

Area Panels: January 2015

Briefing Paper: Increasing Security at High Rise Blocks

Background

Reports of unauthorised visitors into council owned high rise accommodation increased significantly at the start of 2014. The Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee (HMCSC) considered a report on 'Security in High Rise Accommodation' on 1 April 2014 and discussed ways in which unwanted visitors could be prevented in future.

One of the initial responses to try and manage the situation was to contract a security company to carryout sweeps of the main blocks impacted by rough sleepers, drug litter and other anti-social behaviour. This was at a cost of approximately £3,000 per week due to the high volume of complaints and amount of security patrols necessary. A full report was requested to look at the recommendations made by members and residents and suggest alternative low cost options.

Recommendations - options to improve security

The recommendations made to improve security at high rise blocks from members, residents and from consulting with colleagues were as follows:

- To disable the trades button facility at all current properties city wide and provide Royal Mail with access to continue with postal deliveries
- To not install the trades button facility on flat intercom systems for any new builds
- To install multi steel doors (secure by design) as standard and part of the capital investment programme, at all blocks of flats citywide. This would be a change from the alternative timber style door, which are vulnerable to damage and require more maintenance.

If the above lower cost options are unsuccessful, it is recommended the following higher cost options are explored further:

- Investment in a linked up CCTV system that will be monitored
- To pilot a concierge service at a suitable area
- Identify any benefits of reintroducing a residential caretaker service

The full report provides further information on the research carried out, the purpose of the solution, any costs and a case study for each example.

Why have the recommendations been brought to the Area Panels

To seek the views of representatives and include all comments within the report which will be presented at Housing Committee in March.

Next steps

All feedback will be considered and summarised in the final report. If the recommendations are agreed then a programme will be put in place to turn off the trades button city wide, with a clear strategy for communicating the changes to residents. Ideas for ways to communicate include an article within Homing In, a poster campaign, an announcement on the council's website and use of text messages to ensure the information is accessible to all residents.

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AREA PANELS

Agenda Item

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Increasing security at blocks of flats		
Date of Meetings:	26, 28, 29 & 30 January 2015		
Report of:	Executive Director, Environment, Development & Housing		
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1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report provides information on the steps already taken to manage and reduce unwanted visitors accessing both high and low rise blocks of flats in the city. Recommendations have been provided on how the issue could be managed in the future, this includes taking a more sustainable approach opposed to reactive measures.
- 1.2 An initial report was provided to Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee (HMCSC) on 1 April 2014. This paper expands on some of the options that housing were asked to explore by members and the Executive Director at the meeting, which included an integrated CCTV system linking up all blocks of flats in the city, a concierge service, reintroduction of residential caretakers and any other cost effective measures that could help increase security.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Area Panels provide feedback on the recommendations made in order to take a final report to Housing Committee on 4 March 2015.
- 2.2 The recommendations are:
 - To disable the trades button facility at all current properties city wide and provide Royal Mail with fobs for access to continue with postal deliveries
 - To not install the trades button facility on flat intercom systems for any new builds
 - To develop a programme for the installation of multi steel doors (secure by design) as standard and part of the capital investment programme, at all blocks of flats citywide. This would be a change from the alternative timber style door, which are vulnerable to damage and require more maintenance.
 - To carry out a review, 12 months after the trades button has been switched off
- 2.3 Other options for the Area Panel to note and which could be considered for implementation in future if the above recommendations are not successful are:

- To research and gather clearer figures on the investment required in a linked up CCTV system that will be monitored
- To pilot a concierge service at a suitable area
- To identify any benefits of reintroducing a residential caretaker service.

