

Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 4 November 2021

Housing Service Response following a Fire Incident

Executive/Routine	Routine
Wards	All
Council Commitments	

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee is asked to:
 - 1.1.1 Note the information provided on the response and processes in place if a fire or other major incident occurs in or near Council homes; and
 - 1.1.2 Agrees to discharge the adjusted motion agreed at Policy and Sustainability Committee on [10 June 2021](#) to prepare a report for Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee detailing the Council's current post-fire procedure should a fire occur on or near Council run accommodation and to suggest any updates to the procedure.

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Report

Housing Service Response following a Fire Incident

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides information on the follow on response provided by the housing service in the event of a fire or major incident and seeks agreement to discharge the action from Policy and Sustainability Committee on [10 June 2021](#) to prepare a report for Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee detailing the Council's current post-fire procedure should a fire occur on or near Council accommodation and to suggest any updates to the procedure.
- 2.2 The Council's response to an incident such as a fire is determined by the extent and scale of the incident and the instructions from the relevant emergency services who have overall control of the scene during incidents. Follow on processes and actions by officers take account of the nature of the incident and the support needed by tenants and other affected residents based on their individual household circumstances.
- 2.3 The housing service works closely with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) on an ongoing basis to ensure tenants are safe in their homes and that they have access to fire safety advice and support.

3. Background

- 3.1 The revised Council Fire Safety Policy 2021-24, approved by Policy and Sustainability Committee [10 June 2021](#), affirmed the position of The City of Edinburgh Council with regards to regulatory compliance with Scottish Fire Law and Guidance.
- 3.2 Two significant domestic fire guides were introduced by the Scottish Government to supplement existing fire legislation and the Housing (Scotland) Act to further promote fire safety in the community.
- 3.3 The revised Council Fire Safety Policy incorporates the new fire safety standards that cover the Council's responsibilities as a landlord, owner and manager of domestic property of all types.
- 3.4 The Scottish Housing Regulator requires landlords to assure themselves that they are complying with all relevant duties around the safety of tenants' homes. Fire

safety is an important element of the regulatory requirement and the housing service and the SFRS work together to make sure that tenants and residents are safe in their homes.

- 3.5 This joint working covers the technical aspects of fire safety regulations for buildings, the response to any local issues that increase the risk of fire and communications to reinforce individual responsibilities for fire safety.

4. Main report

Notification, Site Control and Access

- 4.1 The housing service response to incidents such as a fire is determined by the nature of any incident, the scale, location and whether it occurs during or out with normal working hours.
- 4.2 Notification of a fire can come through various routes depending on the scale and timing of when an incident occurs. The Council will normally be alerted to an incident if the SFRS attends the site.
- 4.3 In the event of small fires, when emergency services may not attend the scene, officers may only be alerted to an incident when a tenant reports a repair.
- 4.4 The Incident Commander from the relevant emergency service, such as the SFRS or Police Scotland, attending any incident always controls the scene including any decisions taken regarding the safety of residents.
- 4.5 Decisions on when officers can access the scene of an incident are taken by the Incident Commander and the emergency services will also determine the scale of any support required from the Council.
- 4.6 The SFRS or Police Scotland, depending on the nature of the incident, will assess the situation and determine if it should be managed as a major incident.
- 4.7 In the event of an escalation, the Council's Resilience Team is contacted and are involved in coordinating any response with the emergency services in line with the Council's Emergency Plans. This includes the opening of Council buildings to provide a safe space/emergency rest centres where these may be required.
- 4.8 During working hours, fires are reported to Housing Property to check if any repairs are required and to the locality team for follow on actions relating to the affected households.
- 4.9 If an incident occurs out of hours, staff from Housing Property attend on site where required and liaise with the Council's central out of hours service to assist any households who may need immediate assistance or overnight accommodation. Any staff attending out of hours incidents can escalate the response to the Resilience Team for additional support if required.

Housing Service Response

- 4.10 The housing service response, and the subsequent actions taken, is determined by the incident and the number and needs of the households affected. When and how actions can be taken on site will be determined by the lead emergency service in control of the incident scene. Officers are only be able to access sites/buildings when the emergency services are satisfied the site is safe.
- 4.11 The Council response is led by a team leader or an operations manager to provide clear direction and determine any requirement to mobilise staff. A response checklist is in place to help ensure a consistency in response across localities. The follow-on actions cover the following areas as applicable:
- 4.11.1 A survey takes place as soon as practically possible if the building appeared to be unsafe. A structural survey is requested if there is potential damage to load bearing timbers (such as floor joists, roof truss or wooden beams) or extensive damage to the structure/fabric or roof of the building. Any fire that causes significant damage to an area in the property would result in a survey taking place to identify what remedial works would be required as part of the refurbishment works;
 - 4.11.2 Affected households are offered advice, information and support in relation to temporary accommodation and practical assistance where this may be required;
 - 4.11.3 If the repairs are likely to take some time to complete or the household is vulnerable, officers work with tenants to find and move them into alternative decant accommodation where required;
 - 4.11.4 Advice and assistance are provided around practical issues such as access to homes where safe to do so to collect essential personal items, accessing emergency financial assistance, replacement household items and help with information for insurance claims;
 - 4.11.5 Follow on contact is attempted with other residents in any blocks that may not have been directly impacted to provide reassurance and to check if they need any assistance;
 - 4.11.6 Any owners affected are provided with advice on access to emergency accommodation if they are impacted by a major incident if this is not covered in their insurance or is required short term;
 - 4.11.7 Clearance of any debris, cleaning and repainting of stairs/common areas is arranged where required; and
 - 4.11.8 Where relevant, referrals may be made to provide support for tenants if they have been identified as potentially vulnerable.
- 4.12 Final debrief sessions are held after every significant fire incident to ensure that all necessary actions have been fully completed and to agree any further actions required. These ensure processes take account of learning from officer and tenants' experiences.

