

# ESTATE WALKABOUTS AND RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In March 2007 Westlea Housing Association [WHA] adopted a policy of monthly estate inspections and quarterly Estate Walkabouts, i.e. housing officers accompanied by residents, these to be advertised in advance in 'Home' magazine and on WHA website.

1.2 The necessity for estate inspections arises from the regulatory framework within which [WHA] operates.

The Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate under the terms of Key Line of Enquiry No6 Estate management requires for an excellent level of service that landlords shall "*systematically inspect all estates working with local residents and relevant partners....*" and identifies a series of specific issues to be considered.

1.3 In addition to the above, landlords are required to '*provide regular, meaningful and accessible feedback on its performance and issues of local concern to residents, such as estate inspections....*'

1.4 The Tenant Services Authority [TSA] is moving towards a different approach. Their method is that landlords shall work in partnership with their tenants and other providers to help promote social, environmental and economic well-being in the areas where they own properties.

1.5 The Resident Inspector Group were asked by the Neighbourhood Housing Manager to look at the quarterly estate walkabouts as it was felt they were not effective in involving residents in the management of their neighbourhoods.

1.6 The objective of the Resident Inspector Group has been to examine the matter in a rational manner, assess the actual level of resident involvement, problems or reasons for lack of involvement and issues that are of significance to residents.

1.7 Simple methodologies were chosen. A short questionnaire was produced [see appendix A] and used to test the views of the Disability Forum [DF], The Older Persons Forum [OPF]'s and a limited face-to-face household survey was also carried out to check attitudes of non-involved residents. In addition members of the Group shadowed Housing Officers carrying out Estate Walkabouts and also carried out unaccompanied "mirrored" Estate Walkabouts.

## 2. RESULTS OF SURVEY (Appendix B)

2.1 In response to Q.1 asking if the respondent was aware of the advertising of forthcoming Estate Walkabouts, DPF response was a 100% positive virtually the same for OPF but only 50% on the door to door survey.

2.2 Question 2 asked if the respondent had taken part in any Walkabout but the replies were overwhelmingly negative. DPF a 65% **No**, OPF 80% **No** and door to door a 100% **No**.

2.3 Those who had been involved in reply to Q3 had a series of concerns but grounds maintenance was a common issue, litter which is closely related was a second, with property maintenance and anti social behaviour followed closely behind.

To balance this however 82% of OPF had no problems worth reporting.[Q4]

2.4 The response to Q5 was very mixed. In reply to the question – are you interested in taking an active role in your neighbourhood? DPF – **Yes 44%, No 26%, maybe 30%, OPF Yes 38%, No 43%, Maybe 19%**. The door to door **Yes 28%, No 55% maybe 17%**.

2.5 Q6 asked if additional WHA personnel or other representatives should attend Estate Walkabouts with residents.

There was overwhelming support for the attendance of Maintenance Section, Local Councillors and police/Community Support Officers.

2.6 Finally respondents were asked what they thought were the most important matters to be investigated on an Estate Walkabouts. Litter and dog fouling was seen to be the highest priority, anti-social behaviour second and grounds maintenance third.

### 3. RESULTS FROM SHADOWING AND MIRRORING EXERCISES

3.1 Members of the Resident Inspector Group shadowed two estate walkabouts. They observed that while residents came out during the walkabout with specific issues for the housing officer, they did not join in the walkabout.

3.2 It was also noted that participants needed to be physically fit to take part as they are lengthy procedures.

3.3. One inspector had difficulties finding staff while another was unable to take part in a walkabout as there was no evidence of the advertised one taking place.

3.4 Not all the issues raised were the responsibility of Westlea's to resolve. Typical issues raised during these observations concerned dog fouling and litter. In some communal areas residents heard that there were not enough resources to keep on top of these problems.

3.5 Members of the Resident Inspector group also mirrored 2 walkabouts by walking the advertised route of the walkabout without staff to assess whether the same issues were picked up by staff and residents.

3.6 A follow up meeting with the staff who had carried out the walkabouts in these areas suggested that similar issues were picked up. Residents saw evidence of how issues were logged and actions allocated following a walkabout.

