

# Thurrock Fairness Commission

Final Report and Recommendations (January 2016)

An independent report on the findings and recommendations of the Thurrock Fairness Commission following consultation and engagement with local residents, businesses and public agencies between April - October 2015

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# Introduction by Demus Lee



One of the main drivers for Thurrock to consider a Fairness Commission was the lack of open discussion and apparent awareness in Thurrock about some of the key, historic examples of inequality that blight our communities. August 4<sup>th</sup> 2015 brought this fact home to me. I had spent the day with others from the Fairness Commission at a fun day in Tilbury, speaking to people about how they felt about fairness. We spoke with lots of people who touched on a range of concerns – mainly around the need for parks and open spaces to be safer and cleaner. That evening, Tilbury appeared on the news. There wasn't any mention of the positive day spent in the open air, enjoying sports and community life. Instead the report raised the major concerns about the level of healthcare provision – especially the number of GPs

needed in Tilbury and the size of GP patient lists compared to the mid Essex average. On that day in August, not one resident raised accessing their GP with us as a concern. Official data shows poor health levels amongst Tilbury residents where the average life expectancy is 8 years lower for men and 7 years for women than more affluent parts of the Borough. Yet this issue was not raised with us by residents themselves – a clear example of why a Fairness Commission was considered important.

An equally compelling reason for a Fairness Commission for Thurrock was the scale of regeneration and growth planned. This provides our best opportunity to tackle historic areas of inequality for the benefit of existing residents and future generations.

Thurrock as a Borough is growing – current estimates expect our population of 164,000 in 2015 to grow to 190,000 by 2030. The creation of new jobs and new housing presents many opportunities for the residents of Thurrock. However, public sector budgets are shrinking. Thurrock Council has made £83.2m savings over the last six years (2010-2016) and faces an estimated budget gap of over £28m from 2016/17 – 2019/20. And the Council is just one of the agencies managing key public services for Thurrock residents.

I am grateful to my colleagues who have given their time in 2015 to the Fairness Commission, and to the hundreds of residents who shared their views with us providing the content for this report and its recommendations.

**Demus Lee**  
**Chair, Thurrock Fairness Commission**

# Message from the Commissioners

Thurrock Fairness Commission was established to find out more about inequality in Thurrock and to make recommendations about how to achieve positive change for the future.

As a group of individuals from across a wide range of interests, the Commission has aimed to steer clear of coming up with a wish list of recommendations that would cost money and probably be at risk of ever being considered. We are bound by the context in which we work and have tried to use this opportunity to shine a light where more awareness is needed, so that we can work together for a fairer future.

The Fairness Commission agreed its own definition of fairness as: *“a fair society is where people have an equal chance to realise their full potential and an equal chance to have their voice heard and be part of decision-making.”* Discussion of the definition helped the Commission reflect on the need to understand the wider public’s view of fairness. This informed our commitment to the Summer of Listening, providing opportunities to speak to residents across the Borough.

Our formal role on the Fairness Commission will end with the publication of this report. However, as a group of individuals committed to seeing change in Thurrock, we will continue to meet and scrutinise future policy to ensure this report has a lasting legacy for our Borough.

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<b>Steve Cox</b>	<b>Assistant Chief Executive, Thurrock Council</b>
<b>Cllr Oliver Gerrish</b>	<b>Labour Councillor</b>
<b>Cllr Robert Gledhill</b>	<b>Conservative Councillor</b>
<b>Len Green (until June 2015) &amp; Lesley Buckland</b>	<b>Lay Member for Public and Patient Participation, NHS Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group</b>
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<b>George Wright</b>	<b>Thurrock Youth Council</b>

# Executive Summary

Between March 2015 and October 2015 the Thurrock Fairness Commission – an independent group of individuals from across a wide range of interests including local residents, business people, councillors, professionals and academics – have been undertaking an analysis of the evidence and the perception of fairness in Thurrock. Through a series of meetings, presentations and a *Summer of Listening* to residents, the Commissioners received a wealth of information and hundreds of views from which they have developed this report and the recommendations within it.

The Fairness Commission has made 6 recommendations plus a set of ***Principles of Fairness*** to which Thurrock should commit.

## Principles of Fairness

Thurrock commits to:

- **Eliminating unfairness**, promoting opportunities that benefit all people, whatever their background
- **Empowering people** to do things for themselves, working **with** rather than **for** the community
- Promoting **social responsibility** amongst local employers so Thurrock people have the earliest opportunities for employment and self-development
- Making decisions and running services **openly**, listening to communities and communicating outcomes and reasons in good time
- Giving priority to **those in greatest need** when allocating resources

## Recommendations

### 1. A Fairness Charter

That Thurrock's Fairness Commission's 'Charter for Fairness' based on the ***Principles of Fairness*** above is adopted by public agencies working in Thurrock with consideration of how these will be achieved, linking to performance frameworks where possible.

### 2. Strengthening Communities

Explore a campaign to build on the pride which exists in Thurrock and to promote all that is good about the Borough as well as its economic potential. A campaign should explore a 'giving' element to build on the passion and energy for a more caring, connected Thurrock which brings residents, the public sector, businesses and charities together.

### 3. Improved Communications

Residents need to know where to go to access relevant, accurate information. This should promote positive opportunities for the Borough, help increase pride in Thurrock, and ensure residents can have their say and be heard and understand the reasons behind decisions.

### 4. Introduce a regular Residents Survey for Thurrock

A regular, consistent survey across key agencies and policy areas will help ensure that people's perceptions about Thurrock were taken into consideration when developing policy.

**5. To provide feedback to all stakeholders that contributed to the *Summer of Listening***

The publication of this report will be widely shared to assure residents that we have aimed to represent their voice to help create change in the future.

**6. Review Thurrock's Single Equality Scheme**

To provide a focus on objectives for Thurrock regarding:

- Access to services – e.g. health care, school placements, physical access
- Poverty and austerity, including child poverty
- Building cohesion and creating welcoming communities

# Section 1- Background to the Fairness Commission

## Why have a Fairness Commission for Thurrock?

Many statistics relating to Thurrock suggest high levels of inequality amongst our communities. Inequality is evident across areas including health, educational attainment, employment, income and child poverty to name some key examples.

Within this context, the Council's Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed on 12 September 2013 to establish a Task and Finish group to look at ways other local authorities deploy equality commissions within budgetary constraints and progress equality issues within their localities. The panel's overall aim was to make recommendations on the relevance of a commission for Thurrock, other alternatives, as well as any costs involved.

The Fairness in Thurrock Review Panel was subsequently established and undertook this investigation, reporting to Cabinet in April 2014. A copy of the report published as a result of the review provides a great deal of relevant information and background to Thurrock's Fairness Commission. This can be viewed online - [www.thurrock.gov.uk/fairness](http://www.thurrock.gov.uk/fairness)

Thurrock Council's Cabinet approved recommendations to establish a Fairness Commission in April 2014. The focus for the commission was:

- to progress equality issues within the Borough, and,
- to prepare a Thurrock Fairness Commission Annual Report for Cabinet to review and monitor progress.

The initial report prepared by the Fairness in Thurrock Review Panel contains detailed data and evidence regarding the equality challenges for Thurrock. Thurrock's Fairness Commission has neither sought to replicate that data nor the work of the Review Panel.

Alongside some of the data and statistics for Thurrock, we felt it imperative to understand the perception of how people feel about the area and how fair they feel the Borough to be. As a Commission, we commended the work of the Review Panel in highlighting examples of inequality through data – but we needed to understand how people felt about how best to tackle inequality and create greater fairness.

Many of the statistics around inequality point to a north-south split in the Borough where communities south of the A13 are more at risk of experiencing inequality. The perception of all, however, was felt to be central to our mission.

Everyone has to understand the benefit of a more equal society in order for the incentive to create change to be fully embraced. These early principles underpinned our approach to taking on the task set to us in considering fairness in Thurrock.

## The Role and Remit of the Fairness Commission

The Review Panel agreed a Terms of Reference for the Commission (Appendix 1). This set the framework for a time-limited consideration of fairness in Thurrock with a view to making recommendations to improve fairness in the future.

The Terms of Reference suggested organisations to approach to bring together a panel of commissioners. A recruitment process was held in order to attract a wide range of interested residents and professionals.

Thurrock Fairness Commission held its first meeting on 12 March 2015.

## The approach taken by the Fairness Commission

Based on the early principles to seek the perceptions of all and provide an understanding of a more equal society, the Commission set a work plan which sought to:

- a) examine themed areas, and,
- b) conduct a *Summer of Listening* campaign.

### **a) Themed areas**

Two themed meetings were held focusing on Housing (April 2015) and Life in Thurrock (June 2015). A review of this approach was completed in June 2015 as some concern was expressed about the ability of themed meetings to really reflect residents' views and the support in place to promote the Commission's message to residents.

### **b) *Summer of Listening* Campaign**

From July 2015, a *Summer of Listening* was launched with a supporting programme of events between July and the end of August 2015.

During the course of the campaign the Fairness Commission:

- attended 9 community events across the Borough and recorded comments from over 300 people and spoke with many more about their perceptions of fairness
- conducted a survey into fairness in Thurrock with over 200 responses (extended to early October 2015);
- issued press releases, tweets and posters promoting the work of the Commission as well as writing to over 200 stakeholders encouraging participation; and
- established a dedicated mobile telephone number, email address and webpage on Thurrock Council's website.

The evidence gained through the *Summer of Listening* is covered in detail in Section 2 of this report. The recommendations made by the Fairness Commission are based on our consideration of how Thurrock works as a Borough, taking into account the views and perceptions gained through our evidence gathering.

The following section of this report aims to summarise the key points made through the consultation.

People were very open with us; they made considered points and were clearly passionate and keen to have their say. Many were interested in what difference the Commission would have. We felt it absolutely essential that people's views be shared with decision makers to help to provide this insight to local people's perceptions.

Responses provided from some of the agencies who co-ordinate services are contained in Section 3 of this report.

## Section 2 – What we found

At our initial meeting in March 2015, we agreed to hold topic-based meetings to allow us to focus on key issues in Thurrock including, education, housing and health and well-being. However, very early on we felt that these themed meetings did not attract public involvement. The Fairness Commission could already access strategies, reports, data and policies for Thurrock – but what we wanted was to get under the skin of how people felt. We decided therefore to focus on a *Summer of Listening* that would involve meeting people and talking to them with an on-line survey running alongside.

It rapidly came apparent that the concept of ‘fairness’ was too wide to confront and would need breaking down. The question ‘what do you think is unfair about Thurrock?’ often became translated as what people liked and disliked about Thurrock. The on-line survey was something that could be completed later following time to reflect, but most Commissioners had this experience at outdoor events.

