

## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CABINET**

**22<sup>ND</sup> JUNE 2017**

### **FIRE SAFETY ARRANGEMENTS FOR SOCIAL HOUSING, SUPPORTED HOUSING, HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION AND COUNCIL OWNED BUILDINGS**

#### **REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR PUBLIC HEALTH & PROTECTION IN DISCUSSION WITH COUNCILLOR R BEVAN AND COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS**

**Author(s) Paul Mee, Service Director for Public Health & Protection  
Phillip Howells, Head of Community Housing Services**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Members on enquiries with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and supported housing providers operating in Rhondda Cynon Taf seeking assurance regarding fire safety and fire precautions at their properties. The report also briefly updates Members on checks made in relation to Council owned buildings and the important role of Building Control.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the contents of this report, and
- 2.2 Request the Service Director for Public Health & Protection to make any further enquiries that may be necessary to provide public reassurance.

#### **3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 In response to the tragic loss of life at the Grenfell Tower fire in London, the Leader of the Council has requested an urgent report to Cabinet to update Members on the fire safety arrangements at social housing, supported housing and other buildings across the Council.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The Grenfell Tower fire occurred on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 at a 24-storey tower block of public housing flats in North Kensington, London. The

tower contained 127 flats and 227 bedrooms. At the time of writing, the presumed number of deaths is 79.

- 4.2 Investigations into the cause of the fire and the reasons for its rapid spread are ongoing. However, it has been widely reported in the press that residents had expressed concerns over the safety of the building and that the cladding used during its recent renovation may have played a part in the spread of the fire.
- 4.3 In response to this tragic loss of life, the Council has made enquiries with RSLs operating in the County Borough regarding fire safety and fire precautions at their properties. Enquires have been made regarding the system of cladding, if any, employed in their refurbishment works.
- 4.4 This report will also provide Members with an update on fire safety checks as part of the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and further checks by Corporate Estates in respect of Council owned buildings and Building Control in respect of External Wall Insulation (EWI) schemes in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

## **5. REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORDS**

- 5.1 The Council has contacted all social housing providers operating in Rhondda Cynon Taf. We have received responses from four RSLs who between them cover the majority of social housing provided.
- 5.2 There are no high-rise blocks of flats in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The accommodation provided by RSLs is typically self-contained flats within smaller lower rise blocks no more than five storeys high.
- 5.3 The RSLs have all confirmed that annual fire risk assessments have been undertaken at their schemes and all are up to date. There are a number of outstanding, minor actions arising from the risk assessments, for example, items stored in communal areas that require removal and these are being addressed. Fire alarm tests are on a weekly basis and logs are retained and monitored by the RSLs.
- 5.4 All RSLs that have responded have confirmed that they have not used the PE type cladding system used at Grenfell Tower. Three RSLs have confirmed that any cladding used at their properties is made out of fire retardant materials or compliant with fire resistance standards. One RSL is making further enquiries with the provider.

## **6. SUPPORTED HOUSING PROVIDERS**

- 6.1 The Council is making enquiries with supported housing providers in respect of their fire safety precautions and procedures and is awaiting responses. However, enquiries with RSLs have confirmed the

arrangements for sheltered accommodation and independent living schemes.

- 6.2 Annual fire risk assessment are undertaken and action taken to address any non-compliance. Regular inspections are undertaken and fire alarm tests undertaken weekly. Where appropriate, evacuation schemes are in place and these may include delayed evacuation if agreed with the Fire & Rescue Service.

## **7. HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMOS)**

- 7.1 There are 650 licensed HMOs in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The majority of these are two storey properties comprising of four or five bedroom accommodation. There are only four HMOs in five storey buildings.
- 7.2 All licensed HMOs must comply with licensing conditions in relation to appropriate fire precautions including smoke detection and alarms, provision of firefighting equipment, emergency lighting if necessary, safe electrical and gas installations and in some cases a secondary means of escape.
- 7.3 In April 2016, Cabinet approved recommendations contained within the report "*Opportunities to improve housing stock and support a functional housing market in Treforest*". As part of the two year targeted housing intervention within Treforest, the Project Team has carried out 491 annual safety inspections of licensed HMO with a target that all Licensed HMOs will have received an annual inspection by September 2017.

