

# COMING OF AGE

## **Thurrock Council was created on 1 April 1998.**

A new unitary and keen to show it could flourish independently, Thurrock is an area of great contrast and unique opportunities. It is 70% green belt with 18 miles of riverfront, wildlife areas of natural beauty and many period features including two historic forts. But it also had the space and potential to grow into a leading centre in ports & logistics, retail and creative industries.

## **As a youngster, Thurrock had some challenging years.**

Reputation was at rock bottom. The council was judged as not improving adequately with “red flags” for community cohesion and educational attainment. It had inadequate leadership, weak governance and poor member/officer relationships. It had six chief executives, five monitoring officers and five directors of children’s services in five years.

Poor quality, insufficient housing stock and inadequate repairs service were just a few of the problems facing the council. Overspent by £4m in 2009/10, no reserves and relying totally on external support. Regeneration and major planning decisions were in the hands of a development corporation, the future looked bleak and Thurrock residents felt very much ‘done to’.

Thurrock was described as the “third worst council in the country” and voted the Most Unhappy Borough in the country.

## **But the teenage years started to show promise.**

At 13 years old (2011) an LGA peer review classified the Council as “normal”

At 14 years old (2012) the government gave back responsibility for regeneration to the council

At 15 years old (2013) it gained Investors in People (IIP) Gold status for the first time

## **By its 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (2016) there were some real signs of growing up.**

Stability, purpose and innovation were becoming the norm, the quality and supply of housing had improved. There was a strong and collaborative relationship with the community and voluntary sector, Stronger Together was launched and is still the cornerstone for our asset-based community development. Regeneration had gone from strength to strength with six exciting, transformational (and achievable) growth hubs identified. Thurrock was leading one of the largest regeneration programmes in the UK and partners, local and further afield. Internationally renowned companies were choosing to locate in Thurrock eg Amazon and Royal Opera House.

## **And at 21 years old... now in 2019 Thurrock has really come of age.**



# Now at 21 years old, Thurrock is hardly recognisable from its former self. In the last two years Thurrock Council has:



- ↑ balanced the budget for next 5 years without cutting services whilst at same time generating additional in year surpluses to invest in priority services. No other unitary in the country has this strong a financial position
- ↑ increased General Fund Reserves by 40% from £8m to £11m
- ↑ maintained Investors in People Gold Standard
- ↑ achieved £20 billion investment planned for homes, jobs and infrastructure including £6 billion being invested in private sector jobs
- ↑ is investing more than £70million with partners to create over 3,500 new school places across the borough in the next few years including two new secondary schools, a special school and capital improvements to others
- ↑ has direct involvement in delivering over £500m worth of growth projects at this time
- ↑ produced advanced plans for revolutionising health and social care in the borough with four new Integrated Medical Centres planned and a whole system, asset-based approach to health and social care
- ↑ launched masterplans for two town centres and riversides, with funding of £11m already secured
- ↑ set up Thurrock Regeneration Limited (TRL), the council's housing company and completed its first development of 128 award-winning new homes - a further 1000 homes will be built in the next 4 years.
- ↑ launched a new website, the Thurrock Magazine and exhibited at MIPIM 2018 to showcase Thurrock to investors
- ↑ completed contracts to secure the Purfleet Centre project - delivering 2,500 new homes, local shops and facilities alongside a 600,000sqft state-of-the-art film and television studio complex on 140 acres of land owned/will be acquired by the Council
- ↑ continued to have the lowest council tax authority in Essex, and the third lowest of all unitaries
- ↑ become a crucial, fully-engaged player in SELEP, South Essex 2050 partnership and Thames Estuary growth plans
- ↑ delivered the joint best planning performance in the country
- ↑ commercial approach on investment
- ↑ developed an agreed plan for a customer focused, digitally enabled civic offices to meet the needs of our residents
- ↑ won numerous national awards including planning, street data, public health intelligence, public participation, housing development, housing design, highways and two councillor of the year awards in 2017 and 2018.

# Place is not about buildings: It's about People



In 1998, Thurrock Council served a resident population of 138,700. Turn the clock forward 21 years, it has increased by a fifth to 170,000.

The council – members and officers – is acutely aware of the responsibility it holds to prepare for Thurrock's future generations. With "no overall control" of the administration, three large political parties AND with three-out-of-every-four yearly elections, cross party engagement, support and collaboration has been crucial to the success to date.

