

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Strategic Lead, Housing and Employability

Housing and Communities Committee: 4 November 2020

Subject: Enhanced Standard for High Rise Flats

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This report updates the Housing and Communities Committee on the Council's work to develop the enhanced standard for high rise flats and provide reassurance to our tenants that these properties are as safe and desirable as conventional dwellings.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that the Housing and Communities Committee:
- (i) Notes the content of the report and the draft specification of works towards enhancing standards for high rise flats;
 - (ii) Notes officers will consult the Ministerial Working Group for Building and Fire Safety regarding the specification; and
 - (iii) Invites officers to prepare a capital plan for enhancement works based on the draft specification and feedback from the working group for approval at a future committee.

3. Background

- 3.1** The fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017 was unprecedented in scale and understandably led to questions about fire safety in high rise blocks across the UK, which remains the focus of a public inquiry and a Scottish Government ministerial working group to examine building and fire safety regulatory frameworks.
- 3.2** West Dunbartonshire Council currently has 19 high rise blocks (the Scottish Government defines a high rise building as those that have a floor which is more than 18 metres above ground level), 3 in Dumbarton and 16 in Clydebank. These blocks constitute a total of 1,400 flats, around 14% of the Council's housing stock.

4. Main Issues

Risk Assessment and Reassurance

- 4.1** The Council instructed enhanced Fire Safety Risk Assessments to be undertaken for each of our high rise blocks, in order to provide additional

assurance to tenants and other stakeholders. An external fire safety specialist commenced work on 29 June 2017 and the final report was received on 09 October 2017.

- 4.2 On completion of the reports, we arranged for the consultant to present findings of the enhanced Fire Safety Risk Assessments to elected members on 16 November 2017 and four local briefings for tenants took place on 20-21 November 2017, with a summary report issued to tenants for their own block.
- 4.3 Incorporated within the reports was a recommendation to remove and replace 'spandrel panels' beneath some of the windows within 11 of the 19 blocks in order to reassure tenants and further reduce the 'tolerable' risk assessed by the consultant. Work commenced on this when the recommendation was made in October 2017 and has taken longer than initially anticipated owing to the complex nature of the work and the necessity of finding a specification which achieves the optimum rating for fire safety, whilst also affording adequate insulation.
- 4.4 A range of other recommendations for capital improvements were also made and are included in the specification to achieve an enhanced standard for the properties.

West Dunbartonshire Standard for High Rise Flats

Spandrel Panels

- 4.5 Significant work was undertaken to identify an alternative specification for the spandrel panels, however no replacement was available on the market which met the technical and regulatory requirements.
- 4.6 Spandrel panels, being adjacent to windows, previously fell under the same interpretation of building regulations as window openings, however on 20 January 2020 the UK Government's Independent Expert Panel on Fire Safety published consolidated advice which specifically defined them as part of the external wall. Whilst this has no direct legal status in Scotland, a draft Scottish Advice Note being consulted on by the Scottish Government incorporates the same principle.
- 4.7 This evolving regulatory framework is important, since it informs the future treatment of spandrel panels within the building regulations and criteria which need to be met for future replacement.
- 4.8 A structural engineer was appointed in October 2019 to develop a specification which meets the requirements. The engineer has provided two options for this work, which are intended to be shared with the Ministerial Working Group for Building and Fire Safety, in order that the assumptions made are consistent with both existing interpretation and future anticipated changes. This will also include the expectations in terms of product/component certification and/or testing.

- 4.9** Option A is for the spandrel panels to be removed and replaced by a *Nordan Windows and Wetherby Cladding System*, a rendered external wall insulation system, similar to the rest of the building exterior. The budgetary estimate for this solution is approx. £900k per block, which reflects the extent of work at height involved in the installation.
- 4.10** Option B is for a *Nordan Windows and Aluminium Cladding System* to be used, which would replace the existing panels with a non-combustible alternative. The budgetary estimate for this solution is approx. £800k per block, which reflects the ability to prefabricate more of the components off-site and thereby reduce work at height when installing.

Other Recommendations towards enhanced standard

- 4.11** As part of the programme to enhance fire safety across the buildings, a specification for other recommendations arising from the risk assessments has been developed. These elements are not mandatory, but are recommended to improve the fire safety profile. These elements are:
1. Installation of spot protection (sprinkler) within the waste room;
 2. Installation of Fire Detection Within All Service Areas;
 3. Installation of Fire Detection & Alarms in Common Areas;
 4. Installation of Manual Call Points;
 5. Complete a full review of Emergency Lighting.
- 4.12** These recommendations pertain to all 19 blocks and the estimated cost is £292k per block. Again these enhancements will be consulted upon with the Ministerial Working Group.
- 4.13** When the capital programme is drafted, there will be a typical ancillary and contingency applied to the cost estimates of 20%.
- 4.14** Complementing all of the physical enhancements has been an overhaul of the day to day management of the buildings, with an additional focus on fire safety, a designated officer responsible for each block and our new Neighbourhood Team patrolling the buildings in the evenings, including weekends.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no direct people implications arising from this report.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

Financial

- 6.1** The structural engineer's report cost £29,280, which was met within the existing housing revenue budget for 2019/20. A fire safety budget of £75k (revenue) and £500k (capital) is already in place and once the outline

specification has been finalised, the eventual capital programme will be consulted upon and remitted to Council for approval.

Procurement

- 6.2** The capital programme will be subject to a full tender exercise, in accordance with relevant Council procedures.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** Implementing the recommendations arising from the enhanced fire risk assessments will ensure the Council has assurance that the fire risk for each high rise property is low and any immediate actions to maintain this are scheduled. Developing and implementing the Enhanced Standard for High Rise Flats will secure the Council's recent investment by maintaining demand for these properties in the decades to come.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** The proposal does not alter any existing policy or pattern of service delivery and so is not considered to require an equalities impact assessment.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** Regular updates on fire safety have continued to be provided to the West Dunbartonshire Tenants and Residents Organisation as a standing agenda item at the bi-monthly liaison meetings.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** The Local Housing Strategy is the overarching document setting out the strategic direction for housing across West Dunbartonshire.
- 10.2** Having considered all the Council's strategic priorities, this report contributes greatly to all five strategic priorities and significantly to improving local housing.

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Date: 21 October 2020

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: Fire Safety – High Rise Flats, 9 August 2017

Enhanced Standard for High Rise Flats, 9 May 2018

Wards Affected:

Ward 3 – Dumbarton

Ward 5 – Clydebank Central

Ward 6 – Clydebank Waterfront