

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY 2 JUNE 2009

EXECUTIVE
16 JUNE 2009

FIRE SAFETY POLICY FOR HOUSING PROPERTIES

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Members' approval for a new policy regarding the management of fire safety in the Council's housing stock

2 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Each year, throughout the country, fire not only kills people but costs thousands of pounds in terms of the damage that it causes. This policy sets out how Exeter City Council will identify, reduce and manage the fire risks within its accommodation.
- 1.2 The policy will mainly apply to the common areas of flats and will establish a set of standards that the Council will work towards to ensure the safety of its residents. It is acknowledged that this policy cannot just be delivered by the Council alone and that the cooperation and agreement of its residents is central to its success. A copy of the policy is available on the Council's website.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 places a duty on the nominated 'responsible person' of the organisation to take general fire precautions to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the safety of the people on the premises (which in the Council's case includes its residents, their families, visitors, contractors and employees).
- 3.2 The order covers general fire precautions and other safety duties which are needed to protect 'relevant' persons. The order requires fire precautions to be put into place and this policy is intended to set out how the standards will be achieved for our own housing stock.

4 FINDINGS

- 4.1 In 2008 the Council appointed a firm of external consultants to undertake fire risk assessments (FRA) to 361 of its blocks of flats which fall under the Fire Safety Order. The majority of these have now been completed with a list of actions established in those blocks where failures have been identified. The aims of a FRA are to identify the fire hazards, reduce the risk of those hazards causing harm as reasonably practicable and to decide what physical fire precautions and management arrangements are necessary to ensure the safety of people at the premises if a fire does start.
- 4.2 It is clear that a lot of residents living in our flats use the common areas as either storage areas for their belongings (bikes, prams etc) or as an extension of their own accommodation. Although this can make the environment in these areas more

pleasant to live in, they may also create a fire hazard where flammable items are stored or an obstacle to either residents or the Fire Service if a fire actually occurs.

- 4.3 This policy sets up the principal of designating 'safe areas' within each block of flats where certain non flammable items can be stored. A full list of eligible items will be published and residents in each block will be consulted about the proposals before the new policy is implemented. However, it is intended that as the policy is implemented within each block of flats or neighbourhood, residents will agree to sign a Neighbourhood Agreement that sets out what can and can't be stored in the common areas and where such storage will be allowed. It will also set out the roles and responsibilities of both the Council as landlord and local residents. Regular inspections will need to be undertaken to ensure these agreements are adhered to.
- 4.4 The FRAs have detailed a number of fire precaution measures that are required to our blocks of flats and these are dealt with in more detail in the policy document. The majority of these proposals reflect the fact that the Council has a large number of blocks of flats that are over 30 years old and very little investment has been made in keeping the fire precaution measures up to date. The major areas that require attention are:
- Replacing the front doors of flats with 30 minute fire doors.
 - Updating of the fire detection equipment in common areas.
 - Consideration of emergency lighting
 - Fire management plans (evacuation procedures etc)
- 4.5 To identify those blocks of flats that are at highest risk should a fire occur a scoring system has been established with those blocks reaching the highest score being those that will be prioritised as work is undertaken.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The work required to update the general fire precautions within our blocks of flats to comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 has already been identified under the Asset Management Strategy 2009-2015 where for the period 2010-2015 funding of £1,008,000 has been identified to undertake work to 1680 properties.
- 5.2 An additional £500,000 has been identified to help implement this policy across the stock and in particular help to pay for enhanced refuse facilities etc where they are required.

6 TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Tenant and Leaseholder Committee was consulted on the details of this policy on 11 May 2009. The committee welcomes the plans to undertake more intensive management in communal areas and the introduction of a policy that clearly sets out what can and cannot be stored in communal areas. The committee does however, have concerns that reducing the chance to store certain items in the communal area may cause storage problems for some tenants.
6. Following the publication of the STATUS survey and the Resident Auditor Team's flat survey (both undertaken in 2008) it is clear that the majority of residents in our flats regard the condition of the communal areas in and around our blocks of flats as a high priority for action. The Council accepts that further work is required and adopting

this policy will go some way to ensuring communal areas are improved across our housing stock. However, maintaining, inspecting and enforcing these new standards will be difficult given the high numbers of blocks of flats within our ownership.

5. RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Community – Scrutiny supports and Executive approves the Fire Safety Policy for the Council's housing stock

HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

S:LP/PA/Committee/609SCC16
20.5.09

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:**