Housing Estates Investment Plan

Selecting Neighbourhoods for Improvement

1. The Council is committed to ensuring that the methods for neighbourhood improvement set out in section 4 of the report are targetted at neighbourhoods needing them most and where the application of these methods will be most effective. This document sets out in more detail the assessment process and criteria that will be applied to select neighbourhoods.

Overarching criteria

2. Neighbourhoods that may be potentially suitable for comprehensive regeneration do not fall within the purview of this policy and are therefore outside the scope of selection.

3. Neighbourhoods may be brought forward for improvement and have their priority increased where they attract resources and a programme of activities outside the frame of this policy, providing there are sound business reasons (of a predominantly housing nature given sources of funding) and the evidence shows Community Strategy goals would be furthered by designating the neighbourhood as an Action Area for Improvement.

4. At the outset officers will not look to initiate an improvement programme on the Council's largest estates (save in wholly exceptional circumstances), given this is a new approach and the Council will seek to move by degrees.

5. In deciding which neighbourhoods to bring forward officers will be mindful of the findings of independent research, insofar as they indicate that proven methods of improvement are contingent on (1) area size and (2) the geographic boundaries of improvement areas equating with the spatial brief of the main delivery agents.

Defining a neighbourhood

6. Neighbourhood boundaries will in all cases encompass Council housing estates and in most cases will be delineated by estate boundaries. There are several reasons for this:

- working at an area level on housing and the physical environment is known to bring a wide range of benefits
- deprivation data disproportionately maps onto the borough's social housing estates
- the main delivery partner for housing and the physical environment is Housing Services whose operational brief, where it is spatial, is in relation to housing estates

7. In relation to size, neighbourhoods will be defined as areas made up of 100 or more dwellings with 100 or more social rent tenants in keeping with the improvement methods which so far have been mainly tested on larger populations.

8. Where a number of small estates are in the selection pool and are in close geographical proximity and all evidence high levels of need, the viability of them

being treated as a single neighbourhood for improvement purposes may be considered.

9. Where high deprivation is mapped onto an estate below 100 units, and that estate is in close geographical proximity to an estate identified for improvement, officers will consider the viability of the former constituting part of the neighbourhood for improvement.

10. As expertise is gathered in the use of estate improvement methods, future reviews will consider the feasibility of extending this policy (1) to estates below 100 units and (2) to neighbourhoods not dominated by Council Estates and Council-owned housing and (3) to the largest estates.

The assessment process

11. Housing estates falling under the scope of this policy will in the first instance be put through a needs analysis. Needs evidence will be compiled to compare and rank housing estates that fall under the scope of the policy.

12. A shortlist will be drawn up from this exercise of the 3 neediest estates.

13. This first stage analysis is conceived as a transparent and rudimentary means of sifting out the estates most obviously requiring support, however it will be rudimentary and by no means an exact science. There will be gaps in the statistical picture as data that is not available for all estates will be excluded. This is particularly the case with sub-ward data which is of limited use once catchments fall below a certain size. Estate-level statistics on the various Community Strategy priorities will also be uneven, with some priorities well-served by data and others less so. Universal indicators while ensuring all estates are judged on the same criteria are also unlikely to capture all the complex circumstances of an individual estate, however well devised. Resource constraints, in addition, will hinder sourcing data for all the estates from databases not configured to extract such reports.

14. The top 3 estates will therefore be subjected to a second-stage analysis, involving examining further data sets which may be easier to source for 3 estates, rather than 22. The size of the estate and its main needs will be considered at this point. This will be in terms of whether the improvement methods proposed are likely to have much purchase, and also, at the outset, whether the estate is of an appropriate size for conducting a trial, i.e. not one of the largest.

15. The selection process will be repeated as and when the Council is ready to bring forward the next neighbourhood for improvement, subject to review of the policy and any amendments arising from that review.

The Assessment Tool

16. The assessment tool to be used is set out below.

17. The estates will be accorded a rank for each of the evidence measures. The placings will be collated and averaged out, with weighting applied.