At engagement events, we used a stall with prompts to help over 300 people reflect on local issues. Examples of this include:

- Participants were asked to use shells to indicate what level of child poverty existed in Thurrock – the majority got this right by choosing the bowl marked 22% rather than 13% or 17.5% - those who got it wrong were often not surprised by the true result.
- A Town Crier was used at some events to help stop people and engage them on the issue of fairness. We found that using someone in this role helped people respond to a question on ‘what they thought’ rather than ‘who is asking the question’.

Feedback from this direct engagement was gathered together with survey results received during the course of the online consultation. The key themes that emerged from the *Summer of Listening* campaign were:

- The environment – the look and feel of the Borough
- A growing population
- Activities for children, young people and families
- Public transport

Many members of the community that shared their views told us they were happy in Thurrock. Quite often their comments were preceded with ‘more could be done to improve...’ or ‘well I’m quite happy here, although ...’ This type of feedback is explored further in the following sub-sections of this report that focus on the emerging themes.

The Commissioners felt that as well as listening to people about their views of fairness, it was equally as important to capture comments and recognize how people felt, as well as provide feedback on the comments and suggestions received. Initial feedback from the Commissioners follows a summary of the comments received around different themes. Where possible, we have sought feedback from services to the views of local people – these are contained at section 3.

## The Environment

More comments were received about the environment than any other issue. The comments we received ranged from the loss of green belt to the increase of litter and the quality of open space.

This comment was typical of many received through the survey and face to face consultation: *“Grays looks like a rubbish dump and it’s unfair of the Council that they don’t seem concerned enough to clean it up and actively punish those who drop litter and don’t clean up after their pets”* (online survey response).

Many of those we spoke to saw a clear correlation between fairness and the state of the environment. There was a clear frustration amongst the public who regarded a littered and overgrown environment with a lack of pride. That frustration was vented at services that were not seen to carry out effective enforcement against those who cause litter and who were deemed as ‘not listening’ to the concerns of local people by cutting a service that sought to benefit all.

A poor environment was considered to impact on the well-being of the area. People were left feeling as if the Borough didn’t care about how it was perceived. This was seen to be deterring inward investment as well as having a negative impact on people’s well-being.

Lots of people valued the open space and parks around Thurrock. People who had moved here more recently seemed to value these areas more and young people spoke very well about the number of parks.

Feedback received from one child indicated *“I like Thurrock, (there are) lots of parks to play in”*. Children were generally positive about the Borough but wanted to see more entertainment and leisure opportunities to add to their quality of life.

However, nearly all comments concluded with an appeal for safer, cleaner parks. In some areas, Tilbury and Chadwell St Mary for example, there was a clear frustration with many residents who really felt as if their concerns about safety continued to fall on deaf ears. *“My child is hyper but the park where I live is too dangerous to visit and play there – there are drugs and needles left behind. A fence needs fixing to stop horses getting in, plus there is a building that is derelict which should be pulled down as kids play on the roof (Daisy Field)”* Tilbury Fun Day, August 2015.

A common theme from respondents was that they felt their particular neighbourhood was neglected at the expense of other places in Thurrock that were considered to get a better service.

Some people expressed concern that the Council mixed recyclables, wasting people’s time in the separation of rubbish into three bins. There was praise for weekly waste collection. *“What is fair in Thurrock is that we all continue to have our waste collected weekly”* (online survey response).

Air quality was raised as a concern by some residents, with the number of lorries using our roads adding to the problem. Specifically, one resident told us *“It is unfair that West Thurrock is seen as the not so desirable part of the Borough and a place for industry and HGVs to take over. Also that people living here are expected to take the brunt of traffic congestion, exhaust fumes, air and noise pollution that already exist. I think that is unfair that Thurrock has so much air pollution”*.

#### **Comment from Fairness Commission: Environment**

The Commission was not surprised that concern for the environment topped the list of issues raised by local people. As identified with other commissions, people report the issues they experience most day to day. In addition, the Commission’s engagement coincided with a time when service reductions, following cuts to budgets, had just come into play. This attracted a lot of media attention in late Spring 2015, the time when grass grows the most!

That said, Thurrock does not enjoy a positive reputation for being an attractive place. Its industrial landscape often overshadows its many qualities – 17 miles of riverfront, 70% greenbelt and a wealth of heritage sites. Yet there is a clear passion amongst local people who want to see these assets shine and the ‘dumping ground’ stigma lost.

Residents make a clear link between the quality of the environment and impact on a person’s health and well-being. The evidence collated will be shared with Thurrock’s Health and Well Being Board to encourage better consideration of this correlation in future policy development.

Grays High Street is recognised as a key area in need of improvement. It is not just that it is dirty and often covered in litter. As the main town in Thurrock it needs to be transformed. A place we can all be proud of and want to come into. Similar concerns are around the cleanliness of the “Gateway into Thurrock” i.e. the A13.

There is a clear opportunity here that must be grasped. The Council cannot continue to provide a service which meets local aspirations. It must therefore work to tap into the passion and opportunities within communities to help people do more to take pride in where they live.

Consideration of the feedback on the environment led to **recommendation 2 and recommendation 3**. There is a great deal of evidence that people are willing and keen to get involved with protecting and beautifying their local environment and a campaign to strengthen communities would help more people get involved in other areas too. A more positive portrayal of Thurrock through the media, celebrating local achievements and dispelling myths would build pride in Thurrock.

## A Growing Population

The growth in Thurrock's population was raised as a concern by many. Often, immigration was the focus, with an appeal to government to limit the number of immigrants and to assess the skills base of new immigrants. Many others however welcomed the increasing diversity of Thurrock, although more should be done to encourage cohesion and a shared understanding.

*"I can't think of anything that is fair in Thurrock. But what is unfair is the way that the English hard working people are put at the bottom of lists and foreigners and people who have no intention of working and do nothing but claim benefits are put at the top"* (via online survey).

Of course, one can pick this argument apart. Not all immigrants have no intention to work and not all who claim benefits are immigrants. But the perception was evident – a large section of those we spoke to felt their prospects and ability to access services from housing to health were at risk due to the growth in population, partly due to immigration.

Migration from London was also considered a threat to local services, making the pressure on current residents unfair. *'Sadly there is a strong resentment to people moving into the area from London and some comments/ attitudes are racist'* (feedback from resident at Grays Big Lunch event).

In addition, travellers were mentioned by a small number of people as presenting the same pressure.

*'Speedier action with Essex colleagues to remove travellers before they become ensconced'* (via online survey),

Another correlation made by some respondents was between an increased population (immigration, migration from London and travellers) on the look and feel of the Borough. Many respondents felt Thurrock was becoming more like London, dirtier with too much rubbish and anti-social behaviour – the perception being this was often carried out by people coming in to Thurrock. One resident that attended a community engagement event described the Borough as *"London's dustbin (with) local people treated with a lack of respect by authorities"*.

Many comments however welcomed the increase in diversity in Thurrock. We spoke to lots of people who had moved to Thurrock, often from London. They really valued our open spaces and celebrated living here. *'(I) moved here from London and like it as it is quieter and I'm happy for my children to be brought up here'*.

Whilst some felt Thurrock had a long way to go to be more welcoming – not only to welcome newcomers, but also to be more accepting of people who were disabled and or frail. *"(I) felt uninvolved by (my) neighbourhood when moved into Thurrock from East London."* (Village Beach) *"I don't know my neighbours and could never ask for their help. We need to be more considerate and kind to others"*. (Over 60s club)

Others felt that Thurrock could be very insular as a Borough, and that more could be done to encourage an understanding of people from different backgrounds. This comment was made a

number of times in relation to combating homophobia, racism and discrimination against people with disabilities, including children and the need for inclusive activities and buildings.

Much of the face to face engagement we undertook happened at open, community events. Many people felt these were positive opportunities to build a cohesive, less insular Thurrock to build strong communities.

### **Comment from Fairness Commission: A Growing Population**

Thurrock's population is set to grow further. More homes are to be built and our neighbourhoods will expand, potentially changing the 'urban village' feel of Thurrock. As a result, our population will continue to become more diverse.

Managing this change in a positive way which addresses the fears of existing residents is paramount. As an area, we have to know and understand all our communities – including emerging communities. Engaging positively with all communities will help to ensure people come together around the issues they share concern about. This will strengthen common bonds and build stronger communities. Engagement also means bringing people together so they have a shared experience. We need to build on the warmth people feel for the Borough so that everyone feels welcomed and encouraged to get involved in making Thurrock a better place to live.

The Commissioners reflected on the value that people placed on the free events held over summer 2015 and the opportunities these gave different people to mix together, breaking down barriers. **Recommendation 2** is informed by our desire to see more opportunities for Thurrock communities themselves to make our communities stronger, more connected places to live. We want to unleash the energy and passion people have for Thurrock to increase community-led action. This will need more community funding, advice, joined up information and support. Community venues need to be more accessible so that all residents can arrange meetings and events for their neighbours. We heard from *Islington Giving* about how they worked with businesses and residents to form a common campaign to achieve these very aims. We feel Thurrock can benefit from the same approach and encourage a detailed consideration by all partners in Thurrock to make this happen locally.

**Recommendation 3** should help ensure more people are aware of the prospects and opportunities in Thurrock so they can take advantage from the benefits this will bring, especially with regard to jobs. **Recommendation 4** is intended to ensure that the decision makers keep their finger on the pulse of public opinion.

## Young People

The majority of comments made relating to young people concerned the need to see more facilities and opportunities for children and young adults. A lack of youth clubs and activities

was considered to increase the risk of anti-social behaviour as young people were left to roam the streets or congregate in parks.

Affordability and access to opportunities for young people were considered important factors. Thurrock's transport arrangements for young people were considered poor. Free events were encouraged, and as captured under 'The Environment', many people celebrated our parks and open spaces which were seen to have potential for more organised leisure activities for young people. Free events and activities are particularly needed by working parents with children. They earn too much to be on benefits but not enough to be able afford many of the fee charging events and entertainments, particularly through the summer months. Some felt more was needed to help ensure activities were accessible to young people with physical and learning disabilities.

Access to community buildings to help run activities was considered a barrier and some commented that community venues originally intended for young people were now hired out for other purposes (e.g. Chadwell St Mary).

Education levels were considered to be improving, but more was needed to increase aspirations in an area where low paid jobs were considered the norm.

#### **Comment from Fairness Commission: Young People**

As a Commission, we attended 10 events across Thurrock in the summer – but we could have attended many more. These events were free, most held in parks and open spaces and encouraged families to take their own refreshments and spend time with other residents. We felt more joined up communication was needed to ensure all families knew about these opportunities so they did not have to face spending lots of money to have a good time.

**Recommendation 3** therefore encourages better communication in Thurrock – we need to co-ordinate information so people have a 'one stop shop' for all they need to know. This should make full use of social media but also cater for people excluded from modern communications and encourage 'word of mouth' and social interaction.

