

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Panel held on Wednesday, 26 July 2017 at 5.30 pm at the Civic Offices, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Scott Harris (in the Chair)

Councillors Alicia Denny
Ben Dowling
Colin Galloway
Steve Hastings
Stephen Morgan
Gemma New
Darren Sanders
Tom Wood

Officers

James Hill - Interim Director of Housing and Property
Ian Collins, Emergency Planning (Civil Contingencies Manager)

Meredydd Hughes, Assistant Director of Property and Housing (Repairs and Maintenance)

Robert Parkin, Deputy City Solicitor

HFRA Representatives

Andy Bowers and Mick Thompson

FBU Representatives

Nigel McCullen, Mark Chapman and Gary Jackson

10. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 1)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting including Andy Bowers and Mick Thompson from the HFRA (Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority) and Mark Chapman, Nigel McCullen and Gary Jackson from the Fire Brigade Union (FBU).

Councillors Frank Jonas and Lee Hunt were in attendance in the public gallery.

Councillor Darren Sanders declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in agenda item 4 in that his Mother lives in Horatia House, one of the high rise residences in Portsmouth.

11. Apologies for Absence (AI 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ian Lyon. Councillor Alicia Denny attended as his standing deputy and apologised for lateness.

12. Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 April 2017 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2017 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

13. Notice of Motion Referral from 21 March Council Meeting - Hampshire Fire Service (AI 4)

(TAKE IN BRIEFING PAPER)

A Notice of Motion had been on the agenda of the 21 March 2017 Council meeting and had been referred to this Panel for debate. The Panel is requested to make a recommendation back to Council for adoption once it has deliberated on the issues raised.

The Chair, Councillor Scott Harris, invited Councillor Steve Pitt to make his deputation which he then did. Councillor Pitt spoke in favour of the panel sending the original wording of the Notice of Motion back to Council for approval.

The Chair thanked Councillor Pitt for his deputation.

The Chair then invited James Hill, Interim Director of Property and Housing to summarise the briefing paper that had been previously circulated.

Mr Hill set the context of the City Council owned high rise flats saying that Portsmouth is a relatively flat city and that Local Authority owned high rise flats were predominantly built in the 1960s. Appendix A lists the 40 blocks of flats deemed to be "high rise" that the City Council owns.

Mr Hill drew members' attention to the section of the briefing paper headed "Approach to Fire Safety (Local Authority High Rise Flats)". This set out the fire safety measures designed to assist in the event of a fire. He said that the local authority undertakes fire risk assessments and has a policy to review fire risk assessments every three years. He confirmed that all the high rise blocks of flats have fire risk assessments in place.

Mr Hill mentioned the section on Partnership Working and said that Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services (HFRS) is the enforcing authority for the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Property and Housing regularly meet with HFRS to discuss fire strategy and progress of plans to undertake Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) or associated work.

The meetings also provide an opportunity to discuss current guidance. Services work together to hold community events and run practice fire exercises in high rise buildings. Services also undertake joint partnership inspections to review fire safety measures.

Mr Hill confirmed that Local Authority purpose built blocks of flats were constructed in compliance with the building and fire safety regulations appropriate at the time of construction. Some blocks of flats have since had

cladding installed as part of refurbishment schemes. Horatia House and Leamington House have both had cladding added. This is made from Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) Cladding System which has now been tested and failed the current test. However a joint partnership inspection assessed the measures in place and concluded that residents could remain in residence as the cladding is removed.

Mr Hill then provided information to the Panel about the "Stay Put Policy" and advised that HFRS endorsed the stay put approach.

With regard to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, Mr Hill explained that inevitably this had brought into sharp focus fire safety measures in high rise blocks both in the private and public sector. He said that PCC's approach to fire safety had been tested since that incident as well as the emergency response arrangements. Actions had been taken as outlined in the briefing paper to ensure that if necessary, measures were in place to evacuate the two tower blocks that had ACM cladding. Mr Hill said that PCC would continue to build on current working arrangements and said that our partnership arrangements are well placed to respond in case of fire.

