



Title	Renewal of fire alarm systems in sheltered housing schemes
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Wards of the District directly affected	Saltisford, Crown, Clarendon, St John's
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	
Background Papers	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	Yes
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	Yes, Ref. 784
Equality and Sustainability Impact Assessment Undertaken	No

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	10/06/2016	Bill Hunt
Head of Service	09/06/2016	Andy Thompson
CMT	10/06/2016	
Section 151 Officer	10/06/2016	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	10/06/2016	Andy Jones
Finance	09/06/2016	Kunmi Joseph
Portfolio Holder(s)	15/6/2016	Peter Phillips
Consultation & Community Engagement		
Final Decision?	Yes	
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report requests additional resources to enable the replacement of the current out- of-date fire panel alarm systems at the Council's five sheltered housing schemes for older and/or vulnerable people (Acorn Court, Chandos Court, James Court, Tannery Court and Yeomanry Close) which together provide homes for around 185 people.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That Executive agrees to increase the £71,000 of earmarked funding for the renewal of the fire alarm systems in the Council's five sheltered housing schemes up to a maximum of £207,000 by reducing the contribution to the Housing Revenue Account Capital Investment Reserve during the financial year 2016-17.
- 2.2 That Executive notes the works will be completed by the end of the current financial year and that, given the inadequacies identified with the existing systems revised management arrangements that will remain in place until the completion of the works, to ensure the continued safety of the sheltered scheme tenants.

3 **REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The current fire systems in the Council's five sheltered housing schemes have been in place since the schemes were built over 30 years ago. In recognition of the age of these systems £71,000 was transferred from the Fire Risk budget to the Sheltered Schemes Fire alarm budget and earmarked to fund the system upgrades.
- 3.2 A major re-organisation of the sheltered scheme contracts had been agreed by the service area and the Procurement Team, with the previously separate contracts for fire alarms, Lifeline call systems, automatic doors and CCTV at the sheltered schemes being brought together into a single contract to improve efficiency and maximise best value through an economy of scale. It was, therefore, decided to defer major works to the fire alarm systems until the new contractor was in place.
- 3.3 The new contract was put out to tender via a framework agreement in April 2015. However only one supplier tendered for the contract and the evaluation process, which included a comprehensive benchmarking exercise, determined that the prices quoted were above market average, so the contract was not awarded. After careful consideration and liaison between the service area and the Procurement Team it was decided that the contract should be re-tendered, but with the works sub-divided into lots. This second procurement exercise was undertaken in July 2015 and contracts let in October 2015.
- 3.4 The newly appointed contractor was instructed to carry out a full inspection of the systems in each scheme. This survey identified an unanticipated range of problems including that some sensors were not working and that many others were operating with too long a delay before triggering an alarm. After examination of the inspection results and discussions with the contractor it was determined that the existing systems could not be upgraded and that full replacement was the only viable option to ensure the future safety of the scheme's tenants.

- 3.5 Two options for replacement systems were considered, replacement with a like-for-like conventional system or replacement with an addressable system. Conventional systems will identify that a fire alarm has been activated at a scheme but not its exact location whereas an addressable system identifies the precise location of the activated sensor. Advice from the Building Control team and Health & Safety Officer is that an addressable system should be fitted.
- 3.6 Addressable systems are more expensive than conventional ones and the earmarked £71,000 would be insufficient to cover their installation. However, they have many advantages over conventional systems including:
- Greater reliability and fewer false alarms
 - Greater functionality, identifying the location of a fire with much greater precision, thus saving time in an emergency situation
 - Lower repairs and maintenance costs as each detector effectively incorporates its own computer which evaluates the environment around it and, in addition to alerting the Control Panel if there a fire, also identified faults or the need for the sensor head to be cleaned.
- 3.7 The contract for the repair and maintenance of fire alarm systems provides for upgrades and new system installations, as well as repairs, under the Schedule of Rates (SORs) we issued in the contract specification. This removes the need for a separate procurement exercise for the installation works and will allow the new systems to be in place by the end of the current financial year.
- 3.8 However, having identified that there are deficiencies with the existing systems the risks associated with these issues will not be fully addressed until such time as the all the installations are complete. To mitigate this risk a range of revised management arrangements have already been implemented.
- 3.9 The existing systems are monitored by the Council's Lifeline control centre, which operates 24/7, 365 days a year and if any alarm activation is detected a protocol has been put in place with the Fire & Rescue Service to ensure that they will call out to the affected scheme as a priority. In addition, if there are no staff on site the Control Centre will dispatch a minimum of two response officers to the scheme. Once on site they would investigate to ascertain if the activation is a false alarm or, in the event of fire, they would, if the Fire Service was not already on site, assess the need for an evacuation provided it was safe to do so.
- 3.10 An enhanced testing regime has also been put in place as an interim measure with a weekly test undertaken by staff and a full inspection by the contractor every 3 months. This is a blanket measure and is now being reviewed to determine if the contractor should be instructed to inspect particular schemes more regularly.

4. **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

- 4.1 **Policy Framework** – The recommendations support the Council's delivery of its Sustainable Community Strategy. The investment in the Council's housing stock assists delivery of the Housing theme, the additional protection of the additional functionality of the new systems supports the Community Safety scheme and the benefits of the provision of a safe environment for older or vulnerable tenants supports the Health & Well-being theme.

4.2 **Fit for the Future** – The proposals will assist the Service Strand of the Fit for the Future Programme as it will maintain or improve our services to the local community.

5. **BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK**

5.1 The estimated cost of the works to upgrade to a fully addressable system at each scheme is £180,000. However, given the scale of the works across 5 separate sites it is prudent to include a contingency budget of 15%, taking the estimated cost to £207,000. This would cover the works themselves with any ancillary works, for example, making good and decoration or associated M&E upgrades being covered by the appropriate budgets, which have capacity to absorb any in-year expenditure.

5.2 Funding of £71,000 has already been set aside towards this work from earmarked reserves carried forward from 2015-16 to 2016-17, so the additional budget requested is £136,000.

5.3 This sum can be funded from the Capital Investment Reserve. This will have no immediate impact on the Council's capacity to meet its wider housing investment needs, such as building new homes, which are being developed as part of the Housing Futures project.

5.4 The costs of the contract will be closely monitored and any unused contingency would be returned to the Capital Investment Reserve.

6. **RISKS**

6.1 If the Council does not maintain adequate fire safety system, there then it is at risk of not meeting its obligation to ensure a safe and secure environment for our residents. The Council also needs to meet the requirements of the Government guideline for Risk Assessment to Sheltered accommodation in association with compliancy to the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 which recommends that fire alarm systems in the communal areas comply with BS5839 part 1 2002 LD2. Whilst this guidance is not retrospective and does not apply to the existing systems any new system would have to be compliant. The proposed addressable systems will meet this standard.

6.2 Significant weaknesses have been identified with the existing alarm systems requiring specific mitigation measures. It is therefore imperative that the enhanced management arrangements set out in paragraphs 3.9 and 3.10 are maintained, monitored and adjusted as necessary until all the proposed new installations are complete at which point the risk level within the Service Area Risk Register can be downgraded as appropriate.

7. **ALTERNATIVE OPTION CONSIDERED**

7.1 We could install a conventional systems but this has been discounted as the addressable systems will provide the greatest protection to the scheme residents and ensure compliance with good practice and all relevant legislation and regulations.