**Recommendation 2** is also relevant – most of the events held in Thurrock are community-led. This fact needs to be celebrated, recognized and invested in. We felt that a specific campaign to strengthen communities help this happen so that more communities were helped to help themselves.

## Travel and Transport in Thurrock

Access to affordable, convenient public transport was often spoken of in relation to work (especially shift work) and leisure as well as essential services – health care and education.

Poor public transport was considered to negatively impact young people, older people and those who could not afford private transport. Improved bus services in particular were spoken about as requiring investment – often seen as a lifeline to help people stay active and connected. As one person at a summer event said: *“I like living in Thurrock but I don’t want to grow old here due to the public transport”*.

Accessible public transport was raised on a number of occasions. We heard from people who felt if a bus was too packed, or too late, that the driver would not stop to assist someone with mobility problems to get on. Ramps were often broken and bus companies reluctant to prioritise their replacement.

Traffic congestion was raised by many as a key concern. The west of the Borough in particular was considered to be too congested with HGVs, pollution and constant traffic jams. Increased housing would make this problem worse. People expressed frustration with some of the ways in which roads were designed. Simple solutions raised by residents were thought to be ignored. Many people are worried about the proposals for a new Lower Thames Crossing. Many more bemoaned the charge to residents for using the Dartford Crossing.

#### **Comment from Fairness Commission: Travel and Transport**

People’s ability to go about their day to day business has a huge impact on their perception of fairness. Whilst we recognise that public transport exists within a financial market, more could be done to represent the frustrations of people living in Thurrock with current levels of service.

Discussion on this point, as well as the perception that when residents made suggestions to officers that their views were ignored, led to **Recommendation 1: A Fairness Charter for Thurrock**. We see this as an opportunity to agree principles that people in Thurrock can expect - for example, transparency and helping people make the most of local opportunities. Complaints arising from statements in the Charter would be taken up with the most appropriate organisation – Thurrock Council’s information management service could assist in identifying who to approach.

## Housing

Residents of the Borough expressed deep concerns around the local housing market, the affordability of properties within the Borough and housing options available to residents.

Many people expressed frustration with the difficulty young families have in finding affordable accommodation. Many accepted that the cost of housing in Thurrock was relatively lower than London and the South East, but this attracts people to Thurrock at the expense of local people who cannot afford to stay.

The frustration felt by many was linked to issues expressed by residents with access to housing options within the social sector (Council housing). Many residents wanted to see preferential treatment of local residents of social housing to be a fairer prerogative. Many views were expressed about housing in Thurrock which suggest that myths take hold very quickly – for example, that housing lists are not reviewed, that the council is selling housing to London councils and that immigrants are given preferential treatment to access council housing – when in fact, the policy states that people have to be resident for five years before being accepted onto the list.

One council tenant that completed the online survey highlighted a lack of availability of suitable housing: *“The way the housing is today it is unfair that people like myself wish to downsize but I am too young to downsize to a bungalow or a nice ground floor place in areas I wish to go - they are all for 55 years with DLA or 60 plus...it’s crazy as the council would gain a very big three bedroom house back here with so much parking and it has been very looked after in and out it looks private as well...so this should be looked into for people like myself”*.

**Thurrock Citizens Advice Bureau has highlighted the top housing issues it has supported April – September 2015 as being:**

1. Threatened homelessness – 20%
2. Private rented property – 20%
3. Local authority housing – 10%
4. Access to accommodation – 9%
5. Actual homelessness – 8%

Thurrock CAB are seeing more and more clients struggle to find decent affordable private rented accommodation. Some are receiving a section 21 (no rent arrears) from their landlords simply because the landlord has received a better offer elsewhere. Often this better offer includes an incentive to take a tenant from out of the area and provide a 2 year fixed term tenancy. This additional problem further reduces the affordable housing available to the local community. This reflects the concern raised by residents that they are increasingly priced out of the local private rented market.

**Comment from Fairness Commission: Housing**

Thurrock Council presented its new Housing Strategy to the Commission. This takes a holistic approach to housing and its impact on well-being where people live happy and healthy lives. The Council has taken proactive measures to improve the repairs service experienced by tenants. Housing is being re-let quicker than ever and new developments planned across Thurrock with the advent of *Gloriana* – the council-owned housing company, building new affordable houses in the Borough.

Whilst the demand for social housing outstrips supply, the ability of residents to access suitable housing is affected by their personal circumstances as much as the physical availability of housing. There is a particular concern regarding housing for single occupancy tenants who are often young people or vulnerable and in need of safe housing. Commissioners were shocked to hear of the potential numbers of street homeless in Thurrock – between November 2014 and March 2015 twelve men and two women were supported by St Mungo's. Faith organisations and other practitioners raised wider concerns with homeless figures in Thurrock, reporting people living in tents as well as sofa-surfing between friends and families. We understand the Council is looking at commissioning additional support for people experiencing homelessness, something welcomed by the Commission.

The many comments made to the Fairness Commission about the availability of housing and the perceived preference given to people from out of Borough has informed **Recommendation 3** (improved communications) and **Recommendation 4** (a residents survey to ensure people's perceptions are considered when policy is developed).

## Thurrock Council

Many of the comments received by residents were coupled by criticism of Thurrock Council. Many people felt that the Council didn't care how local people felt about a number of issues from the state of the environment to the design of highways. Staff were often cited as 'not listening to local people'.

Some staff were praised, especially in front line roles such as social care. Overall, however, people were skeptical about the influence of local people on the decisions made. There was little awareness of the role of Councillors compared to paid staff.

The Council's customer contact systems were considered poor by many. We heard lots of examples of when residents had reported something but never heard back, or didn't see the incident dealt with. Contacting the Council was something people felt very negative about. Telephone calls would be passed around the organisation, with too much communication via the website.

### **Comment from Fairness Commission: Thurrock Council**

The Fairness Commission felt that whilst the Council (and other agencies working in Thurrock) carries out a lot of specific consultation, there is still a strong perception that local people are not listened to.

**Recommendation 1** – A Fairness Charter aims to set out key principles to create a fairer Thurrock. The Commission also recommends a regular residents survey.

**Recommendation 4** - so that decisions are informed by people's perceptions. Whilst we recognise there is a cost to a new approach there are likely to be savings (by reducing the

number of specific consultation exercises). Furthermore a better understanding of how people feel about Thurrock is likely to result in more effective services and communication.

**Recommendation 3** – Improve communications to dispel myths and build positive relationships – is made in response to the way people feel about living in Thurrock and their relationship with the Council.

## Education

Most comments relating to education recognised the improved attainment levels in recent years. Adult skills were considered as needing improvement.

The largest number of comments received about education related to catchment areas and the size of classes in a growing community. Competition for places at schools was compounded by more people moving to Thurrock, often attracted by lower priced housing.

Some comments appealed to the need to educate children and the wider public around behaviours – especially the importance of recycling rubbish and tackling racism.

### **Comment from Fairness Commission: Education**

The Fairness Commission recognises the frustration of parents seeking school placements near to their home. Current arrangements fall to individual schools; however, the Council could encourage a discussion around greater co-ordination of catchment areas and boundaries.

**Recommendation 1** sets out key principles to help drive a Fairer Thurrock. The adoption of these principles would help address current barriers experienced by families when considering school placements.

We need to raise aspirations of young people with better and more opportunities for apprenticeships. All young people should have an entitlement to an employment destination in Thurrock whether or not they have formal qualifications. This includes the need to encourage partnerships with local industry and businesses and promote social responsibility towards people in Thurrock.

Young people need to be able to take advantage of the opportunities brought about by the location of the Royal Opera House, and the future of the TV and media studios in Purfleet. This is happening for those who are still at school, through such initiatives as the Royal Opera House's Trailblazer programme. However, for those young people who have already left school, the opportunities are less clear.

The Fairness Commission felt the need to continue to monitor closely the groups of children who successfully achieve their targets to ensure that no group of children is left behind – particularly white, working class children.

Finally, the Fairness Commission echoed the many sentiments to have a university offer in Thurrock to allow local young people the opportunity to achieve higher level qualifications.

## Crime / Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

At the time of preparing this report, Essex Police had just announced plans to close two of the Borough's police stations and cut the number of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in Thurrock from 38 to just 6.

The dramatic reduction in the number of police officers and PCSOs on our streets was flagged on a number of occasions during the *Summer of Listening* where it was recognised as a key issue for our residents with worrying implications for community safety.

One resident that completed the online survey highlighted their feelings of helplessness arising from the limited powers and resources available to the police to intervene and manage crime in Thurrock. They noted: *"The Police Force has been and still is being stripped of its manpower, assets and powers to the extent that they are now little more than a small dog with no teeth. It is unfair that the remaining police officers etc. are lucky if they can be reactive slightly, let alone proactive as in the distant past. A simple call to them typically takes weeks to be addressed as the few remaining personnel are dealing with emergencies"*.

Other concerns included the lack of visible and quality policing, the scale of drug use and drunkenness (particularly around parks and high streets), anti-social behaviour and support for vulnerable residents. First-hand experience of this impact was shared by a resident that attended a community event and stated: *"I have had several instances of unfairness: My wife was attacked by youths and the Police Force has been unable to do much about it. Any real initiatives that may help, will have to be performed by the public or volunteers"*.

Feedback from the online-survey also revealed individual examples of fears from perceived crime: *"I don't feel safe if I have to work late evenings. Many of the street lights don't work which makes travelling by foot dangerous. I have to walk 10 minutes to my car and sometimes it's very dark and dangerous especially during the winter evenings"*.

Suggestions to overcome these issues ranged from increasing police patrols and expanding youth activities in Thurrock with one resident proposing *"Youth projects in areas like East Tilbury and more effective policing"*. Another that had completed the online survey highlighted *"street wardens in the past knew the hot spots and where our vulnerable members of our community were and helped to keep them safe"*.

The role of parents in educating their children against anti-social behaviour was also noted *"More education for parents to (be) better role models for children. Anti-Social behaviour, racist"*

*abuse aimed at me when I walk passed school age kids walking the streets during term time. Why?"*

### **Comment from Fairness Commission: Crime / Anti-Social Behaviour**

The online consultation closed just prior to the announcement from Essex Police that, after already making cuts of £40 million, they face having to make over £60 million worth of cuts by 2020. Commissioners anticipate that if the survey was run again, residents' concerns about the scale and impact of cuts on crime rates in Thurrock would be greater. The Commissioners felt that the proposed loss of the PSCOs was considerable and that this should be looked at again by the Essex Police and Crime Commissioner.

