

<b>Housing Select Committee</b>			
Title	Emergency services review	Item	3
Contributor	Lewisham Homes		
Class	Part 1	Date	19 June 2013

## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with a response to issues raised at the last Housing Select Committee on 16 May 2013:
- Progress on considering the installation of sprinklers in Lewisham Homes' high rise buildings
  - The response to proposals by the Fire Service to reduce the number of fire fighters based in the borough by one quarter, in particular how residents are being involved and informed about fire safety.

## **2. Recommendation**

It is recommended that Members note the contents of the report.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 Housing Select Committee considered a report on the Emergency Service Review at its last meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2013. Following this, the Committee wanted to know more about two of the issues raised:
- 3.2 Firstly, progress on discussions about the installation of sprinklers in Lewisham Homes' high rise buildings.
- 3.3 Secondly, the Committee wanted to know more about resident involvement in fire safety and prevention measures. Specifically, how residents are being informed about fire safety, and, when problems are identified in particular buildings, how these are dealt with. The Committee also wanted to know whether there were ways in which residents could become more involved in ensuring that their buildings are fire safe.

## **4. Retro-fitting of sprinklers to blocks of flats managed by Lewisham Homes**

- 4.1 In line with legislative requirements, Lewisham Homes has adopted a risk-based approach to managing fire safety. A fire risk assessment has been completed for each building and there is an on-going programme to

regularly review these assessments, and make any reasonable improvements to fire safety in each block.

- 4.2 Sheltered accommodation was identified as a higher priority due a combination of fire risk assessments and the vulnerability of tenants living in those schemes. Therefore, Lewisham Homes completed a programme of intrusive fire risk assessments, to ensure that the strategy for managing fire risk in sheltered housing is effective. Feasibility studies are now programmed for 2013-14 to assess the viability of installing sprinklers in these properties.
- 4.3 There are additional factors, for example problems in managing the storage of mobility scooters. These present a fire risk because they are flammable and can obstruct the access routes from a building. They are also highly valued by their users and equality legislation requires proper consideration of the needs of those with disabilities. The installation of sprinklers, if viable, can address those risks.
- 4.4 The use of sprinklers has been piloted, and a sprinkler system has been installed in Somerville, which is an extra-care sheltered housing block. This was a ground breaking approach, and the first of its type in London, developed in partnership with the London Fire Brigade. It has been heralded as good practice because it greatly increases protection to residents by suppressing a fire in its early stages. Lewisham Homes has been taking part in good practice seminars organised by the LFB to promote this approach.
- 4.5 Intrusive fire risk surveys are currently being considered for other blocks, with priority being given to the buildings that present the highest risk. The height of a building is not a good indicator of the greatest risk – some lower blocks with complex construction or housing vulnerable people present a higher risk. Future assessments will consider retro-fitting sprinklers as one option, comparing this to the cost of remedial works.
- 4.6 It is difficult to estimate the future costs of fitting sprinkler systems, as each block is different. However, an indication can be given from the cost of installing sprinklers at Somerville - this was £41,800 and covered all communal areas, 2 offices and 26 flats, making a unit cost of £1500.

## **5. Response to reductions in fire fighters in the borough**

- 5.1 The storage or dumping of combustible items within or close to buildings is a major contributory factor to fires in social housing. Regular checks and removal of combustible items are carried out by Lewisham Homes.

- 5.2 Residents can actively improve the fire safety arrangements in their building by observing the guidance given by Lewisham Homes in various publications including the 'Fire Safety in the Home' booklet. They can also contribute by reporting promptly to Lewisham Homes any items that have been left within the communal areas.
- 5.3 Residents receive information about fire safety from Lewisham Homes in the following ways
- Fire safety booklet and Tenants' handbook provide guidance;
  - The Lewisham Homes' residents magazine has regular articles on fire safety;
  - All new tenants are shown a DVD at sign-up which similarly gives advice;
  - Tenants are advised about the maintenance of smoke alarms fitted as part of major works refurbishments in an after care booklet.
- 5.4 In terms of involvement, tenants and residents associations are encouraged to have fire safety as an agenda items, and to feed back to Lewisham Homes any issues identified. The Lewisham Homes Fire Safety Advisor has also attended TRA meetings to give advice. At community events, including DIY training run by major works contractors, sessions are run by the London Fire Brigade to promote fire safety.

## **6 Further implications**

There are no financial, legal, crime & disorder, sustainability of equalities implications arising from this report.

Please contact Louise Spires, Housing Strategy, Policy and Development Manager, 020 8314 6649.