

Agenda Item:



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| Name of Committee: | Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee |
| Date of Meeting: | 06/03/2019 |
| Relevant Scrutiny Committee: | Homes and Safe Communities |
| Report Title: | Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy (Housing) - Six Monthly Monitoring Report |
| Purpose of Report: | To update the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee on progress implementing the Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy (Housing). |
| Report Owner: | Nick Jones - Housing and Strategic Projects Team Leader |
| Responsible Officer: | Miles Punter - Director of Environment and Housing Services |
| Elected Member and Officer Consultation: | This report will affect all Council tenants and therefore no individual ward member consultation has been undertaken. The report has been reviewed by Officers from the Legal and Finance teams. |
| Policy Framework: | This report is a matter for information and noting |

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Executive Summary:

- The Environment and Neighbourhood Strategy sets out a framework for investing in and improving Council housing estates. In the strategy, a two stage approach was adopted which combines larger capital investments which are focussed on a small number of larger estates with lower level, resident led environmental improvements.
- Regular monitoring reports have been reviewed by Scrutiny and all of the key actions have now been completed. Appendix 1 highlights each of the actions. Work has therefore started are reviewing the Strategy and considering changes required to drive further environmental improvements to Council housing estates.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1** That the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee note the six monthly monitoring report in relation to the Operational Delivery Plan for the Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy (Housing).

2. Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1** To ensure that the actions in the Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy are progressed and the external environment on public housing estates are maintained to a good standard.

3. Background

- 3.1** The Environment and Neighbourhood Strategy was approved by Cabinet in February 2017 and incorporated feedback from the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee. One of the recommendations was to provide six monthly monitoring reports to the Homes and Safe Communities Committee. This report therefore updates members of progress against the actions identified.

4. Key Issues for Consideration

- 4.1** A key principle of the Strategy is around targeting investment in environment and schemes in order to achieve a significant impact. On that basis, budget provision has been set aside to undertake estate improvement works at Buttrills estate (phase 2 and 3) with additional sums set aside at Williams Crescent, Irvine Place and Owens Close the year after and then Gibbonsdown in 2020/21.
- 4.2** The approach taken to working up the detail of the schemes involved consultation with tenants regarding priority themes i.e. security, car parking, provision of open space, play areas etc. These ideas were then translated into proposals and be subject to further consultation- to ensure the environmental investment meets the needs of local people. This approach will be developed further and tweaked to reflect lessons learnt and this will form the basis of a toolkit to support future investment.
- 4.3** At the Buttrills estate, following a wide ranging consultation with local tenants and residents, a programme of works was agreed, the contract has been let and contractors are on site. The improvements being carried out include: new roofs, replacement windows, upgrades of communal areas, external wall insulation plus external landscaping. Significant progress has been made already but work will continue on site in phases 2 and 3 over the next 12 months.
- 4.4** Alongside the capital budgets for larger schemes, there is a smaller annual revenue budget set aside to support resident led environmental schemes in other areas. To date this has paid for raised flower beds at sheltered housing schemes, benches, changes to bin storage areas, community noticeboards etc.
- 4.5** The physical appearance of estates was also identified as a priority in the strategy and a 'photobook' has been developed which is a set of agreed environmental standards used to grade the quality of estates and drive improvements. Regular estate walkabouts are also an important part of improving standards and a more formal programme of walkabouts is now in place so tenants have the opportunity to take part or engage with their Neighbourhood Manager when they are on site.
- 4.6** A number of community 'helping hand' events have taken place as part of the Initiatives to improve the appearance of estates. These have involved tenants, contractors and partner agencies and have been very well received. At Gibbonsdown, a rubbish amnesty resulted in the removal of a large amount of rubbish and household items which had been building up in homes, outhouses and gardens. The events have been an effective means of raising the profile of the Neighbourhood teams and enabled staff to establish themselves as a key point of contact and build relationships with the tenants. A toolkit for running

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these events has been developed and will improve the success of future events in different areas.

- 4.7 An important element of the strategy is estate action planning. The development of tailored estate action plans which pick up local issues and priorities is underway and draft action plans are in place for ten estates.
- 4.8 Finally, there are still some changes to be made regarding the use of the smaller pot of revenue money for estate improvements. There are some good examples of this fund being used to make improvements to recycling and rubbish disposal at blocks of flats, however there is scope for further publicity of this funding so tenant groups across the Vale can make applications to fund creative solutions in their area.

5. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

Long term

- 5.1 The Strategy ensures that a planned approach is taken towards the long term investment in Council housing estates. This ensures that they remain vibrant and viable places to live.

