

<b>DECISION-MAKER:</b>	<b>OVERVIEW &amp; SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE</b>		
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>IMPROVING FIRE SAFETY IN THE COUNCIL'S HIGH RISE ACCOMMODATION</b>		
<b>DATE OF DECISION:</b>	<b>10 MARCH 2016</b>		
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING &amp; SUSTAINABILITY</b>		
<b><u>CONTACT DETAILS</u></b>			
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<b>STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY</b>			
None.			
<b>BRIEF SUMMARY</b>			
Following the fire at Shirley Towers in 2010, Southampton City Council Housing Services worked in partnership with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services to put in place a series of actions as a result of our partnership learning from the incident giving particular regard to the recommendations from the Coroner's Inquest in 2012.			
Following the recent minor fire at Millbank House this report summarises for OSMC the action the Council has taken to ensure that our high rise accommodation remains safe for residents and visitors.			
Southampton City Council is able to confirm that all its high rise buildings meet the required regulations and indeed the Council is going further by carrying out some refurbishment and improvement works to a number of buildings over and above our current legal obligations.			
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS:</b>			
	(i)	That OSMC note the current position	
<b>DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)</b>			
1	On 6 April 2010 a fire broke out in flat 72 at Shirley Towers. Tragically in the course of tackling the fire, two firefighters lost their lives. A number of investigations were instigated through the Police, Fire Service and Health & Safety Executive. No criminal proceedings resulted however a Coroner's inquest took place in June / July 2012. During the inquest and the questioning a list of issues was compiled for SCC to follow up on to ensure the matters raised within the inquest were identified and acted upon. These issues were collected into a post inquest action plan. The action plan was then shared with HFRS and subsequently joint actions under 9 headings were agreed. These were:		

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Signage in corridors;</li> <li>2. Warden regular building checks;</li> <li>3. Warden training and role in a fire;</li> <li>4. Building Access and issues protocol;</li> <li>5. Building upgrades and communication with HFRS;</li> <li>6. Communication with tenants;</li> <li>7. Cable mounted in conduit;</li> <li>8. Internal (within flat) doors on intermediate landing; and</li> <li>9. Sprinklers.</li> </ol> <p>This was kept under regular review through joint meetings between SCC &amp; HFRS and signed off as complete at the end of March 2013.</p>
2	<p>Further in February 2013 the Coroner published his recommendations (known as rule 43 recommendations) of which 4 specifically related to issues for consideration by the Council. These specific recommendations were as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is recommended that all FRSs and social housing providers consider the Rule 43 recommendations made by HM Coroner for Hertfordshire Mr Edward Thomas following the inquest into firefighter fatalities at Harrow Court in particular Recommendation 8 made by the FBU which is here repeated for ease of reference: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“8. That SBC should remove all the surface mounted plastic trunking/conduit used to protect and support the <b>Fire Alarm and Automatic Fire Detection System</b> in the Common Areas of all their premises, and replace them with a method of cable support which as a minimum conforms to BS 5839- Part 1 : 2002; clause 26.2 (f);</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. It is recommended that Building Regulations are amended to ensure that all cables, not just fire alarm cables, are supported by fire-resistant cable supports. This could be achieved by an amendment to BS 7671 (2008) Institute of Electrical Engineers Wiring Regulations.</li> <li>3. Social housing providers should be encouraged to consider the retrofitting of sprinklers in all existing high rise buildings in excess of 30 metres in height, particularly those identified by Fire and Rescue Services as having complex designs that make fire-fighting more hazardous and/or difficult. It is noted that current legislation requires that all newly built high rise buildings in excess of 30 metres in height must be fitted with sprinkler systems.</li> <li>4. It is recommended that there should be an obligation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide signage to indicate floor levels both in stairwells and lift lobbies in high rise premises, to assist the emergency services;</li> <li>• ensure that signage indicating flat numbers and emergency exits in high rise premises are placed at a low level to <u>increase</u> visibility in smoke conditions.</li> </ul> <p>This could potentially be achieved by amending Article 38 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, which relates to maintenance of measures provided for the protection of firefighters. Alternatively new legislation may be required.</p> </li> </ol>

