be made aware as to what they can and cannot alter – this is part of establishing constraints and boundaries.

### **3. Measuring Success**

**'We will evaluate the engagement process against agreed outcomes and make the results of the evaluation available to our community'**

Where engagement has taken place, monitoring should take place to examine whether outcomes have been met. The process used should also be assessed against the principles outlined within this document. Just as the community should be involved from the outset, they should also be given the opportunity to comment and advise on the findings of any engagement evaluation.

### **4. Lessons Learnt**

**'We will ensure that any lessons learned from engagement carried out are used to develop better processes and are used to inform future engagement with our community'**

It is important that something happens to 'learning points' gained as a result of monitoring and evaluation. Apart from gaining an understanding as to why part(s) of the engagement process have not worked or could have worked better – for example, maybe the methodology was not the most appropriate, or participation was not as good as expected, learning points should be

factored back in to the planning process to avoid the same thing happening again. In this instance, learning should help to develop Shaping Thurrock's Community Engagement Toolkit.

## **5. Best Practice**

**'We will recognise best practice and ensure that it is used to inform future engagement with our community'**

Just as lessons learned should be observed, engagement that has worked well should not be taken for granted. Engagement that has worked well should be shared between partners and should also be used to develop future engagement exercises by informing the planning stage. Reasons where community involvement has not led to the expected outcomes should also be shared.