3. CONTEXT / BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The proportion of vulnerable people living in council housing in Brighton and Hove is high. For example, the proportion of tenants who have disclosed that they have a long term health issue or disability has increased from 37% in 2012 to 41% currently, which contrasts with 16% of the total population of the city according to the 2011 Census. Also, 28% of council tenants in the city are aged 65 years or over compared to 13% for the population of the whole city. Furthermore, we have an increasing number of residents living in council housing who have identified as having complex needs, which applies to 17% of tenants. Complex needs is defined as residents who have multiple needs and where there are potentially serious risk to their or others health, safety and wellbeing without intervention. This leads to complex social problems where there are high levels of anti-social behaviour (ASB), and often vulnerable victims living alongside vulnerable perpetrators.
- 3.2 Reports of unauthorised visitors into council owned high rise accommodation, mainly in the Kemptown area of the city increased significantly at the start of 2014. The Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee (HMCS) considered a report on Security in High Rise Accommodation on 1 April 2014 and discussed ways in which unwanted visitors could be prevented in future.
- 3.3 The Committee meeting noted the following in response to the report:
- There had been successful examples of concierge services in London Boroughs. A suggestion was made to seriously investigate the idea of introducing a concierge service within high rise blocks.
 - A suggestion for contact to be made with Sussex Police to scope the installation of CCTV at St James's House car park, with any action on the issue applying to properties citywide
 - To put up robust signage about the move on policy and also engage with the people who require support
 - To re-introduce a caretaker role to help with the issue of rough sleeping in a storage area at St James's House
 - To also consider that security was also an issue in low rise blocks, with CCTV unable to solve the problem of a recent theft when good quality images were available. This was because the perpetrator could not be identified.
- 3.4 The Head of Tenancy Services informed the sub committee that long term solutions would include a wider review of security in all council blocks, with costly solutions to be considered within a report.
- 3.5 This report provides feedback on the work completed to date, which is divided into sections on the research carried out, the purpose of the solution, any

associated cost and a case study example for each recommendation. These are to consider the costly alternatives which include an integrated city wide CCTV system, a concierge service in high rise blocks, reinstating the role of a residential caretaker and other cost effective options that may help reduce the unauthorised access.

- 3.6 An initial multi agency meeting was held in February 2014 involving all teams dealing with enforcement and support. The aim was to gain a clearer understanding of the problem at blocks of flats and devise an action plan to make improvements. Positive discussions were had about engaging with the individuals responsible and ways to re-design St James's House Car Park to resolve some of the issues.
- 3.7 One of the initial responses to try and manage the situation was to organise a security company to carryout sweeps of the main blocks impacted by rough sleepers, drug litter and other anti-social behaviour. This also included the introduction of static guards at some sheltered blocks in the city. This service provides either support during normal office hours, or visits out of hours to lock up communal rooms that had experienced unwanted visitors trying to rough sleep in the lounge area. The cost of providing both the sweeps and static guard service from April 2014 to end of December 2014 was £74,453. There has been a decline in security sweeps required for general needs housing over the recent months, the sweeps and static guards have continued within sheltered blocks. During the month of January 2015, two static guards are in place at Stonehurst Court and Lavender House.
- 3.8 Regular reports on drug litter and other related nuisance activity were shared between internal BHCC teams. The information included the current level of security sweeps, with detail on the name and location of the high rise block, where the report came from, feedback from the security company and follow up actions to resolve the issues. Examples of the action taken as a direct result of this approach include:
 - Improvements to the car parking area at St James's House, mainly to close off space used to rough sleep and use drugs
 - Locking up and unlocking of the communal rooms at sheltered blocks
 - Direct intervention with rough sleepers occupying a bin room to find alternative suitable accommodation
- 3.9 Officers regularly communicated with residents being impacted by the unauthorised entry by attending the High Rise Action Group, Special General Meeting on 17 April 2014, and both Warwick Mount and Essex Place Tenant and Resident meetings.
- 3.10 The Anti Social Behaviour Crime & Policing Act came into force during October 2014. This legislation is intended to enable authorities to take faster and more effective action to stop those making victims lives a misery. The statutory guidance accompanying the Act states that "the welfare, safety and wellbeing of victims whose complaints for the basis of any action must be the main consideration at every stage of the process, and that the right response will depend on a range of factors but most importantly, on the needs of the victim and on the impact the behaviour is having on their lives".

3.11 In order to identify alternative cost effective technology solutions to help increase security, colleagues from both Tenancy Services and Property and Investment teams were consulted, along with technical advice from approved contractors who repair or install cameras and door entry systems for Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC).

3.12 The two ideas supported at first by ward councilors and subsequently by the Warwick Mount Resident Association were to close off the trades button at the high rise blocks being most impacted by unauthorised entry. In addition to this to upgrade all entrance doors to a multi steel door, where conservation restrictions do not apply.