- 4.13 Once it is safe to do so, homes are assessed after a fire incident and categorised as requiring small, medium or large repairs.
- 4.14 Where there is minimal damage and it is safe for the tenant to remain in their home, work orders for small repairs are raised. Where the damage from a fire requires medium or large repairs, the tenant will be decanted into alternative accommodation.
- 4.15 Repairs are carried out following the processes in place for works to empty homes. All homes are inspected on completion of repairs before the tenant can return to their tenancy.
- 4.16 Officers liaise with SFRS/Police Scotland as relevant in relation to any investigations on circumstances surrounding incidents, wilful fire raising and any follow-on action that may be required.

Prevention and Communications

- 4.17 A fire safety leaflet and information on how to request a free SFRS Fire Safety visit is provided to all new tenants in the new tenant information pack. Articles on health and safety matters including fire safety are regularly included in the Tenant Courier newsletter issued to all tenants.
- 4.18 The SFRS carry out annual/regular inspections of all 44 of the Council's multi-storey blocks along with Housing Property and housing operations managers. Daily block inspections are carried out where a concierge service is provided to ensure stairwells are kept clear of waste and flammable materials and any essential repairs are carried out quickly.
- 4.19 In blocks where there is no concierge service, on site issues would be reported by the cleaning services in place and urgent clearance arranged. Fire safety equipment is checked and maintained as part of a planned programme of maintenance. Specific information from SFRS on what to do in the event of a fire in a multi-storey block is provided to residents in this type of accommodation.
- 4.20 In the event of an incident, communications are prioritised to make sure that those affected have all the information and support that they require. This includes engagement through door knocking by officers, concierge support in multi-storey blocks, letters or phone calls to make sure that tenants are reassured and have access to any advice and practical support as per the checklist actions set out in paragraph 4.6.
- 4.21 Communications on incidents are managed through the service to relevant stakeholders. All media enquiries would be managed through the Council's Communications Team.
- 4.22 Local elected members are also notified of any major incidents as soon as practicable so that they can help direct tenants/residents to where they can get advice and assistance. Updates on the regular inspections to the blocks, including any actions arising, can also be shared with elected members through local newsletters (these can also be made available to residents).

- 4.23 Officers will continue to build on the strong relationships with the SFRS and other emergency services to make sure that process are appropriate to maintain the safety of tenants and residents. This includes working closely with emergency services to alert them to anything which may impact on decision making in the event of fire, such as lifts being out of commission due to upgrades.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The Council will continue to work closely with the SFRS on communications, regular inspections of blocks and in responding to local issues to ensure tenant and residents' safety and wellbeing.
- 5.2 An article on the importance of fire safety and actions tenants can take to help protect themselves and neighbours will be included in the autumn 2021 edition of the Tenants Courier and in other regular communications with tenants. This will include advice about preventing fire hazards such as making sure belongings do not block communal spaces and access areas.
- 5.3 Additional fire safety training will be delivered to all housing officers before the end of 2021. This will include an opportunity for officers to share their experience of being involved with incidents and the follow up support provided to tenants/residents. Information from the training will be used to update the current checklist and to identify any other additional information or assistance that may be useful for officers and/or the households affected.
- 5.4 An additional action will be added to the checklist for a mandatory final debrief session to be carried out following any significant fire incident to record any lessons learned, feedback from staff involved and to best practice. This information is essential to ensure the service response is adapted as required to best protect and support tenants.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 There are no new financial impacts arising as a result of this report.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The Council will continue to engage with the SFRS and other emergency services on best practice and any actions that need to be taken to ensure that tenants and residents are safe in their homes.
- 7.2 Tenants views are considered on regular communications including those covering fire safety advice to make sure these are clear and provide the information tenants need. Tenant representative views are working with the Edinburgh Tenants Federations and other tenant groups will continue to reinforce this work.

8. Background reading/external references

8.1 None.

9. Appendices

9.1 None.