

STRATEGIC FIRE SAFETY REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council discharges a diverse range of statutory functions and controls a number of different buildings, all of which require consideration from a fire safety perspective to ensure that those visiting, working or living in such buildings are adequately protected from the risk of fire.
- 1.2 This report concentrates on the Council's strategic approach to fire safety and explains how the Council will implement detailed fire safety policies covering all areas of responsibility, to include public facilities (including offices and leisure centres), depots and council housing stock.
- 1.3 Whilst the Council has an existing fire safety policy and procedures in place, it is opportune to review these to ensure that the Council's approach to fire safety is robust. Nationally this issue has come into greater focus as the recommendations following the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy come forward.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In 2006 the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (known as the Fire Safety Order) was introduced after reforming all previous fire safety legislation relating to fire safety. It brought the common parts of blocks of flats within scope of mainstream fire safety legislation for the first time and applies to England and Wales. It covers 'general fire precautions' and other fire safety duties that are needed to protect any 'relevant person' on or in the immediate vicinity of premises who may be at risk from fire. Responsibility for complying with the Fire Safety Order rests with the 'Responsible Person' (normally the owner of the building) who has the responsibility for fire safety matters on site.
- 2.2 In addition to the Fire Safety Order, the Housing Act 2004 introduced the housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS). The HHSRS is a risk based evaluation tool used to assess potential risks and hazards to the health and safety of occupants from deficiencies identified in residential properties in England and Wales. The assessment method focuses on 29 categories of hazard, including the threat of uncontrolled fire and smoke and tackling these making housing healthier and safer to live in.
- 2.3 The Council has fire safety responsibilities for all buildings under its control. These responsibilities apply to the following:
 - all facilities, including offices and depots;
 - leisure centres;
 - council housing stock.

- 2.4 In addition to ensuring its buildings and occupants are safe, the Council also has duties under the Housing Act 2004 relating to the enforcement of standards in residential accommodation in the private rented sector. The standards are designed to ensure that accommodation is safe, in reasonable repair, with at least a minimum level of facilities and not overcrowded.
- 2.5 As the statutory fire and rescue authority, Hampshire Fire and Rescue also has duties and responsibilities delegated to it by central government to undertake visits to premises to check fire risk assessments and ensure fire prevention measures are appropriate and issue formal fire safety notices where fire safety measures are inadequate.
- 2.6 The Grenfell Tower fire of 2017 was the deadliest structural fire in the United Kingdom since the 1998 Piper Alpha disaster and the worst UK residential fire since the Second World War. The independent review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety that followed the tragedy, led by Dame Judith Hackett, 'Building a Safer Future' was published in May 2018. The report describes how the regulatory system covering high-rise and complex buildings was not fit for purpose with key issues underpinning the current system failure including:
- Ignorance of fire safety requirements;
 - Indifference;
 - Lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities;
 - Inadequate regulatory oversight and enforcement tools.
- 2.7 The level and likelihood that a fire could start and cause harm is based on key risk factors in consideration of the building type, its intended use, persons at risk and the activities undertaken on the premises. The likelihood of fire is strongly influenced by social and lifestyle factors and it is these, more than any others, that result in a disproportionate number of fires (and fire deaths) occurring in housing.
- 2.8 Whilst this Council does not have buildings of a type associated with the Grenfell Tower disaster (as it does not have any building or dwellings over 10 storeys), senior officers have considered it prudent to review its approach to fire safety to see if improvements can be made.

3. STRATEGIC APPROACH

- 3.1 The Council has a varied property portfolio and needs to take steps to ensure that its approach to fire safety and risk management is fit for purpose, robust, resilient and proportionate to risk.
- 3.2 This report concentrates on the Council's strategic approach to fire safety and proposes a new overarching Fire Safety Strategy for the Council recognising that there are a number of different functions/responsibilities that the Council has when it comes to fire safety. The proposed Fire Safety Strategy is attached as Appendix 1.

3.3 The overarching Fire Safety Strategy sets out the scope, aims and objectives to achieve and maintain full compliance with the Council's duties under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and the Housing Act 2004. It is based upon the following principles:

- Identification of property asset and enforcement risk strands;
- Identification of 'responsible persons' ensuring clarity on those roles accountable for the implementation, enforcement, management, monitoring and compliance relating to fire safety;
- Fit for purpose fire safety and arrangement policies for each identified risk strand;
- Adoption of good partnership working with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service through Strategic Fire Management Steering Group;
- Fire prevention, removing or reducing hazards and risks and precautions to ensure that people are adequately protected, if a fire were still to occur;
- Adequate and competent resources to enable the effective discharging of duties;
- Allocation of resources proportionate to risk;
- Ensuring front line staff receive appropriate instruction and training;
- Being proactive in providing information to Council housing tenants and building users about fire safety, including setting out what their responsibilities are.

