

## Communications Activity 2020/21

### COVID-19

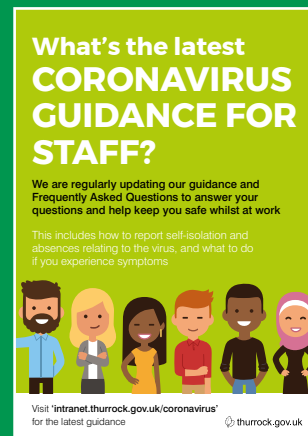
#### First Lockdown – March 2020 to June 2020

During the initial lockdown period, the focus of the communications team had to immediately shift to prioritise clearly communicating vital public health messages to our residents.

- Thurrock Council shared national messaging relating to restrictions and specific local information relating to council services
- 1,474 social media posts were shared through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
- these messages appeared on nearly 11.3 million screens/devices (reach), were seen 3.1 million times (impressions) and generated over 11,200 clicks on links to further information
- during this period the council's twice weekly e-newsletters were sent mailing list of over 100,000 residents
- a total of 23 newsletters were sent and each edition was opened by up to 60,000 individual recipients
- local media was kept informed through daily update emails with key updates on facts and figures and a round-up that day's activities and received a total of 81 press releases during that time

### Internal Communications

It was critical that essential updates were quickly provided to all Council staff, with details of appropriate processes and actions they must take. This included changes to working conditions and the use of transformational IT systems.



- from 1 February 2020 to 12 April 2021 more than 65 editions of the #TeamThurrock newsletter were issued to more than 2,500 council staff
- during this time average newsletter open rates were 61.7% per edition
- daily and then weekly messages were also shared by Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive, to all colleagues across the organisation
- these blogs included features on the 'Real Heroes of #TeamThurrock', which focused on the essential work being carried out by council staff at that time
- a strong internal communications approach continued throughout the pandemic which provided staff with frequent updates on the ever changing national guidance and what it meant for their roles

## Thurrock Thanks

The Thurrock Thanks campaign was created to support the national weekly 'Clap for Carers' and clearly demonstrate how Thurrock residents were supporting frontline workers, including council staff, the NHS, key workers, supermarket staff and volunteers as well as thanking people across the borough for protecting their friends, family and communities.

- a social media campaign launched on 9 April and used a mixture of social media graphics and animated videos on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
- this included artwork from local children and children of council staff
- local artwork and messages of support left for council frontline staff including refuse workers
- images of rainbow road markings painted on Long Lane, Grays, in a collaboration between the council and Henderson & Taylor to show appreciation for NHS staff
- a total of 88 posts were published and posts appeared on 531,092 screens/devices (reach) and were viewed by 131,432 people (impressions)
- user engagements saw 59 clicks, 146 retweets and shares, and 618 total likes

Key moments included:

- raising a 'Thank you NHS' flag outside the council offices in Grays
- sheltered housing residents socially distancing to celebrate the 75th anniversary of VE Day celebrations
- National Thank a Teacher Day

- the Thameside Theatre's Thameside Creative Community Challenge
- video tribute created by the Thameside Theatre and Thameside Young Producers
- highlighting the work of volunteers during Volunteers Week including Thurrock Coronavirus Community Action

## Thurrock Coronavirus Community Action (TCCA)

Thurrock Coronavirus Community Action (TCCA) was launched on 1 April 2020 as a new initiative to support vulnerable Thurrock residents who were self-isolating and needed support in accessing essential services.

A social media, media and poster campaign supported residents to know how to access food and medicine throughout the pandemic as well as befriending services for those who did not have friends or family locally.

Throughout the lifetime of the TCCA, social media content on Facebook and Twitter

- reached more than 200k individual people
- appeared on more than 84k individual devices
- was liked a total of 163 times across all platforms
- messaging was shared 271 times by members of the community to spread the word
- 481 clicks were recorded to the TCCA webpage on [thurrock.gov.uk](http://thurrock.gov.uk) to find out more information

## Introduction of COVID-19 Tier system

In October 2020, Thurrock remained at local COVID-19 alert level Medium while Essex County Council controlled areas were successful in their request to the government to be moved into the high or Tier 2 category.

- shared the council's position and provided regular updates on this to the people of Thurrock through a wide reaching communications approach which included internal, digital, social and media
- weekly e-newsletter, Thurrock News, was opened by 92,000 on Thursday 15 October
- secured an interview on BBC Radio Essex for Thurrock Council Leader Cllr Rob Gledhill, as well as being approached for interviews by several other broadcast media outlets
- developed Thurrock specific clear messaging and guidance on what the rules were for alert level medium, and had an overwhelmingly positive (98.7%) response on our social media posts on this topic during this time
- 'social media first' approach meant that we were able to get our message out quickly to our main target audience of those who live, work and visit Thurrock. The top performing posts were

### **Thurrock Council is not part of Essex County Council proposals to move to Tier 1 / High alert level**

- 61.9k people reached, 11k engagement including likes comments, shares and 6,348 clicks through to our news release

From Saturday 19 October, we will remain at medium COVID-19 alert level in Thurrock

- 69.3k people reached, 13k engagement including likes, comments, shares and 8,127 clicks through to our news release

## Lockdown 2.0

As Thurrock, and the rest of England, entered a second period of increased restrictions throughout November the council shared vital advice and information residents would need as we entered and prepared to emerge from this short second lockdown.