#### 4. OTHER INFORMATION

4.1 A WHA Housing Staff walkabout Review Meeting in May 2010 found that the present regime was very labour intensive, over-stretches resources housing staff and maintenance surveyors and has an annual cost in excess of £34,000.

4.2 At a focus groups on estate management in March 2010 residents were asked how they thought estate standards could be integrated into walkabouts. The report on the focus groups concludes 'participants felt a more proactive approach to encouraging local communication would be more effective'. Comments from residents ranged from wider promotion of walkabouts, including the housebound, working with other agencies and showing that it makes a difference.

4.3 At a meeting to discuss the TSA Approach to regulation on 7<sup>th</sup> July residents were asked what Westlea could do to make improvements relating to Neighbourhood and Community, Neighbourhood Management and Local Area Co-operation (TSA Standard 4). A number of different suggestions were put forward and the two that related to walkabouts proposed increasing the profile of walkabouts and taking a more pro-active approach, 'knocking on doors' to involve residents during walkabouts.

#### 5. FINDINGS

5.1. It would seem that residents already active in some form of Resident Involvement are well aware of the notices relating to forthcoming Estate Walkabouts and a reasonable percentage (DPF 44% OPF 38% ) were interested in taking an active role in their neighbourhood. Yet only 36% of DPF and 21%OPF have ever been involved in an Estate Walkabout. Door to Door is even more disappointing, 28% expressed an interest in becoming involved but this translated into zero involvement in Estate Walkabouts.

5.2. Group Members were aware of complaints by residents, through the questionnaires, focus groups, consultation on TSA standards and personal experience of resident inspectors themselves, of the lack of visible presence of Housing Officers on the advertised dates of Estate Walkabouts and even some scepticism that they even took place.

5.3. The Group did not see any evidence of any system existing whereby residents could be advised of actions taken following an Estate Walkabout.

5.4. Similarly the Group was not aware of any direct evidence of any increase in Customer Satisfaction with the appearance and quality of their immediate environment solely due to the regime of Estate Walkabouts.

5.5. It must be concluded therefore that the criteria set out when the policy on Estate Walkabouts was originally agreed (July 2007) have not been met.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Estate Walkabouts at present are not fulfilling their remit to involve residents in their neighbourhoods and not meet their original criteria of increasing customer satisfaction.

6.2. Actual resident involvement in Walkabouts is minimal although there are claims of a lack of any visible presence.

6.3. The recommendation of the Resident Inspector group is that estate walkabouts in their present form should be reviewed.

6.4 To test the viability of estate walkabouts as a means for involving residents in the management of their estates, the following is recommended:

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

IN A PILOT AREA FOR A LIMITED PERIOD ESTATE WALKABOUTS CONTINUE AS NOW BUT RESIDENTS ARE GIVEN ADVANCE NOTICE BY HAND DELIVERED FLYERS. HOUSING STAFF TO WEAR HIGH VISIBILITY CLOTHING DURING THE WALKABOUT. RESIDENTS TO BE ADVISED OF THE OUTCOMES OF ANY ACTIONS RESULTING FROM THE WALKABOUT.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

FOR ALL REMAINING AREAS DURING THE WINTER MONTHS, OCTOBER-MARCH, ESTATE WALKABOUTS SHALL BE SCALED BACK TO A SINGLE VISIT.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

DURING SPRING 2011, THE PILOT AREA WALKABOUT BE REVIEWED AND A DECISION MADE ON THE FUTURE OF ESTATE WALKABOUTS AS A WHOLE.

6.5 To consider other methods of involving residents in the management of their estates:

**RECOMMENDATION 4**

FORM A RESIDENT-LED WORKING GROUP TO CONSIDER A RANGE OF METHODS TO INVOLVE RESIDENTS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THEIR ESTATES OR NEIGHBOURHOODS.

Report written by Eddie Peckham on behalf of the Resident Inspector Group.

August 2010

The Resident Inspector Group: Toni Andrews, Roy Bristow, Eve Crook, Patricia Denyer, Alison Desouza, Bob Edmonds, Eddie Peckham, Sam Turner