

THE EXECUTIVE

27 JULY 2004

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF HOUSING AND HEALTH

RYLANDS HOME IMPROVEMENT ZONE

FOR DISCUSSION

This report has been produced to inform Members of the progress of the Rylands Home Improvement Zone.

Summary

This report highlights the current progress of the Rylands Home Improvement Zone. It looks at the positive outcomes that have been achieved on the estate and the lessons that have been learned for future schemes. It also highlights the involvement of other council services in helping improve the Rylands Estate as a whole. Finally it highlights some of the further initiatives that are being planned on the estate in the near future. The list below sets out the positive outcomes that have occurred on the estate due to the Home Improvement Zone.

- 100% of properties offered advice (1578)
- 102 properties (6.5%) fully inspected and provided with survey
- 93 energy efficiency surveys passed to Warmzones for analysis
- Insulation levels, age of wiring, defective porch roofs and kitchens in lean-to's are the main areas of non-decency on the estate
- £5000 grant from Private Sector Housing Team towards Alley-gator scheme for the estate
- £10,000 grant towards tree planting scheme from PSHT
- Main graffiti hot-spot dealt with
- Youth Offending Team taking on garden clearance works
- Reduction in dumped cars in area
- Increase in take up of dropped kerbs in the area
- Increased awareness of security issues in the area

Recommendation

The Executive is asked to note this report and allow officers to publish the Rylands Home Improvement Zone Interim Report, attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

Reason

The Executive should allow the report to be available to the general public because it highlights the continued commitment of the Private Sector Housing Team, and the Council as a whole, to Improve Health, Housing and Social Care and to make Barking and Dagenham Cleaner, Greener and Safer. In particular it highlights the council's commitment to all residents in the Borough and its continued support to vulnerable home-owners living within the Borough.

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1. **Background**

- 1.1 As part of the Private Sector Housing Strategy produced in 2003 the Private Sector Housing Team introduced a Home Improvement Zone on the Rylands Estate Dagenham. The aim of the zone was to offer private home owners free home surveys to give them the opportunity to bring their homes up to the decent standard. This report has been produced to highlight the progress of the zone so far and to set out recommendations for future Private Sector Housing regeneration projects.

2. **Conclusions**

- 2.1 The Private Sector Housing Team set out to give residents on the estate the opportunity to have a decent home. By contacting every home in the estate and giving every resident the option of having a home survey and subsequent help with the results of that survey then the team have achieved what they set out to do.
- 2.2 Our presence has also seen other environmental issues on the estate highlighted and new schemes are now going on site to make the estate a better place to live. We therefore believe that so far the scheme has been a success.

3. **Consultation**

River Ward Councillors.

The following Background Papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- Private Sector Housing Strategy - April 2003

Rylands Home Improvement Zone Report in Full

Home Improvement Zone 1 Interim Report

Introduction

The Home Improvement Zone (HIZ) was set up as part of the Private Sector Housing Strategy in August 2003. The basis for the work was to give owner occupiers the opportunity to bring their property up to the decent standard.

The scheme also represented an ideal way for the Private Sector Housing Team to work towards three of the Community Priorities. The project helps to “improve Health, Housing and Social Care”, “Make Barking and Dagenham Cleaner, Greener and Safer” and “Raises General Pride in the Borough.”

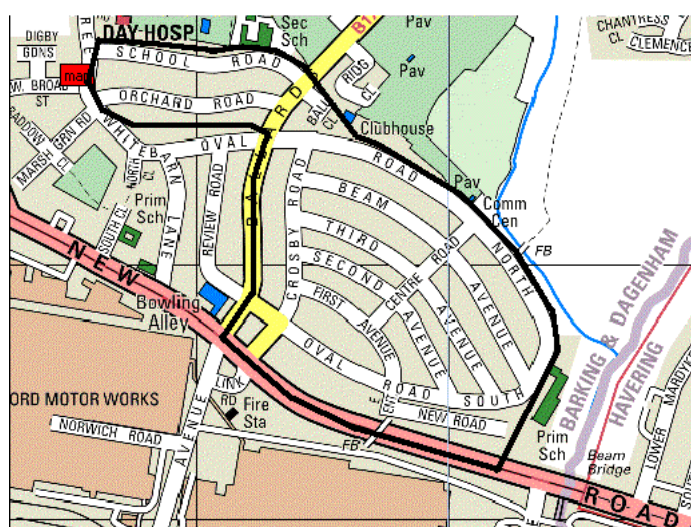


Image 1

The Rylands Estate (see image 1) was chosen as the first home improvement zone for a number of reasons.