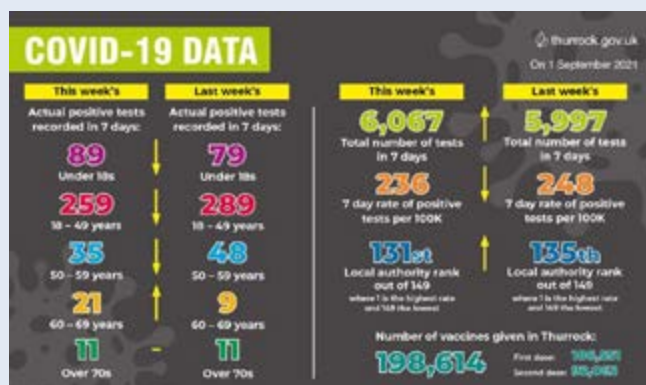
- e-newsletters detailed what the new restrictions were, how they would affect council services and what would follow with information about tier 2 and the rules which came into place as the restrictions came to an end
- backed up with a social media campaign and appropriate press releases carrying the relevant information
- focus on messaging for CEV (Clinically Extremely Vulnerable) people
- two key messages were developed to go out weekly alongside two Thurrock designed graphics
- main messaging focused on the support available to CEV people locally through TCCA and nationally through a new government portal for help with priority supermarket slots
- additional messaging highlighted the specific advice that CEV people should follow around staying at home, going outdoors and exercising

## Thurrock highest COVID-19 rates in the country

As we entered 2021, Thurrock had the highest rate of positive test for COVID-19 in the country and on 4 January new national lockdown was announced for England by the Government.

A full range of communications activity was immediately rolled out to communicate this new lockdown far and wide.

- as with our overall approach to COVID comms we amplified national campaign materials while also developing Thurrock specific materials which focused on clearly explaining the latest guidance and rules
- e-newsletter was increased in frequency from once to twice a week for the duration of the lockdown and continues to have an open rate in the region of 50% per edition.



On 11 January, Thurrock launched testing for workers who cannot work from home, a change from the testing regime which was in place for 11 to 18 year olds and their families in the run up to Christmas and over the New Year.

**Everyone who lives in Thurrock and cannot work from home should get a FREE weekly COVID-19 test**

[thurrock.gov.uk/coronavirus-test](http://thurrock.gov.uk/coronavirus-test)

#StaySafeThurrock

- campaign resulted in over 1000 people a day who were working outside their home accessing at test at a drive-through or walk-through test centre
- evaluation showed a direct link between the age and gender of those who were most actively engaging with our social media posts and those attending test centres - women aged 45 to 65
- we were able to quickly adapt and target young men aged 20 to 29 as the data showed they were not accessing as many tests
- residents were initially asked to get one test as soon as possible to slow the spread of coronavirus, with a shift in messaging at the end of January to once weekly testing



## Entering recovery phase

Business information packs were sent to over 5,500 local businesses including shops, warehouses and offices. Prior to distribution views were sought from local businesses during visits by members of the Public Health Team and used to help tailor messaging and content to support businesses and workplaces needs. Packs were distributed through the mail and sent directly to businesses.

The packs contained:

- a series of posters addressing issues that had been raised as a concern for businesses, their employees and customers or other visitors to their premises
- simplified COVID-19 Outbreak Prevention and Management Protocol
- reminders on symptoms to be aware of social distancing and hands, face, space advice as well as posters specifically about the need to maintain social distancing in break rooms and eating areas and outdoor smoking areas and the advice around the possible dangers of shared lifts to work
- a covering letter for business managers and owners outlining the help and support available for them from the council and Government as well as other key safety advice

The poster pack and protocol were also available to download from the Council's website, and promoted through the councils Business Buzz e-newsletter which is sent over 3,200 subscribers in the local business community.

## Vaccination rollout

As the vaccination rollout began nationwide in December 2020, we worked with NHS and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to publicise the most up to date information on who was eligible at a particular time and where to access the vaccine.

We commissioned in depth research into local attitudes which could lead to vaccine hesitancy, and then developed videos to help combat the top causes of vaccine reluctance in Thurrock.

