

Subject:	Retro Fitting Sprinklers in High Rise Blocks		
Date of Meeting:	16 November 2016		
Report of:	Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Theresa Youngman	Tel: 29-3190
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report updates on the completion of the recent pilot project to retro-fit a sprinkler system at Somerset Point. This was a joint, match funded initiative with East Sussex Fire and Rescue Services (ESFRS), who have made provision for a second block (St James House) to be match funded in 2017/18.
- 1.2 The intention of the pilot project was to identify how further installations could be carried out to blocks in the city and what issues may arise.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Housing & New Homes Committee notes the success of the pilot installation at Somerset Point.
- 2.2 That the Housing & New Homes Committee agrees that officers proceed with resident consultation, procurement and subsequent installation of a further pilot sprinkler system at St James House subject to match funding from East Sussex Fire & Rescue Services and consideration of leasehold implications.
- 2.3 That the Housing & New Homes Committee agrees that officers prepare a business case to East Sussex Fire & Rescue Services for match funding of a sprinkler installation to Essex Place.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 In November 2014 Housing Committee considered an initial report on retro fitting sprinklers in housing owned high rise blocks. Committee agreed that a pilot project should be undertaken to Somerset Point and a subsequent report be provided ahead of a further pilot installation to St James House.
- 3.2 Somerset Point is a sheltered housing scheme high rise block comprised of 72 dwellings over 13 floors. St James House is a general needs high rise block comprised of 120 dwellings over 16 floors. 30 flats (25%) at St James House are

leaseholder owned and will be subject to additional consideration with regard to leaseholder implications; this is set out in 5.5.

- 3.3 The report asks members to agree to the preparation of a business case for retro fitting sprinklers to Essex Place. Essex Place is a general needs high rise block comprised of 128 dwellings over 17 floors. 31 flats (24%) at Essex Place are leaseholder owned.
- 3.4 The council has invested over £1.5 million on fire safety works across Housing Revenue Account (HRA) owned stock throughout the city to ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. This includes works to ensure dwellings are appropriately compartmentalised, signage is in place and doors and windows onto common ways are of the appropriate fire safety standard.
- 3.5 Ongoing compliance of fire safety is overseen by a Fire Health & Safety Board which includes officers from Housing, Health & Safety, East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service and partners including Mears.
- 3.6 The retro fitting of sprinkler systems is an improvement to the existing measures in place and is not a requirement of fire safety regulations. However following fires at Lakanal House in July 2009, in which 6 people died and Shirley Towers in April 2010, in which two fire fighters died, coroners issued recommendations on both that:

“Social housing providers should be encouraged to consider the retro-fitting of sprinklers in all existing high rise buildings in excess of 30 meters in height”.
- 3.7 Blocks identified for enhancement / improvement of fire safety measures derive from fire service advice on where such additional measures are best applied. ESFRS is providing match funding for a number of pilot projects based on this advice with the objective of supporting installations and encouraging partners to fund further sprinkler installations from their own resources.
- 3.8 In line with previous Housing Committee recommendations detailed in 3.1 the council has successfully completed a pilot retrofit installation of sprinklers at Somerset Point. A report detailing the outcome of this pilot was considered and well received at the Housing Area Panels, in September 2016. This report is attached as Appendix One.
- 3.9 The sprinkler installation at Somerset Point is at practical completion stage. The final account is being agreed and is expected to amount to £0.145 million. ESFRS will pay 50% of this cost.
- 3.10 This project and its funding fits with one of the key priorities of our recently agreed Asset Management Strategy to invest in homes and neighbourhoods to provide safe, good quality housing.
- 3.11 The council has also invested in retro fitting sprinklers to other properties including Evelyn Court and homes of vulnerable residents who may be at greater risk of fire.

- 3.12 In addition sprinklers are being installed as part of the extra care scheme at Brooke Mead as part of the New Homes for Neighbourhoods programme and as part of the conversion of unused space in St James House under-croft into three new homes.
- 3.13 Further installations of sprinklers will be subject to required procurement processes in line with the council's contract standing orders.
- 3.14 This report is timely given recent widely reported fires in council homes which, it should be noted, do not reflect any failure of Council statutory duties in relation to the fire safety compliance of the blocks.
- 3.15 One of the main benefits of installing a sprinkler system is that it reduces the risk of loss of life to residents and fire fighters. In addition a sprinkler system would ensure that an outbreak of fire is confined to one small area and reduce damage to the overall unit.
- 3.16 The reinstatement costs on the four recent fires have amounted to £0.12million, and this potential cost for any future fire would be greatly reduced.
- 3.17 This work aligns to the Community Initiatives Partnership with ESFRS, a cross agency group looking at how to reduce fire risk related to vulnerable people in the city.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 Selection of the two pilot scheme installations was based on a matrix provided by ESFRS in 2014. This guidance identified Somerset Point and St James House as the recommended blocks for the pilot within council owned stock. Further guidance has identified that a business case for installation of sprinklers in Essex Place should be considered.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 A comprehensive consultation process was carried out with residents at Somerset Point before the commencement of the project; this was developed by the council in partnership with ESFRS and Triangle Fire Systems (the installer). An initial installation was carried out to a guest flat in the block so that residents could see how the installation would look within their homes. Additional boxing in was carried out to ensure the installation would be aesthetically pleasing for residents.
- 5.2 The sprinkler feedback briefing paper was presented to all Area Panels in September and received positive feedback
- 5.3 Following completion of the works a tenant satisfaction survey was completed which demonstrated a high satisfaction rate, where most residents gave a satisfaction rate of nine or ten out of ten. This is included in Appendix One and shows a high 55% response rate.

