

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

RECORD OF DECISIONS taken by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Jennie Brent, at her meeting held on Tuesday, 10 October 2017 at 5.00 pm at the Executive Meeting Room - The Guildhall - Floor 3

Present

Councillor Jennie Brent (in the chair)

Councillor Tom Wood

22. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Councillor Stephen Morgan MP had submitted his apologies for absence due to parliamentary duties.

23. Declaration of Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of members' interests.

24. Fire Safety Update - Local Authority Owned Properties (AI 3)

James Hill, Director of Property & Housing, presented this update report on the actions underway concerning properties owned by the Local Authority. He explained the background to the identification of Horatia House and Leamington House needing to have cladding removed. The regular communication with residents included access to a Residents' Liaison Officer who was holding coffee mornings to answer any queries. Fire safety electrical checks were being offered to residents in the two affected tower blocks.

James Hill reported on the on-going work in collaboration with Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service and on the funding discussions with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Meredydd Hughes and Steve Groves were part of the team working on the government guidance received and a report would be brought back (to the appropriate decision body) on the feasibility of replacing the cladding.

Councillor Tom Wood, Opposition Spokesperson, commented on the hard work of the officers involved in the project, which had put Portsmouth ahead of other local authorities in making their case to the DCLG and for the good communication with residents. He asked on progress of the funding discussions.

Nick Haverly, as Finance Manager, reported that there was on-going dialogue, with the DCLG offering flexibilities but details had not been finalised.

It was reiterated that Portsmouth City Council (PCC) was still requesting financial assistance rather than the suggestion of favourable borrowing options. James Hill added that discussions had moved beyond the requesting of information from PCC to negotiations of how the DCLG can support PCC with this unforeseen expense.

Councillor Jennie Brent, as Cabinet Member for Housing, welcomed the update report which showed the swift response by officers and this had enabled submission to be made to DCLG ahead of many other authorities. She asked for further details on the range of actions being taken. Regarding the take up of white goods checks it was reported that whilst this had been low (13 checks) this offer was still open to tenants. It was also reported that the role of the Residents' Liaison Officer was as part of a long project during the works, to get to know the residents and share information and allow them to feed back any concerns, with dedicated sessions being held at each block twice a week. The role of the fire wardens was explained; they had been instigated immediately and were there for the duration of the cladding removal from both tower blocks. They undertook checks, walking the inside and around the outside of the buildings, to ensure a good response from Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service and to offer reassurance to residents.

Councillor Brent asked if there had been any further progress to report since the report had been written? Steve Groves, Asset Manager, circulated photographs of the progress of the works to remove cladding at Horatia House and Leamington House. This showed the use of a mast climber at Horatia House at first floor level, and there would be scaffolding for a cradle to go further up the building. Removal was so far up to the sixth storey on the East elevation (except over the entrance), and up to fourth storey on the West elevation. At Leamington House the removal of cladding had reached the 5th floor on the East elevation and 7th floor for half of the West elevation, and a cradle system would be used here. During October the contractors would start the removal of upper levels of cladding and it was anticipated that all of the panels would be removed by February 2018, weather permitting.

It was further reported that the DCLG had issued more guidance in the last week of September, and this along with Hampshire Fire & Rescue Services' own wish to revisit the highest risk properties, had led to a re-inspection that had taken place on 6th October 2017. The result of the re-inspection had been the same outcome and it had been stated that the properties were safer now than in June with the safety measures being in place, and the "stay put" policy was still seen to be correct.

The Cabinet Member for Housing noted the work being undertaken across the Local Authority Housing blocks.

25. Fire Safety Update - Private Sector Owned Properties (AI 4)

James Hill, Director of Property & Housing, introduced the report which set out the local authority's shared duty to undertake joint inspections (with Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service and the owners) of private sector housing,

although Portsmouth City Council is not the owner and the private owners are responsible for fire safety in these buildings. This had resulted in a hugely increased work-load for Bruce Lomax's Private Sector Housing team. James Hill stressed that the report did not contain details of the individual inspection reports as this information was for the building owners. There had been a broadly positive response, with owners engaging in the process of inspection, and no evacuations had been required.

Councillor Jennie Brent, thanked the officers for their hard work and swift response. In answer to her questions regarding the extent of the inspection works, Bruce Lomax, Private Sector Housing Manager, reported that 102 inspections had been undertaken over 8 weeks, with only 7 outstanding (which should be completed within the month). Follow-up reports would be sent out over the next few weeks. The inspections could take 5 hours each and a further 2 hours of officer time for the report on each property. The city council's findings and those of Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service were sent to the property owners. There were then discussions with the owners and technical information was sent out, and where action was taken a re-inspection would be required. At the time of the meeting 8 re-inspections had taken place.

The Cabinet Member for Housing noted the work being undertaken with property owners and the support being provided by the Private Sector Housing Team.

The meeting concluded at 5.27 pm.

Councillor Jennie Brent
Cabinet Member for Housing