Community Action Scheme in Grange Villa
13 January – 9 March 2014

Background

The Community Action Team (CAT) tackled a range of local housing and environmental problems in Grange Villa from 13 January to 9 March 2014.

The CAT worked alongside both local community and partner agencies to deal with a number of issues in Grange Villa including:

- improving housing standards and management of privately rented property
- dealing with empty properties
- ensuring that rubbish dumped in gardens, on streets and on waste ground is removed
- assisting with improvements to buildings and abandoned land
- investigating noise issues
- challenging under-age sales of alcohol and tobacco
- implementing energy efficiency schemes
- advising on consumer rights and dealing with cold callers

During our time in Grange Villa, the team ran a number of events where local residents, landlords and businesses could get involved and have their say. There were also a number of informal drop-in sessions. These gave anyone interested the opportunity to help identify local priorities and issues.

Residents' meeting

Members of the community were invited to attend a residents’ meeting to provide the CAT with feedback on the scheme and to give their views into areas the team planned to target. There was a discussion about the issues identified through our initial research, an outline of the proposed plans and an opportunity to ask questions and view a location map where problem areas were identified.

The priorities that were agreed with partners following this residents’ meeting were:

- improving housing standards
- the removal of rubbish dumped in back yards
• tackling void and empty properties
• making improvements to abandoned buildings and land.

**Keep Warm, Stay Safe**

Running alongside the team’s programme of action in Grange Villa was the ‘Keep Warm, Stay Safe’ project which offered residents of the area who live in owned or privately-rented accommodation the opportunity to apply for funding of up to £3,000 to help with essential energy efficiency improvements and home safety and security measures. Improvements that residents of Grange Villa could apply to get assistance with included:

• Repair and replacement of boilers
• Upgrading of partial central heating systems
• Improvements to the property insulation
• Provision of heating controls
• Handrails on staircases
• Upgrading of door and window locks
• Repairs to dangerous electrical wiring
• Fitting smoke/carbon monoxide detectors
• Improvements to lighting.

Cases were prioritised where at least one occupier is at greater risk of cold-related health conditions or other home safety risks. Residents of the area were encouraged to contact the team or attend the residents’ meeting to register their interest and apply for the funding. Approximately 25 residents of Grange Villa applied for the funding during the project.

**Drop-in sessions**

Residents were encouraged to attend drop-in sessions at Grange Villa Community Centre, Grange Villa Community Enterprise throughout our visit to Grange Villa to discuss progress and report any issues to us. Each drop-in session focused on a different topic including:

• Energy Efficiency Advice – information on how to reduce energy costs
• Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) to ensure your appliances are safe to use
• Recycling – what you can and can’t recycle in your bin
• Support for young people and their families with issues relating to drugs and alcohol from 4Real
• Trading Standards – consumer advice
At the drop-in sessions, Check4Life health trainers were also present to offer one-to-one advice on healthy lifestyles and carry out mini health checks which consisted of;

- Blood pressure checks
- BMI (height and weight) checks
- Brief discussions on lifestyle issues
- Information about services and support

**Community litter-pick**

The CAT arranged for a community litter-pick in Grange Villa which took place during half-term on Monday 17 February 2014. Junior wardens helped to clean the area along with residents of Grange Villa, local councillors and the Police and Crime Commissioner, Ron Hogg. The litter-pick was a great success, with all streets and green areas of Grange Villa cleared throughout the morning.

**Evaluation**

At the end of the scheme, an evaluation process was implemented, seeking feedback from residents and producing an exit plan to continue to deal with identified issues.

In visiting Grange Villa, we carried out the following actions;

- weekly walkabouts – identifying 153 issues of concern
- served 71 legal notices
- held drop-in sessions with CAT representatives, including displays and health trainers
- the Keep Warm, Stay Safe Initiative was undertaken to improve the health and wellbeing of residents
- a survey of private landlords on management standards was carried out
- two long-term empty homes were brought back into use
- the Fire Service carried out home fire risk checks and alarms were fitted
- there was reactive/proactive casework with Public Health and Housing, Planning, Building Control, Housing Regeneration, Environmental Wardens, Police, and Fire Services
- Junior Wardens carried out a litter pick and walkabout to identify and report any environmental issues.
- Junior Wardens, PCSO and Neighbourhood Wardens cleaned-up the children’s play area.
- Neighbourhood Wardens carried out dog fouling patrols and issued two fixed penalties.

Although we have moved onto another area, other council services and partner agencies will continue to operate in the area and we have put in place the following measures to continue to work on the areas of priority:

- the Fire Service will continue to work in the area for the foreseeable future to offer free home safety checks
- the Keep Warm, Stay Safe scheme will be completed
• the residents will be encouraged to use the new housing advice line to report issues
• Housing Regeneration colleagues will continue to pursue the empty homes with a view to bring them back into use
• Planning colleagues will continue to pursue the derelict/untidy sites
• individual casework will be seen to conclusion
• regular patrols of the terraced streets will be carried out by the Wardens
• individual casework regarding property condition and rubbish accumulations will be seen to conclusion.

Further information

For information on what and where the CAT are working currently, please visit our Community Action Scheme – Current Project webpage.

You can also find out what work the team have carried out in other areas of the county by visiting our Community Action Scheme webpage.

Contact us

Residents of Grange Villa are encouraged to continue to report any issues of concern to the CAT, either by e-mailing CommunityActionTeam@durham.gov.uk or by calling the team on 03000 261 016.