There is a cross-party Constitution Working Group and a Corporate Governance Group. Most of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees are chaired by opposition councillors. There has also been cross party engagement on key issues such as savings through the Council Spending Review, Lower Thames Crossing Taskforce and commitment to growth and regeneration including the growth hubs programme.

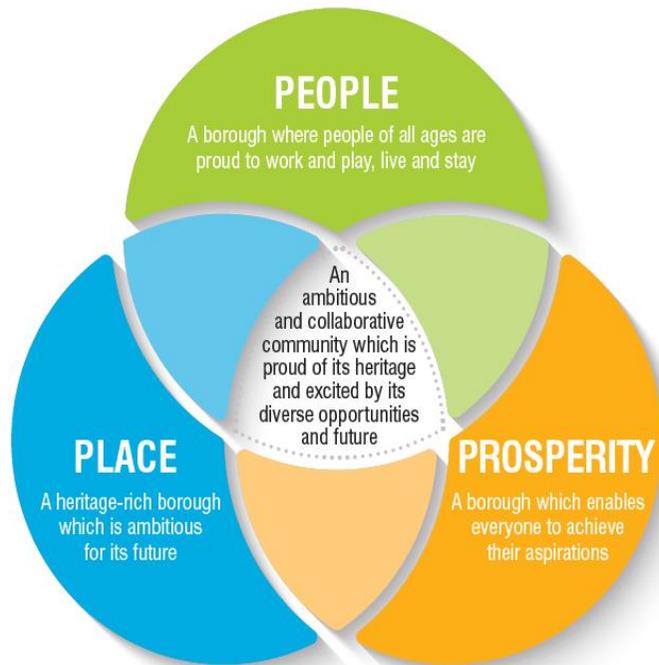
With support from a cross-party working group, plus CVS, Youth Cabinet and resident groups in 2018 we reviewed the vision and corporate priorities to better reflect the aspiration and uniqueness of Thurrock, where the place and the council are now, the ambition for delivery and balancing the need for growth with quality of life. This has allowed us to progress with stronger messaging about Thurrock the place and celebrate and capitalise on the wonderful opportunities on offer. This cascades into all council's strategies and service plans and into individual staff objectives.

We are very clear. **Place** is not about buildings: It is about people. It is about putting our residents first. Through the place agenda our plans develop the right infrastructure for Thurrock's people, including significant improvements to public realm through our Clean it, Cut it, Fill it campaign and feeling safe in the borough including investing £1m over 3 years for extra police officers.

We are ambitious on behalf of residents and businesses but keenly aware of the careful balance needed for growth and investment whilst ensuring improved quality of life. We want every resident to have the opportunity to be the best they can be.

Thurrock has one of, if not the largest and most ambitious growth programmes in the country. We have six major growth hubs - most local authorities would be happy with just one! The council itself is directly involved in delivering over £500 million worth of growth projects, ranging from major transport investment (eg A13 widening), new housing schemes and community infrastructure. We have to plan for approximately 32,000 homes over the next 20 years.

The Thurrock magazine and website launched in January 2018 ahead of our attendance at MIPIM Cannes in March 2018. This international property industry event provides direct access to showcase what Thurrock has to offer to over 20,000 participants including 5,000 investors. It was so successful at highlighting our potential we are going again in March 2019.



## A series of game-changing initiatives



With the best will in the world, we know we cannot do it all by ourselves. As well as the South Essex (ASELA), LEP and Thames Estuary growth partnerships we have good working relationships with the other local public sector organisations as well as community and voluntary sector. This includes development of a Joint Strategic Plan with South Essex councils and supported £1m planning delivery grant and £4.5m digital infrastructure bid.

Historically, there has been a lot of talk about plans. Now there is now step-change to actual delivery – masterplans are agreed, procurement is either complete or underway with contractors on-site and work beginning.

Our schools are getting increasingly better. With partners, we are investing more than £70million to create over 3,500 new school places in the coming years. We are working towards a future where every resident has a job – 24,500 new jobs planned for the next 20 years - with better educated children and skilled residents accessing local and national employment opportunities.

There are plans for four Integrated Medical Centres opening in the borough. This is just one of a series of game-changing initiatives being delivered with our health partners.

