



# **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 8th AUGUST 2017**

**PRESENT:** Councillor A James (Chair), Councillors S Goodall, T Clements, C Cooke, A Couchman, M Gant, M Oates, R Rogers and County Councillor A Little

The following officers were present: Ryan Keyte (Senior Legal Officer), Janine Bryant (Scrutiny and Corporate Support Officer), John Murden, Tina Mustafa (Head of Landlord Services) and Paul Weston (Head of Asset Management - Property Services)

Cabinet Member: Councillor M Thurgood

## **15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received by Councillor J Faulkner

## **16 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the previous Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny committee held on 22nd June 2017 were approved and signed as a correct record.

*(Moved by Councillor M Gant and seconded by Councillor A Couchman)*

## **17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor T Clements declared that she sits on the Fire Authority for Staffordshire County Council.

## **18 PROCEDURES AND PROTECTION OF HIGH RISE BLOCKS**

A presentation was made to the Committee by Tina Mustafa - Head of Landlord Services, with the assistance of Paul Weston – Head of Asset Management; John Murden – Repairs Contract Manager and Paul Richins from Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service (SFARS).

The presentation outlined the position of Tamworth Borough Council in respect of Fire and Safety within all Council owned residential properties and the National Focus in the aftermath of Grenfell Fire Tragedy in June 2017. Assurance was provided to the Committee that it is business as usual for Tamworth Borough Council continuing to work closely with SFARS with whom there is already an excellent working relationship. The points discussed included:

- Reassurance letters to residents since the Grenfell Fire Tragedy
- Drop in sessions centred around Fire Safety at the high-rise social club
- Sheltered accommodation support
- Development of the Web – <http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/fire-safety>
- Freedom of information and access to Fire Risk Assessments
- Regular performance discussions with the Tenant Consultative Group
- SFARS offer to facilitate visits to support on Sprinkler system with links to David Garrick Gardens where the system is show cased

The Committee had tabled questions through the Chair and the answers discussed, as detailed below:

1. *Have all of the council owned blocks of flats been checked for cladding?*
  - a. *If yes, when were they checked?*

All the Councils owned blocks are checked in accordance with Landlord Regulatory Standards. In addition to periodic inspections by a range of housing staff, annual Fire Safety Risk Assessments (FSRA) are routinely undertaken by Graham Environmental Services. In an open letter sent by the DCLG on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017 cladding subject to testing is that containing Aluminium Composite Material (also known as ACM).

There is no Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding on the Councils landlord stock.

2. *Are fire doors fitted in all public areas of all council owned blocks?*

Yes, the fire doors are fire rated and provide a 30 minute protection. Each flat is designed to provide a 1 hour (60 minute) fire resistant compartmentalisation. Each fire door provides 30 minutes protection and in the high rise there are 2 fire doors; 1 leading from the flat onto the landing &/or corridor space plus a second fire door leading from the living space into the hallway.

- a. *How regularly are the fire doors tested?*

This is in line with Fire Regulations. The Annual Fire Risk Assessment, along with periodic inspections on flat doors, checks that these fit and close correctly and where issues are identified they are repaired within policy timescales.

3. *Are fire call points fitted in all public areas of all council owned blocks?*

There is no requirement for manual call points in the majority of Council owned flatted accommodation. Where they are required, such as in Sheltered Schemes, they are provided. There are also some low-rise blocks where alarms have been installed despite not being required. There is no requirement for manual call points in the high-rise blocks, and the installation of manual call points is not recommended.

*a. How regular is each fire call point tested?*

In line with British Standards (BS5839); manual call points, where fitted are checked weekly.

*4. Are smoke alarms fitted in all public areas of all council owned blocks and council owned properties?*

Heat and smoke detection units are installed and hard wired in all flats in accordance with British Fire Standards (Part 6: BS5839). (There are no battery operated heat and smoke detection units in any Council flats.)

Heat and smoke detectors are not fitted in all communal areas where the design is such that this is a sterile area, such as stairwells. This is also because the advice from SFARS, is that, in order to effect a 'delayed evacuation', if the fire is elsewhere in the block and tenants stay put – the flat is designed to give an hour protection to allow for rescue.

Where the Fire Risk Assessment identifies the potential for a non-sterile environment then smoke and heat detection is installed. This is the case of the communal basements within the High Rise and for some of the communal rooms within sheltered schemes. Areas do have heat and smoke detection in line with the Fire Risk Assessment.

*a. How regular are the smoke alarms tested?*

These are tested weekly in accordance with the British Standards referenced at question 3.

*5. How many fire evacuation tests have taken place in each council owned block during the last two years?*

There are Annual fire safety exercises done at the high-rise and sheltered housing schemes. It should be noted that these exercises are tailored to the type of accommodation and are run by SFARS, supported by Tamworth Borough Council.

