

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee	27 November 2013
Subject: Community Projects on Estates	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Information

Summary

- This report tells Members about a range of community projects which have taken place on particular housing estates in 2012 and 2013.
- Most of these projects have been run in partnership with Waste Watch, under their 'Our Common Place' programme, and their report of the work they have done is attached as Appendix A. They worked with local staff and residents to run projects on three estates; Golden Lane, Avondale Square and Dron House.
- The Housing Service has also launched its own Good Neighbour Scheme, on the Middlesex Street Estate. This is now being extended, first to Golden Lane, and then to all our estates.
- The success of the community work led to the creation of a 2 year Community Development Manager role to work with all estates to encourage volunteering and develop projects to bring the community together.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. From extensive consultation, we know that one of the things our residents value most about their estates is that they are safe, friendly places to live. Nevertheless, in recent years, we have listened to residents who feel that the estates no longer have the sense of community spirit that they used to, and that neighbours no longer look after each other as much as they did in the past.
2. Much of this is simply the impact of modern living. Families are dispersed and people work longer hours, with many more women, who might in the past have supported neighbours, working outside the home. Technology, whilst having many benefits, can cause social isolation.

3. Housing officers felt that it would be useful to trial some community development work on specific estates to see if we could support and encourage residents to come together to support each other and become more involved with their estate, so that they had a stronger sense of ownership and belonging. We wanted to have a 'green' theme to some projects to develop stronger support for recycling and environmental sustainability.
4. Crucial to the success of any projects would be persuading residents to volunteer in their community, and so SPICE have been an integral part of this work throughout, using time credits to reward and motivate and helping us to promote volunteering.
5. Waste Watch was already doing some work with residents on Golden Lane Estate on environmental projects, and we felt it would be sensible to build on this partnership. They had already developed a programme of community building for social housing estates called "Our Common Place", and we felt this was a good model. We commissioned them to continue their work on Golden Lane, but also to work on two other estates. Avondale Square Estate was chosen as our largest estate, and Dron House because there had been some anti-social behaviour there. This was being tackled by managers, and we felt that residents would benefit from some additional support.
6. At the same time, we set up a pilot Good Neighbour Scheme at Middlesex Street Estate, to link volunteers wishing to help their neighbours with vulnerable people and newcomers to the estate. We have worked in partnership with Broadway and Community Service Volunteers on this project, which was provided with seed funding from the Small Grants Scheme.

Our Common Place

7. The 'Our Common Place' programme ran from June 2012 for one year. The aims we agreed with Waste Watch for the work were:
 - To engender a sense of ownership of the estate by involving people in caring for it;
 - To encourage residents to respect each other and their environment;
 - To engage particularly with young people and short-term residents, to encourage consideration for neighbours and for their estate;
 - To improve the appearance of the estate through environmental projects;
 - To promote energy conservation, recycling and environmental responsibility.
8. £25k funding for the projects was provided by the Housing Revenue Account, with a further £5k being contributed by the City's Recycling Team.
9. Waste Watch started their year by engaging with staff and residents, running workshops, meetings and drop in sessions and going door to door to seek views and ideas. Through this process of listening to people, they developed posters which set out the values of the people living on each estate, to provide inspiration for projects. They then held an exhibition on each estate to discuss these values and officially launch the programme.

10. The next part of the process was for residents to identify the projects and initiatives that they wished to have on their estate. Waste Watch facilitated this, but the emphasis throughout was that the residents decided what they wanted and were in control, not Waste Watch or the City.
11. As a result, a programme of initiatives was developed for each of the three estates. This was adapted during the year, as priorities changed and in response to practical issues. A detailed description of the projects can be found in the 'Our Common Place' report attached at Appendix 1, but they included:
- The establishment of a composter, with training and promotion across the estate, at Golden Lane;
 - A Christmas event and summer barbeque at Dron House;
 - The setting up of a community garden at Avondale Square, with plots for individuals and families as well as for all residents;
 - A gardening Buddy scheme at Golden Lane;
 - Bingo sessions to bring together sheltered housing residents at Avondale Square with neighbours elsewhere on the estate;
 - A toy and book swap as part of the Golden Lane Christmas Fayre;
 - A project at Avondale Square to collect memories and thoughts about living on the estate from residents and to produce a CD of these. The title of the CD was taken from a quote from one long-term resident who said "The estate has changed.....and so have I!".