3.13 **Trades button switch off**

The trades button provides free access to anyone between the hours of 6am – 1pm. Disabling this will instantly make the block more secure and the cost to do so are very low. This includes a contractor attending site and the issuing of a fob for Royal Mail. Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council issued Royal Mail with their own fob/s as part of a security upgrade to communal high security doors in September 2013. A pilot trial was suggested at Warwick Mount with communication to be made with Royal Mail to make sure there would be no interruption to postal deliveries.

3.14 Consultation started by attending the Resident Association meeting on 21 May 2014 with the group supporting that all residents within the block be contacted by letter to explain the proposal and seek feedback. Letters were sent to all 73 flats in the block, 21 responses were received all in favour of the pilot going ahead and this level of support, along with the positive feedback from the Resident Association the trial started on 21 July with a key fob being supplied to Royal Mail in order for them to gain access and continue with postal deliveries.

3.15 The pilot lasted for three months and the review completed in October identified two issues. These were queries on emergency service access and lack of communication within Royal Mail to make sure all delivery staff were aware of the new entry arrangements. The response made to the Resident Association explained that the Fire and Rescue Service have an override key for all blocks in the city, this provides access to the main door/s and can power down lifts if required. Sussex Police have fob access to a number of blocks due to being one of our partners to tackle crime, nuisance and anti-social behaviour in the city. In the event of an ambulance attending the block without the Fire & Rescue service or Police, there would be an expectation for a neighbour to provide assistance with entry. Royal Mail were contacted as part of the complaint and advised to improve on communication with delivery officers.

3.16 The Warwick Mount Residents Association completed a review in October and felt the trades switch off had been a success. Reasons to support this were because there had been a noticeable reduction in visitor traffic to the block, including unwanted visitors. One resident commented that they had noticed the lift not being used as much after midnight until approximately 6am. Everyone agreed that the block felt more secure in the month of October 2014 in comparison to June 2014, when the trades turn off trial started. The group decided that due to the positive changes the arrangements should be made

permanent and suggested a letter in the notice boards should be sufficient to let everyone know.

3.17 A direct result of the trades button being permanently turned off meant the main doors at Warwick Mount were secure 24 hours a day. Cost savings have also been made, as each visit by a contractor to adjust a trades button timer is a current charge of £65.

3.18 Due to the positive response at Warwick Mount a neighbouring block, Essex Place learnt of the pilot scheme and requested more information be presented at their meeting in September. See section 5.2 on the community engagement and consultation carried out to take forward this second pilot phase. The Sheltered service completed the removal of the trades button facility at all blocks during 2014, currently no properties have the use of this function.

3.19 **Installation of the multi steel door as standard**

The multi steel door or other similar secure by design product is much more robust, has an improved closure mechanism and costs much less to maintain in comparison to a timber door. Residents attending the High Rise Action Group Special General Meeting in April 2014 made suggestions to install heavy fire doors that lock automatically in order to reduce anti-social behaviour.

4 **ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

Other higher cost options for the Area Panel to note if the suggested recommendations are unsuccessful include:

4.1 **An integrated city wide CCTV system**

This would require high level of investment from the Housing Revenue Account into the current network of cameras positioned at high rise blocks. The equipment currently records images, from a fixed position and for any pictures to be accessed an officer has to attend site to download the information required. Major upgrades would be needed to allow the cameras to rotate and send images back to monitoring suite, including a platform to transmit the CCTV images.

4.2 Estimated figures provided by an approved council contractor to upgrade all cameras and wiring infrastructure at one high rise block in the Kemptown area was in the region of £2000 - £5000. External cameras used by the BHCC Traffic Management Team have a broad price structure and can cost anything from £400 for a fixed camera used typically in a car park to £15,000 to install a camera used to monitor bus lanes and capture specific detail like vehicle licence plates. The annual maintenance charge also provided by the Traffic Management Team is £1,000 per camera per year and broadband connection charges are £3,500 per year, per car parking site. The reason for not providing more information on the full cost of introducing an integrated network of cameras in the city are due to the varied requirements for each block. For example some have existing infrastructure that could be used, other differ in size and could be in need of more equipment.

