

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Chief Executive

Council : 25 June 2008

Subject: Lomond Court Evacuation - 19/20 May 2008

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the Council's response to the evacuation of Lomond Court, Dumbarton on 19 May 2008.

2. Background

- 2.1 The report summarises the information contained in Emergency Log Books along with the outcomes of the Council Incident Debrief meeting and the Multi Agency Incident Debrief meeting which were held on 27th & 29th May 2008 respectively.
- 2.2 At approximately 19:25 on Monday 19th May 2008, a fire broke out in a flat on the 13th Floor of Lomond Court. The fire was brought quickly under control, despite the failure of the Dry Riser in the main services cupboard on the ground floor of the block.
- 2.3 This failure caused extensive water damage to the ground floor and the electrical switch gear located in the services cupboard. As a result, Scottish Power, following their initial inspection, advised that extensive repair work was required to both the Landlord supply and their own supply board and that it was unlikely that this could be carried out quickly. At this point, the incident moved from being a response to a high rise fire to one that was likely to involve other agencies.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1 The Local Authority were required to respond both in support of the emergency services and to ensure that our own clients were adequately cared for. That response was undertaken in a professional and efficient manner.

3.1.1 Alert and Immediate Response

Four Police Officers originally responded to the incident and evacuated the residents of the 13th floor of Lomond Court. 1 resident was taken to hospital along with two of the Police Officers and the others were taken to the residents lounge in Leven Court.

In addition, Strathclyde Fire & Rescue also evacuated residents from floors 14 and 15 to the Residents lounge in Leven Court as well as carrying out the rescue of the occupier of the blazing flat.

The Duty Warden alerted the Home Care Section who sent an officer to the scene to liaise with the Warden and residents during the initial evacuation. When it became apparent that the situation might escalate, the Head of Social Work (Operations) was informed and she also decided to attend the scene. The Duty Homeless Persons Officer was also informed and requested to attend.

Thereafter, these officers along with the available Home Care Assistants and Sheltered Housing wardens based themselves in the Wardens Office in Leven Court and worked to identify the vulnerable residents in the affected block and decide on what appropriate care needed to be provided throughout the incident. This involved contacting care homes in the area to assess available accommodation for those in need.

The Duty Homeless Persons Officer requested that Westbridgend Community hall be kept open following a let in case it would be required and began identifying possible B&B accommodation for those evacuees who had nowhere else to go.

At 20:20 hrs, the Head of Social Work Operations contacted the Contingency Planning Officer and requested her presence at the scene as it had been rumoured that a total evacuation of the affected block might be required.

3.1.2 Communications

The CPO remained at the scene to undertake the role of Council Incident Officer to maintain communication and information flow between the emergency services and council staff responding to the incident and this seemed to resolve the issue.

3.1.3 Continued Response

The first multi agency meeting took place at 21:00 hrs when it was decided to wait on Scottish Power to confirm if they could or could not maintain power supplies to the building before deciding whether or not to evacuate 61 flats.

All efforts were then made to retain power supplies but because of the extent of the damage, the height of the block, the required lift access to all floors and the demographics of the residents, the decision was taken at 22:45 hrs to evacuate the building to ensure the safety of all concerned.

At the request of the Police, it was agreed that the most vulnerable residents be removed first and a list was quickly supplied because of the work already carried out by Social Work & Health staff and the knowledge of the Home Care Assistants who were not only able to identify the needs of their own clients but those of other residents who were not known to the service.

These residents were taken out first by teams comprising Police, Fire and Home Care/Council staff. Those who were particularly frail were taken to alternative accommodation by Ambulance.

Thereafter, teams went back in and evacuated the remaining residents floor by floor. All evacuees were processed in the West Bridgend Community Hall by Homeless Persons staff and Police Officers before going to their alternative accommodation with either friends and relatives or to B&B accommodation.

With 7 residents remaining unaccounted for, teams comprising a Police Officer, a Fire & Rescue Officer, a Home Care Assistant and two Council Joiners revisited the 6 remaining flats and removed two further residents before having to force entry into the remaining properties to check that they were empty. By 02:00hrs the following morning, the emergency services and council stood down and a police presence was maintained at the scene overnight.

The Rest Centre also closed down once all residents had been processed and reopened again the next morning. It was used extensively by the residents and the emergency services and council staff during the following day as they waited on each individual flat's electrical supply being checked once repairs had been carried out. Catering was originally supplied by our own hall keeping staff before additional supplies were provided by Dumbarton Academy. The hall remained opened until after the residents meeting on the second night when everyone had been given access to their property.

Following repair of the main electricity supply, Scottish Power remained on site all day to assist the Council electricians to repair the Landlord Board and to carry out checks on individual properties. All flats had been checked by 17:30 hrs and residents were allowed back despite only one lift being operational. Those residents on the floors without lift access were given the option of remaining in alternative accommodation for another night but most returned home. Those residents who were taken to care homes did not return home until both lifts were operational.

3.1.4 Clean Up, Repairs & Restoration

A number of doors were damaged when entry had to be forced and these were replaced by Council joiners on the second day. There was some water damaged to the flats immediate below the fire damaged property on the 11th and 13th floors and appropriate repairs have now been carried out.

The community alarm system was also damaged by the water run off from the fire fighting and had to be repaired to allow vulnerable residents to return.

All common areas were cleaned very quickly and following the inspection by the Council's Insurance Loss Adjuster, residents were allowed back onto the 13th floor quite quickly. The external smoke damage on the frontage of the building has also now been cleaned.

A programme of testing of the Dry Risers in all High Rise property in the Council area commenced as a matter of urgency.

The bespoke door entry system, which was damaged beyond repair, is being replaced as a matter of priority.

3.1.5 The Media

There was a large media interest and Council Press officers were at the scene to deal with inquiries from the local and national press and television news.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 There are no personnel issues.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 Costs involved in an emergency response of this nature are generally absorbed into Departmental budgets. The full cost of the response will not be known until final accounts have been collated.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 There is no requirement for a risk assessment to be carried out on the content of this report.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1** Overall, 58 flatted properties were evacuated, 3 of them being empty, which involved 59 people, 26 of whom were identified as being vulnerable with 14 being transferred to care homes. 1 person was taken to hospital 11 stayed with friends and family. Of the remaining evacuees, most went to friends or family with a small number being accommodated in the Abbotsford Hotel.
- 7.2** Unusually for incidents involving residential property, identifying vulnerable residents was very easy because of the nature of the complex in that it involves sheltered housing and therefore has warden and home care assistance in attendance. This local knowledge proved invaluable to the emergency services in planning the evacuation and is unlikely to be replicated elsewhere.
- 7.3** The fact that there was also a community building on site which could easily be utilised as a rest centre/staging post proved invaluable over the whole incident and again, unfortunately is unlikely to be replicated elsewhere.
- 7.4** The Emergency Services were very appreciative of the help and assistance provided by council staff both during and after the evacuation and have indicated that they believe the incident response went extremely well. It is acknowledged that the Council's emergency response went according to plan.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1** Council is recommended to note this report and that to further improve the handling of Emergencies within West Dunbartonshire, Officers will be moving forward to include learning points in future reviews of emergency plans and procedures.

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Chief Executive
Date: 19 June 2008

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: Dumbarton