3	<p>At the point of publication of the Coroner's recommendations in February 2013 items 1 and 4 had already been addressed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All fire alarm cables with SCC Housing buildings were already confirmed as conforming to the regulations.</li> <li>4. The Council had undertaken a project with HFRS to review all communal signage in our Tower Blocks was clear and provide the appropriate indication. All three scissor blocks (Shirley, Sturminster and Albion) where the specific issues within the recommendation had been identified, had already had all their signage upgraded and all other tower blocks were either underway or planned. All signage was concluded in 2013.</li> </ol> <p>Recommendations 2 &amp; 3 were more complex and our action is outlined below.</p>
	<p><b>Fire resistant cable supports</b></p>
4	<p>The recommendation specifically suggested a change to the Building Regulations or the Electrical Engineers Wiring Regulations. In the Government's response to the Coroner's recommendations they rejected the proposal to change the Building Regulations but referred the matter for consideration under the Electrical Regulations.</p>
5	<p>However, regardless of the outcome of this recommendation SCC took the decision to assume that the change in regulations would be forthcoming and therefore by March 2013 we had changed the specification for our contracts to ensure that all cabling in any future rewires or refurbishments was secured with fire resistant clips. This was therefore over and above the regulations that were in force at the time.</p>
6	<p>In January 2015 the Electrical Engineers Wiring Regulations were altered so that with effect from July 2015 it became a requirement for all new wiring installations to be secured with fire resistant clips. Like all changes to such regulations they did not apply retrospectively meaning that organisations were under no obligation to replace any existing wiring. However, SCC had been in discussions with HFRS since 2013 on the particular issues within the scissor blocks and had agreed in principle that as part of the wider refurbishment projects being planned to these buildings under ECO funding that we would address the cable supports during these works (even though we were not actually due to replace the wiring itself, meaning the regulations would not normally apply).</p>
7	<p>Members will be aware that the significant changes to ECO funding in December 2013 meant that these projects have taken longer to commence than originally intended, however work is now well underway. Replacement of clips has been prioritised for the early phases of the project. Work in the communal areas of Shirley Towers and Sturminster House is all complete. Individual flats along with communal areas in Albion Towers are currently being addressed and the work is being carried out in consultation with HFRS.</p>
8	<p>To undertake this work SCC has appointed a contractor and the cost of retrofitting clips in these three specific towers under the contract is £100k. The cost has been minimised by running it alongside the ECO project as staff are already on site who have already removed the corridor ceilings as part of the</p>

	enabling work for ECO pipe runs. It has also been agreed with HFRS that whenever the City Council undertakes a refurbishment project in its tower blocks that we will use the opportunity to address any cabling supports.
9	The Council did give consideration to a programme of retrospectively installing fire retardant clips in all high-rise buildings within the City. SCC has 23 buildings that it would consider to fall into the category of high-rise in this regard and these properties contain over 2,000 individual flats. These works would be in addition to current electrical works that we undertake and therefore would require the employment of extra dedicated resources. It was estimated that on average the cost of works to each individual flat would be in the region of £250 for the labour and materials. In addition to facilitate appointments and access to over 2,000 properties would require additional resources for planning and scheduling. Therefore the works to individual flats alone would be in excess of £0.5m. In addition to the individual flats the Council would need to undertake works to secure all cables in communal areas and this type of work would vary by building depending on whether the cables were surface mounted, boxed in or fitting behind existing ceilings. Consideration for each building would need to be given to how cabling runs through existing building partitions, risers and other building voids. This would require full surveys of all buildings and detailed method statements for completion. It was estimated that on average each building's communal area would cost in the region of £25,000 therefore making the total cost of this part of the project in excess of £0.5m. As a result, the combined cost of both elements of the project is likely to exceed £1m.
10	In consideration of all the factors including the fact that this was over and above the requirements of the regulations; the cost to the Authority, disruption to residents, and the risk associated with the potential for a further fire of this nature, it was agreed with HFRS that it was most appropriate to undertake works as part of ongoing programmes of refurbishment over a period of time.
11	It should be noted that as a result of the Coroners recommendations HFRS have made changes to equipment and procedures. Specifically they have made changes to the breathing apparatus by the installation of strapping at the top to prevent any loose cables going between the apparatus and the firefighter. Additionally all firefighters carry hand wire-cutters which can be used in the case of any emergency. These changes further reduces the risk to residents, and firefighters in the unlikely event of a similar fire.
12	It should be noted that these HFRS changes help to protect firefighters when tackling incidents across all of Southampton's housing stock. Council homes comprise around 16% of the city's stock, with the remainder mostly in private hands, including around a quarter of the city's housing stock in the private rented sector. While the council stock meets all existing fire regulations, members should be aware that the Private Sector House Condition Survey 2008 for Southampton indicated that 2.8% of private sector housing falls short of fire safety standards. The councils Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Scheme is improving fire safety in HMO's, which have the highest fire safety risk. It should be noted that breaches would not include the use of plastic cable supports as this does not apply to retrofitting. Therefore, members may wish to consider if the council should seek to raise awareness