## **8. OTHER COUNCIL BUILDINGS AND OFFICE ACCOMMODATION**

- 8.1 The Council's office accommodation is fire risk assessed depending on the complexities of the building. For example, Sardis House is Fire Risk Assessed every 3 years, it has a fire alarm system and there is more than one means of escape. External cladding applications on the Council's office accommodation and large schools are in the process of being checked.

## **9. BUILDING CONTROL**

- 9.1 The Building Control service has undertaken an initial review of records that indicate the following:
- The External Wall Insulation (EWI) systems in RCT are Building Research Establishment (BRE) accredited.
  - Where EWI is fitted to buildings, it is directly fixed to the external facade, creating no additional cavity or gap behind the cladding which could create a chimney effect.

- Predominately the buildings that have been fitted with EWI are no more than two storeys with the exception of a few maisonettes/low rise blocks of flats.
- Any work must be in accordance with the manufacturer's specification to receive a Completion Notice following inspection. For example, the correct amount of fixing, installation of fire stopping where necessary.

9.2 Building Control will make further detailed checks to verify the above information at all relevant schemes.

## **10. DISCUSSION**

10.1 There are no high-rise blocks of flats in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The accommodation provided by RSLs is typically self-contained flats within smaller lower rise blocks no more than five storeys high. RSLs across Rhondda Cynon Taf have provided assurance that their fire risk assessments and fire precautions are up to date and that action is taken to address non-compliance where identified.

10.2 Where external wall cladding or insulation has been used, this is not of the type that was used at the Grenfell Tower. However, RSLs are making further investigations into the safety of the products used on their properties to provide their tenants with re-assurance.

10.3 Enquiries are ongoing with providers of supported accommodation to ensure that fire risk assessments and fire procedures are up to date.

10.4 The Council has introduced a HMO licensing scheme that is inclusive of all HMOs in the County Borough. The license includes conditions that cover fire precautions and these properties are subject to regular inspection.

10.5 Further checks to all large Council owned buildings or schools with external cladding systems are underway. The Council's Building Control service is also making further checks in respect of EWI systems installed elsewhere across the County Borough.

## **11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of this urgent report are for information purposes only.

## **12. CONSULTATION**

12.1 There are no public consultation implications arising from this report.

### **13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

13.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### **14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

14.1 The Council regulate fire safety of HMOs through the Housing Act 2004 licensing and hazard rating provisions. All licensed HMOs within Rhondda Cynon Taf have a specific fire safety condition attached as part of their license. The Fire & Rescue Authority regulate student halls of residence, sheltered accommodation, residential care homes and holiday lets in accordance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

### **15. CONCLUSION**

15.1 Following the tragic fire at the Grenfell Tower Block in London, the Council has promptly sought reassurance from local RSLs regarding their arrangements for fire safety and procedures at their properties. Responses have been received from four RSLs so far that provide the majority of social rented accommodation in Rhondda Cynon Taf and all have confirmed that they are taking their responsibilities seriously, have ensured that fire risk assessments and procedures are up to date and are actively seeking to reassure their tenants.

15.2 The Council is awaiting a response from supported housing providers and from the remaining RSLs that have fewer properties in Rhondda Cynon Taf. We will complete these enquiries in the next couple of days.

15.3 The Council's Corporate Estates Service is checking any EWI systems installed at Council owned large buildings or schools and the Building Control Service is checking the details of EWI systems installed elsewhere across the County Borough.

#### **Other Information:-**

#### ***Relevant Scrutiny Committee***

Health & Well-being Scrutiny Committee

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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**Background Papers**

None

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