18. Levels of weighting reflect the differing quality and quantity of data for the various community strategy priorities: higher weighting for priorities well represented by data is to ensure the evidence is given due influence. Higher weighting has also been accorded to priorities that encompass the type of needs the improvement methods

are most likely to combat – e.g. poor area satisfaction, high crime and ASB, tenure imbalance, concentrations of unemployment and benefit dependency – bearing in mind the twin goal of targeting assistance where it is most needed and where the methods will have most effect. Low weighted priorities acknowledge the fact that the core improvement approach will not be a principally area-based one, though these will remain as priorities for the Council and its partners and the expectation will be that area-based support complements those core approaches.

19. The theme 'Promote home ownership and housing opportunties' will receive the highest weighting. This is for the reasons expressed in the paragraph above i.e. to ensure resources are channelled to neighbourhoods that would benefit most from the methods and to reflect the quality and quantity of the data. Additionally, it is because the biggest cost in any programme will be physical improvement which will be paid for from housing funds, and would, thus, require any Council estate receiving such funds to demonstrate that it is the neediest for housing investment, over and above what other non-housing needs the area or the residents may have.

Assessment Tool for Selecting Estates for Improvement

Community Strategy Priority	Reason to intervene at a neighbourhood-level	1st stage analysis – Evidence Measure	2nd stage analysis – Evidence Measure	Weighting in overall assessment
Provide a top quality education for all	Many children on the estate need support at school	% of pupils on the estate registered as having special educational needs	% of 7 year olds achieving Level 2 or above in reading, writing and maths in local primary schools % of 11 year olds achieving Level 4 or above in Key Stage 2 in English, maths and science in local primary schools	5%
Tackle crime and ASB	The estate has high levels of crime and ASB	Rate of ASB per 100 residents Average incident of crime (i.e ABH, criminal damage, residential burglary, drugs possession) per head of population		20%
	Graffiti is a problem on the estate	Incidence of graffiti per 100 dwellings		
Deliver a cleaner, greener borough	Graffiti is a problem on the estate	Incidence of graffiti per 100 dwellings	% of estate that is green space	15%
	Litter and caretaking are a problem	Caretaking performance on % of tasks raised and inspected		
	There is			

	insufficient green space			
Promote home ownership and housing opportunities	The estate is mainly monotenure social rented with few owner occupiers	% of properties that are leasehold on the estate Capacity to accommodate new infill housing for low cost home ownership	% of properties that are owner-occupied on the estate	25%
	There are high levels of housing need	% of tenants awaiting a transfer in Bands A-C (excluding under-occupiers and beneficial transfers) % of households in Bands A-C (excluding under-occupiers and beneficial transfers) % of residents applying as homeless as an annual average based on figures for last 3 years % of tenants served with a NOSP (Notice of Seeking Possession) % of new lettings annually to first-time tenants or those that have lost homes in the recent past, based on figures for the past 3 years.		
Setting the framework for a healthier borough	Residents suffer more with their health than elsewhere in the borough	% of residents engaged with children social care (per 100 dwellings) % of residents engaged with adult social care (per 100 dwellings)	Ambulance call outs per 100 dwellings as an annual average based on figures for last 3 years (where sub-ward data can be meaningfully applied)	5%

		Incidence of hospital admissions per 100 population as an annual average based on figures for the last 3 years (2006-2009)	Teenage pregnancy rate per estate % of adult working age population on JSA, Income Support, Incapacity Benefit or Employment and Support Allowance (where sub-ward data can be meaningfully applied)	
Delivering high quality, value for money public services	The area is unpopular	% of residents satisfied with the area* % of new lettings to existing tenants annually, based on figures for the past 3 years.	% of leasehold property that appears to be buy-to-let	15%
	Residents are dissatisfied with services	% of tenants satisfied with the general condition of their property* % of tenants satisfied with the estates management service*		
	Residents have a high take up of costly acute services	% of residents applying as homeless % of residents engaged with children social care (per 100 dwellings) % of residents engaged with adult social care (per 100 dwellings) Fire brigade call outs per 100 dwellings as over the last 5 years Incidence of hospital admissions per 100 residents as an annual average based on figures for the last 3 years	Ambulance call outs per 100 dwellings as an annual average based on figures for last 3 years (where sub-ward data can be meaningfully applied)	