Prevention

- 5.2 The approach to environmental improvements will help minimise crime and anti-social behaviour, it will also improve residents' sense of security and promote more community spirit and pride.

Integration

- 5.3 The Strategy supports a holistic approach to estate improvements and requires colleagues in Housing and Assets to work together with a range of other teams and agencies, including Parks, Keep Wales Tidy, South Wales Police, Safer Vale etc.

Collaboration

- 5.4 The Strategy recognises that a number of factors contribute towards effective neighbourhoods and sets out a framework for several Council teams ie Assets, Neighbourhood Management and Repairs- to work together with residents to deliver a programme of estate improvements.

Involvement

- 5.5 Resident involvement is key to the effective delivery of the objectives in the Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy. The Strategy therefore takes account of feedback from tenants in terms of what is most important and how priorities should be decided but also requires staff to work closely with local people to develop environmental improvement schemes on different estates

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6. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 6.1** Significant financial support has been set aside to deliver the objectives in the Strategy. This includes provision of a £8.25m budget for environmental and estate improvement works over the course of the next three years (which forms part of the Council's WHQS investment commitments). Revenue budget has also been set aside to fund two Community Investment and Involvement Officer Posts to take the lead in community engagement and drive a range of environmental improvements. Lastly, participatory budgets of £64,000 per annum have been set aside to fund smaller scale estate and environmental improvements identified by local residents and groups.

Employment

- 6.2** There are no direct employment implications arising from this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 6.3** There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

7. Background Papers

OT None

Operational Delivery Plan

Objective 1: Increasing safety of residents and homes

| Action | Start date | Finish date | Progress | Status |
|--|------------|-------------|--|--------|
| Allocate a pot of money specifically to address tenants security concerns, allowing purchase of deployable CCTV cameras, additional lighting, more secure fencing etc. | March 17 | July 17 | <p>Estate budgets have been top sliced to create a pot of £8,000 for security measures.</p> <p>Deployable camera was used at Central Estates and Buttrills estate to monitor on going anti-social behaviour (ASB) problems. Cameras have proved effective in reducing ASB and improving residents' sense of safety. Specification for cameras currently being reviewed in order to improve surveillance (including sound recording, night vision and allowing longer distance coverage). Demonstrations received from suppliers and the case for increased level of investment is being considered.</p> <p>All new ASB cases are being assessed to establish if any security/ target hardening measures would assist to alleviate problems and decisions are made on a case by case basis.</p> | |
| Review published crime statistics and liaise with Police and Safer Vale to identify key issues on Council estates | Sept 17 | Dec 17 | <p>Close partnership working in place with Safer Vale, including joint visits, case reviews and problem solving.</p> <p>New information sharing project is in place where South Wales Police send daily reports of crimes and incidents which relate to Council owned properties. This information enables the Housing Management team to identify issues at an early stage and work with the Police and other partners to resolve problems before they escalate. Crime statistics also being reviewed as part of the Neighbourhood Plans- which identify key concerns and priority actions for different estates.</p> | |
| Adopt secure by design principles for all Council new build developments | April 17 | Sept 17 | New build properties at Francis Road incorporated secure by design principles. In addition, future developments at Holm View and the Brecon Court will also incorporate the principles. | |
| Re tender empty property security contract | April 18 | Dec 18 | No longer appropriate. There has been a reduction in the use of empty property security which reflects fact that long term empties have now been refurbished and re let. Only in exceptional circumstances are steel shutters or alarms used to protect empty properties. Current levels of expenditure mean the service does not need to be subject to formal procurement exercise. | |

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| Run focus groups with tenants who have expressed a concern regarding security in order to identify local priorities that can make a difference | April 17 | July 17 | Local consultations and meetings taken place with residents at Fairoaks and Central estates regarding ASB. Package of measures including CCTV, increased Police patrols etc. have been adopted. Security concerns continue to be discussed with existing tenants groups as part of their standard monthly meetings. A good example is at St Luke's Avenue, Penarth where the Police have attended the residents' board meeting and discussed concerns of residents and talked about how they can work with local people to address crime and the fear of crime in the local area. | |
| Develop estate action plans for larger estates to set out responses to residents' concerns | Feb 17 | Feb 18 | Draft estate action plans have been developed for many of the larger estates which include a range of socio economic data, information about the housing stock and demographics of the people who live there. The Housing Management team have consulted with local tenants about these plans and are in the process of agreeing priorities for future actions. | |