When featured in the council's weekly newsletter the article accompanying the first video on vaccine safety achieved:


- 32,276 (33%) unique opens
- 63,341 total opens
- 1,309 unique clicks
- 1,567 total clicks

**CALLING YOUNG PEOPLE  
AGED 16 OR 17**

the NHS is inviting **You** to receive a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine

Want to know **MORE?**

Keep informed and visit:  
[thurrock.gov.uk/coronavirus-vaccine](https://thurrock.gov.uk/coronavirus-vaccine)

#StaySafeThurrock  [thurrock.gov.uk](https://thurrock.gov.uk)

## Non COVID-19

### LGA's second #CouncilsCan Day

Thurrock took part in the national online campaign highlighted the critical work of local government during the coronavirus pandemic.

- in total the council shared 16 posts on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter
- posts appeared across 127,900 device screens and was seen by more than 38,700 unique users
- the most clicked posts championed work by our libraries teams with 49 clicks through to our website. A post celebrating the hard work of our street cleaning team achieved 237 likes and 52 comments on Facebook
- the school crossing team post had the biggest reach with more than 13,500 appearances on residents devices
- Overall feedback and engagement activity was 97.3 per cent positive or neutral

### Virtual Internal Housing Conference

- comms team filmed and edited four videos featuring the Corporate Director, Assistant Director, Cllr Barry Johnson and sheltered housing officers
- these videos were the top 4 most viewed items on the conference news feed
- received very positive feedback from housing staff
- used as a template for future online conference events

### Flats recycling

- comms designed recycling pack for flats scheme which were distributed to 2,305 households in 47 blocks
- as well as the packs, posters for communal areas were produced
- the approach was supported with updated website content, social media and a press release

### Fuel Poverty Awareness Day

On Friday 27 November we published case studies over the course of the day on our social media channels Highlighted the Well Homes scheme which improves the housing conditions and the health and well-being of residents living in private properties:

- appeared on device screens more than 89,000
- reached more than 15,700 individuals appearances on resident's devices
- overall feedback and engagement activity was 97.3 per cent positive or neutral
- Housing had 10 enquiries in the days following our publicity around Fuel Poverty Awareness Day - normally they would get an average of 1 or 2 a month

## Towns Fund

- communication support for Tilbury and Grays town fund boards
- launched two local websites and an e-newsletter for each fund
- two social media campaigns including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Instagram
- social media campaign seen by more than 118,000 people with 14 posts achieving 373 clicks
- 14 press releases issued to date and referenced within 32 wider council statements
- hoarding and marketing collateral design support and delivery

## Talking about Rent

Festive campaign to provide financial support and advice to council housing tenants tackling the pressure of Christmas and coronavirus financial challenges.



- launched on 27 November and included 42 social media posts that appeared on 54,649 screens (impressions) and were viewed by 314,565 people (reach)
- user engagement saw 313 clicks, 80 retweets and shares, and 88 total likes
- text message service to directly reach those tenants who had fallen into rent arrears and provide direct support
  - 390 residents were contacted and the service received payments from 190 of the residents within two weeks of the message being sent
  - 37 residents responded as a direct result of the text and agreed an arrangement on their rent arrears with an advisor with nine accessing additional support from our Financial Inclusion Officers (FIOs)
  - The accounts that accepted FIO support made payments totalling £1,640 towards their rent accounts once support had been offered
- 499 visitors to the *difficulties with your rent* webpage between November 2020 and February 2021, an increase of 153 visitors from figures from November 2019-February 2020

## Plastics recycling campaign

A 2020 pre-COVID campaign promoted plastic recycling raising awareness of both focused on environmental and wildlife implications of poor recycling habits.

- collaborated with various stakeholders including Bywater's, Essex Wildlife Trust, local primary schools and litter picking groups
- hosted school assemblies with Bywaters to promote better recycling and educate students about the waste journey
- outdoor advertising in strategic locations where dwell time was high within postcode areas where data indicated recycling was low
- included 149 social media posts that achieved almost 400 clicks and were viewed by more than 970,000 people

## Scam awareness fortnight

Thurrock Council joined the national Scam Awareness which took place between 14 and 27 of June this year.

- across the two week period Thurrock Council shared a total of 18 social media posts which were appeared on over 137,000 screens (reach) and were seen nearly 18,200 times (impressions)
- the fortnight supported ongoing work done to highlight the work carried out by the Council's Trading Standards team to make sure that residents are aware of possible issues or scams and know the correct actions to take if they feel they are being targeted
- communication on this subject is ongoing throughout the year and delivered through a mixture of press releases, social media post and articles in council e-newsletters

## Fostering

A refreshed fostering campaign encourages potential foster parents to foster directly through the council rather than use agencies.

- the campaign emphasises both the financial advantages, such as the Council Tax exemption, and the additional excellent support available from our dedicated team
- uses design materials which have been newly created this year and tested on a panel of existing foster parents
- it is promoted widely through social media, outdoor advertising and direct engagement at online events

