

Area Panels – November/December 2016

Briefing paper – Fire Safety Policy and associated work

Background

This briefing paper has been produced for Area Panels to bring together a number of pieces of work associated with fire safety. In view of a number of fires this year in blocks of flats it is timely that we outline the steps we are taking to minimise risk to residents.

An inquest into the deaths caused by fires in high rise blocks in Southampton and Southwark concluded in 2013 and resulted in the Coroner issuing a Rule 43 Letter. One of the recommendations was to provide fire safety information to residents to help people understand what to do in the event of a fire. We have taken steps to meet the requirements of Rule 43 by producing fire safety leaflets for our residents and giving advice in the autumn edition of Homing In. We are also currently producing posters for our blocks of flats explaining the evacuation process.

Fire Safety Policy

To bring together our approach a Fire Safety Policy has been drafted which is attached to this briefing. A copy of the draft Housing & New Homes Committee report supporting this is also attached for information.

This policy sets out Housing's commitment to provide a safe environment in which our residents are assured that the risk of injury or damage to their homes caused by fires is minimised. By doing so we shall also comply with all relevant legislation and subsequent guidance. These include the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) and the Housing Act 2004.

The main objectives of this policy are to ensure the council has adequate measures in place:

- to safeguard all relevant persons from death or injury in the event of fire
- to minimise the risk of fire and to limit fire spread
- to minimise the potential for fire to disrupt services, damage buildings and equipment or harm the environment

This policy provides a further opportunity for us to confirm our approach of delayed evacuation in blocks of flats, which we have promoted in the leaflets and in Homing In.

This draft policy has been reviewed by the Fire Health and Safety Board, East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (ESFRS) and the Tenancy and Neighbourhood Service Improvement Group before being considered at Area Panels. The policy will be considered at Housing & New Homes Committee in January 2017.

Supporting fire safety work

Alongside this policy we have also:

- Updated our clear common ways procedure
- Started work on a vulnerable tenants and fire safety process. This will ensure that our most vulnerable tenants are assessed and measures put in place to support them and minimise fire risk.
- Installed a sprinkler system in Somerset Point with further schemes subject to committee decision
- Agreed a cooker cut off pilot which will take place in one Seniors housing scheme.
- Reviewed mobility scooter storage options across the city.

Two further pieces of partnership work are being undertaken as a result of our involvement with the Community Initiative Partnership, which is a multi-agency partnership led by ESFRS bringing agencies together to minimise risks to vulnerable people. These are:

Hoarding protocol

A project group formed from the Community Initiative Partnership are working on a protocol in respect of hoarding. The purpose is to enable targeted multi agency support to vulnerable residents of Brighton and Hove who are known to hoard. The group are formed of the fire service, mental health, social services, Housing, G.Ps and others, to develop a unified approach to resolving high level hoarding cases. The fire risks to property, the person, neighbours and fire fighters are higher where hoarding exists. An agreed multi agency approach will ensure risks are minimised and support made available to begin resolving the hoarding, at the earliest opportunity.

Resettlement initiative

ESFRS and the Police are working with Housing to develop information and agree processes, to enable safe supportive resettlement of vulnerable high risk incoming tenants. There are instances where an incoming tenant will not have lived independently, possibly for years and instead received intensive support to manage their accommodation. For example those leaving supported housing, hostels or prison are to be provided with additional support and visited where required to enable safe independent living.

Mobility Scooters

A review of mobility scooters, across the city was started earlier this year, assessing the storage options available for those tenants continuing to park in common ways. Advice from ESFRS is that scooters should not be parked in the common ways of residential blocks where they would block escape routes.

To help resolve the current issues we have a series of recommendations going forward which will involve us working with tenants to find individual solutions. These are:

- Provide a low cost option for bolts and chains to be supplied by the Estates Service to secure scooters to the exterior of the building
- Tenants can request alterations, to install an individual external storage unit at their own expense
- Continued use of stores where used well e.g. Leach Court and new schemes where there is sufficient demand could be considered through EDB funds
- Review the current Tenancy Agreement and revise the clause on storage of scooters.
- Ensuring that residents understand that if they are thinking of buying a scooter that they will need to identify where they are going to store it first.

After committee we will also undertake a citywide communications campaign about the storage of scooters.

Recommendations

- For the Area Panel to provide feedback on the draft Fire Safety Policy
- For the Area Panel to note the fire safety work currently taking place

Contact

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