- 1) The estate is made up almost completely of private sector housing. This simplified the task of identifying which properties to approach. (There is one Council owned property)
- 2) The estate is adjacent to a number of current regeneration projects that would be complemented by the Home Improvement Zone.
- 3) The estate had been identified as having a large proportion of properties that were below the decent standard
- 4) The residents of the estate feel that they have been ignored by the council in the past and there is a feeling of isolation from the rest of the borough.

The zone was first publicised in September 2003 and staff began to carry out decent homes surveys at the same time.

This interim report has been produced to evaluate the impact of the Zone so far. It will look at the successes that have been achieved and also look at how we can ensure we do not repeat the mistakes we have made on future schemes.

Home Surveys

The basis of the zone was to inspect resident's homes. The Home Improvement Officer looked at three areas within the home; Home Improvement, Energy Efficiency and Security.

Home Improvement

The Home Improvement aspect of the inspection looked at what works would be required to bring the property up to the decent standard. (See Appendix 2 for a definition of the decent standard)

A basic description of the work required was set out on a survey letter and residents were then requested to contact the Home Improvement Officer if they would like to receive further help with the work and also if they would like to see if they were eligible for some form of financial assistance. (See Appendix 3 for example of a home survey)

Within the properties on the Rylands the main failure to meet the decent standard was in the insulation levels within the roof space. Other areas of concern within the zone were the flat porch roofs which were prone to water penetration, kitchens built in "lean-to" constructions on the backs of properties and the age of the electrical wiring within the property.

Energy Efficiency

Whilst carrying out the survey the Home Improvement Officer also fills in a Warmzones form. This form is sent off to the Warmzones team who are based with Newham Council. (The LBBB has a contract with Warmzones Newham to provide an energy efficiency grants service). The forms are processed by Warmzones who contact any clients who may be eligible for energy efficiency grants or benefits advice. The most common forms of assistance are increased loft insulation and cavity wall filling where applicable. As well as filling in the form the Home Improvement Officer also gives basic advice on everyday energy saving ideas.

Security

The Home Improvement Officers also offered basic advice on the security of the home. In particular they highlighted the importance of complying with any insurance cover that residents might have. Fire safety was also discussed at this point to emphasis that any security measures should not supersede fire safety.

Outputs

| Properties | Number | % of zone |
|--------------------------------------|--------|-----------|
| Offered Advice | 1578 | 100 |
| surveyed | 102 | 6.5 |
| Energy Efficiency survey's completed | 93 | 5.9 |
| Offered Garden Clearance | 62 | 3.9 |
| Accepted Garden Clearance | 7 | 0.4 |

ODPM Guidance

There have been a number of publications from the ODPM which sets out the governments views on how Local Authorities should be tackling the problem of non decent homes within the private stock. The most recent publication “A Decent Home, The definition and guidance for implementation” sets out a number of objectives that the council needed to comply with. This next section sets out briefly where the Home Improvement Zone has helped the council comply with the ODPM guidance.

- “The Spending Review 2002 extended the decent homes target to the private sector with the focus on reducing the proportion of vulnerable households living in non-decent homes.”¹

The Home Improvement Zone has helped the council comply with this point by targeting a specific area with a high proportion of vulnerable households.

- “Local authorities should bear in mind the importance of the decency standard and in all cases provide advice and support to owners to encourage them to achieve it”²

The Home Improvement Zone helped the council comply with this requirement by targeting the estate as a whole for advice and support and not targeting specific people within the area.

