

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Executive Director Social Work & Health

Social Work & Health Improvement Committee - 25 May 2009

Subject: Fire Safety in Residential Care Homes for Older People

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the fire safety improvements being undertaken in residential care homes for older people under the control of Social Work & Health.

2. Background

- 2.1** With the introduction of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Fire Safety (Scotland) Regulations 2006, Strathclyde Fire and Rescue (SFR) replaced the Health & Safety Executive as the enforcing authority for 'fire safety' legislation within local authorities under their jurisdiction. At the same time the responsibility of the Care Commission to advise and inspect on fire safety issues within registered services was removed.
- 2.2** Following the introduction of the new legislation, the publication 'Practical Fire Safety Guidance in Residential Care Homes' was published by the Scottish Executive in September 2006 (with a revised edition issued in December 2006).
- 2.3** Following enforcement action by SFR and the undertaking of fire risk assessments to reflect the new standards it was recognised that all residential care homes for older people would require significant upgrade work.

3. Main Issues

Upgrade Work

- 3.1** Following fire risk assessments carried out by fire safety consultants on each of the residential care homes for older people, a full programme of work was identified by Architectural Services to ensure each care home would be upgraded to meet the current benchmark fire safety standards for residential care homes. Tenders were then invited from relevant businesses in accordance with West Dunbartonshire Council's tendering procedures.
- 3.2** To date work has been completed at four of the residential care homes (Langcraigs, Willox Park, Dalreoch & Frank Downie). The contracts for work at Mount Pleasant and Boquhanran House have been awarded and work is due to start at Boquhanran House in June 2009. Work at Mount Pleasant is expected to start in August 2009.

- 3.3** Aside from some specific issues relating to individual care homes, the work being carried out involves the replacement of existing bedroom, office and other internal doors with doors that are fire rated FD30 (i.e. these doors will provide protection from fire / smoke for a minimum of 30 minutes).
- 3.4** All bedroom, office and other internal doors will (where appropriate) be fitted with self closers that are linked to the fire alarm system. The type of door closer system installed will allow doors to be held open at appropriate times and enable residents to move freely throughout the care homes without being restricted by closed fire doors.
- 3.5** In the event of the fire alarm being activated all doors linked to the system will close over to restrict the spread of smoke / fire throughout the care homes and provide protection for staff carrying out any necessary evacuation procedures.
- 3.6** All fire alarm systems will be designed and upgraded to meet benchmark standards.
- 3.7** All door closers have been adjusted to ensure they close at a speed that will minimise the risk of injury to residents should they be moving between doors when the self closers are activated.

Fire Risk Assessments

- 3.8** The fire risk assessments for Willox Park, Langcraigs, Mount Pleasant and Dalreoch have all been reviewed since March 2009. Action plans, as a result of these reviews, have been developed and the issues identified within them are currently being addressed by Care Home Managers.
- 3.9** The review of the fire risk assessment for Frank Downie is due to be carried out early June 2009 with the fire risk assessment for Boquhanran House scheduled for review on completion of the upgrade work. A further review of the assessment for Mount Pleasant will also be carried out on completion of upgrade work there.
- 3.10** Any actions identified through the annual reviews of fire risk assessments will require to be funded from within departmental budgets.

Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans

- 3.11** All residential care homes have developed personal emergency evacuation plans that detail the action that should be taken with individual residents in the event of an evacuation being necessary. These are displayed in clients' bedrooms and are reviewed by care home managers and key staff on an ongoing basis.

4 Impact Assessments

- 4.1** There is no requirement for an Impact Assessment to be carried out as a result of the fire safety work being undertaken.

5. Personnel Issues

Staff Training

- 5.1** Staff at all units have been trained in fire safety and training will continue on an ongoing basis and a schedule developed to ensure all staff receive refresher training at least every two years.
- 5.2** Aside from fire safety issues associated with the fabric of the building, fire alarm systems, provision of fire fighting equipment etc. it is recognised that fire safety management is the responsibility of all staff. The training provided ensures managers and staff are aware of their duties and responsibilities and there are robust fire safety management arrangements in place at each of the residential care homes. The fire safety management arrangements are also monitored as an integral part of the annual fire safety risk assessment review.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1** As final accounts are at various stages of assessment / negotiation the total cost of the work required to allow residential care homes for older people to meet the benchmark standards has still to be established. Based on information provided by HEEDS the total projected cost of all work carried out at these homes is currently being estimated at approximately £650K. This involves spending over three financial years (2008/09; 2009/10 and 2010/11).
- 6.2** Further capital funding may be required to allow work at Mount Pleasant and Boquhanran House to be carried out and this will be addressed within the regular review of the Capital Programme.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, as amended, introduced changes to fire safety law in Scotland and repealed previous fire safety legislation. Sections 53, 54, and 56 of the Act place duties on employers, owners and managers in relation ensuring adequate fire safety arrangements are in place for care homes.
- 7.2** At an early stage it was recognised that the upgrade work would be an ongoing process over many months. In view of this each unit was risk assessed to determine the level of risk and the work has been scheduled and prioritised based on this risk analysis.
- 7.3** The upgrading of the residential care homes to allow them to meet the benchmark fire safety standards will significantly reduce the risk of:

- Harm to staff and residents in the event of a fire in our care homes for older people
- Significant fire / smoke damage in the event of a fire in our care homes for older people
- Enforcement action being taken against Council Officers and / or Members by the Fire Authority

7.4 A Best Value Review of Older People's Services has been approved and the review recognised cost pressures facing the Council's care homes for older people and this included the cost of meeting fire safety requirements.

8. Conclusions & Officers' Recommendations

8.1 The SWHI Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

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Appendices: None

Background papers: Report to Social Work and Health Improvement
Committee: 18 February 2009.

Wards Affected: All