Regenerating the most deprived parts of the borough	Many residents subsist on benefits, most people are on a low income, debt is a problem, and many working age residents are not in employment	% of Council tenants on Housing Benefit % of school age children receiving free school meals % of tenants in rent arrears of 4 weeks or more % of households with incomes of £20k or less	% of all tenants on Housing Benefit % of leaseholders in service charge arrears % of adult working age population on JSA, Income Support and Incapacity Benefit/ Employment and Support Allowance (where sub-ward data can be meaningfully applied)	15%

The evidence indicators

19. The measures used to assess need are by and large self-explanatory. The notes below provide more detail on those statistical measures thought to need more explanation.

20. Population data from the 2001 census is the last complete account of the resident population available at a postcode level which is the closest for data coverage of an estate. This data has been used sparingly given its age. Specifically, it has been used as the head count element in proportioning ASB incidence and hospital admissions. Figures from the forthcoming 2011 census will not be available until 2012.

21. Evidence will have more than one use. For example, numbers approaching the Council as homeless have been counted as a measure of housing need as well as to measure levels of engagement with acute, crisis services.

A Top Quality Education

Primary school data is being relied on as most local children (78%) attend primary school in the borough whereas only a third of local secondary school age residents (34%) attend borough secondary schools. For key stage results performance is collected by school, rather than residential location. This will be a 2nd stage analysis given the resource intensity of identifying what the local primary schools are for each of the respective estates in the 1st stage pool.

Deliver a Cleaner, Greener Borough

Improvements to the physical environment has proven benefits, however, there is little overarching data available on which to consider the comparative merits of one estate's needs for physical improvements - for example, in relation to being cut off and unintegrated with the surrounding local area or to spatially design out crime – against another's. For resource reasons, consideration of these factors will be limited to the 2nd stage analysis.

Promoting home ownership and housing opportunities

The number of units owned on an estate are not necessarily identical with the number that are owner-occupied. The distinction is important as independent research indicates that estate improvements gained from more home owners is dependent on them buying-to-live, rather than buying to let. Figures on current owner-occupation levels are derived from leaseholder records and whether the owner's address for service charge correspondence is the same as the property address. Where the two do not match it can be assumed that the property is not owner-occupied. This is time consuming data to collect and therefore will be reserved for 2nd stage analysis.

The main source of data for determining levels of housing need in the borough is the Housing Register, a list recording all requests for housing received by the Council. Once received, applications to the Housing Register are assessed and accorded a band between A-D, defined as follows:

Band A = Emergency and very severe housing need
Band B = High priority or urgent need to move
Band C = Households with an identified housing need to whom the Council is required to give reasonable preference under s.167 Housing Act 1996
Band D = All other applicants

Households to whom the Council is required by law to give reasonable preference include the homeless, those who are overcrowded and those needing to move for health reasons. Given the above, the significant bands for enumeration and analysis of housing need are therefore bands A-C.

Delivering high quality value for money public services

*The results of the annual Tenants Satisfaction Survey on satisfaction with area, property condition, and estate management will be used, however in accordance with the fact that the respondent sample is small these indicators will be given half the weighting they would have ordinarily received were they equal to the other indicators in the group.

The Decent Homes survey which included a questionnaire on tenant satisfaction had a greater number of respondents. It was undertaken, estate by estate across the course of the last 4 years during a period that has seen significant improvement in HFHomes service standards. Therefore survey feedback would differ depending on when it was collected on the improvement curve. The presence of this variable makes the data set unreliable for purposes of comparison.

The proportion of lets to transfer tenants will be used as an indicator of area popularity. Transfer tenants, having the benefit of a high level of security of tenure, are in stable housing, which affords greater opportunity to accumulate favourable waiting time on the Housing Register and exercise options about when and where they move than those in the same Housing Register band who are homeless, or in short-term tenure in the private rented sector or households living with friends or family, whose more precarious circumstances are likely to result in them taking lettings on estates that are less desirable.

Figures for buy-to-let will be derived from comparing the property address with the owner's service charge address. Where the two do not match it will be assumed that the property address is rented. Housing Benefit data may be used to provide further verification.