12. A year is a very short time in community development terms, and the amount which could be achieved was, inevitably, limited. Although Waste Watch carried out pre and post project surveys, responses were low and it would not be possible to draw conclusions based on statistical evidence. However, there has been considerable positive anecdotal feedback, which has been encouraging. Quotes from residents about the projects include:

"Golden Lane had its community networks consolidated as a result of the project and this helped strengthen our community."

"Being part of the Dron House Film Club has helped me meet my neighbours who I'd never made an effort to build a relationship with due to coming home from work and making no effort to get to know the community I live in."

"I am now more confident at meeting people, and have a desire to encourage children to get more involved in community projects."

"I have increased my sense of value of my local community."

"We knew we could do things like this as a group of residents but it has been your involvement that has made it happen. Being involved in the project has made us think differently."

"It was nice to get involved and to know someone was looking out for residents needs in some way. Having things like this happen are great for taking loneliness away."

I have lived here for 14 years and there has never been any community at Dron House before this.”

Good Neighbour Scheme

13. The Good Neighbour Scheme was set up by officers at Middlesex Street Estate to see if we could encourage people to support individuals in their community. We felt that by providing support and a framework for people, we would make it easier for them to volunteer.
14. The scheme recruits volunteers and matches them to vulnerable people who would like some support, or to newcomers who would appreciate a welcome. As well as promoting the scheme, we provide guidelines, so that volunteers have clear boundaries and understand their roles, and ongoing staff support. Working with Community Service Volunteers, we provide training for the volunteers, including in safeguarding issues, and we also organise security checks. We offer expenses and are providing equipment for tasks like gardening.
15. Good Neighbours may undertake a range of volunteering. Some might focus on befriending – simply calling in to see an isolated neighbour and perhaps taking them out occasionally. Some run errands, such as fetching library books, posting letters and doing small amounts of shopping. They might introduce a newcomer to the estate to neighbours or take them to an event or estate meeting, to help them settle in. Others are happy to do light gardening on behalf of neighbours. The Scheme has also encompassed a gardening group, which works on communal gardens for the benefit of all residents.
16. All Good Neighbours receive time credits for every hour of time that they give and can spend these on a variety of local activities.
17. The Good Neighbour Scheme is currently involving a small number of residents but is steadily growing. Residents at Golden Lane Estate started some ‘buddying’ as part of the Our Common Place programme and we are now supporting them to establish this as a Good Neighbour Scheme. There has been considerable interest from other estates, and we now propose to roll the scheme out further over the next 2 years.

Next steps

18. The outcomes of the pilot community projects have been encouraging and we will now be building on this work. As part of the Estates Management Restructure, it was agreed that a post of Community Development Manager would be established on a two-year, fixed-term contract. The purpose of this post will be to extend and embed the use of time credits in the City and its estates, and to work with staff and residents on all estates to develop projects which will strengthen communities.
19. 50% of the funding for the post is coming from the Community & Children’s Services Department, rather than the Housing Revenue Account, as the post will

be promoting time credits across the City, not only on our estates. Although the operational management of the post will be carried out within Housing, the role and job description has been developed jointly with SPICE, and the programme of work will be managed in partnership with SPICE.

20. Part of the role will be to help residents take on long-term responsibility for the continuation of projects. We hope, for example that, eventually, residents will co-ordinate and run their own Good Neighbour Schemes. This will require support and capacity building but will benefit residents by giving them new skills and experience, and will allow the work to continue beyond the 2 years of the Community Development Manager post.

21. At time of writing, interviews for the post have not yet taken place. We hope to be able to verbally inform Members of the appointment and the new Community Development Manager will present reports to the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee to update them on progress during the two year period.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Our Common Place – Community Development Projects on Estates, City of London 2012/13

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