4. **HOUSING STOCK**

4.1.1 Within the overarching Fire Safety Strategy the Council's housing stock has been assessed as the highest risk strand due to sleeping accommodation, the likelihood of fire and the consequential risk to residents.

4.2 The Fire Safety Order includes the common parts of housing blocks and specialist housing but not resident's private accommodation. However the vast majority of fires occur within residents' own accommodation and consequently, the majority of deaths and serious injuries to residents from fire result from fires that start within the persons' own accommodation (and often the room in which the fire starts).

4.3 Residents who reside in the Council's specialist extra care housing schemes range from active older people to those who require additional supported care. In some cases these residents can be indistinguishable from our residents residing in general needs housing. For these residents a person-centred approach will be necessary to identify additional risk factors arising from aspects of resident vulnerability, taking account of lifestyle, mental capacity to make decisions, physical agility, potential for carelessness, hoarding or lack of awareness increasing the likelihood of a fire occurring.

4.4 The Council recognises that in addition to those vulnerable residents who reside in the Council's specialist extra care housing, it is likely that other vulnerable residents may be residing in the Council's wider general needs housing stock.

4.5 Since new management has been in place within the Housing Service, a thorough review of fire safety procedures has commenced. The following steps are currently being worked upon and will form part of a detailed Fire Safety Policy specific to Housing (Landlord Services):-

- Housing Landlord Services to review fire risk assessment schedules based on the level of risk and likelihood that a fire could start and cause harm to those residing in Council owned housing stock;
- Extending fire risk assessments beyond the common parts required by the Fire Safety Order in some building types to include a frequency schedule of the accommodation itself;
- Introduce 5 yearly stock condition surveys from 1st April 2019 which will also focus on fire safety within all dwellings;
- Appoint a suitably qualified and experience Fire Safety Officer to be responsible for the day to day delivery of fire precautions and compliance across all Council owned housing stock, whilst working collaboratively with Housing Maintenance and Estate Management staff providing advice, support and guidance.

4.6 It is proposed to take the draft Landlord Services specific policy to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 21 November 2018 and thereafter signed off by the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

5.0 OTHER COUNCIL SERVICES

5.1 As per section 2.1.3 of the overarching Fire Safety Strategy, it is proposed that other Services covering all of the Council's buildings including depots, leisure centres and offices will also have new detailed Fire Safety Policies specific to the risks identified for such buildings.

5.2 Whilst the Council's current approach to fire safety covers many of these aspects, it is prudent to have up to date detailed policies and procedures so that the Council's approach to fire safety is up to date, well documented, actioned and understood by staff.

5.3 It is proposed that these policies are in place by 31st March 2019

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 This strategy will require extra resources of approximately £60,000, mainly in the Housing area, to ensure there are adequate resources within Housing to deal with the improvements identified within this report.

7. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITY AND DIVERISTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL

7.1 None arising directly from this report.

8. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' COMMENTS

8.1 I am pleased that our officers have continued to review our current policies on fire safety to fulfil our statutory functions. It is important that our residents, staff and visitors to our various properties continue to feel safe. I therefore support this Strategy and the continuing work both internally within our service areas and externally through our developing partnership with the Fire and Rescue service.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The overarching Strategic Fire Safety Policy at Appendix 1 sets out the Council's corporate approach to fire safety. As stated above, detailed policies for all Council buildings will be prepared and signed off by the relevant Portfolio Holders.
- 9.2 The outcomes of adopting this strategic approach will be:-
- Corporate recognition of the importance of fire safety;
 - Clear accountability for ensuring the effectiveness of discharging duties;
 - Tailored fire safety arrangements for property risk strands taking account of – building types, intended use, persons at risk and activities undertaken;
 - Fire safety culture embedment at strategic, operational service delivery and occupancy level;
 - Council resource being effectively directed and managed proportionate to risk;
 - Strengthening the partnership working between the Council and Hampshire Fire and Rescue on fire prevention and management and supporting fire training and education.

9. RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 That the strategic approach to Fire Safety, as set out in this report, be endorsed: and
- 9.2 That the additional resource of £60,000 required within Housing, as set out in this report, be approved.

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Background Papers:

None

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