

Communities Scrutiny Commission

8 February 2021



Report of: Growth and Regeneration Directorate

Title: Estate Safety Group Project update

Ward: City-wide

Officers Presenting Report: Martin Owen

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Recommendation:

That the Communities Scrutiny Committee note the report.



1.0 Summary

1.1 The Estate Safety Group (ESG) has been established as a task and finish group with its main purpose to increase safety for residents who live in high and low rise blocks of flats. The project will also improve the 'look and feel' in and around blocks; to make the buildings look more desirable places for our residents to live in. There are over 500 high and low rise buildings around the city which house approximately 10,000 tenants.

2.0 Context

2.1 The ESG group was formed as part of an initiative to improve the look and feel of high and low rise blocks around the city. The idea for the group came via the former Executive Member for Housing, former director and an active leaseholder who had previously worked with the former member. Initial discussions started in Jan 2019 with the group's first meeting taking place in September of that year.

2.2 The ESG was formed before the Moving Forward Programme – transforming the way the landlord function is delivered – had started and identified a number of quick wins to improve the look and feel in and around blocks.

2.3 The resolution of quick wins was dependent on internal and external services working closely together. However during the process, opportunities for better coordination and improved communication between internal and external services were identified and work to improve joint working will continue and is outlined in next steps below.

2.4 The ESG has been paused for over twelve months, mainly due to the pandemic but also to align it with the Moving Forward Programme where one of the six priorities for residents was improving the security and appearance of homes and estates.

3.0 Progress to Date

3.1 The ESG first met in July 2019 and undertook a tour around housing stock, primarily in the central and south areas of the city. The inaugural ESG meeting was held in September 2019 and the group have four met times, the last one in January 2020. The table below summarises activities and discussions held by the group:

Activity	Date	Progress
Tour of BCC stock	July 2019	Mini bus tour of BCC stock – Kingsdown, Easton, Hartcliffe, Bedminster to help build a picture of the differences between areas of the city
Inaugural ESG meeting	September 2019	Agreed Terms of Reference, membership, discussed a vision for the group, feedback on learning from others, themes of issues faced, how we measure the project
Site meeting	November 2019	Identified short term improvements around pilot blocks
Second ESG	October 2019	Agreed a vision, what good looks like, blocks for pilots, how we communicate with residents
Third ESG	November 2019	Update on pilots, identifying other improvements in and around blocks, indicative costings for CCTV and concierge service plus benchmarking with other organisations

Forth ESG	January 2020	Site visit with door entry manufacturer to help design out crime, updates on pilots and measuring their success, planning for site visit to Tower Hamlets
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3.2 Presentations, agendas and minutes of the ESG meetings are available on request.

Commentary

3.3 To gain a current position for the project, Housing Officers from across the city identified issues in high and low rise blocks. These were themed into the following areas:

- Anti-social behaviour
 - Drug dealing and drug taking (in communal areas)
 - Intimidation – youths congregating in stairwells, tailgating residents into blocks, asking to be let in
 - Prostitution
- Rough sleepers in bin rooms and communal stairwells – this is prevalent in central areas of the city. It is rare for rough sleepers to be found in the north or south of the city
- Graffiti – widespread in the central areas but can appear in any part of the city
- Housing stock is ageing and requires investment

Some examples of issues faced are below:



Measures

- 3.4 ESG discussed measures for the project and the group recognised that the main success measure is based on residents' perception; do residents feel safer, are there less unauthorised people visiting the block, do the blocks look and feel better? The ESG also developed more tangible measures:
- Resident satisfaction
 - Number of tenants spoken to by Housing Officer
 - Reports of ASB reducing
 - Numbers of reports to police reducing
 - Length of tenancies sustained
 - Number of properties let first time
 - Reduction of graffiti reported and cleared
 - Action plans developed for each block
 - Improved cleaning standards/caretaking score
 - Number of tenant groups set up
 - Number of new lights fitted around blocks
 - Number of walkabouts with residents in attendance
 - Service level agreements set up for each block in conjunction with residents