Finally, with regard to Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services, Mr Hill said that a coherent fire safety approach relies on 3 key elements:-

1. The landlords measures to ensure
 - a. The property meets the required standards for fire safety
 - b. they work with their tenants/occupiers to ensure they understand their responsibilities in how they use the property and understand the approach to dealing with fires
2. The occupiers responsibilities for their own safety and use of the property
3. The Fire Service's ability to respond to the fire quickly and with the right equipment

The Chair thanked Mr Hill for his briefing.

During discussion, the following matters were clarified

- Although there are regular inspections and discussions with residents, ultimately it is down to residents themselves to behave responsibly and not put themselves or others in danger by for example propping fire doors open. However it would be possible to alarm the doors and this was being considered.
- With regard to the stay put policy, fire alarms do not sound throughout the building as this may create panic and make the problem worse. The policy has been shown to be effective.
- It was confirmed that all new residents are made aware of the fire safety approach and all residents are frequently reminded about what to do in the event of fire. In connection with this, providing information in different languages was being looked at.

Representatives attending the meeting from the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) and the HFRA agreed that there were inaccuracies in the wording of the notice of motion itself. The only occasion when an Aerial Ladder Platform was not available was because there was no crew to man it and in any event the fire was a low rise property so would not have been needed. Matters had now moved on and different practices had been agreed.

Representatives of the FBU and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service said that contrary to what was stated in the Notice of Motion, the ALP has never been taken off the pre-determined attendance (PDA) procedure for tall buildings fires.

With regard to further queries, the following matters were addressed

- In response to a query about fire doors and when these would be fitted, Mr Hill said there was a 7 year programme of works and PCC was engaging with the HFRA over all planned work.
- The Chair confirmed that the feasibility of fitting sprinklers to properties was being looked at.
- The HFRA representatives said they are awaiting the full facts about the Grenfell Fire in relation to a query about whether an even higher Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) would be necessary in Portsmouth. HFRA representatives said that access was usually gained to high rise properties from the inside which is normally adequate, but lessons learned from the Grenfell fire may change procedures. The Fire Brigade Union representatives agreed that getting an ALP that was capable of reaching higher levels was probably not suitable for Portsmouth as there would be a need to accommodate the longer and wider appliance which may not be possible given the high density of housing in Portsmouth and consequent lack of space. It would depend on how close the appliance could get to the building.
- Mick Thompson of the HFRA said that to date almost all of the local authority blocks over 18 metres high had been inspected and so far only minor discrepancies had been identified.
- The Fire Brigade Union representatives said that there was now an officer in charge of an incident and could determine which appliance should be used. If an ALP was not available at Southsea, there would still be an immediate response but from further away. Both the representatives from the FBU and the HFRA agreed that they wanted to bring in changes together. They said that flexible working was standard practice across the South East.

The Chair thanked the FBU and HFRA representatives and officers for their attendance and contributions.

Councillor Sanders commented that the delay in discussing this Notice of Motion is of concern as it could have been dealt with at the March Council meeting. Councillor Hastings replied that nobody from HFRA or the FBU were able to attend the March Council meeting so it was better that the Motion was referred.

It was proposed by Councillor Scott Harris

Seconded by Councillor Stephen Morgan

that

"Scrutiny Management Panel (SMP) have considered the notice of motion on the 'Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service'.

SMP notes (having heard from representatives of the FBU and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service) that the ALP has never been taken off the pre-determined attendance (PDA) procedure for tall buildings fires.

SMP notes that the Council as landlord of its own housing, as well as in its private-sector housing regulation role, depends on a strong partnership with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and works with them and other stakeholders including the FBU to promote and maintain fire safety and to continue to be vigilant and seek to plan for the evolving risks and pressures in which they operate. This involves examining for a range of fire safety issues and solutions, beyond ALPs.

SMP welcomes the expertise of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Fire Brigade Union and recognise that they have jointly worked toward a solution in this instance, and strongly encourages the continuation of the strong partnership ethos which characterises the relationships."

Upon being put to the vote, this was CARRIED

RESOLVED that the response as set out above be referred back to full Council.

The meeting concluded at 6.30 pm.

Councillor Scott Harris
Chair