	of this issue amongst private property owners in the city, where firefighters carry out the majority of their work.
	<b>Sprinklers</b>
13	The specific recommendation from the Coroner was for Social Landlords to consider the retrofitting of sprinklers in high rise buildings. In May 2013 the Council and HFRS held a joint workshop with representatives from across our respective services as well as Capita and Domestic Sprinklers UK to hear about a pilot project undertaken in Sheffield and to discuss the issues in Southampton. As a result of this workshop it was agreed that a feasibility report would be commissioned with Capita to consider the ability to retrofit sprinklers into the three scissor blocks in Southampton. It is the view of HFRS that these buildings, due to their complex layout are more challenging and therefore present the best opportunity for improving their ability to tackle a fire in a high rise building in the city.
14	This feasibility study was undertaken during 2013 and was discussed with colleagues in HFRS. It concluded that it was technically possible to install a sprinkler system within the three buildings and the recommendation was therefore accepted by both SCC and HFRS.
15	As has already been outlined these three tower blocks were due to benefit from extensive refurbishment as part of the Council's ECO project and so it was agreed that the sprinkler works would be undertaken as part of the wider refurbishment. Specific scheme approval was agreed at Cabinet in February 2015 and that report provides more detail on the scheme at this link. <a href="#">Cabinet meeting Feb15</a>
16	Work is currently underway on site at Shirley and Sturminster and is about to commence at Albion to carry out the enabling work in advance of this project being undertaken over the coming months.
	<b>Millbank House</b>
17	Members will be aware of the recent fire at Millbank House as a result of the media coverage. The specific issue which brought this to the attention of the media were comments regarding cables. However, this situation is in no way comparable to that at Shirley Towers in 2010. Millbank House was a small electrical fire from a suspected fault in the consumer unit which was confined to the lobby area of the property. To give some sort of scale to the issue, our insurers confirm that they expect the refurbishment costs to be less than £10,000.
18	Such faults are very rare, indeed colleagues cannot remember the last time such an issue occurred. Further since 2010 there have been a number of flat fires across the City and in no other instance has there been any issues with cabling. From the inquest in 2012 it was established that in order for the plastic conduit to expand to such an extent that the cover falls off it has to be subjected to temperatures in the region of 180 degrees Celsius – such temperatures only occur in very severe fires or, in the instance of Millbank House, in a confined area.
19	We are currently in discussions with HFRS about the issues that the fire in Millbank House has identified to determine whether the Council needs to

	consider undertaking a programme of works in Millbank House.
<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>	
<b><u>Capital/Revenue</u></b>	
20	There are no specific implications as a result of this report other than those already outlined within the body of the report.
<b><u>Property/Other</u></b>	
21	Compliance and testing programmes are undertaken in all Council buildings in accordance with the relevant current regulations.
22	The Council has an agreed partnership with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services which includes ongoing and regular liaison in relation to works affecting all SCC buildings.
<b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>	
<b><u>Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:</u></b>	
23	None.
<b><u>Other Legal Implications:</u></b>	
24	None.
<b>POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS</b>	

<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	Yes/No
<b>WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:</b>	all
<b><u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u></b>	
<b>Appendices</b>	
1.	None.
2.	
<b>Documents In Members' Rooms</b>	
1.	None.
2.	
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	
Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to be carried out.	Yes/No
<b>Privacy Impact Assessment</b>	
Do the implications/subject of the report require a Privacy Impact	Yes/No

Assessment (PIA) to be carried out.		
<b>Other Background Documents</b> <b>Equality Impact Assessment and Other Background documents available for inspection at:</b>		
Title of Background Paper(s)		Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
1.		
2.		