Financial Assistance

The financial assistance available is from equity release or renovation grants as set out in the Private Sector Housing strategy. There was also a further grant available, specific to the Home Improvement Zone, for £500 to cover financial advice or repair work. This grant was means tested and so far no one has taken up this type of grant.

Our equity release scheme is run by Houseproud and is a risk free way for people over 60 to borrow against the equity they have in their property.

Renovation grants are available for residents who are unable to release equity in their property and are also means tested. For further details of the financial assistance available contact the Private Sector team who can send you a copy of the “how to improve your home booklet”. This sets out in full detail the financial assistance available.

Customer feedback received

Although no formal customer satisfaction survey has been carried out as yet general customer feed-back has been good on the scheme. There has been a feeling in the past that the Rylands Estate has been mainly ignored by the council and a number of residents spoken to referred to it as “the forgotten estate.” They felt that the scheme was a good idea. Although a number of the residents who had a home inspection were ineligible for financial help they still found the scheme worthwhile. They felt that it gave them useful information on the state of their property and an idea what areas they needed to prioritise around their home. The information on security and energy efficiency were also well received.

There was some negative feedback on “Houseproud“ the equity release scheme that the borough has put in place. Residents felt that the Council should be putting grant money forward as they have in the past. There was a feeling that equity release was a punishment for residents that have saved all their lives to save something for their children when other residents have never saved or worked and therefore get everything for free.

¹ A Decent Home, The definition and guidance for implementation Feb 2004, ODPM

² A Decent Home, The definition and guidance for implementation Feb 2004, ODPM

The Houseproud scheme is taking time to become established because of these types of feelings; however when it becomes clear that the scheme is the only option take up should hopefully increase.

Overall however the views of residents were positive and they appreciated the opportunity to discuss their housing maintenance issues with a Technical Officer free of charge. There was a definite mistrust of “cowboy builders” on the estate and so free, clear technical advice was very much appreciated.

Involving others

Other departments were involved in the project at different points. This helped to offer a broad spectrum of resources to the area.

Highways were carrying out planned maintenance within the north east area of the zone and offered 50% discount on a drop kerb. The Home Improvement Officers pro-actively encouraged residents to use this scheme. This helped ensure that a number of residents who use their front gardens for off street parking benefited from the discount. The community as a whole also benefited from an environmental perspective.

The Home Improvement Officers also pro-actively reported dumped or untaxed cars in the area. This led to a number of dumped cars being removed from the area and untaxed cars being taken off road.

The Street Warden Service is also involved on the estate. The two teams have worked together to deal with one particular graffiti hot spot.

The parks service and the regeneration section were also involved in providing information for the open day to help increase residents awareness of the current regeneration projects happening in the area.

Extra Activities

There were a number of activities and projects that have come about because of the scheme these are set out below.

Open Day

An open day was held in February which was well attended by residents of the Rylands Estate. This helped to increase awareness of the scheme and also provided residents with information on the Beam Valley Parks regeneration and the South Dagenham regeneration scheme.

The event was catered for by Triangle Community Association which operates from the local community hall. Many residents used the event as an opportunity to discuss other issues that were affecting the local area and these issues were directed to the relevant departments the next day.

Alley-gator Scheme

The Rylands Estate has a network of back alleys. These are mostly unused and are often the site of dumped rubbish. They also constitute a security risk as the alleys provide easy unobserved access into peoples back-gardens. The Private Sector Team have put forward £4800 to kick start the alley-gator scheme in the area. This will provide eight gates for the alleys to stop intruders. The street warden service, who are managing the scheme, will also be organising a clean up of the alleys before the gates are put in place. Any residents who wish to continue using the alleys will be provided with an access key.

Youth Repatriation Scheme

The youth repatriation scheme is due to get underway at the end of March. This is a scheme aimed at tidying up some of the front gardens in the area. The PSH team is paying for the Youth Offending Team to supply one youth worker for one day a week. This youth worker will be taking a group of Youth Offenders on to the estate to work on the front gardens. This will be a free service to the residents that agree to the work. The youths carrying out the work will have connections to the Rylands wherever possible. If this scheme is a success the PSH team will look to continue their work with the YOT on any new projects that are instigated.