Thurrock is a place with a rich cultural heritage, which is often overlooked. With our cultural partners, including the Royal Opera House (based here in Thurrock), we are developing plans which will enable all Thurrock residents to enjoy and benefit from high quality arts and heritage activity, creating a strong pride in place, better well-being and economic prosperity. This has been helped by the recent Thames Production Corridor grant of £4.3m.

Digitally speaking we have enabled huge channel shift for our residents. There are currently 79,468 registered users of MyAccount - our online transaction service. (Amazing reach, given we have 67,000 households in Thurrock). More and more services are now available online.

We transformed the customer experience with a physical and digital transformation and modernisation of the council reception and face-to-face area. A physical space which maximises new technology to enable a quicker, easier, more attractive, quieter, more professional – altogether better customer experience. Improving self-service options, thus enabling increased focus and dedicated advisors for those vulnerable residents who really need dedicated one-to-one face-to-face support.

Since the transformation, average waiting times have reduced by up to 8 minutes and footfall to the Civic Offices has reduced by up to 6,000 people per month. Approximately 3,000 visitors each month have transferred to self-service/assisted self-service. And all achieved whilst making a £225k saving. Customers who have been visiting Civic Offices for years now have the knowledge, skills and confidence to access these services from home 24/7. Feedback has been very positive from visitors and staff alike. And the transformation was highly commended in UKCCF Public Sector Contact Centre of the Year 2018.

## No more navel-gazing

# THURROCK FILM OFFICE



Rural and urban

Historic and contemporary

Industrial and residential

Riverfront and docks



filming@thurrock.gov.uk

thurrock.gov.uk

 **thameside**



Like all local authorities, we have spent many years painstakingly reviewing our finances in order to balance our budget.

However, through the implementation of a huge, cross-council spending review, including

- deep dive service reviews
- cultural change
- development programmes
- staff awards
- maximising income generation and commercial opportunities
- innovative investment strategies

.....the council's MTFS is well on its way to enabling the council to become self-sufficient.

Our financial, commercial and investment strategies mean we are one of the few top tier authorities who have not only projected a balanced budget for the next five years, but – because we now have choices – without needing to cut services. Our conversations are about what is the right transformation to services to better provide good outcomes for our residents, rather than annually navel-gazing to find savings.

We have even increased the general fund balance by 40% and project a minimum £10m surplus over four years to be spent, penny-for-penny, on our place, people and future.

**Yes, that is right, the council is achieving in year surpluses allowing us to invest heavily in priority services such as adult social care, children's services and environment.**

New commercial offerings include an Outdoor Education Centre, a rejuvenated and revitalised theatre and a brand new Thurrock Film Office. Each now creating ten of thousands of pounds of income, when previously there was either no offer whatsoever or an overspend.

The council has also developed a strategic ambition regarding fees and charges, aligned to the wider commercial strategy ensuring discretionary services should be nil cost to service budgets by 2020/21. This approach has led to year-on-year growth for external income in recent years.

In 2017/18 external income from fees and charges brought in an additional £6.6m plus £5.1m in traded services – the forecast for 2018/19 is £7.5m in fees and charges and £6m in traded services.

# Leading by example

Such have been the success of our investment and commercial approaches, over the past 12 months, both the Director of Finance (*'Alternative sources of revenue from the treasury function'*) and Director of Commercial Services (*'Growing commercial functions and developing an entrepreneurial culture'*) have been invited to present at national conferences to share the journey and best practice.

*"..considerable progress has been made in terms of the clarity of direction, the progress made by Thurrock Council and the current financial situation. The council has a strong voice within the South Essex agenda and its reputation with partners and stakeholders has come a long way in two years. The council should be proud of the progress made."*

LGA Corporate Peer Review Report 2018

Our starting point a few years ago was a position of instability and insecurity.

But now there is strength in our finances, our growth plans, our relationships with our health, community and business partners, our transformed customer services, our IIP Gold reaccreditation, our unbeaten planning performance, our award winning Public Health data analysis.

That is what makes Thurrock Council distinctive. That is what other authorities can learn from us.

21 is a very good age for this council, its residents and its businesses.

## Some of our business partners



next



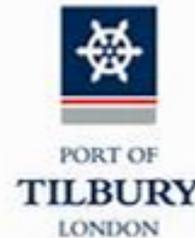
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