- 4.3 Other housing providers have made significant progress in this area and set up dedicated CCTV suites. Sandwell Homes based near Birmingham set up a suite covering 150 cameras at 30 separate blocks of flats and 20 other sites. The costs provided for the year 2011 which relate to the communications room were £2.2 million; this figure includes staff resources and provides 28 full time employees for a year. The landlord passes the cost onto residents by a service charge of £3.59 per week. In order to generate revenue the camera network also covers an area in the city centre.
- 4.4 Enquiries have been made with Sussex Police and the Traffic Management Team who have existing arrangements in place to share and view city wide cameras 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. There is a high possibility that images could be viewed at the Traffic Management Suite if the housing service decide to proceed with an investment programme.
- 4.5 There are limitations to the use of CCTV. An article 'CCTV: Neighbourhood Watched'¹ cited research carried out in 2008 by the Campbell Collaboration which found that although cameras could be effective with vehicle and car park crime, evidence to support how CCTV has reduced crime on housing estates was 'mixed'. BHCC have experienced incidents when suspected criminals have been able to avoid identification by being aware of the cameras position and used clothing to cover or shield their face. Furthermore, decisions would have to be made on the type of response BHCC would provide if 24 hour CCTV detected an incident. The most serious issues would be responded to by Sussex Police and consideration could be given to a private security company being called out to deal with other incidents. This service would be an additional charge, with one approved security company charging £15 per call out. At this time there is no data or evidence to help predict how many incidents would require attendance, therefore the total costs are very uncertain.
- 4.6 All existing and any planned new installations of overt CCTV need to adhere to the Regulations of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). This Act governs the powers of public bodies to carry out surveillance and investigation. One of the steps public bodies must take is to consult with the residents impacted by a new installation. This could find some residents in support of the additional CCTV; others may find the idea intrusive, and the right balance would need to be found.
Integrated CCTV is not being recommended at this stage due to the high costs and lack of evidence to support how effective this measure would be. If this option is selected at a later date, further extensive research will need to be completed on the cost options for a programme of investment and with the assistance of residents to clearly define the purpose and benefits of CCTV.
- 4.7 **Concierge service**
- A linked city wide CCTV system providing real time images would be imperative in order to provide any form of concierge service. Research has shown two types of service:

¹ Inside Housing 9 June 2014

1. A static model with officers based in a geographic area carrying out security patrols, general caretaking duties and meeting/greeting visitors and contractors.
2. A remote service based in a concierge suite and using technology to monitor activity in and around a block, communicating with unwanted visitors through speakers based in communal areas and with residents through intercom systems within their homes.

From the research it was confirmed that both types of service are operational 24 hours a day, every day of the year

- 4.8 Southampton City Council set up a concierge centre over 8 years ago to manage 19 high rise blocks, with 10 members of staff employed to run the service. Residents have a handset located in their flat which is linked to the control centre. There are also intercoms and speakers in the communal ways which can be used to make announcements and for residents to communicate. Set up figures were not provided for this service, but a £1 per week charge is made to residents. BHCC would have to give further consideration to the service charge if it was decided to pursue this option.
- 4.9 North Ayrshire Council offers a static service providing 82 cameras and covering 41 high rise blocks. This costs £1.9 million per year. All costs are absorbed by the Housing Revenue Account and at present no charge is passed to residents.
- 4.10 The option of a Concierge service is not being recommended at this time, as the investment into CCTV would need to happen first in order to provide a remote service model. Further research would need to be carried out on the benefits of a static model and how this would be funded.
- 4.11 **Residential caretaker service**

Brighton & Hove City Council had a Residential Caretaker Service up until 2005 when the new Estates Service Team was introduced. Some of the reasons behind this change were due to the introduction of the European Working Time Directive in 2003, setting a maximum limit for weekly working hours with adults being unable to work more than 48 hours per week. Other reasons for the service being changed were high costs and the job package including a 'service tenancy'. This type of tenancy provided accommodation in or near to the area the role covered and resulted in properties being taken out of the total number of homes BHCC could provide to people on the waiting list, often occupying expensive temporary accommodation. This option would lead to a significant increase in service charge.