- 5.4 Potential installations at St James House and Essex Place will include similar consultations with residents ahead of works and satisfaction surveys following completion of works.
- 5.5 St James House and Essex Place contain a mixture of tenants and leaseholders, implications for leaseholders will need to be considered in more detail as part of the further pilot project. St James House has 30 leasehold flats (25% of the block); Essex Place has 31 leasehold flats (24% of the block).
- 5.6 Initial advice is that leaseholders will not be obligated to have a sprinkler installed within their properties although discussions between the council and ESFRS have indicated that there will be joint work to emphasise the benefits to leaseholders of connecting to the block sprinkler systems. At this stage further legal advice will be required to identify the mechanism by which leaseholders are consulted on sprinkler installations within blocks and dwellings and to what extent costs are recoverable under the lease.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This report includes outline costs for the funding of St James House installation through the 2017/18 HRA Capital programme, which will be subject to Committee approval through capital budget papers.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The final costs for Somerset Point are expected to be approximately £0.145 million with 50% of this amount to be funded by ESFRS.
- 7.2 If recommendation 2.2, to proceed with a sprinkler system at St James House is approved, a budget amount of £0.250 million will be included in the HRA Capital Programme Budget proposals for 2017/18, which will be reported to this Committee for approval in January 2017, prior to approval at Policy Resources & Growth Committee in February 2017. These proposals assume that match funding is available from ESFRS of £0.125 million. Any significant variations in costs or funding arrangements would need to be reported back to Policy Resources & Growth Committee for approval. Maintenance costs are minimal at £250 per block per annum and will be met within HRA existing revenue budgets.
- 7.3 Subject to approval of recommendation 2.3, finance officers will review the financial implications of the business case proposals for Essex Place sprinkler installation, which will be reported back to this Committee.

Finance Officer Consulted: Susie Allen Date: 31/10/16

Legal Implications:

- 7.4 There is no statutory obligation on the council to fit sprinklers. However,

their installation will assist in discharging the council's obligations to take fire precautions under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Lawyer Consulted: Judith Fisher: 01/11/2016

Equalities Implications:

- 7.5 Somerset Point is a senior housing scheme comprising 72 flats over 13 floors. As this scheme houses older and more vulnerable residents, the logistics of ensuring the safe evacuation of the block in the event of an outbreak of fire, present greater challenges and complications than general needs blocks. The installation of a sprinkler system removes the risk of any consequences derived from delayed evacuation procedures.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.6 The new installation is highly sustainable in terms of lifespan and type of material. The system offers a 50 year lifespan and the product is fabricated from chlorinated polyvinyl chloride which is fire retardant plastic.
- 7.7 The system will require annual maintenance checks, but the cost of these is negligible.

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.8 The sprinkler system that has been installed houses a sprinkler head in each room of the dwelling. The system will not activate unless the prevailing conditions are synonymous with an established fire (heat and smoke discharge levels).

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 7.9 None

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 7.10 The decision to use Somerset Point as the pilot project was following a risk rating matrix held by ESFRS. The matrix sets out a 'risk' score to each block across the city and the dimensions of the risk are categorised by factoring in the number of call outs and severity of the fire. Somerset Point was in the table of top ten risk blocks. As there is still match funding available for an additional one or two blocks, we are seeking agreement to complete further blocks that remain within the table of top ten risks.

Public Health Implications:

- 7.11 In line with our principles of demonstrating citizen focus and increasing equality to improve:

Health and Wellbeing: Safeguarding our most vulnerable children and adults from neglect and harm. Providing better care services for older and vulnerable people, focused on personal choice and staying independent.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 7.12 Corporate Plan Commitments, the council has pledged, through its corporate plan to deliver on its main values / purpose:

A good life: Ensuring a city for all ages, inclusive of everyone and protecting the most vulnerable.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Report to Area Panels on installation at Somerset Point

Documents in Members' Rooms

None.

Background Documents

None.