

GAS AND ELECTRIC FOCAL POINT FIRES

Report of the Director of Investment and Regeneration

1. SUMMARY

A proposal to install electric fires wherever possible when replacing a gas fire, which is now made possible by highly efficient modern gas central heating systems and advances in electric fires.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the City Board approves:

1. that we install an electric fire wherever possible when replacing a gas fire, giving the tenant a reasonable choice from a range of modern electric fires; and
2. that we fit only one focal point fire in each property.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Models of gas fires have varied over time but electric focal point fires have not been fitted as replacements until recently. This was mainly because electric fires had a poor appearance, looking outdated and lacking sophistication. Also, older central heating lacked the controllability of modern systems, which have thermostatic valves on every radiator. This meant that focal point fires were sometimes used to support the whole house heating system, especially during Spring and Autumn.
- 3.2 Substantial improvements to central heating controls have meant that the reliance on the focal point fire has drastically reduced. Electric fires have also developed a great deal over recent years and become more aesthetically pleasing. They can include a fire surround and hearth or even the high-end 'plasma TV' style fires. For both these reasons it has become possible to consider electric fires as an alternative to gas fires.
- 3.3 On evaluation it quickly became clear that fitting gas fires is not the best use of resources available to improve tenants' homes. A new gas fire requires a large amount of remedial work, such as flue liner and brickwork. The typical installation costs for fitting a gas fire is around £650, including the flue liner. On top of that, gas fires need testing for safety annually, which costs a further £23 for each fire.
- 3.4 Electric fires can be fitted for around £440, including making good the gas fire opening and providing an electrical supply. An electric fire does not require annual safety checks, meaning year on year a saving is made. Over time this will build up to a large annual saving from our servicing budget.

- 3.5 Over the last few months Derby Homes has offered electric fires as an alternative option to a new gas fire where new heating systems have been fitted. This has proved popular with many tenants, even though only one basic model was offered.
- 3.6 Due to the increased controllability of new heating systems it is only necessary to install one focal point fire. In some properties background heating is provided by a second gas fire, often in a kitchen, which is out-of-date and unnecessary these days. Part of this proposal is to remove these second fires when worn out, as the fully controllable heating system is sufficient to heat the whole property. This would again result in a saving as an annual safety check would not be required.

4. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

We would work closely with the Derby Association of Community Partners to choose at least four electric fires to be offered to tenants, aiming for a modern range with reasonable choice. This would include the very modern wall mounted 'plasma TV' style electric fires, which would require more making good but would be very aspirational and really help modernise some homes.

5. FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PLAN IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council's capital programme would save approximately £126,000 each year, which would be spent on other improvements to tenants' homes or on building new homes. This is based on needing to install an average of 600 fires each year, assuming an average 20 year life span for a fire, at a saving of around £210 each.
- 5.2 Derby Homes' maintenance budget would save around £23 each year for each gas fire replaced by an electric fire. After one year we would expect an initial annual saving of around £14,000, but building year on year over a 20 year period until an annual saving of around £280,000 could be achieved.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Electric fires provide the opportunity to use energy from renewable resources, since renewable energy sources generate electricity.

7. RISK IMPLICATIONS

As gas fire emissions can result in carbon monoxide release and require regular servicing and safety checks to ensure safe operation, fitting electric fires will eliminate these potential safety risks.

The areas listed below have no implications directly arising from this report:

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| • Consultation | • Equalities Impact Assessment |
| • Legal and Confidentiality | • Health & Safety |
| • Council | • Policy Review |
| • Personnel | |

If Board members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact the author.

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Background Information: None.

Supporting Information: None.