Objective 2: Improving the appearance and cleanliness of the community environment

| Action | Start date | Finish date | Progress | Status |
|---|------------|-------------|---|--------|
| Schedule monthly estate inspections/walkabouts in advance and publicise dates and times to tenants | April 17 | Dec 17 | Estate walkabouts are now taking place at most estates and a system of estate grading is underway. This involves grading estates against an agreed standard. The standard also breaks down into different elements e.g. car parks, garage areas. Dates and times for estate walkabouts have been shared with tenants and there has been some take up, with a small number of people taking part. | |
| Encourage tenants to take part in estate walkabouts, including consideration of incentives | April 17 | On going | Time credits (which can be redeemed at a range of outlets and leisure facilities) are being offered to tenants who take part in estate walkabouts and other community activities. There has been an increase in the number of tenants taking part in some areas; however there remain low levels of engagement in other areas with no tenants taking part in some walkabouts. | |
| Review service level agreements and arrangements with Cleansing and Parks team to ensure rubbish removal and grass cutting works are carried out regularly to a high standard | June 17 | Dec 17 | There have been some issues with the cleansing and grass cutting service over the last Summer months, with delays starting the weed spraying contract, delays in getting rubbish cleared and with grass and bushes cut back. This has resulted in a number of complaints and negative feedback from Residents Boards. Discussions have taken place with Neighbourhood Services to improve response times; the quality of work carried out and to resolve billing queries. | |
| Work with Cleansing team to develop | Feb | June | Several meetings taken place with the enforcement team and a process has been agreed | |

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| process for tackling fly tipping and dog fouling and take enforcement action against offenders | 17 | 17 | and adopted to tackle fly tipping. Whilst dumping continues to be an issue in the Vale there have been reductions at the sites targeted. A number of fines have been issued to tenants who have been caught fly tipping on Council estates. It is anticipated this will serve as a deterrent to other people. |
| Identify hotspots for rubbish dumping and use CCTV to identify perpetrators | April 17 | Sept 17 | Several specific sites have been identified, including the garage courts in Llantwit Major and parts of Gibbonsdown. Regular inspections are being carried out at both sites and advice given to tenants about correct disposal. Sites are also on rota for the cleansing team to clear. |
| Review communal bin store facilities at flats to ensure residents have got sufficient means of disposing of household rubbish | April 17 | March 18 | Pilot schemes have taken place at several blocks of Council owned flats; this has involved supplying tenants with containers for waste which can be used in between collection days. This has proved effective and has resulted in less waste being piled up outside flats and reduced the cost incurred in rubbish removal arranged by the Housing team. Further works will be considered for different locations on a site by site basis- dependant on the local issues and resident preferences. |
| Work with Visible Service to target publicity and education campaigns towards Council tenants | April 17 | March 18 | Several community events/ roadshows taken place at Gibbonsdown, Dinas Powys, St Athan and Rhoose aimed at raising awareness of rubbish disposal and recycling, including providing recycling materials. |
| Provide recycling materials free of charge to all new tenants at start of their tenancy | Feb 17 | On going | Packs provided to all new tenants and left in the property prior to the tenant moving in. |
| Hold annual 'best garden' competition for tenants to include categories for best individual garden and best street | April 17 | Oct 17 | Best garden competition has taken place and winners have been announced at the recent Festivale event. |
| Target overgrown gardens and encourage and support individual tenants to keep their garden in good condition | April 17 | Oct 17 | Housing staff have been undertaking garden inspections across the Vale and have targeted tenants who have not kept their garden to an acceptable standard |
| Research scope for a garden service to assist disabled or elderly tenants | Sept 17 | May 18 | Discussions underway with 'Gibby Greenfingers' the tenant volunteer group who manage the Treharne Community garden. They have recently carried out garden work at sheltered complexes and are looking to expand this work to elderly and disabled tenants across the Vale. In addition, a number of focus groups have taken place to explore options of creating a social enterprise which could take on responsibility for cutting communal grass and |

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| | | | gardens of vulnerable people. | |
| Develop a photo book which sets out different environmental standards and allows consistency in recording | Feb 17 | May 17 | A photobook has been completed using a variety of photographs to define different environmental standards. This has been rolled out for use by front line staff and is used during monthly estate walkabouts. | |
| Use photo book to grade environmental standards on all Council estates | May 17 | Dec 17 | The Photobook is in place and all estates have been graded. | |
| Record the estate grading's as part of performance reporting and target improvements on estates with lower grading's | Dec 17 | On going | Gradings are in place for all estates and changes in standards are monitored on a quarterly basis. | |
| Consult tenants and produce business case for a communal cleaning service to improve the cleanliness of shared areas in flats | April 17 | March 18 | Scope for communal cleaning service is hampered by the fact there is a condition in the current tenancy agreement, which makes it the responsibility of tenants to clean communal areas. As a consequence, any service would not be eligible for Housing Benefit. This action will be put on hold pending the introduction of revised tenancy agreements under the Renting Homes Wales Act. | |

