



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 29TH OCTOBER 2015

SUBJECT: FIRE SAFETY MEASURES FOR COUNCIL OWNED FLATS

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide members of Caerphilly Homes Task Group with information on fire safety measures in relation to Council owned three storey blocks of flats.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Following a Members request, this report provides details on fire safety measures already provided and planned to be undertaken to all three storey Council owned flats to comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Welsh Housing Quality Standard is intended to ensure that all local authority housing is maintained and improved to achieve specified standards.
- 3.2 The Council's Local Housing Strategy 'People, Property and Places' has the following aim: *"To provide good quality, well managed houses in communities where people want to live, and offer people housing choices which meets their needs and aspirations"*.
- 3.3 The Single Integrated Plan 2013-2017 has a priority to improve standards of housing and communities, giving appropriate access to services across the County Borough.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The Council's housing stock currently stands at 10,865 properties which comprises 184 three storey Council owned flats and a further 72 leasehold flats.
- 4.2 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 applies in relation to fire safety within blocks of flats. Although this order primarily covers all non-domestic buildings, it also applies to shared communal areas within a domestic setting in certain circumstances.
- 4.3 All the authority's three storey flats are required to comply with these regulations, as the individual entrance doors to the flats open onto an enclosed communal landing and stairway.
- 4.4 In order to improve the safety for our tenants and comply with the Regulatory Reform Order, all our blocks of flats have been risk assessed by our Fire Officer from the Corporate Health and Safety Team. The risk assessments identified the following works and the progress against each has been provided:-

- Enclosed communal areas must be ventilated –This work has been completed by either providing openable windows on landing areas or by providing permanently open louvre vents.
- Communal areas must be free of any obstructions, combustible materials or items – Letters and detailed guidance notes were sent to all tenants advising them of the need to remove any such items from the Communal areas (Appendix 1). This includes floor coverings, rugs, furniture, curtains or any appliances. If tenants failed to remove the required items, a further letter was sent advising that if they were not removed, then arrangements would be made for Council operatives to clear the area. In order to ensure that the communal areas are maintained as clear areas, weekly inspections are undertaken by our Community Environmental Wardens and records of these inspections are retained.
- The communal areas are fitted with emergency lighting to ensure that the walkways and access routes are lit in the event of a power failure. These are checked and maintained on a regular basis to ensure they operate satisfactorily.
- All doors opening onto an enclosed communal area are required to provide a half hour fire resistance (FD30S). This includes entrance doors to flats, as well as any cupboard/store doors that open directly onto the landing area. – Due to the scale and cost associated with bringing all doors up to this standard, the Fire Service accepted that this could be progressed on a planned basis, and work is ongoing to complete this exercise.

4.5 An added complication in this area relates to flats that have been purchased on a leasehold basis. This has delayed the works in some areas as we are required to follow a legal consultation process with the leaseholders prior to replacing the existing doors. We have also faced legal challenges from some leaseholders, who have claimed that they have sole responsibility for their entrance doors.

4.6 Although not a requirement of the Regulatory Reform Order, all Council owned properties have been fitted with mains operated smoke detectors, to provide an early warning of a potential fire to our tenants.

4.7 Following an incident at Claude Road, Caerphilly, it was identified that whilst the flat where a fire occurred was fitted with a compliant fire door, at some stage after the installation, the door closure had been removed. This resulted in the door being left open when the tenant exited the flat. As a consequence a tenant in a second floor flat had to be evacuated from their flat by the fire service.

4.8 As a consequence of this incident, all our flats are being surveyed to check if door closures fitted to fire doors have been removed. Arrangements will then be made for new door closures to be fitted where they have been removed and a letter will be sent to all our tenants concerned to re-inforce fire safety procedures within the communal areas and for them to advise us if there are any problems with the doors including the self closing mechanism. See Appendix 2.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no equality implications associated with this report.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The costs associated with undertaking fire safety measures to our housing stock will be covered by the WHQS Capital Investment Programme with regards to new installations and for improvement works.

6.2 Any associated repairs e.g. replacing door closures, will be addressed through our Response Repairs Team with costs being covered from existing budgets within the Housing Revenue Account.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no personnel implications associated with this report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been reflected within the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That this report is noted for information.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 To make members aware of the fire safety measures required to Council owned three storey blocks of flats.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 To comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Author: Shaun Couzens, Chief Housing Officer
Consultees: Cllr Dave Poole, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing
Chris Burns, Interim Chief Executive
Phil Davy, Head of Programmes
Nicole Scammel, Acting Director of Corporate Services and S151 Officer
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Paul Smythe, Housing Repair Operations Manager
Kenyon Williams, Private Sector Housing Manager
Donna Jones, Health and Safety Manager
Kelvin Hughes, Fire Safety Officer
Julie Reynolds, Area Housing Manager
Debbie Bishop, Area Housing Manager
Karen James, Neighbourhood Housing Manager
Angela Hiscox, Neighbourhood Housing Manager

Background Papers:

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Letter to residents – Fire Safety in Communal Flats – 11th February 2013
Appendix 2 Fire Safety Advice for Tenants in Flats (Tenants' Handbook)
Appendix 3 Fire Safety Management of Communal Areas in Blocks of Flats
Appendix 4 Draft Letter to Tenants of Three Storey Flats– October 2015