

Collective rewards and awards

Only a decade ago Thurrock faced government intervention for poor governance and leadership, poor finances with services facing significant cuts and reductions. Thurrock was named the Most Unhappy Place in the country. There was low confidence in the council and the place with low resident aspiration and ambition. Directors Board has led significant change in progress for both council and place:

- ↑ 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 3,500 new school places including two new secondary schools, a special school and capital improvements to others
- ↑ has direct involvement in delivering over £500m worth of growth projects
- ↑ produced advanced plans for revolutionising health and social care 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

Every Director has had at least one service/initiative receiving external recognition for excellence as finalists at industry awards. This includes winning national awards for planning, street data, public health intelligence, public participation, housing development, housing design, highways and two councillor of the year awards in 2017 and 2018.



Out of the silos

Like directors across the land, Directors Board has spent many years painstakingly reviewing council finances in order to balance its annual net revenue budget of £115m, having to reach difficult decisions about where to save costs, rather than how to improve outcomes for residents.

But rather than the age old tradition of salami slicing and protectionism of own financial silos, Directors adopted a fully collegiate and collaborative approach.

This involved the implementation of a huge, cross-council spending review including:

- deep dive cross-cutting service reviews
- cultural change
- development programmes
- staff awards
- new approaches to maximising income generation
- developing commercial opportunities
- innovative investment strategies
- financial development for officers

Council Spending Review and service review frameworks are underpinned by a series of strategic boards. Each strategic board is led by a Director and has directorate representatives. Workstream examples include cross-cutting reviews of children's services and transport, single view of debtor, customer service transformation, income generation and a new RRR asset strategy (release, reuse, reduce).



Because of the Directors' "we are in it together" mindset, and their financial, commercial and investment strategies - we are one of the few top tier authorities who have not only projected a balanced budget for five years, but – because we now have choices – without needing to cut services. Conversations are about what is the right transformation to services for best outcomes for residents, not annually navel-gazing to find savings.

They have also increased the general fund balance by 40% and project a minimum £10m surplus over four years to be spent, penny-for-penny, on Thurrock's **PEOPLE, PLACE**, and future **PROSPERITY**.

Directors have a strategic ambition regarding fees and charges, aligned to the wider commercial strategy ensuring discretionary services have plans to be nil cost to service budgets by 2020/21. This approach has led to recent year-on-year external income growth. In 2017/18 fees and charges income brought in an additional £6.6m plus £5.1m in traded services. Forecast for 2018/19 is £7.5m in fees and charges and £6m in traded services. That is money to spend on delivering our priorities such as adult social care, children's services and environment.

Cultural Change

The same united team effort is needed when it comes to council's staff. Over 2,000 of them - 80% of whom also live in the borough. Delivering the growth agenda and providing services within the recent financial climate has required significant cultural and transformation shift amongst the council's staff – the wheels of #TeamThurrock.

Three key strands to this cultural change have been the coordination and connectivity of:

- the People Strategy
- the Digital Strategy
- the Customer Services Strategy

Three different strategies, owned by different Directors, but with a shared delivery plan, recognising the internal approach required to develop the capacity, confidence and culture within the workforce and working practices to deliver the new vision and priorities of the council. Engagement with staff is crucial. Whether it is through the Leadership Group, Managers Conferences, Staff Networks, Team Meetings, Corporate Workforce Group (front line officers and managers working directly with the Chief Executive) or via the internal on-line channels including #TeamThurrock e-newsletter, intranet, posters or informally through conversations in the Staff Café or Meet and Eat lounge area.

This also included a whole-scale review of - and investment in - the leadership and development programme. Two key cross-cutting new disciplines identified were the need for training on customer service for all front line staff and commercial/entrepreneurial skills for all. And it really did mean “all”. The first cohort of the new programme included Directors – leading from the front.