Thurrock's Community Safety Partnership has been established for some years and helps to bring together public agencies to work together to improve the safety of residents in Thurrock. It has produced a detailed plan to tackle many of the issues highlighted. These include maintaining local multi-agency action groups to challenge anti-social behaviour and hate crime, working with Local Area Coordinators and Neighbourhood Watch to support vulnerable residents, and increasing the number of youth activities.

The Commissioners recognised the excellent work that has been done by Community Builders and continues to be done by the Local Area Coordinators. They did feel, however, that it was not always clear how to access the Local Area Coordinators.

These provisions should however continue to be strengthened and linked to the Fairness Commission's **Recommendations 1** (A Fairness Charter). Furthermore **Recommendation 6** (A Single Equality Scheme with a priority around building cohesion) will support stronger, more welcoming communities. **Recommendation 4** (a residents' survey to capture people's perceptions) would also help to ensure that people's concerns around crime and safety were understood when developing policy.

## Health and Well Being

Fewer comments were made about health and well-being than any other issue. The Commissioners felt that the *Summer of Listening* campaign may not have captured the views of people who are disabled or in ill health and felt that this might have been because they were not able or did not wish to attend the outdoor community events. For this reason, the views of those members of the community may be underrepresented.

Those comments we did receive largely related to the availability of services and access. The loss of a dedicated general hospital for Thurrock was cited by many who felt that as Thurrock grows in size, we need better access to secondary care.

The time it takes to book a GP appointment in Thurrock received some comments, as did the decision to close Thurrock's Walk in Centre in Grays.

Support for people with disabilities, mental health and those receiving social care was mentioned by many to be an issue. There was a feeling amongst some who we spoke to that people didn't receive enough help when they experienced ill health, especially relating to welfare support and general community care.

Concern was expressed for those experiencing social isolation and loneliness. Many of the conversations we had reflected on the need to create a culture of care within communities – a more human approach to the traditional service offer through social care and NHS services.

### **Comment from Fairness Commission: Health and Well Being**

As a Commission, we were surprised that health inequalities did not resonate with people as much as we had expected. Thurrock residents face some dire inequalities around health from life expectancy to the prevalence of some diseases. The Health and Well Being Board is currently reviewing its priorities. In doing so it has opportunities to engage with residents and identify actions that aim to reduce health inequalities within Thurrock.

As detailed in the Chair's introduction, Tilbury experiences some of the most stark health inequalities however, this was not raised by any of the people we spoke to when attending a community outreach event in Tilbury.

Most of the comments received reflected concerns about accessing hospitals (because they are outside the Borough) or problems accessing GP appointments (due to quality of service and demand). It was also felt that access to services at the weekend, both for health and wider welfare issues, was a particular problem. Access to health care must be improved if the health challenges we face are to be addressed. The quality and availability of primary health care across Thurrock must be improved to avoid the need for people to travel. The Fairness Commission has recommended that access to services be adopted as a priority for the Single Equality Scheme (**Recommendation 6**). We are confident that services are planning to address the challenges in services, but a clear focus on this is required.

Concern was expressed about the quality of mental health provision for adults and for dementia in older people. A great deal has been achieved in Thurrock to create dementia friendly communities. A Fairness Charter (**Recommendation 1**) would help to further this work in Thurrock.

**Recommendation 4** (a residents survey) and **Recommendation 5** (improved communication) would help strengthen an alliance between services and residents so that expectations are more aligned.

### Poverty and wider indicators

As identified with other commissions, it is not surprising that people report the issues they experience most day to day. It is important therefore to consider a wider range of evidence.

Utilising the experience of the local voluntary sector is considered invaluable in understanding grass roots views of how a community is operating. Although not necessarily provided to the Commission since its formation in March 2015, the sector has provided some evidence to the Task and Finish Group, and has produced reports, for example through Annual Reports, that can help to inform our understanding of fairness in relation to specific issues or themes. The commission is aware of the limited capacity within local organisations, and the campaign role they play in highlighting issues of inequality and disadvantage in Thurrock.

Thurrock Citizens Advice Bureau is one such organization working locally. CAB specialises in welfare and money advice but provides advice on a full range of issues. The main issue presented between April and September 2015 related to welfare benefits (31%) and the main concern in relation to benefits was Housing Benefit (17%) and Child and Working Tax Credit (15%). CAB explained that Housing benefit issues often go hand in hand with financial pressures including rent arrears. Recent welfare reform changes, especially the under occupancy deduction to housing benefit, often increase the pressure upon an already stretched household budget. Sometimes these pressures may be resolved by a successful discretionary housing application but this is becoming more and more difficult because discretionary housing payments are designed to be a short term 'stop gap'.

Thurrock CAB also explained that Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claimants currently have a 5 week waiting period to receive a medical assessment. This can be a distressing 5 weeks when someone is genuinely struggling with their care and mobility.

Full roll out of PIP for those residents currently claiming Disability Living Allowance was introduced in Thurrock from October 2015, with residents being randomly selected to receive their PIP pack, asking them to apply by a set date, failure to do so or failure to secure enough points at the medical assessment will see them losing their DLA income or possibly receiving a lower rate, which may reduce their household income. Thurrock CAB often see clients who use this DLA or PIP income to help cover essential living expenses which is not what it is designed to do, any change or reduction to this income places further pressure on stretched budgets.

Further tax credit changes start in April 2016, along with a further reduction to the benefit cap (£20k) and changes to the work related activity group of Employment and Support Allowance in 2017 that are likely to have further impact.

Interestingly, residents did not raise austerity as a key issue to Commissioners. Related issues such as concerns for affordable housing, finding work that pays and quality of life were raised, but overall there was a low awareness of the impact of welfare reform on residents.

Whilst Thurrock's Fairness Commission wanted to listen to local people's perceptions of fairness, we also wanted to prompt people to think about the hidden issues within our communities. One way in which this was done was by asking people to place a shell in one of three bowls to indicate how many children in Thurrock they felt lived in poverty. The choices were 13%, 17.5% or 22%. Most people guessed correctly and said they were not surprised; they only had to look around the Borough to see evidence of child poverty. Although one woman was reduced to tears by this fact, most thought it a shame but had little else to say. The figure is from the Public Health Report 2014 where child poverty in Thurrock is measured above the regional average (16.7%) and the national average for England (20.6%). This is

based on the measure for relative poverty. Relative poverty, defined by Prof. Peter Townsend as when someone's 'resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities'

## Partnership Working and Policy Making in Thurrock

Thurrock is a unitary authority and unlike many cities or urban areas, we have a single Council and health authority (NHS Clinical Commissioning Group) operating within our boundary. Essex Police is a County based organisation, but Thurrock's approach to dealing with crime and community safety is locally influenced through the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) of which the Police are a part. The CSP – as well as the Health and Well Being Board and the Children and Young People's Partnership are all required to work for the interests of residents by Government – they are a statutory requirement and are responsible for shaping the policy and use of resources to meet local need. They work alongside Thurrock Council and elected Councillors to ensure accountability. The Commission is confident that partnership working in Thurrock is strong, focusing on priorities for improvement. As a Commission, we have avoided duplicating the work of existing partnerships.

It does appear however that issues impacting on equality are very cross cutting in their nature and that there is scope to bring a common focus to some key areas of concern. Child poverty, life expectancy, homelessness, educational achievement and local income levels are obvious examples. Rather than duplicate the work of existing partnerships, we feel that a focus around three key outcomes in a Single Equality Scheme would help drive a focus around how we improve the life chances and living conditions in the Borough, as well as attract people to think about living here from outside the Borough. We want to see improved life chances because people's lives have improved – not just because the population has increased with more affluent residents moving from outside areas.

**Recommendation 6** therefore calls for a Single Equality Scheme where all effort from public sector agencies can be monitored and tracked to see how things are made better for people living in Thurrock.

Thurrock Fairness Commission recommends that the Single Equality Scheme provides a focus on three key areas. These are:

- Access to services – e.g. health care, school placements, physical access
- Poverty and austerity, including child poverty
- Building cohesion and creating welcoming communities

Collating the intended actions, headline evidence and performance against targets in one place will help ensure all public agencies are focused on improving equality for future generations.

## Area Specific

Many of the comments received related to specific parts of Thurrock. This was compounded by the outreach supported by the Fairness Commission throughout the *Summer of Listening*.

Wherever possible, comments have been linked back to the relevant issue (e.g. environment or housing).

## Section 3 – Service responses to consultation

### Environment

As with many other Directorates within the Council, the level of funding available for Environment Services (including Waste Collection, Street Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance, Parks and Open Spaces, Country Parks and Burial Grounds) was reduced significantly from April 2015. The savings targets meant that the Department has lost approximately 30% of front line staff and 45% of the back office and management team.

The results of this are the remaining area based staff have to achieve more with less. The impact of that has been a reduction in frequencies of grass cutting and litter picking. In part the task has been made harder given the increase in fly-tipping over the course of this year and the significant reductions in the number of enforcement staff.

For the purpose of providing efficient street services, the Borough has been divided into four segments with a dedicated team working in each. The thinking is that enhanced local knowledge will enable the teams to focus on hot spots that require additional input rather than following a set schedule that may include some tasks that don't need to be done. The pilots for this started at the beginning of 2015. Progress and outputs are being closely monitored so that adjustments to teams and activities can be undertaken as required.

The Directorate would welcome support from communities in keeping our Borough clean and tidy. This can be as small as just taking your rubbish home rather than dropping it in the street. There are a number of community groups that are carrying out excellent work with the Environment Teams including the Blooming Marvels in Stanford Le Hope.

The Council are aware that there are parts of the Borough with poor air quality and are currently in the process of producing an Integrated Air Quality and Health Strategy, which will provide information on the current status of air quality in the Borough, summarise the known evidence of poor air quality on health and help to identify the communities most vulnerable to the impacts of poor air quality.

Thurrock monitors air quality in the borough via continuous monitoring stations in four locations, and NO<sub>2</sub> diffusion tubes which are more flexibly distributed. There are a number of

different pollutants that are measured across the sites, and there are acceptable threshold limits nationally set for each pollutant. Measurements are submitted to DEFRA on an annual basis. An Air Quality Management Area is designated for an area where pollutant levels continue to exceed acceptable levels, and an Air Quality Action Plan devised for each of these areas.

The Integrated Air Quality and Health Strategy is due for completion in early 2016 and will provide a set of recommended actions to be undertaken across the Council and with partners, which will best mitigate negative impacts.

## Growing Population

In February 2014, Cabinet gave approval to undertake a full review of the Core Strategy and to begin the preparation of a new Local Plan to guide the future development of Thurrock over the period to 2035.

The Council recognises that significant changes are likely to take place in Thurrock, South Essex and London over the next twenty years with increased local population growth and growing demand for new homes, jobs and facilities to serve both existing and future residents. The production of a new Local Plan is a key component in securing the benefits of growth for existing and new residents and contributing to the creation healthy, sustainable communities where everyone has a chance to succeed and nobody gets left behind.

