

To: Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board

On: 10 March 2020

Report by: Director of Communities, Housing and Planning Services

Heading: High Rise Blocks - update

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the on the range of measures that have been taken and are in place to ensure the safety of residents living in high rise properties across Renfrewshire.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the board:
- (i) note the ongoing investment in our high rise blocks and the measures that have been taken to ensure that effective fire safety management practices are in place at the 14 high rise blocks owned and managed by Renfrewshire Council.
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3. Background

- 3.1 Renfrewshire Council owns and manages fourteen high rise blocks of flats – thirteen in Paisley and one in Johnstone, providing homes to 1,132 tenants and residents. The council has 1,001 properties within the blocks which represents over 8% of the council's total housing stock.
- 3.2 High rise properties play an important role in the provision of housing and the council has committed significant amounts of investment in recent years to ensure they are maintained in a good condition and are sustainable and attractive to both current and future residents. High rise blocks remain popular with residents and our waiting list demonstrates a continuing demand for this property type.

3.3 Following the Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017, a group of key officers including representatives from the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service have been meeting regularly to:

- review the measures that are in place to ensure fire safety at our high rise blocks;
- agree any actions that may enhance these fire safety arrangements; and
- ensure tenants and residents are kept up to date and re-assured of our ongoing commitment to fire safety

3.4 Reports were presented to the Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board in August and November 2017 and May 2018 detailing the range of measures that are in place to ensure the on-going safety of everyone living in our high rise properties and the advice that has been given to residents. The reports also set out a range of actions that had been undertaken, including:

- an independent assessment of the external cladding system at five blocks which concluded the materials used for both cladding and insulation are not the same as those used at Grenfell Tower and all materials used complied with the Scottish Building Regulations;
- a fire safety assessment of each of the five blocks where no adverse concerns in relation to the fire risk of the buildings were identified;
- installation of communal area fire alarm systems in five blocks, with all fourteen blocks linked to a 24 hour monitoring system;
- council properties had 60 minute fire resistant front doors fitted and this was extended to privately owned properties where it was identified that the existing door did not meet the necessary fire resistance rating; and
- written correspondence to all residents, as well as drop-in sessions to allow residents to meet face to face with Housing Services staff and Scottish Fire & Rescue Service officers
- an independent audit of fire safety measures within each of the fourteen blocks with the outputs informing future programmes of work – see section 6, below;
- installation of automatic fire suppression systems at the bin areas of each of the fourteen blocks;
- works to upgrade the smoke and CO2 detection alarms within tenants' properties to meet the new standard introduced by the Scottish Government have been completed in all 14 blocks;
- replacement of the balcony enclosure panels at George Court, and

- regular review of any callouts to high rise blocks which Scottish Fire & Rescue Service have responded to. The majority of these have been false alarms, many caused by members of the public smoking in common areas. This issue is being addressed through increased signage and advice to residents requesting their assistance in reducing these incidences.

4 Concierge and Caretaking service

- 4.1 A concierge and caretaking service is provided, with 24/7 concierge service on site at four blocks in Glenburn and Gallowhill, and the remaining 10 blocks benefitting from on-site Caretakers. The Caretaking service has in the past year been enhanced to provide cover over 7 days a week including at weekends and evenings instead of Monday to Friday 8am – 4pm.
- 4.2 As well as offering general advice and assistance to tenants and residents, the role of concierge and caretakers includes a range of security related duties and safety checks including daily inspections of landings, fire doors and bin chutes, as well as regular fire alarm tests, the safe removal of bulky items and so on. All staff have now attended specialist fire safety training.
- 4.3 Feedback has shown that the concierge and caretaker service is valued highly by residents and plays an important role in ensuring a safe environment for those living in high rise flats and their visitors, particularly in matters relating to fire safety.

5 Fire Safety Update

- 5.1 Following a recommendation from the Ministerial Working Group on Building and Fire Safety, the Scottish Government published guidance for those responsible for fire safety in high rise buildings. A document entitled 'Practical fire safety guidance for existing high rise domestic buildings' was published in December 2019.
- 5.2 This guidance provides practical fire safety advice on how to prevent fires and reduce the risks from fires in high rise domestic buildings and aims to assist the assessment of fire risk and the adequacy of existing fire safety measures. The focus is on communal areas and aspects of building design which could affect the safety of others.
- 5.3 The importance of good housekeeping in relation to ensuring common areas are kept clear of all items is included within the guidance and work is ongoing to with all residents in our high rise blocks to ensure landings and all common parts are kept clear from storage and obstruction at all times.

- 5.4 A fire safety leaflet has been produced by the Scottish Government and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for high rise residents which outlines how to prevent fires within the home and what to do if one starts in their building. Links to both the guidance and the leaflet are included below:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/practical-fire-safety-guidance-existing-high-rise-domestic-buildings/>

https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/media/2113380/high_rise_fire_safety_campaign_leaflet_final.indd.pdf

6 Ongoing Investment

- 6.1 A comprehensive programme of lift upgrade works is planned to commence during 2020 which will ensure the lifts within all 14 high rise are refurbished to ensure they operate safely and smoothly for the foreseeable future.
- 6.2 A stock condition survey has been commissioned for all 14 blocks, which will assess the condition of each block and associated external elements including roof, insulated render, rainwater goods and windows to inform our capital investment programme for future years.
- 6.3 Following the conclusion of the exercise to ensure all landings and common areas are cleared, it is intended that the condition of landing floorings is assessed and a programme to replace old flooring where required will be developed.
- 6.4 The considerations of fitting fire suppression systems (sprinklers) to all high rise flats is still being reviewed by both the UK and Scottish Governments and the council awaits their findings / guidance on this issue, A further report will be presented to the Policy Board on this and any other related fire safety matters in due course as findings / guidance are published by the respective Governments.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – none that cannot be contained within existing budgets.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community/Council Planning**

Our Renfrewshire is safe – the range of fire safety measures that are in place is helping to keep residents safe.

Working together to improve outcomes – close working with the Fire and Rescue Service is helping to ensure all residents at all high rise blocks feel safe.

4. **Legal** – none

5. **Property/Assets** – none.
 6. **Information Technology** – none.
 7. **Equality & Human Rights**
The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
 8. **Health & Safety** – none.
 9. **Procurement** – none
 10. **Risk** - none
 11. **Privacy Impact** – none.
 12. **COSLA Policy Position** – not applicable.
 13. **Climate Risk** – not applicable.
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List of Background Papers

- (a) Background Paper 1 - Report to Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board on 29 August 2017 – Fire Safety – High Rise Blocks
- (b) Background Paper 2 – Report to Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board on 7 November 2017 – High Rise Blocks - Update
- (c) Background Paper 3 – Report to Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board on 22 May 2018.

The foregoing background papers will be retained within Communities, Housing & Planning Services for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting. The contact officer within the service is Tom Irvine / Louise Feely, 0141 618 6146 / 6049, Tom.irvine@renfrewshire.gov.uk / Louise.feely@renfrewshire.gov.uk.

FC/LF
27 February 2020

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