“The Council has positively approached its transformational journey and fiscal management and staff feel positive in their role and empowered to make a difference. The staff the peer team met had confidence and a keen sense of loyalty to the organisation, strengthened further by the #TeamThurrock strapline. They feel invested in and valued ... They were positive about the staff awards, recognise the investment in personal wellbeing, valued access to senior managers and were clearly proud to work and live in Thurrock. The Council, therefore, has a fantastic opportunity to capitalise on this resource and to continue to develop #TeamThurrock”.

LGA Corp Peer Review 2018



PEOPLE – PLACE - PROSPERITY

With a growth agenda of the scale Thurrock has – every Director plays their part in leading #TeamThurrock

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 we are now, the ambition for delivery and balancing 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 we offer. This cascades into all council's strategies, all service plans and all the way down into individual staff objectives.

The new vision and priorities focuses activities around three priority themes: **PEOPLE – PLACE – PROSPERITY**. Key to these priorities is they are not mutually exclusive.

PLACE is not about buildings: It is about **PEOPLE**. If Director of Place delivers that agenda in isolation from Director of Children Services and/or Director of Adults, Housing and Health – we will not achieve **PROSPERITY** for Thurrock.

Through the place agenda our plans develop an infrastructure-led approach for and with Thurrock people eg. significant improvements to the 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.

For instance, all proposed developments are reviewed by a cross council group of officers, including colleagues from planning, housing, public health, adult social care and children's services. Developments consider future health, well-being and adult social care impacts, influencing planning policy through the built environment. This consequently benefits the health and well-being of the population.

And our relationship with businesses is very strong. Thurrock Business Board, external to the council, meets quarterly and provides a co-ordinated 'business voice' and insight on trading conditions and experience of the real economy on a sector-by-sector basis. Directors attend and champion our motto: Thurrock Gets Business, Does Business and Means Business. Together we proactively find solutions to enable businesses to flourish, support job growth and producing a labour force with the right skills.

With one of, if not THE largest and most ambitious growth programmes in the country, getting the balance right between people, place and prosperity has to be a team effort.

“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



Delivering together in a changeable political climate

With “no overall control”, three large political parties AND with three-out-of-four yearly elections, it has been absolutely essential for Directors Board to speak with one voice and ensuring cross party engagement on key issues.

Political Make-up of Thurrock Council				
Local Election date	Conservative	Labour	Thurrock Independents	UK Independence Party
May 2018	20 (Administration)	18 (Shadow Administration)	11	0
May 2017	18 (Administration)	14	n/a	17 (Shadow Administration)
May 2016	17 (Shadow Administration)	18 (Administration)	n/a	11

Local elections in May 2019 will see a third of seats contested. This includes seats held by three members of the Cabinet. A further third are up in May 2020. (2021 is a fallow election year).

With potential for the political landscape to change each year, building Council-wide consensus across all groups for key and strategic plans has been absolutely vital. This is a far cry from a decade ago when officer/member relationships were damaging our ability to move forward.

Now, there is a cross-party Constitution Working Group and a Corporate Governance Group. Most Overview & Scrutiny Committees are chaired by opposition councillors. There has also been cross party engagement on key issues including Council Spending Review, Lower Thames Crossing Taskforce and growth and regeneration programmes.



#TeamThurrock

The whole being greater than the sum of its parts is a much-coined phrase.

And nowhere is that highlighted more than around the table at a Directors Board meeting. They recognise the power and value of teamwork. And they instil and empower that in their teams, with cross-directorate strategic, operational and workforce groups including a diagonal section of officers, all driving change, transforming the business, contributing to the success of #TeamThurrock.

Having created financial sustainability and a motivated, skilled workforce, Directors have the space to genuinely work with members and residents to co-create the right solutions and outcomes based on what will really make a difference to the lives of Thurrock's communities.

"I think what Directors Board a) contends with and b) achieves is absolutely amazing. I've seen how they deal with so much important, potentially life changing, decisions ... all handled with the most utmost of professionalism. Overall, as a team, I've never seen a group work so well together to overcome the challenges placed upon them every single week."

Leadership Group Chairperson