The emerging Local Plan is still at an early stage in its production. Going forward we need to make sure the plan we put forward is fit for purpose and deliverable. To achieve this we will ensure need to ensure that community consultation is embedded into the plan making process. The Local Plan Engagement Strategy approved by Cabinet in December 2015 sets out a range of activities that the Council will seek to undertake as it develops the first stages of plan making. These activities go above and beyond the legal requirements and will hopefully ensure that more people than ever get involved with plan making.

The first consultation on the new Local Plan is scheduled to take place in February 2016.

## Young People

Thurrock Council manages many of the youth services offered in Thurrock. Youth services can also be delivered through the voluntary sector and through private provision. Sometimes, this is funded through the Council service via grants or contracts.

Youth Services recognise that reduced funding in the public sector has had a negative impact on some areas of youth provision in Thurrock. However, youth services are highly valued and effort is made to attract more external funding into the Borough to encourage and sustain opportunities (for example Art Space in conjunction with the Royal Opera House).

Engagement with young people is key to ensure that the youth offer meets the aspirations of young people themselves. Currently, a youth bus is used to help reach out across Thurrock supporting engagement and some provision.

All activities and events, including school holiday activities, are advertised on the Family Information Service website. Youth Services work closely with community safety to help improve safety and the Youth Cabinet has championed improved transport for young people.

Youth services are working with a number of communities where there is an aspiration to see more youth provision. Training, support with external funding and support for adult supervisors can all help develop more community led opportunities to support young people.

Education is covered separately, but there are undoubtedly links between youth activity and aspiration. It is very important that young people have the opportunity to achieve their potential. The opening of the new South Essex College in Grays and a wider offer around a vocational pathway both help to support young people to access the increasing number of local regeneration opportunities.

## Travel and Transport

In the past 5 years, Thurrock Council actively encouraged the use of sustainable transport modes through number of Local Sustainable Transport projects which had positive impact on the attitudes of the residents and their wellbeing thanks to them walking and cycling more often. The Council has successfully obtained additional funding to improve cycle infrastructure and to enhance accessibility and punctuality of the bus services across the Borough. The public transport is currently served by commercial operators. However, where the demand is low, the Council financially supports the services as it understands that the provision of public transport is considered important to social inclusion, especially of youth and older people, and to the most vulnerable members of the community who thus have fair access to the public realm. In particular, disabled people place a high priority on the provision of such services.

As the Local Highway Authority the Council has statutory responsibilities for the safety of the road users and for highway maintenance to reasonable condition. Thus, the roads are designed, built and maintained according to the appropriate engineering standards. The road safety audits are built into the delivery of every engineering scheme as this approach to road design aims at best interest, safety and fairness to local residents. In addition, the Local Sustainable Transport projects involved working in partnership with Parking Association, Essex police, HGV companies and Local Authority which facilitates sharing and finding common solutions to issues such as lorry parking.

Residents who are worried about the proposals for a new Lower Thames Crossing are advised to take part in the next round of consultations. For more details residents are invited to refer to Council's online communication which will be updated early in 2016 as the new Highways England consultation is launched - [www.thurrock.gov.uk/thames-crossing](http://www.thurrock.gov.uk/thames-crossing).

## Housing

Thurrock's housing market is closely linked to the London one and naturally follows the national trend. House prices are increasingly less affordable within the Borough. However, mitigating measures are being implemented, for example Thurrock Council is currently building new affordable homes for local people via its wholly owned company: *Gloriana*.

In addition, Thurrock Council offers financial help to its social tenants with a cash grant of up to £20,000 to buy a home on the open market. This grant can be used towards purchasing a property in the location of choice, thus helping social tenants into home ownership, and freeing social housing stock.

Obviously, the effectiveness of such endeavours are determined by the size these contribute to the housing market.

Residents in Thurrock can influence the way social housing is allocated by various means; for example by lobbying their elected Councillors, MPs, and MEPs, or by actively engaging in the relevant consultations both local and national. Tenants can also join the Tenants Excellence Panel.

## Thurrock Council

There were a number of comments about the Council not communicating sufficiently.

The Council is currently reviewing its approach to communicating with residents and will shortly be launching a year-long programme of engagement activities and opportunities. The details are under development at the point of preparing this report, but are likely to include a range of formats including meetings in the community, summer-long engagement at community events, a regular newsletter, possibly by e-mail as well as online feedback.

During the course of the consultation, several comments related to contacting the Council and the lack of telephone numbers on the Council website for residents to contact Council staff.

The Council has a Channel Migration Strategy that highlights the need to target increasingly limited resources to those with the most complex needs and proposes that for most residents, the first point of contact will be online. This reflects the increased use of technology by residents and the ease of online access nowadays through smartphones and tablets. However, it is also recognised that some of the Council's most vulnerable and older residents may still want to contact the Council by telephone or face to face and there are still ways to do this, but increasingly, experience is showing that they also rely on family members for assistance and those family members expect to be able to transact online.

## Education

Legislation requires that all parents can apply for schools in any local authority and that local authorities and other admission authorities must not give priority on the basis of residence in a local authority area. Local authorities are required to ensure that a place is offered to all those requiring one.

The decision about whether or not to use a catchment area or priority admission area as part of a school's admission arrangements rests with the admission authority as does the determination of the catchment area or priority admission area boundary. All ten of Thurrock's secondary schools are their own admission authority and are thus responsible for these decisions.

We are currently experiencing an unprecedented level of "in-year admissions" The increase is due, in part, to the fact that families are attempting to find accommodation which is affordable within the new welfare benefit constraints and Thurrock generally has more affordable accommodation. We are working hard with our primary schools to deal with these large increases by using the capital programme to help provide places through school expansions, demountable classrooms, and the remodeling of classrooms. We continue to monitor this on a regular basis with our Admissions team and LA Officers and we are proactive in taking necessary action where appropriate.

We have had a complete review of our pupil place planning strategy to take into account the growing demand and have forecasted accordingly. With regards to Secondary schools we currently have enough places available for the number of pupils. Future requirements will need additional secondary places as our primary pupils feed through.

With regards to builders providing school places – we are very robust in seeking Section 106 (S106) contributions from developers, either by cash or buildings, where there is an impact on education. S106 Agreements are legal agreements between Local Authorities and developers which are linked to planning permissions S106 contributions are paid to the Local Authority and to date these monies have offset the Capital spend in the areas that the developer has chosen within the restrictions on use of this funding. One example of this is the expansion of Bonnygate Primary School.

As Thurrock's population grows, and as national policy relating to early years supports an increase in provision, Thurrock Council is working to increase the number of placements to support local families, especially to support 2 year old entitlement provision. There is a clear correlation between good early years' education and educational achievement in later years. Similarly, early years provision and childcare enables parents to return to work and support their families prosper. Demand does outstrip supply in some parts of the Borough but we are working with private providers and schools to help source appropriate accommodation to help ensure places for all eligible early years children.

## Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

The Thurrock Community Safety Partnership (CSP) helps agencies to work together to improve the safety of residents in Thurrock. It is a statutory board with members from Essex Police, Local Authority, Essex Fire Service, Probation (both the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Company), and the Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group. The voluntary sector, housing, youth offending and adult social care are also key members of the partnership.

The CSP recognises the issues identified by the Fairness Commission *Summer of Listening* which overlaps with the shared objectives for the partnership to:

1. Reduce youth offending and re-offending of adults and young people, thereby reducing instances of domestic burglary, most serious violence, personal robbery and drug offences.
2. Reduce harm to vulnerable victims and safeguard them from domestic abuse, sexual offences including rape, child sexual exploitation, serious youth violence, hate crime, anti-social behaviour, cyber bullying, honour-based abuse and serious organised crime encompassing modern day slavery and fraud.
3. Prevent violent extremism locally, delivering the government's counter-terrorism strategy.

In addition to maintaining key community projects that support victims of crime and work with perpetrators, the CSP will improve communications and engagement with residents in Thurrock to:

- Enable concerns to be shared
- Feed back to residents on action taken, in a *You Said We Did* style
- Promote the use of anti-social behavior case reviews more.

The CSP wants to work with communities to help them stay safe. It is important that residents continue to report crime and anti-social behavior in a timely fashion to both the Police and Council. Where there is no immediate risk of harm or threat it may not be responded to, however it enables intelligence to be built up and appropriate long term solutions found.

## Health and Well Being

Health and Wellbeing Boards have responsibility for reducing inequalities in health and wellbeing and improving the health and wellbeing of their local population. Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing Board has a key role to play therefore in contributing to the delivery of the Fairness Commission's recommendations.

The Board is in the process of refreshing its Health and Wellbeing Strategy and a number of the themes to come out of the Commission's work will feature heavily. Improving the access to and quality of Primary Care service in Thurrock for example will be a key priority.

The Board is well aware of the inequalities in health and wellbeing within the Borough. The Strategy's focus will be on reducing these inequalities – with an overriding focus on prevention and early intervention.

The low numbers of comments with regard to health and wellbeing generally echoes the relatively small percentage of Thurrock citizens who responded to the consultation on the decision to close the Walk in Service based in Grays. Following an in-depth and wide-reaching engagement period which lasted almost 18 months, the decision was taken to close the Walk in Service and reinvest the money that would be saved in four weekend health hubs across Thurrock – Corringham, Grays, South Ockendon and Tilbury. The Walk in Service will finally close at the end of March 2016. However, the weekend health hubs are already up and running across Thurrock and proving very popular. There is a commitment to use the money saved from the running of the Walk in Service to enhance the weekend health hubs. This will be done collaboratively with members of the public.

The issue of accessing GP appointments continues to be a high priority for the health system. There are a number of work streams within Thurrock that are tasked with attracting more GPs to Thurrock and improving the health facilities with the aim of enhancing the patient experience. However, we must not forget that everyone has a part to play in creating a resilient health system. The current difficulties in the system are against a backdrop of extremely high numbers of patients who do not cancel their GP appointments. There are more than 30,000 'Do Not Attend' GP appointments every year from the 32 practices across Thurrock.

Thurrock Public Health recognises the impact that unhealthy behaviours can have on individual and community health and provide many local programmes to help combat these such as smoking cessation, drug and alcohol, and sexual health services and also weight management programmes both with schools and community settings. We also liaise with Public Health England around national initiatives and help to shape government information and campaigns.

## Poverty and wider indicators

A number of initiatives have been introduced by Thurrock Council to address poverty in Thurrock. As one of the largest employers, we introduced the Living Wage in April 2013 – 80% of our workforce is made up of residents of Thurrock so this was a significant move by the Council.

