

Statement to full Council regarding fire safety in high rise blocks

Councillor Peter Phillips portfolio holder for Housing and Property Services

Following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in London on Tuesday 14 June 2017, I would first like to express my personal deepest sympathy, and I am sure that of all the Council, to all families affected by this terrible event.

This statement is to update and inform all councillors on the situation with the blocks that we own and manage and to reassure residents and fellow councillors about the arrangements that we have in place; and to set out our plans going forward.

We have seven high rise blocks providing residential accommodation as Council tenancies. High rise blocks are those over 18m high i.e. 6 or more storeys.

The blocks in question are:

Address	No. of floors	Units of accommodation
Eden Court, Mason Avenue, Lillington, Leamington Spa	14 floors	90
Southorn Court, Mason Avenue, Lillington Leamington Spa	8 floors	46
Ashton Court, Newland Road, Lillington, Leamington Spa Mason Av	8 floors	46
Christine Ledger Square, Brunswick, Leamington Spa	11 floors	57
Radcliffe Gardens, Brunswick Street, Leamington Spa	11 floors	54
Stamford Gardens, Rugby Road, Leamington Spa	9 floors	45
Westbrook House, New Brook Street, Leamington Spa.	11 floors	33

The regulation of safety standards are incorporated into Building Regulations, which ensure that fire safety provisions are incorporated into blocks of flats when they are constructed or significantly modified. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 brought the common parts of blocks of flats within the scope of mainstream fire safety legislation. With regards to guidance, this can be found in the Local Government Association publication "Fire safety in purpose built blocks of flats" 2012. <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/fire-safety-purpose-built-04b.pdf>

WDC have the following arrangements in place:

- We have fire alarm systems fitted in each of the blocks in the communal areas.
- The communal area fire alarms are tested weekly, with records kept of the tests. The alarms are serviced every quarter and again records kept.

- We fit smoke alarms in each of the individual flats. These are hard wired. These are tested during five yearly checks to the electricians that we undertake for all properties.
- All of the blocks have emergency lighting which is tested monthly and serviced 6 monthly.
- We undertake weekly health and safety checks of the blocks. These check that fire doors are operating correctly, firefighting equipment is in good order and escape routes are free from hazards.
- Full fire risk assessments are carried out every two years. These were last completed in February 2016.
- Fire safety signs are displayed in all blocks to advise of evacuation procedures. We operate a stay put policy in case of fire. This follows advice from Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. A copy is attached.
- We have reinforced messages to residents to also take responsibility for safety, encouraging tenants to report issues and not leave rubbish or other items in communal areas. We have been proactive in enforcing safety measures and removing obstructions in communal areas.
- There has been speculation regarding the installation of new cladding materials at the Grenfell Tower and that this aided the spread of fire. We do not have cladding of the type installed at Grenfell Tower i.e. Aluminium Composite Materials (ACM). We have not installed any new insulation materials to our blocks in recent years. The cladding materials on blocks have been in place for many years.

Following the fire at Grenfell Tower we have looked to reassure residents. We have therefore undertaken the following actions:

- In order to give reassurance we and the Fire Service visited the blocks on the Wednesday and Thursday following the fire.
- We sent letters to all high rise tenants to give reassurance and highlight the need for all tenants to take fire prevention seriously. This letter was sent out on the Wednesday, the day of the fire. This was hand delivered to all residents. We have had very few calls from our residents in high rise flats following the fire in London.
- We sent out a briefing note to all councillors and our local MPs on Wednesday 15 June. We have responded to many further enquiries from local councillors.
- Myself, Simon Brooke, Russell Marsden and Phil Sheen met with Matt Western, MP, on Thursday and visited two of our high rise blocks.
- We have agreed to meet and discuss any learning implications from the Grenfell Tower fire with the Fire Service. This meeting is planned for Thursday this week.
- We have reviewed the recommendations from the Fire Risk Assessments. These inspections identified priorities for undertaking recommended works. All immediate actions have been completed. There are some actions not for immediate attention that have not yet been completed, but had been planned to be completed in the timescale for the next inspection in February 2018. These are on track to be completed in that period.
- The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) have been in touch looking for information on our high rise stock and our use of cladding materials. We have responded to their requests quickly as and when required.
- We issued a press release on Friday 17 June, to reassure the public and express our sympathies with families affected.

