

FIRE SAFETY MANAGEMENT IN BLOCKS OF FLATS

Report of the Director of Housing & Customer Service

1. SUMMARY

This report proposes the adoption of a sterile area policy for the management of fire risks within the communal corridors, landings and stairwells of flats managed by Derby Homes and outlines the background to this recommendation.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That Derby Homes adopt a “sterile area” fire management policy for blocks of flats to help ensure the safety of residents. This requires the communal corridors, landings and stairwells of flats managed by Derby Homes to be designated a “clear zone” or sterile area free of all extraneous items.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

Background

- 3.1 Sterile area is the technical term used in fire management to describe a common area or fire escape route free from any extraneous items.
- 3.2 Following recent incidents nationally including the fatal fire at Lakanal House in Camberwell, London a more stringent approach has been taken to the management of fire and emergency escape in flats by the enforcing authority.

Legislation and Compliance

- 3.3 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (RRFSO) imposed new requirements to carry out fire risk assessments of blocks of flats with communal areas and communal fire escape routes.
- 3.4 The fire risk assessments carried out on Derby Homes’ managed properties identified items in common areas as a significant issue. Such items include pot plants, door mats, chairs, small tables etc.
- 3.5 Subsequent inspections by Derbyshire fire and rescue service have highlighted that this remains an issue.

Principles of Fire Safety

- 3.6 Most communal areas in Derby Homes’ properties do not have any fire detection or extinguishing systems fitted. The principles of fire prevention are based on communal areas being “sterile areas” with no items that could sustain or

promote the spread of fire.

- 3.7 Additionally, the corridors, landings and stairwells are generally the only escape route. In the event of a fire these routes should be clear of any obstacles and tripping hazards.

Precedents

- 3.8 This policy has been adopted by other large social housing providers including Derwent Living, Wolverhampton Homes and Wakefield District Housing. This could be contentious for some tenants who have invested in doormats, plant displays etc and who have done this to reflect their pride in their homes. We will learn from how others have dealt with these issues.

4. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Derby Homes are liable to prosecution or enforcement action if communal areas are not managed effectively. The Fire Service support sterile areas as an effective way to manage the risk. There is no legal requirement for a completely sterile area. However, if some items are to be allowed it has to be stringently maintained with a managed and auditable inspection process. The resource and manpower costs of maintaining such a policy are liable to be far greater than simply maintaining a clear area. Further, any failure to manage the process may then result in enforcement action.
- 4.2 Organisations who have adopted anything other than a sterile area approach have continuing issues with the return of personal items in the communal areas, dispute resolution and policing. It is a more resource intensive process to manage than a clear sterile area policy.

5. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

Adoption of this recommendation will help Derby Homes meet its legal obligations towards fire management and compliance with The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (RRFSO)

6. CONSULTATION

This matter will be consulted on with all tenants in flats and all comments will be considered. However it will be made clear that the overriding issue has to be that of fire safety.

7. LEGAL ISSUES

We will discuss this with the Council Legal team and it may be necessary to introduce local conditions of tenancy.

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

- Financial and Business Plan
- Policy Review

If Board members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact the author, or the Chief Executive, phil.davies@derbyhomes.org - Tel 01332 711010

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Background Information: None

Supporting Information: None