

THURSDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2017

**REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING SERVICES****COUNCIL TENANTS FIRE SAFETY POLICY 2017-2020****EXEMPT INFORMATION**

N/A

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to detail the Councils policy statement with regard to fire safety in its Council Owned housing stock.

**RECOMMENDATIONS****Cabinet are recommended to:-**

- Approve the Fire Safety Policy attached at annex one
- Delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder of Housing; in consultation with the relevant Directors; to approve development of associated action plan and procedural arrangements to deliver key policy commitments.
- Endorse the involvement of Health & Well-being Scrutiny to inform the policy development, details of presentations and FAQs emerging are shown on the Councils dedicated web area for landlord fire safety. <http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/fire-safety>
- Include an annual review of fire safety on the relevant scrutiny work-plan

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

'Living a quality life' is one of Tamworth's key strategic priorities underpinning its vision "One Tamworth, perfectly placed – open for business since the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD". Integral to this is ensuring the built environment is protected and that effective regulatory and statutory services are delivered. The national focus since the tragedy at Grenfell Tower on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 has highlighted just how important and fundamental managing fire safety is. The Council's housing stock has always been subject to robust health and safety arrangements and strict fire safety risk assessments. Over the last 3 months, led by the Portfolio Holder for Housing, in collaboration with Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Services (SFARs), corporate partners for health and safety and supported by the Councils Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny committee – the approach to fire safety has been subject to review and the approach translated into the attached fire safety policy shown in annex one.

Cabinet over the last 3 years has received a range of reports on fire safety; including reports in January 2014 endorsing the retrofitting of sprinkler suppression systems into its high rise stock as well as authorising over £125k to invest in additional fire safety measures, such as improvements to fire doors and associated compartmentalisation. Then in August 2017, endorsing further work around the sprinklers and commencement of a fixed installation

electrical testing programme across all its stock; aimed at preventative maintenance and in recognition that electrical faults are often a principle cause of fire.

Cabinet are aware of the high profile nature of the Grenfell Tower Tragedy and Officers are following the range of public inquiries carefully to ensure any learning is incorporated into its standard operating procedures. Alongside the Grenfell public inquiry, chaired by Sir Martin Moore-Bick, the Building Safety Programme and expert panel, chaired by Sir Ken Knight, is taking the opportunity to share best practice with the housing sector as matters progress. Concurrently an independent review into fire safety and associated building regulations is also ongoing. The Councils landlord service is regulated by the HCA and in August<sup>1</sup> the Director of Regulation reminded landlords of their obligations under the Home Standard confirming LAs should meet all statutory requirements relating to Health & safety, failing to do so could result in a range of Central Government interventions.

Therefore it is highly likely that government recommendations and codes of guidance around fire safety will emerge and it is imperative the attached policy remains flexible and subject to review, allowing it to develop maximising all opportunities. It is for this reason, that it is recommended that Health & Well-being scrutiny receive an annual opportunity to discuss and inform research and development in this area of the business.

Health & Well-being Scrutiny, at its meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> August 2017, endorsed the Councils approach to fire safety and principles set out in the attached policy. Scrutiny members also congratulated officers and SFARs partners co-presenting; on the immediacy and professional response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy in its communications to its own tenants and leaseholders. Copies of the Scrutiny presentation, FAQs and minutes are available by clicking on <http://www.tamworth.gov.uk/fire-safety>

The Policy attached details the strengths highlighted through Tamworth's proactive response to fire safety. Respectfully the policy may be coming to Cabinet for the first time, but the detail has been standard practice for many years, officers' recognising that capturing this on a formal basis provides a clear framework going forward.

Strengths:-

- Strong political leadership and cross party support for fire safety
- Policy statement, if approved, evidencing a clear framework for fire risk management
- Track record in service delivery enhanced by collaboration with SFARs and corporate partners through shared H&S services
- Commissioned service for 'safe and well' checks provided by SFARS to all its council properties and households
- Independently accredited third party (currently Grahams Environmental Services "GES") to undertake comprehensive annual fire risk assessments (FRA) and associated legionella and asbestos testing
- Evidence of up-to-date annual FRA and action orientated monitoring through the range of Council contractors
- Detailed and annual joint fire safety inspections of all sheltered schemes with officers in partnership with SFARs, with scheme manager focus on intensive housing and property management
- Programme of estate and routine flatted estate inspections by the network of cleaners and caretakers servicing council housing
- Financial Commitments of over £2m of HRA funding into retrofitting of sprinklers at all of its high-rise blocks and consideration of a further £1.5m in a 5 year electrical testing programme.

The fire safety policy details the above and also recognises the areas to ensure continual improvement. If Cabinet approve this policy, it is intended to produce a SMART action plan, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and the Councils Tenant Consultative Group (TCG), that ensures Tamworth continues to 'thrive' and not just 'survive' in this area of

work. SFARS would inevitably support this as will the Councils corporate health and safety team.

Action Planning Recommendations to include:-

- Successfully re-procure third party auditors to continue the approach to Fire Risk Assessments
- Re-procure home fire safety service, currently delivered by SFARs, to ensure this service continues
- Install and develop guidance around sprinkler suppression systems planned for the high rise blocks
- Develop a training and competency framework for landlord service aligned to roles and responsibilities around fire safety
- Development of mobility scooter guidance and policy that conforms to fire safety standards
- Develop the councils web site to allow for the public production of redacted FRA – so tenants and residents can view on line and actions can be monitored
- Annually scrutinise and review the policy commitments

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

**Cabinet resolved on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 2017 to approve option two (Electrical Routine Testing PIR) to allow routine checks to be completed on electrical installations and consider including an additional £306kpa during the medium term financial budget setting process to fund a cyclical 5-yearly programme. A policy change has been submitted to give effect to this recommendation.**

There are no other & direct financial implications arising from the fire policy as funding and investment for planned and reactive maintenance, concerning fire safety, is built into the usual budget setting process.

## **LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND**

The Regulatory Reform (fire safety) Order 2005 and Housing Act 2004 detail the requirements and obligations on landlords. Fire safety guidance is now also available on the Governments website and this link is on Tamworth's own pages detailing its localised approach to fire safety. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-safety-guidance>

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

Sustainability and community cohesion is a clear Council ambition and having a comprehensive approach to fire safety directly contributes to achieving and delivering quality services in this area.

## **REPORT AUTHOR**

## **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

### **APPENDICES**

#### **Annex one – Fire safety Strategy 2017-2020 (annual review)**

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<sup>i</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/639735/Grenfell - letter to NTOs.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/639735/Grenfell_-_letter_to_NTOs.pdf)