- 4.12 Greenwich Borough Council still offer a residential type service, this includes duties such as cleaning, clearance of bulky items, minor repairs to lights, raising necessary repairs and graffiti removal. When fully operational the service provided one caretaker for every 200 properties, with some larger estates having 2 or 3 caretakers covering an area. The service is now being phased out by not replacing staff when the leave the role.

- 4.13 The existing service model at Greenwich offers the same service as cleaners within the BHCC estates service, at a higher cost and lacks evidence to support how the issues with unwanted visitors would be addressed. Further research would need to be carried out on how a residential caretaker service would resolve the present security issues.

5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Section 3.13 onwards provides a detailed explanation on the trades button pilot. Other engagement and consultation to note includes:
- 5.2 Due to the positive response at Warwick Mount a neighbouring block, Essex Place learnt of the pilot scheme and requested more information be presented at their meeting in September. As a result all members supported going ahead with consulting all 127 residents by letter about replicating the pilot scheme here. Out of 127 properties in the block 18 responses supported the trades facility be turned off, 2 had no opinion and 2 others rejected the proposal. The Residents Association advised they wish to proceed with a three month pilot. Communication was carried out by displaying a letter in the notice boards and by sending a text message to all residents (who are contactable by phone) advising them of the changes, with the agreement to carry out a review in February 2015. At the time of writing this report there has been no feedback.
- 5.3 The recommendation is to carry out a full switch off of the trades button citywide and install multi steel doors to be fitted as part of the ongoing capital programme. Further detailed research and consultation would be carried out on the other options if there isn't a continued or sustained improvement with security at blocks of flats as a result of these measures being taken forward.

6. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

6.1 Financial Implications:

The security costs for sweeps and static guards highlighted in this report are forecast to cost approximately £100,000 for the year. These costs were not originally budgeted for in 2014/15 and are being managed within the current overall Housing Revenue Account Budget through underspends in the Employees and Repairs budgets identified during the year, through Targeted Budget Management (TBM).

The HRA Capital Investment Programme 2015-2018 budget proposals, presented to Housing Committee on 14th January includes budget totalling £800,000 for Door Entry Systems (Replacement & Repair) for the next 3 years. The expenditure for multi steel doors will be met from this capital programme budget, which may need to be reviewed once a programme for this type of door is developed.

The other options for Area Panels to note and which could be considered such as CCTV installations and the possibility of introducing a concierge or caretaking service to blocks have wider implications (as highlighted in this report) with costs likely to be more significant. Prior to expenditure being

committed, budgets would need to be identified and approvals sought (using a business case) from senior officers and/or members as necessary.

Finance Officer Consulted: Susie Allen

Date: 12 January 2014

6.2 Legal Implications:

To follow before Area Panels take place.

Lawyer Consulted:

Name

Date: dd/mm/yy

6.3 Equalities Implications:

Identified issues to date are:

- An EIA is currently being completed on the trades button switch off
- The charge to fit multi steel doors would be an increase from timber style doors for Leaseholders
- The standard timer setting on multi steel doors complies with all Equalities Act guidance on opening time for general access, in particular for wheelchair users

6.4 Sustainability Implications:

The maintenance cost of timber doors are substantially more over a 10 year period when compared with a multi steel door. This includes how timber as a material is changeable in different types of weather, the increased visits and repairs required to a Yale key lock and any replacements required to glass panels.

An improvement to the general warmth of the block would be provided by the more robust material the multi steel door is made from, when comparing to a timber version.

6.5 Crime & Disorder Implications:

All options have been made with due consideration to improving block security and any nuisance caused to residents from unwanted visitors.

Landlords have new powers to deal with nuisance and anti social behaviour under the ASB Crime and Policing Act 2014 which will be utilised as and when required.

6.6 Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

Risk:

- There is a strong reliance on Royal Mail taking responsibility for communicating effectively with delivery staff and remembering an access fob to continue with postal deliveries.

Opportunity:

- To improve relations with Royal Mail and the service they currently offer to residents
- To make a cost saving on the visits that are made twice a year to change the trade's timers due to the start and ending of British Summer Time (BST).

6.7 Public Health Implications:

To achieve and provide a safer living environment for residents.

6.8 Corporate / Citywide Implications:

If further options need to be explored there may be opportunities for partnership working with the Traffic Management Team, particularly if one corporate location was shared for CCTV management.