Objective 3: Increasing opportunities to access open spaces

| Action | Start date | Finish date | Progress | Status |
|--|------------|-------------|---|--------|
| Map all open/ green space on housing estates which is owned by the Housing team | July 17 | June 18 | All Housing land is highlighted on the council's mapping system. This is being used to identify plots of land for potential community use | |
| Undertake resident consultation regarding specific plots of green space to identify possible uses | July 17 | Dec 17 | Consultation has taken place with some residents groups regarding the use of green space by community groups. At two separate sites in Coldbrook (Stratford Green and Hathaway Place), resident consultation events and activities have taken place in order to identify residents' priorities and get volunteers on board to support a grant application to improve green spaces. In addition, tenants at Catherine Mezey House in Penarth are working with the Council to improve the communal areas. | |
| Explore grant funding opportunities to secure additional funding to improve specific green spaces, including Treetops in Gibbonsdown | July 17 | Dec 17 | The Community Garden at Gibbonsdown is open again and is being managed by a new group of tenants and residents. Although the part time worker is no longer employed, the Housing team have supported the residents to become a formally constituted group and put in place a range of process governing the use of the garden. It is popular with residents | |

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| | | | and at least 20 individuals volunteer on a regular basis. In addition, the group are working with other agencies including support providers who use the garden to support vulnerable clients. | |
| Prepare a business case for the development of a community garden at Margaret Avenue, Colcot | April 17 | Aug 17 | The grant application for the Community Garden at Margaret Avenue was not successful. A number of volunteering days have taken place recently involving the Colcot residents association, Parks and the local School where volunteers have tidied up the land, painted the fencing and look at installing raised beds and low maintenance play equipment e.g. mud kitchen, sand pit, tyres etc. Provision has been made in the Environmental Improvement budget- to make further improvements to the space and a number of options are being developed in conjunction with local residents. | |
| Develop 2 pilot projects to bring unused areas of land into use by local community | July 17 | Dec 17 | <p>Consultation has taken place with some residents groups regarding the use of green space by community groups. Grant funding was secured (section 106) to develop a parcel of green space adjacent to Oakfield School in Gibbonsdown. Staff have worked with the school, other partners and local residents to establish a steering group to coordinate the project. Work has now been completed and is proving successful amongst school children and local people.</p> <p>Plans are also being developed to improve the communal garden and green spaces at Buttrills to give people more ownership over green spaces and try and engender a sense of community pride. This work is being carried out in partnership with the local Residents Board and politicians.</p> | |
| Establish links with range of agencies e.g. Keep Wales Tidy, Ground works Trust and develop a toolkit to support Environmental Projects | April 17 | Dec 17 | Housing team participate in quarterly task group meetings involving Visible Services, Keep Wales Tidy etc. | |

Objective 4: Increasing community engagement and residents pride in their area

| Action | Start date | Finish date | Progress | Status |
|--|------------|-------------|--|--------|
| Encourage tenants to participate in estate walkabouts, including possibility to use incentives | April 17 | On going | Estate walkabouts are now taking place at most estates and a new system of estate grading is being used. This involves grading estates against an agreed standard. The standard also breaks down into different elements e.g. car parks, garage areas. The system has been rolled out all estates and is helping to drive improvements in appearance | |

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| | | | Dates and times for estate walkabouts have been shared with tenants and there has been some take up, with a small number of people taking part, however there are plans for more publicity in the next tenant newsletter | |
| Schedule and hold a series of community clean ups across the Vale including in rural areas | Feb 17 | Dec 17 | Rubbish amnesties and skip days have taken place in a number of areas including Barry, Penarth and Llantwit Major. These have been very popular events and have led to improvements in the appearance of estates | |
| Develop pro forma for tenants and groups to apply for funding from estate budget and also criteria for prioritising bids | April 17 | Aug 17 | Draft criteria and proforma's have been developed to enable tenants and groups to apply for funding from the estate budgets. This will also enable Officers to prioritise bids. | |
| Promote estate budgets to residents and support tenants to develop projects and secure funding | April 17 | Sept 17 | A set of criteria has been developed along with a process and forms to be used. This is being promoted to local groups and partners and will be advertised more widely in the next tenants' newsletter. | |
| Develop toolkit for undertaking community clean ups e.g. how to promote events, how to engage residents, which agencies to engage, how to source skips etc. | Feb 17 | April 17 | Toolkit is in place and has been used to plan the recent community clean ups. | |