Learning from others

- 3.5 Other housing organisations from around the country have shared their approach to making high and low rise blocks safer and more desirable places to live. Leeds City Council (LCC) have developed and implemented a High Rise Strategy in order to address similar issues to those faced in Bristol and created a Standard High Rise Management Model which includes:
- A Block Action Plan for all 116 high rise blocks outlining the main priorities for that block. These actions are owned by Housing Officers who works with partner services to address actions
 - Smaller patch sizes for Housing Officers
 - Daily sweeps of blocks to identify issues
 - Weekly surgeries held within the block
 - Monthly block inspections undertaken by the relevant Housing Officer, to flag issues within external/communal areas, with tenant involvement where possible
 - Additional contact with known vulnerable tenants – ensure support needs are in place
 - Targeted training for housing officers in the management of flats/communal areas
 - Proactive repairs service to better ensure that issues are dealt with quicker and before they become bigger problems
 - Improving communications – through online and social media, email bulletins to communicate the latest news and issues
- 3.6 Homes for Haringey described a similar approach to LCC with:
- Reduced patch sizes for housing officers

- Local action plans for blocks
- Awareness campaigns and community engagement in block
- Support for vulnerable individuals and ensure the right support is in place to help sustain tenancies
- Looking at other ways to design out crime such as restricting access to floors in the block

- 3.7 Luton still provide a concierge service to some of its multi storey blocks but acknowledged this was costly and other organisations have withdrawn this service, mainly due to cost.
- 3.8 A meeting with Design out Crime Officers (DOCOs) who represent Secured by Design (a national police prevention initiative that aims to reduce burglary and other crime using the principles of good design and appropriate physical security) was held to explore other solutions. The DOCOs provided leads to companies who manufacture door entry systems; some models have in-built video surveillance to help reduce unwanted visitors into blocks of flats. The DOCOs provided contact details for a representative for Tower Hamlets who has successfully implemented measures to reduce anti-social behaviour in blocks of flats. A visit to Tower Hamlets with ESG was scheduled for mid-March 2020 but was postponed due to the Coronavirus outbreak.

Options

CCTV and Concierge Service

- 3.9 BCC did offer a concierge service in several inner city BCC blocks but this was withdrawn due to the cost of the service. As outlined above, very few organisations now offer this service, mainly due to cost and since the introduction of CCTV cameras.
- 3.10 Bristol has a network of CCTV cameras covering much housing stock but there are many blocks of flats that do not have cameras for a variety of reasons including cost, lack of infrastructure to support a camera network and residents in some blocks voting against installation. Indicative costs for installing one camera in a block of flats are in the region of £50,000.

Partial Closure Orders (PCO)

- 3.11 A partial closure order is a formal sanction that allows the police and the council to quickly close premises (or communal area) which are being used, or are likely to be used to commit nuisance or disorder and lasts for three months with an option to extend for a further three months. In July 2019, three blocks of flats in Easton – Lansdowne Court, Twinnell House and Croydon House were granted closure order status meaning that anyone found in the blocks uninvited could be arrested on the spot. These were the first closure orders for Bristol although others including LCC have used them. The success of PCOs is reliant on residents reporting issues to the police and the police being reactive to the reports.
- 3.12 Whilst there is no formal measurement of the PCOs success, the perception from the Police, Caretakers and Housing was there were less unauthorised 'visitors' in to the blocks and a reduction in the number of informal complaints being received. There were no reports of rough sleeps in these blocks during the PCO. The Twinnell House closure order was not extended and the police feedback that they had received no calls

reporting 'trespassers' in the block. BCC is continuing its work with the police to consider the next steps.