With regard to the High Rise, SFARS have undertaken 2 exercises in the last two years, the latest on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017; which had been scheduled since December 2016. The exercise is designed to test a range of factors and is not called an evacuation test as the guidance is around delayed evacuation.

With regard to sheltered schemes, there is an annual plan, involving SFARS that tests personal evacuation planning and seeks to reassure and support residents with what to do in the event of a fire. This does include

evacuation scenarios and again there have been two exercises at each scheme over the last two years.

6. *How regularly are the public areas of all Council owned blocks checked for fire hazards?*

As indicated the Annual Fire Safety Risk Assessment is undertaken by an accredited contractor Graham Environmental Services. In addition there is a full suite of local and operational inspections undertaken by a range of housing based staff including caretakers, cleaners and housing officers. This is weekly at all flatted estates, in the case of sheltered and high-rise often daily.

We welcome feedback from Scrutiny members on the method and frequency of these checks as it is intended to build these into a formal Fire Safety Strategy, set for Cabinet approval in October 2017.

7. *Are all of the checks documented?*

Yes and they are held on a web portal currently accessed by council staff, contractors and partners. This portal details all the Fire Risk Assessments as well as checks for asbestos; legionella and fire risk. Against each block; files with photos, completed checklists and remedial action undertaken and completed is also listed.

In addition each Month, the Head of Landlord Service chairs a Health & Safety Meeting with a range of partners including SFARS (when appropriate) and Corporate Health & Safety staff to review assessments and actions being undertaken to ensure these are done in accordance with the policy and procedures.

8. *How many flats in the high rise blocks are privately owned?*

46 (as at 4/8/17). Application to purchases can be made at any time and is being promoted by the Government. The distribution of the privately owned flats is spread throughout the development with no concentration in any particular area.

9. *What is the maximum height the fire brigade can reach from outside the building?*

SFARS have confirmed their aerial appliance will reach 30meters (approximately to the 9<sup>th</sup> - storey). It should be noted the ladder is considered to be a piece of firefighting equipment and is not intended for the purposes of affecting a rescue of residents.

10. *Is the health and safety guide for the high rise flats written into the tenancy agreements?*

The Health & Safety Guidance produced in partnership with SFARS is intended to support and compliment the Council tenancy agreement. Whilst the guidance does not translate into a tenancy clause; there are sufficient clauses to tackle tenancy breaches. In fact punitive sanction have been successfully sought (including injunctions and Notices to Seek Possessions) where rubbish has been left on landings for example.

The Tenancy Agreement was reviewed in 2012/13 and was subject to detailed discussion by the then scrutiny committee. It is due for review in 2018 and will take account of any specific guidance around fire safety.

*11. If infrastructure work to fit sprinklers is taking place should this include the fitting of mains powered smoke alarms linked to the fire alarm system?*

It is understood Scrutiny committee members are asking whether alarms be linked to the planned sprinkler systems.

Sprinklers and heat/smoke detectors are not linked. Should a fire start in the flat then the heat and smoke detector would be activated alerting the tenant to leave their flat. When the temperature reaches 68 degrees centigrade the sprinkler head nearest the source of the fire will activate. The sprinkler system is linked to an alarm panel for notification purposes for SFARS so they are aware a sprinkler has been discharged and can prioritise attendance.

The answers were informed by discussions with Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Services.

Clarification was sought on a number of points, which included:-

- The register of assets that SFARS can call upon if the need arose. It was confirmed that there is an Over Boarder agreement that is set up and comes into effect if a major incident is declared.
- Training available on Fire Safety with SFARS Business Support. This is delivered to an NVQ standard with bespoke courses available, the involvement of the Tenants Consultative Group to develop the scope of the training that is wanted.

The Committee discussed a number of aspects for example periodic electrical testing; smoking at home, however, it was agreed that each tenant has a responsibility for their own safety and if following an incident a tenant was negligent then there may be a case to follow this up as a breach to the individuals tenancy agreement.

The Committee thanked the presenters for attending and their thorough work in this area.

County Councillor A Little provided an update from the Staffordshire County Strategy coordination meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2017. It has been identified that there are 41 High Rise blocks in Staffordshire. The feedback provided by the County was a complete success and congratulations were extended to all with thanks for Tamworth Borough Council for communicating well.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing Services – Councillor M Thurgood, confirmed that she was confident that Tamworth Borough Council has done everything within their power to mitigate risk if an incident similar to Grenfell was to arise within the Borough and would be prepared to respond appropriately. The focus on continual improvement and development is key to maintaining our strong position in leading the way within this area, the priority of the sprinkler system installation currently at the forefront.

Councillor A James thanked all for attending the meeting and extended congratulations on an excellent piece of scrutiny, confirming that the Committee were happy with the responses received.

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Chair