With regard to welfare reform, a cross agency group meets on a regular basis to review the impact locally and to consider actions to mitigate negative impact. The government provides a limited amount of funding each year towards discretionary housing allowance, but once this has been allocated, no further payments can be made. Claimants will not be considered unless they can prove they have attempted to change their circumstances such as downsizing or cutting back on non-priority commitments.

Current concerns relate to future welfare changes and include:

- Housing benefit for 18-21 years will be cut from April 2017

- All working age benefits will be frozen for 4 years from April 2016 including the Local Housing Allowance rates.
- Social housing rents will be reduced by 15% for the next 4 years with an estimated loss to Thurrock Council of £1.2million per year.
- Housing benefit will only be back dated for a one month period from the previous six months leading to more rent arrears and convictions. We have noticed a threefold increase in the use of food vouchers being issued across Thurrock over the past year.

Thurrock Council fully recognises the impact of these changes on many of our residents. We operate a Fair Debt Policy which aims to support people make the payments they can afford in agreement with us. Importantly is our commitment to **Encourage and promote job creation and economic prosperity**. Our regeneration programme is the biggest in England, creating thousands of new career opportunities for local people to aspire to. We also have a number of programmes targeting young people and supporting their progression into the world of work, as well as return to work support for parents and the long term unemployed.,

We are committed to ending child poverty and have recently agreed a refreshed strategy and action plan. This recognises the work of Thurrock's Fairness Commission and calls on the whole community including employers, faith groups, voluntary organisations and residents to work alongside public agencies to achieve our vision. The strategy recognises employment as the main route out of poverty but it also recognises the need for parents to receive a living wage, and support for skills development, to break the cycle of in-work poverty.

## Section 4 – Our Recommendations

### 1. A Fairness Charter

That Thurrock's Fairness Commission's 'Charter for Fairness' is adopted by public agencies working in Thurrock with consideration of how these will be achieved, linking to performance frameworks where possible.

We have recommended a set of Principles of Fairness to which Thurrock\* should commit.

Thurrock\* commits to:

- **Eliminating unfairness**, promoting opportunities that benefit all people, whatever their background
- **Empowering people** to do things for themselves, working **with** rather than **for** the community
- Promoting **social responsibility** amongst local employers so Thurrock people have the earliest opportunities for employment and self-development
- Making decisions and running services **openly**, listening to communities and communicating outcomes and reasons in good time
- Giving priority to **those in greatest need** when allocating resources

\**Thurrock* here means the wider community, including local public sector, voluntary organisations, schools, businesses and residents, recognising that this cannot be done in isolation.

Throughout our *Summer of Listening*, Commissioners heard many examples of people feeling let down by the services they rely on. This cut across public and private business, although some of the private business is commissioned through public sector services such as the Council and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

We therefore recommend the above Principles of Fairness so that everyone can come to expect a minimum standard when living and working in Thurrock. We invite services to set out how they will respond to these, and how they will embed these principles across their organisations, staff and procedures.

As well as changing how people are treated, we also hope the Principles will encourage more residents to challenge their own perceptions of what is and is not acceptable from public services. As Commissioners we were left with the impression that people often accept what they are offered, rather than demanding more. A more empowered community should be able to work with services, demanding the best for residents from Government and ensuring we get our fair share of investment for the future.

## **2. Strengthening Communities**

Explore a campaign to build on the pride which exists in Thurrock and to promote all that is good about the Borough as well as its economic potential. A campaign should explore a 'giving' element to build on the passion and energy for a more caring, connected Thurrock which brings residents, public sector business and charities together. Local people love Thurrock – lets tap into that local energy to see a better Borough, helping communities to improve their areas for the future.

This should include:

- A giving campaign to build on the passion and energy for a more caring Thurrock
- A partnership with business that helps companies give time, sponsorship or expertise through a co-ordinated approach, building a legacy for a more prosperous Borough
- Recognition for all that is achieved through community led action to beautify our Borough and care for its residents outside the formal structures of public services
- Make sure we make it easy for people to help themselves and others, reducing red tape wherever possible, to build community spirit
- A branded campaign to galvanise the energy of all working and living in Thurrock

So much happens across Thurrock because people care enough to make things happen. Just a quick look at activity across cleaning and greening demonstrates this with 'Stanford Bloomers' bringing colour and design to the east of the Borough, and Grays Phoenix clearing rubbish and cutting back hedges in the south. Bulphan in Bloom has transformed the village into a truly beautiful location, and there are many examples of residents wanting to improve the look and feel of where they live by developing small community gardens – such as at Peartree Close in South Ockendon.

Often these community led initiatives relate to the passion in that area – Thurrock is a collective of small towns and people love where they live. This was evident from our *Summer of Listening*. We were impressed with the sentiment that people Love Thurrock – this was expressed by people that believed they were disadvantaged as much as from those that felt that they were not. Pride in Thurrock is one thing everyone can share. It can bond and unite communities for the greater good, regardless of their financial or social status. It can foster cohesion, encourage community interaction and self-help. As commissioners, we were greatly encouraged when the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community found it easy to tell us they loved where they lived.

We would like to see all support for increasing community pride easily available to all residents so those active can do so with ease and that those who want to make a difference can do so easily. A fresh campaign to galvanise community spirit in Thurrock could benefit from using social media as well as more traditional methods. It must however be a campaign that calls all partners to action, and enables business, residents and public agencies to play to their strengths, leading where they can best. Discussion on how to take this forward should be started by a conversation between the Council, CCG, Police and CVS. Decreasing public funds means we have to create a new relationship with people who are generally willing to help if asked. Hopefully, partners will respond because this is the right thing to do, regardless of the economic realities we face in Thurrock today.

### **3. Improved Communications**

As a unitary authority we need to ensure residents know where to go to access relevant, accurate information. This should promote positive opportunities for the Borough and help to increase pride in Thurrock, as well as ensure residents understand the reasons why decisions are made and how to have their say when they want to respond.

Thurrock is a growing Borough. We have an opportunity to create a more positive identity for Thurrock, welcoming those new to the area to learn more about our heritage as well as ways to get involved locally.

Thurrock does not have one ‘go to’ place for news and information. The council is increasingly relying on its website to deliver services, and press releases are covered by a range of online and printed press. Positive news, especially announcements around what’s on, or opportunities to get involved with something fun, are often kept within the realms of those ‘in the know’ via email chains.

Throughout the *Summer of Listening*, we heard numerous myths about Thurrock. Myths do take hold quickly, and are difficult to shake once set into people’s minds. With lack of consistent, positive communications across providers in Thurrock, there is little opportunity to change people’s opinions and get the good news through.

Positive communications also includes the need for consistent and respectful customer services. The Principles of Fairness should underpin the need to design and deliver clear, efficient interaction between local people and the services they need day to day.

**4. Introduce a regular Residents Survey for Thurrock** - to ensure how people feel about the Borough is considered when developing policy and making decisions.

A regular, consistent survey using agreed methodology across key agencies and policy areas would help ensure that people's perceptions about Thurrock were taken into consideration when developing policy. The resource implications should be weighed against the potential to stop some consultation exercises with the development of one consolidated approach.

From the *Summer of Listening*, Commissioners found that people were willing to talk about how they felt about fairness, and welcomed the opportunity to have their say. They did not however believe that much would change as a result. Too many people that we spoke to felt that local peoples' views had no bearing at all on decision making. A regular survey, promoted and explained to the public, will help ensure that how people feel has more impact on how we plan services and respond to local issues.

**5. To provide feedback to all stakeholders that contributed to the Fairness Commission's *Summer of Listening***

The publication of this report will be widely shared to assure residents that we have aimed to represent their voice to help create change in the future.

**6. Review Thurrock's Single Equality Scheme**

Thurrock Council is responsible for the Single Equality Scheme. The current scheme was due to be reviewed in March 2015. At this time Thurrock Council said it would base the review on the feedback from the Fairness Commission consultation.

As explained at Section 2, the Fairness Commission would like to see a Scheme which is comprehensive in its consideration of what all agencies are doing in Thurrock to tackle inequality. To be effective, this should focus on a small number of priorities. Based on the *Summer of Listening*, we feel these should be:

- Access to services – e.g. health care, school placements, physical access
- Poverty and austerity, including child poverty
- Building cohesion and creating welcoming communities

Collating the intended actions, headline evidence and performance against targets in one place will help ensure all public agencies are focused on improving equality for future generations.

## Section 5 - Next steps

1. The Fairness Commission asks all organisations and partnerships named\* in this report to provide their response and commitment to delivery of attributed recommendations and initial estimates of timetables by July 2016.
2. The Fairness Commissioners will remain actively involved in analysing actions against key themes, acting as critical friends and advisors if required.
3. The Fairness Commission recommends that an Annual Report is produced over each of the next five years to monitor progress against all its recommendations. We expect this is best managed via reporting on the Single Equality Scheme.
4. The Fairness Commission's webpages will continue to be maintained and updated to reflect progress against these recommendations and ensure public accountability. The report will be shared with all stakeholders who took part in the *Summer of Listening* and made available through the online survey.
5. The Fairness Commission will hold a conference by summer 2017 to review progress. In the interests of even greater public accountability, representatives from local media organisations will be invited to help cover the event and take part in the review.

\*The organisations and partners referenced in this report include the following:

Thurrock Council

Thurrock NHS Clinical Commissioning Group

Thurrock Council for Voluntary Service, umbrella group for Thurrock's voluntary sector

Essex Police

Essex Police and Crime Commissioner

Community Safety Partnership

Children and Young People's Partnership

Health and Well-Being Board

## Section 6 – Conclusion

From the very beginning of the Fairness Commission, the Commissioners wanted to delve into the issues around fairness and to get under the skin of how people felt. They had access to many strategies and evidence-based data and analysis, but knew that this was only part of the story. The *Summer of Listening* enabled the Commissioners to engage with hundreds of residents who shared their views providing the content for this report and its recommendations.

What is clear is that “fairness” is a difficult concept to get to grips with – one person’s interpretation of “fairness” may be different to the next person’s definition. Overall, the *Summer of Listening* showed that people are happy in Thurrock, however their responses often continued to say “... *but it would be better if X*” or “... *but there should be more Y*”.

The recommendations made by the Commission will hopefully address some of this.

The Fairness Commission’s formal role ends with the publication of this report. However, as a group of individuals committed to seeing change in Thurrock, we will continue to meet and scrutinise future policy to ensure this report has a lasting legacy for our borough and to see progress against our recommendations. It is hoped that the ***Principles of Fairness*** will be embraced throughout the whole of Thurrock. Fairness is not something that can be achieved in isolation by one organisation. It must be a holistic effort of the wider community including local public sector agencies, voluntary organisations, schools, businesses, politicians and residents.

# Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference

## Thurrock Fairness Commission

### TERMS OF REFERENCE

#### 1. The rationale for a Thurrock Fairness Commission

- 1.1 The Thurrock Fairness Commission has been set up as an independent body to examine the issues surrounding inequality and to make Thurrock a fairer place to live. The Commission aims to engage with local people, listening to their views and opinions to inform decisions and priorities. It will provide a set of recommendations that will help shape public sector strategies for service provision based on sound evidence and best practice. The Commission will celebrate and promote the positive work that currently takes place within Thurrock, whilst also encouraging greater working relationships between organisations and the local business economy.

#### 2. What the Commission will do:

- 2.1 The Commission has been established with its partners:
- To identify the real issues that will need to be tackled to reduce inequality and create greater Fairness.
  - Will consider how the Council and its partners can make best use of its powers, duties and resources to get the best and fairest outcomes for Thurrock residents.
  - To build on the information that we already know about inequality and will not seek to replicate research that has already been done in this area. The findings of the Fairness Review Panel will assist the Commission in their initial work.
  - To listen to Thurrock residents and their perceptions of Fairness and to strengthen the current asset based community development approach by examining the communities' strengths, particularly in relation to those areas that could be perceived to be at a 'disadvantage'.

#### 3. Scope

- 3.1 The Commission will identify and better understand inequalities and challenges within the Borough and develop a clear long term strategy to reduce inequalities and make Thurrock a fairer place for all its residents.
- 3.2 The Commission will examine the key priority areas that are known to impact on Fairness, including but not limited to: Income, Education, Work, Health, Housing, Families, Community, and Safety.

#### **4. Timeframe**

- 4.1 The Commission will meet at least 5 times (bi-monthly) over a 12 month period.
- 4.2 The Thurrock Fairness Commission will provide a progress update report to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee 6 months after work has commenced.
- 4.3 A draft final report will be submitted to the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee prior to the final report being submitted to Cabinet 1 year after its inception.

#### **5. Membership**

- 5.1 Members will be selected to join the Steering Panel for a one year period when membership on the Panel will be reviewed.
- 5.2 The Commission will be chaired by a non-partisan member of the voluntary or community sector.
- 5.3 The Chair will be the figurehead of the Thurrock Fairness Commission; he/she will represent the Commission and be a strong advocate for Fairness in Thurrock.
- 5.4 The Commission will have no more than 15 Commissioners who will be representatives from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. Example of membership below:
  - Labour Councillor
  - Conservative Councillor
  - Assistant Chief Executive or Senior Management Team Member of Thurrock Borough Council.
  - Head teacher
  - Disability Group Representative
  - Senior figure from local industry
  - Housing Representative
  - Economist
  - Health Representative
  - Youth Cabinet Representative
- 5.5 Commissioners will meet regularly to discuss key fairness issues and will be encouraged to identify and bring forward practical ideas that can be implemented locally through the creation of project delivery groups based on ongoing discussions with the Commission and other stakeholders i.e. residents.

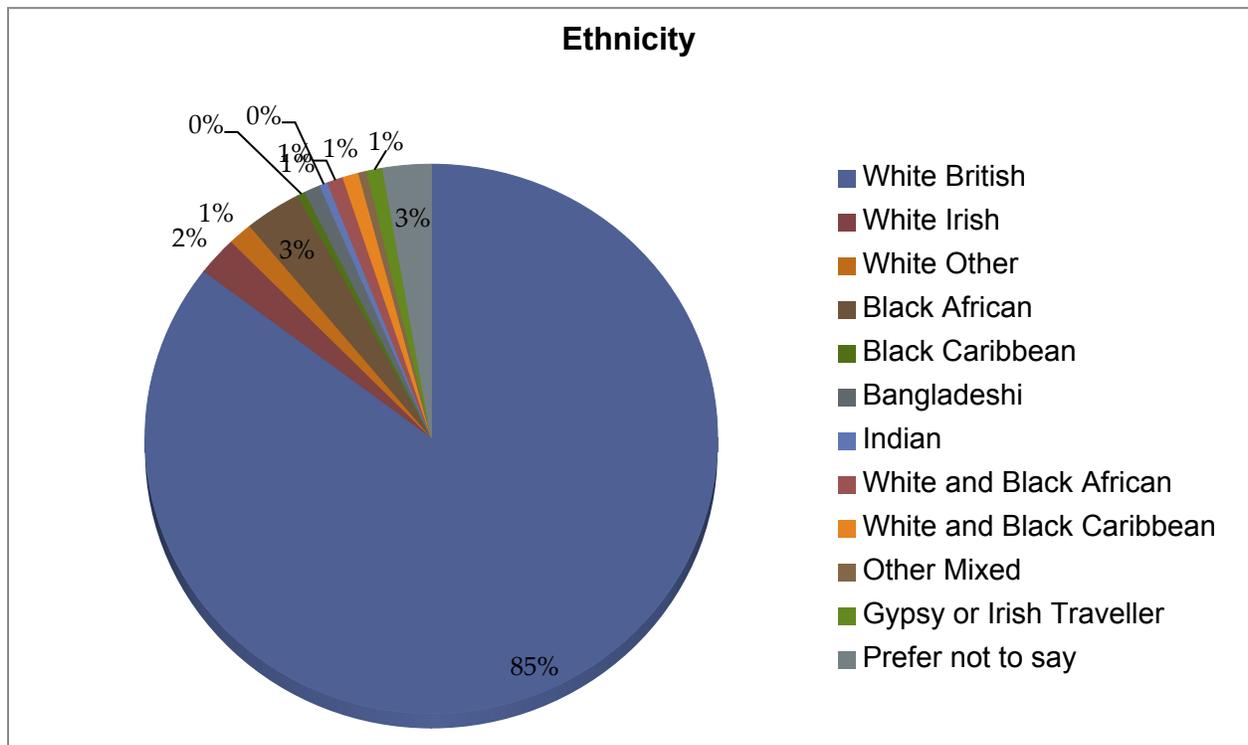
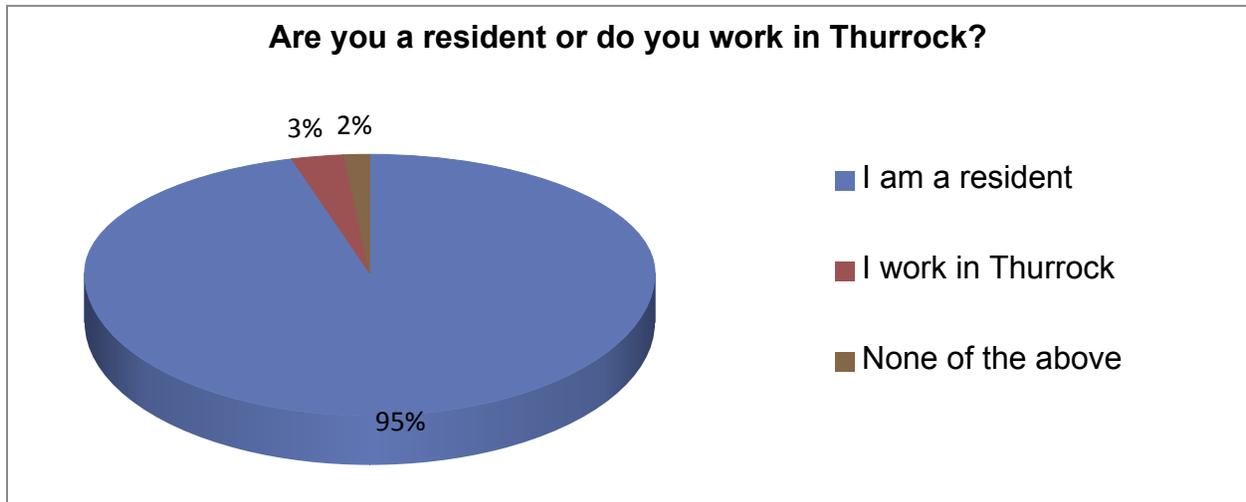
#### **6. Methodology**

- 6.1 It is anticipated that the Thurrock Fairness Commission will undertake a series of activities which may include public meetings public meetings.  
Where the following can be reviewed and obtained:
- a) Minutes
  - b) Evidence Papers
  - c) Testimony from expert witnesses
  - d) Discussions between Commissioners
  - e) Contributions from residents
  - f) Contributions from key stakeholders, voluntary and community sector.
- 6.2 Private meetings for Commissioners only.
- 6.3 Submissions from Members of the Public
- 6.4 Publicity
- a) Online at Thurrock Council's website [www.thurrock.gov.uk](http://www.thurrock.gov.uk)
  - b) Press Releases
  - c) E-Newsletters, such as Insight in order to reach Council staff who are also residents.
- 6.5 Meetings of cross-departmental problem solving team of council staff.
- 6.6 Discussions with:
- Ngage
  - Thurrock Coalition
  - DP World
  - Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions
  - One Community Development Trust
  - South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre (SERICC)
  - Essex Police
  - Citizens Advice Bureau
  - Open Door
  - Thurrock Centre for Independent Living
  - TRUST

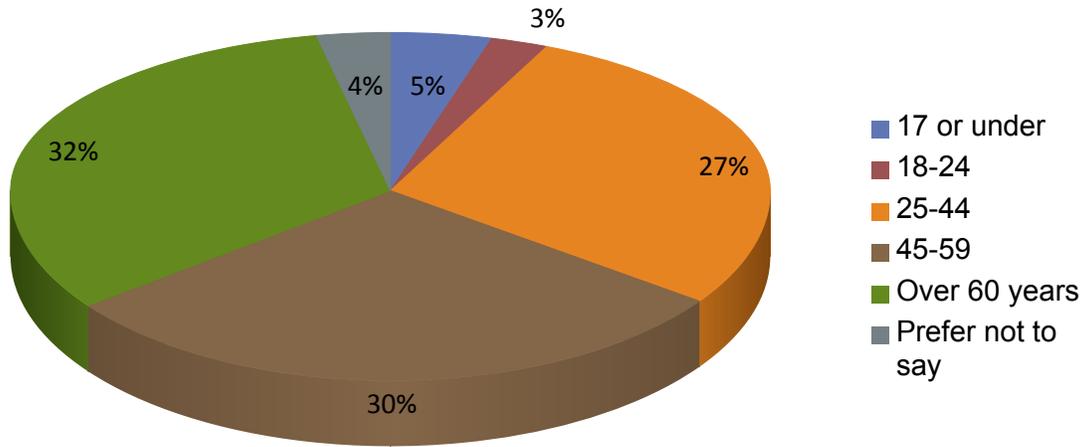
# Appendix 2 – Research profile generated from online survey and summary of outreach events attended