Tree planting scheme

The Private Sector Housing Team has recently put in place £10,000 +VAT funding for a tree planting scheme on the estate to help with the environmental outlook. This scheme will be managed by 'Groundworks' who may also be able to generate funds from Thames Gateway and other bodies.

There is the potential for this scheme to be converted to look at other environmental improvements if the tree planting scheme is met by local opposition. One of the possibilities will be to create a visual identity for the Rylands, possibly including an emblem or crest. This could then be used on signage to give the estate a feeling of community and belonging.

Exit Strategy

The zone will need to be wound down in the near future so that staff and resources can be committed to new areas for renewal works. It is important that this is done in a controlled manner and that everyone who has applied within the correct time table is supported throughout the procedure.

Officer time will need to be allocated to cover this work once the zone has been completed. Those grants that do eventually go on site will require officer input throughout their life. This work will be covered as part of the routine grants workload.

The Youth Offending Teams start date has also been delayed so it will be a good idea to factor in some additional time for them to carry on working on the gardens. This will require minimal officer input from Private Sector Housing.

The tree planting scheme will also take time to implement as it will require a consultation period and is subject to a seasonal timeframe.

There will therefore need to be overall time set aside for the Team Leader Area Improvements to continue managing certain aspects of the scheme once it is formally closed down.

Lessons Learned

The lack of consultation with residents of the estate before the zone was declared proved a hindrance to the works. The Consultant that introduced the idea of Home improvement Zones referred to consultation before the zone was declared but when the leaflets went out it became apparent that the residents had not been consulted. At this point it had become too late to delay the start of the scheme. One effect of the lack of consultation was that a number of residents ignored the leaflet drop as a Council project that they thought had nothing to do with them as they were owner occupiers.

The importance of consultation was further demonstrated by the effect the open day had upon the take up of surveys etc. The second leaflet was designed to appear more relevant to the occupant. The leaflet helped to attract around 50 people to the open day who were able to look at what was happening on and around the estate and give their opinions on what needed to be changed. The involvement of the community association also helped to advertise the day and inform more local people about the zone. The leaflet and the open day also encouraged more people to have the free surveys carried out.

The scheme as a whole has been a proactive attempt to help the residents of the Rylands estate. Where residents have wanted our help and advice we have achieved a number of good outcomes. Unfortunately there are still a number of properties on the estate that are eyesores and in need of large scale high costing works. Although two of these properties are currently being considered for enforcement there has been no overall enforcement agenda on this scheme. In future projects the role of enforcement will have to be considered so that a more robust scheme can be produced. However if enforcement is to be used it also follows on that schemes will need to be smaller in nature to take account of the extra work involved.

It has become apparent whilst working on the estate that there has been a general increase in the amount of work carried out on properties on the estate. It was also apparent that there was an increase in property being put up for sale and a slight decrease in property being advertised to let. It is obvious that the estate has begun to turn round for the positive and the private market, with a little help from the council, is ensuring that the estate is regenerating.

Conclusion

We set out to give everybody on the estate the opportunity to have a decent home. By contacting every home in the estate and giving them the option of having a home survey and subsequent help with the results of the survey then we have achieved what we set out to do.

Those that asked for our advice and help have received it and will continue to do so. The team's hard work on the estate has meant that we have been able to bring forward the agenda of decent homes into a very large section of Private Sector Housing. This is an agenda that has previously been restricted to social housing and that fact that the idea is now in the minds of a number of home owners should be applauded. This is despite the fact that the decent homes standard is not enforceable legislation within the private sector.

Although there has been a negligible take up of financial help within the zone this can be accounted for and is not necessarily a negative. Equity release is a new idea for Barking and Dagenham and will take a while to be accepted. Previously residents have been used to a grant regime where they are given money to carry out works. Equity release is a way of ensuring residents are investing in their own properties and this culture change will take a while to settle in. It is also worth considering that having had a survey some residents who may not qualify for financial assistance may finance works to bring their property up to a decent standard. (An exit survey will hopefully be able to establish where this has happened) Even some residents who do qualify for equity release via Houseproud will look elsewhere in the market as more favourable rates are available elsewhere. The fact that we have introduced the idea of equity release to them is in itself a positive move.