4.0 Achievements

4.1 Since the inception of the ESG, the following achievements have been made and some photographs showing before and after are below:

- Created a vision for the group – 'Creating world class blocks where residents want to live and are respected, that are clean and safe and contribute to sustainable communities.'
- Developed and agreed measures
- Commenced pilots in four blocks (Carolina, Fremantle and Middleford, Millmead) to try different approaches to the management of tenancies in multi-storey flats
 - A block action plan developed
 - Text messages sent to residents notifying them that the Housing Officer would be in the foyer to record issues. Sessions also attended by local PCSOs
 - Generally highlighted benefits of use of bulk text messaging which is now being used as standard to send short messages to residents is has been rolled out across Estate Services
 - Changed door entry codes
 - Added new external and internal lighting
 - Had rubbish removed
 - Removed graffiti
 - Trees pruned
 - Joint walk-throughs of blocks with Housing Officer, Caretakers, Bristol Waste
 - Better links with Streets Intervention service
 - Security patrols
 - Briefed the Exec member for Housing on progress

BEFORE



AFTER



5.0 The Big Tidy

- 5.1 Big Tidy is part of the Council's Bristol Clean Streets campaign to bring the sparkle back to streets and covers 16 wards and 150 lower super output areas targeting the most challenging issues. Big Tidy crews are working in neighbourhoods across Bristol to tackle issues such as littering, tagging, fly-tipping and fly-posting, and overgrown areas of vegetation.
- 5.2 Recently Housing and Landlord Services agreed to fund a dedicated Big Tidy team who will identify and make significant improvements to longstanding environmental problems across the housing estate. Through integrating BWC Waste Minimisation, the Big Tidy will be able to develop strategies and methods for increasing the amount of recycling that is collected from the housing estate and flats in particular.
- 5.3 A pilot will begin in Hartcliffe in February and teams from H&LS services will work alongside the Big Tidy team, providing a presence in the area which will provide opportunities to undertake further tenancy management work including contacting residents to ensure the appropriate support in place for them to pay their rent. A

programme of work for the four month pilot is being developed and this will be communicated to residents and other stakeholders in due course.

- 5.4 The team will also identify other low level maintenance issues that may fall outside of the scope of the proposal and will be addressed during Big Tidy delivery.

6.0 Moving Forward Together

- 6.1 The Moving Forward Together (MFT) programme – with the aim to improve the way services are delivered across H&LS and put residents at heart of the housing service – started early 2019. Between September and November 2019, over 3,000 residents and staff were surveyed and the six priorities identified were:

- 1 Being more visible and having a local presence
- 2 Listening to what residents say
- 3 Making it easier to contact us
- 4 Keeping our promises
- 5 Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour
- 6 Improving the security and appearance of our homes/estates**

- 6.2 The work undertaken by the ESG will now link into priority six and outcomes of the project will cut across other priorities above.

7.0 Next Steps

- 7.1 A decision regarding the future of the ESG and how it aligns with the MFT programme will need to be made in conjunction with the Executive Member for Women, families and Homes and senior officers.

- 7.1 In the meantime, Estate Standards (ES) will be developed for blocks across the city which will encompass the management and upkeep of the physical environment; giving blocks a grading score. Housing Officers will own the ES plan and work collaboratively with internal and external services to ensure standards are improved and will be part of a continuous programme of improvements across estates. Photographs showing exceptional standards will be used to drive up the quality of blocks. Next steps will include:

- Housing Officers will be more visible in the area where they work
- ES will be developed with residents who live in blocks
- Reintroduction of estate walkabouts where key stakeholders will be in attendance such as the local beat officer, residents, councillors and other services who contribute to the management and upkeep of the area
- Walkabout action plans will be created and owned by Housing Officers
- Walkabout schedules to be displayed in block noticeboards
- Text messages to be sent to residents informing them of walkabouts

8. Policy

Not applicable

9. Consultation

a) Internal

Not applicable

b) External

Not applicable

10. Public Sector Equality Duties

- 10a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
 - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
 - iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
 - tackle prejudice; and
 - promote understanding.
- 10b) This report is for information only.

Appendices:

None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**Background Papers:**

None