## Research Profile

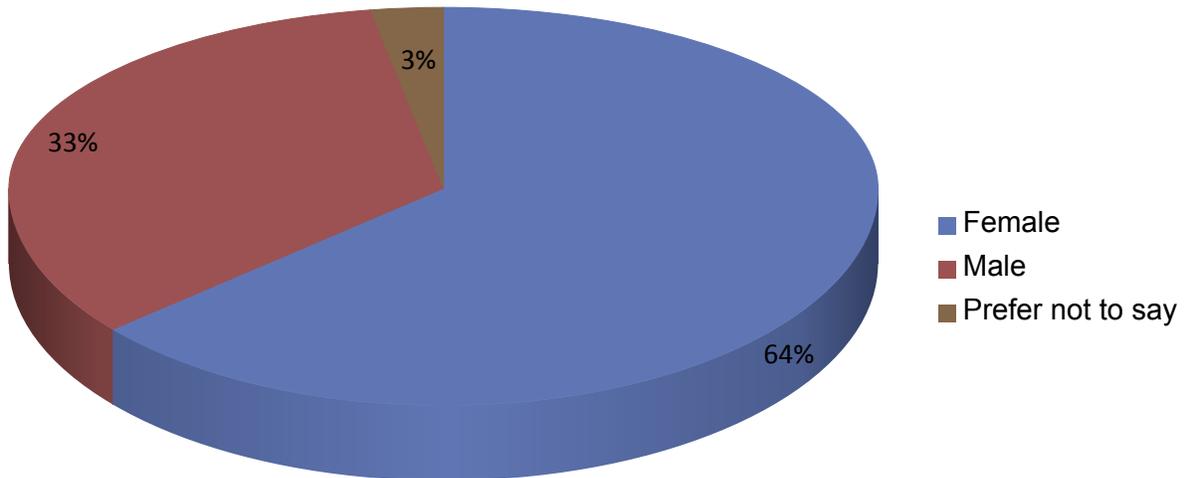
The following data is taken from responses to the online survey, any paper versions of this survey completed are also included. This does not include comments given during the *Summer of Listening* which took the Fairness Commission across Thurrock and gathered over 300 written comments.



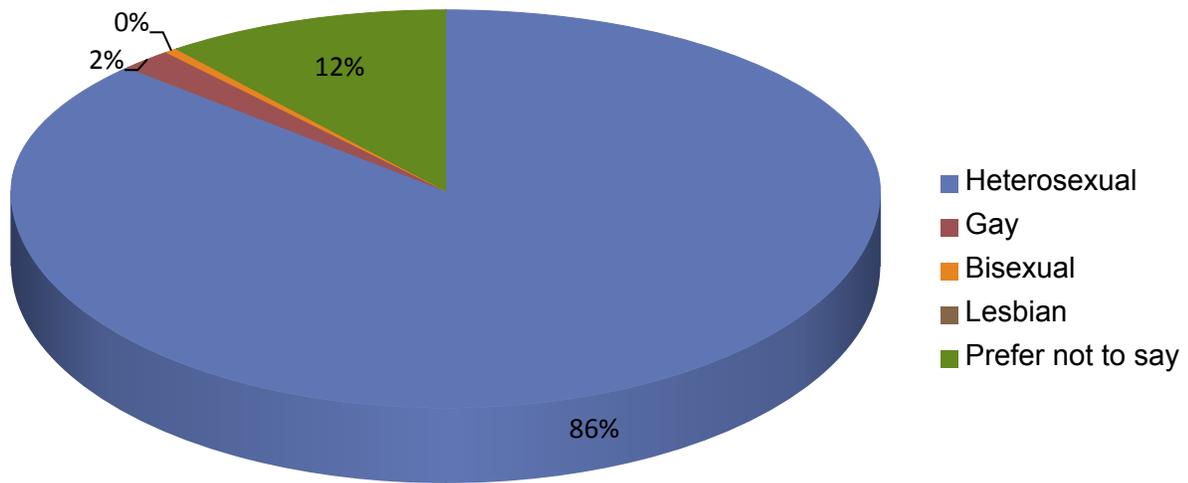
### Age



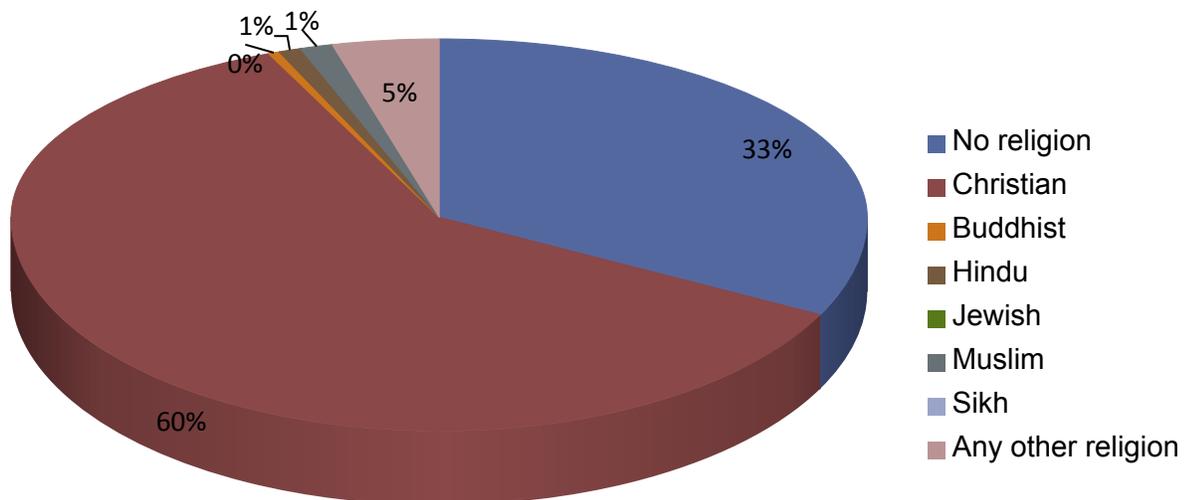
### Gender



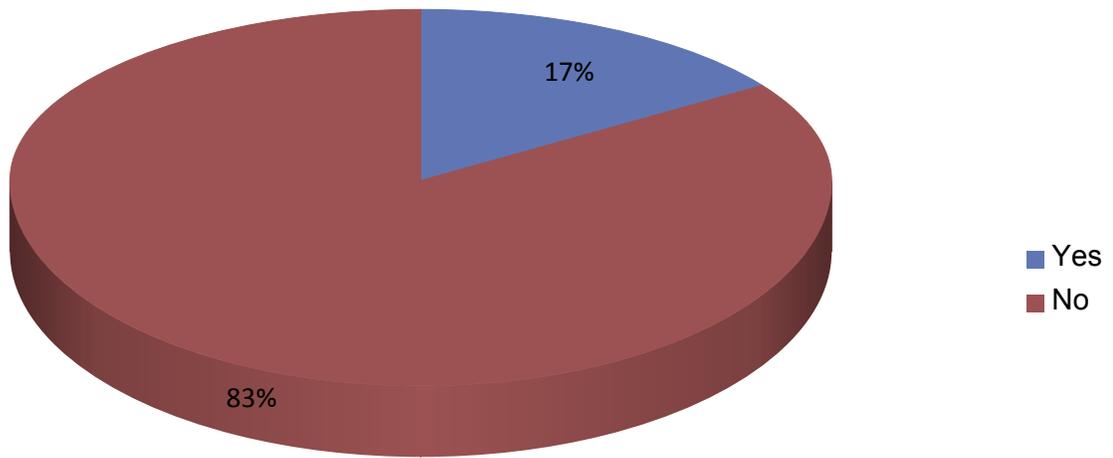
### Sexual orientation



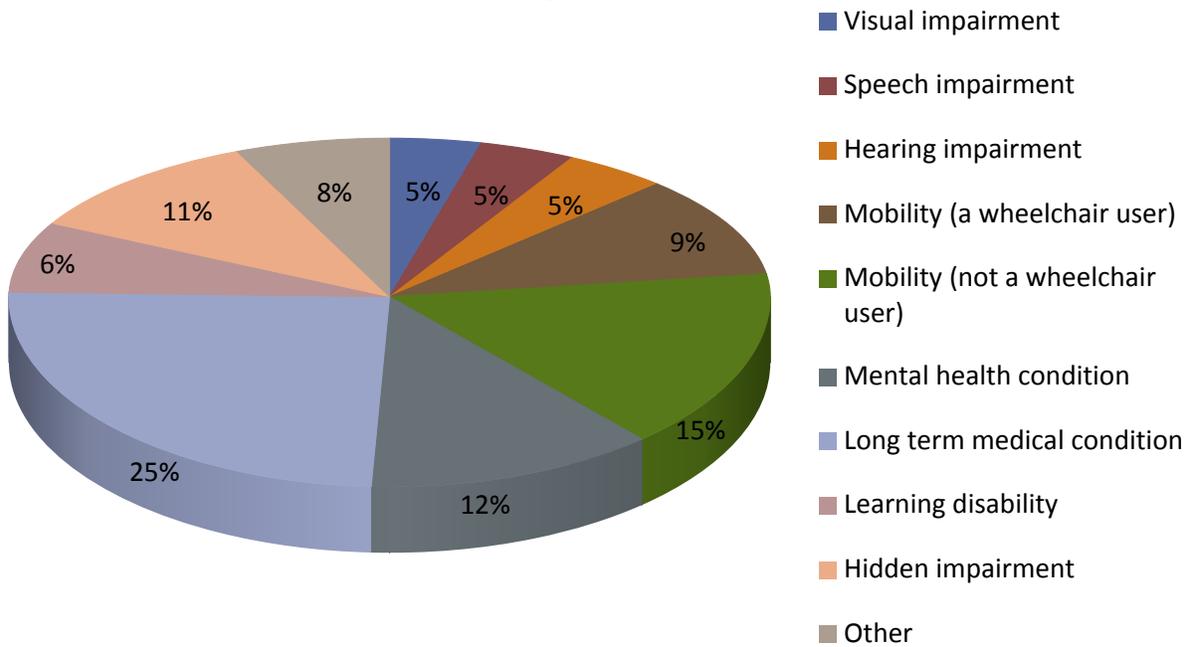
### Religious belief



### Disability



### Impairment



### **Outreach events attended**

Grays Big Lunch  
Tilbury Fun Day  
South Ockendon Fun in the Park  
Village Beach  
Coalhouse Fort WW1 Event  
Orsett Show  
Over 60s Club  
St Stephens' Fun Day  
Stifford Clays Primary School Fete

## Acknowledgement

The Fairness Commissioners would like to thank everybody who has contributed to this report.

This includes the public sector officers, partners, local businesses and the hundreds of residents who have fed back their thoughts and feelings about Thurrock.

Special thanks go to the Strategy and Community Development team for the coordination of this report and the organisation of the Commission meetings and the *Summer of Listening* events.