This positive move has to be backed up with a sustained investment in advertising for the scheme and a united message from the council that this is the form of assistance that the council endorses above any other. This message will be further highlighted by Houseproud who will begin a London based advertising campaign in the autumn and the introduction of equity release schemes for home-owners under the age of 60 in the near future.

Finally once the zone has been wound down an exit survey will be conducted to establish what effect the zone has had on the area and how future area based, private sector based, regeneration projects should be established and managed.

Our presence has also seen other environmental issues on the estate highlighted and new schemes are now going on site to make the estate a better place to live. We therefore believe that so far the scheme has been a success.

(ODPM decent home definition)

A decent home is one which is wind and weather tight, warm and has modern facilities.

A decent home meets the following four criteria:

a - It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing

Dwellings below this standard are those defined as unfit under section 604 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act).

b - It is in a reasonable state of repair

Dwellings which fail to meet this criterion are those where either:

- one or more of the key building components are old and, because of their condition, need replacing or major repair; or
- two or more of the other building components are old and, because of their condition, need replacing or major repair.

c - It has reasonably modern facilities and services

Dwellings which fail to meet this criterion are those which lack three or more of the following:

- a reasonably modern kitchen (20 years old or less);
- a kitchen with adequate space and layout;
- a reasonably modern bathroom (30 years old or less);
- an appropriately located bathroom and WC;
- adequate insulation against external noise (where external noise is a problem);
- adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats.

d - It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

This criterion requires dwellings to have both effective insulation and efficient heating.

Home Improvement Survey

Reference: H60/123495/PJN
Phone: 020 8227 5632
Fax: 020 8227 5799
Minicom: 020 8227 5755
E-mail: paul.j.noble@lbbd.gov.uk

16th January 2004

Dear

The Rylands Home Improvement Zone

Re: ***** , Dagenham

Further to my visit to your home today various issues were discussed and I advise the following:

Survey & Report:

- 'Decent Homes' Standard

The overall condition of the property was good. However it would not currently reach the Governments 'decent homes' standard unless the following repairs/replacements were done:

1. Renew the defective asphalt roof and fascia above front entrance.
2. Rake out and repoint the main chimney stack.
3. Prepare and repaint all previously painted surfaces to the front elevation.
4. Renew defective and insecure windows to various locations.
5. Recover the flat roof to the rear addition. Identify the condition of the decking.
6. Incorporate insulation when recovering the flat roof.
7. Upgrade insulation to the loft void to 200 mm

If these above items were remedied then the property would achieve the 'decent' standard.

- Security

1. Ensure a locking mechanism is incorporated within the new windows.

Continued...

- Energy Efficiency

1. Upgrade insulation to the loft void as in decent standard.
2. Incorporate insulation when renewing coverings to front and rear flat roofs.

Your form has been sent to "warm zones" they will contact you in the near future if you are eligible for assistance with energy efficient measures.

- General maintenance, future improvements and repair comments:
 1. Renew the defective rear entrance door and frame
 2. Clear hall cupboard of household effects to prevent fire hazards.
 3. As a smoker and living alone install a smoke alarm to the ground floor.
 4. Renew the spent battery to the first floor one.
 5. Check your security measures comply with the conditions of your household contents insurance policy.

Grant Availability:

You may be eligible for a Home Improvement Grant, please contact an officer for further information.

Please note that even if you are not eligible for a grant the Home Improvement Officers will be able to assist you with other areas of your work if you wish.

If you are considering having any building work done that is not mentioned within this report please remember that we can provide:

- A list of builders that have signed up to the Councils' Standard.
- A building Contract

Thank you for allowing us to survey your home. If you would like any further assistance on the points raised please contact one of the Home Improvement Officers.

Yours sincerely

Paul J Noble
Home Improvement Officer
Private Sector Housing Team