Summary report
Shaping estate inspections for consideration by residents and the estate services team - Developing a new approach

1. Introduction
The Resident Scrutiny Panel (RSP) has been reviewing estate inspections, focusing on the process and management functions. The review has concentrated on what does it feel like to residents and questioning is the inspection process delivering what both residents and officers aspire to.

The overall impression is that Homes for Haringey estates are in the main well maintained and that there are high levels of inspection by a range of different teams. This has resulted in delivering estates that are to a good standard overall. This reflects the commitment to create neighbourhoods in which people want to live.

The current performance indicators and the grading process based on the Housemark picture standard has been considered, and we would like to propose a new approach with the help of staff and residents.

2. Key observations
The RSP has been fortunate to have been given training on the estate inspection process and invited to attend a number of annual estate inspections across the borough. This has been enlightening and officers have made us feel very welcome. Without this insight and experience, we may not have been able to consider whether there is a more inclusive approach for estate inspections. The key observations:

• That there is a number of different teams inspecting estates but there is a lack of a joined up approach to planning, recording and sharing intelligence gathered.

• Feedback to residents, resident associations, councilors and colleagues following inspections is not consistent, with many officers indicating that they do not complete site reports as it is ‘just paper’ and so there is limited accountability to the person/s carrying out inspections to justify the time and cost of the inspection.

• There are templates for recording inspections but these are not used and there was no evidence that inspection teams are also utilising the app.

• Both residents and councilors who have a great deal of reason to be interested in what happens on their estates do not attend the annual inspections.

• The reasons for not attending by Councillors is that they are not given adequate notice so that they can get time off from work
to attend and that all inspections are carried out at a time to suit officers and would be better at different times either after work or on weekends.

- At the start of each inspection we were not given an explanation of what will happen and why and any feedback and progress since the previous inspection. You need to set the scene and be able to demonstrate that there is a purpose and a good reason to take part. Communication and feedback are limiting the effectiveness and impact to residents.

- Those carrying out inspections need to have a better understanding of the contract requirements placed on contractors so that they can explain issues around, plant replacements, pruning standards, weed control, and cleaning schedules.

- Those where there is a concierge the condition of communal areas and the overall condition of the estate are significantly better regards, cleanliness, and litter and bin areas. We noted that lifts were clean and doors highly polished.

- Caretakers provide a valuable service with many observed cleaning the estate and advising residents on fly tipping and safe disposal of household items.

- There are issues regards enforcement, such as where residents have taken ownership of communal gardens for private use, locking out other residents and service providers from maintaining the sites. This we picked up as being frustrating for officers and other residents especially where these areas are not being well maintained.

- Many of the estates do not have appropriate access for those that have mobility scooters and this included a lack of drop curbs and steps leading to entrances that are for communal use. These issues may adversely affect the ability of these with mobility issues being able to remain independent living in their home and having an opportunity to move around outside their home on the estate.

- The current grading system was not used or mentioned on estate inspections and the feedback from a number of officers is that it is subjective, results are determined by officers, there is little or no regard for seasonal issues, failure is often reflected on all the service departments rather than the specific service provider which means that estate officers are often faced with being considered to have failed when responsibility lies else where.

- There are different inspection processes for estates and supported housing which has resulted in some sheltered areas where people are less mobile having to live with unacceptable plant growth over paths etc. There should be one process and standard for all areas.
• Where there are active resident associations the condition of estates is better and through their partnership working with officers they are able to resolve problems and estates reflect a higher standard.
• There are resident estate monitors that complete monthly reports and submit them; they receive acknowledgement but unless they chase up there is no feedback on actions proposed or timescales for corrective work to take place.

3. Proposal
The RSP would like to involve residents who attended the Estate Inspection Focus Group and those identified through the current leaseholders’ survey to be invited to help shape a proposal for a more resident led inspection process which would include consideration of:
• Developing a set criterion for each estate and a standard that is agreed by those residents.
• Each estate to be subject to an annual inspection where an award will be made indicating whether a gold, silver or bronze award is appropriate. A team of judges to be selected and trained in the process of determining the award.
• Encourage the achieving of the award by linking a financial reward for the estate to be spent on a specific improvement that is selected by residents. Your contractors all have corporate responsibility budgets and have indicated that they would be keen to support this initiative, as it will have a positive impact on the cost of service time provided.
• Plan the annual inspection around resident availability and make it an event so that you motivate participation, have a tea and cake stall and allocate a senior member of management to attend so that the event will be seen as important.
• A plaque to be put up on the estate indicating the award, and this may go some way to pleasing leaseholders as the better the estate the greater the value of their home.
• Residents to be encouraged to have regular estate tidy days and look at encouraging local private sector organisations to provide additional volunteering to help with planting, litter picking, painting communal areas etc. This will have a positive impact on community cohesion.
• Ensure that the award process takes place when there is a level playing field regarding grass cutting, flowering shrubs etc. Avoid the autumn when leaf fall will adversely affect the area depending on the number of trees and shrubs in the area.
• Look at setting up a tool and equipment hire service for estates, so that access to equipment can support residents
Empower residents to have control and make decisions about their area.

4. Recommendations
   - At this stage look at how best to facilitate a resident and staff workshop to develop the proposal and refine the process
   - Survey estates to find out views, aspirations and commitment from residents
   - Look at how introducing a new reward process will be funded and evaluate the impact on officers’ time and resources
   - Meet with resident associations to develop bespoke criteria for their area, taking into account the need to give additional support to areas termed ‘hot spots’.
   - Look at how estate inspection data can be better collated and used
   - Make each estate set its own goals and have a plan for improvement
   - Look at engaging the youth so that vandalism etc. is minimized

5. Conclusions
   The overall appearance of our estates is good but there is not a consistent standard achieved across all estates. The Estates team work hard and have developed a service improvement plan.

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