In the light of the Grenfell fire there are further actions that we have decided to take to provide additional assurance.

- Although we have none of the type of cladding used at Grenfell Tower, we will however check the materials used and efficacy of these materials in fire retardation. We expect to have the results of this within 4 weeks.
- We are suggesting a move from once every two years to annual Fire Risk Assessments in our seven high rise blocks. Existing Fire Risk Assessments will be reviewed this week, with new Fire Risk Assessments completed over the next four weeks. These will also cover the external aspects of the buildings as per new guidance from DCLG, including any cladding issues.
- We will review our fire evacuation plans and publicity to tenants with the Fire Service. This should be completed within two weeks. We will write to tenants again after this has been completed.
- We will undertake a full review of all front doors to flats within communal areas in our blocks to ensure they are certified to 30 minute fire protection. We are aware of some original front doors in place that were compliant when the properties were built, but may not comply now. Although there is no regulatory requirement to change these doors, we think that this would be a worthwhile improvement in fire safety and reassurance to residents. This will also include working with leaseholders in instances where a new non-compliant front door has been installed.

There are other measures which some other Local Authorities / Housing Associations have in place that we will now consider:

- Sprinkler systems or other fire suppressant methods. These may assist in preventing the spread of fire. These are not part of the current building regulations but were one of the recommended changes following the Lakanal fire in 2009. A survey in 2015 showed that just 18 of 2,925 council owned high rise blocks in England have sprinklers inside flats, with only 187 having sprinklers in other communal areas. We will review our position on sprinkler systems and report back to the Executive and Council.
- Improved fire and smoke control in communal areas. Following our last Fire Risk Assessments many carpentry repairs were identified and carried out to ensure the effective operation of existing doors, closers and ventilation systems. There is however a limit to how effective repairs can be to old doors and systems. We had been planning as part of the work arising from the stock condition survey and the associated forward investment plans, to lay out refurbishment plans for high rise blocks and this will now be prioritised.

We will continue to follow events as they unfold. We will implement any further guidance or instructions from the DCLG. The Housing Services and the Property Services teams will keep all councillors informed in further briefings. Reports to Executive and / or Scrutiny Committees will be produced as necessary and/or when required.

We will also continue with our efforts to ensure resident safety is of paramount importance and to reassure our residents living in high rise accommodation that arrangements are in place to ensure their safety.

Please in the meantime if you have further question let me know or speak to Simon Brooke Sustaining Tenancies Manager in Housing Services or Russell Marsden our Asset Manager in Property Services.

Fire Information

What to do if fire breaks out in your flat

- Don't try to tackle the fire yourself, unless you are absolutely sure it is safe to do so.
- Leave the room at once and close the door.
- Alert any other people in the flat. Leave the flat and, when everyone is out, close the front door.
- Call the fire brigade by dialling 999, using either a mobile phone or the nearest telephone. This is a free service - you won't need to pay money if you have to use a phone box.
- If you have to leave the building leave using the staircase, not the lift, and avoid using balconies, which are not part of an escape route.

If fire breaks out elsewhere in your building, or if you hear the fire alarm

- You should consider whether to leave the building or remain in your flat, but it will normally be safe for you to stay in your own flat.
- The front door of your flat is a fire door, designed to protect you until the Fire Service arrive.
- However, if your flat is affected by heat or smoke, leave at once, closing windows and doors behind you.
- **It is an offence to intentionally wedge fire doors open, if anyone is injured due to this action you could be held responsible in a court of law.**

Lifts should never be used in a fire situation

If you require any further assistance or clarification on the matters above please contact Warwick District Council on 01926 456129

