

**AGENDA ITEM:**

<b>REPORT TO:</b> Meeting of the	<b>MERSEYSIDE FIRE &amp; RESCUE AUTHORITY FULL AUTHORITY</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>3<sup>RD</sup> DECEMBER 2013</b>
<b>REPORT NO.</b>	<b>CFO/135/13</b>
<b>REPORTING OFFICER:</b>	<b>DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER</b>
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>MYLES PLATT – AREA MANAGER OF PREVENTION &amp; PROTECTION, EXTN: 4644</b>
<b>OFFICERS CONSULTED:</b>	<b>GM GUY KEEN</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>FIRE RISK MANAGEMENT IN RESIDENTIAL BLOCKS</b>

**THERE ARE NO APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To request that the Authority approve the recommendations of this report relating to Fire Risk Management in residential accommodation blocks in Merseyside.

**Recommendation**

2. That the Authority approve the provision of capital funding to support the installation of fire suppression and engineered solutions to enhance the safety of Firefighters and residents in purpose built blocks of flats.

**Introduction and Background**

3. In England, around 10 per cent of the population live in a purpose-built flats yet, during 2009-2010, around 25 per cent of dwelling fires occurred within purpose-built blocks of flats. As a result, in that year, 23 per cent of all fire deaths in dwellings occurred in these blocks.

*Source: UK Fire Statistics 2008*

*Source: 2001 Census and English Housing Survey (2009-2010)*

4. The likelihood of fire is strongly influenced by social and lifestyle factors. It is these factors, more than any other, that result in the disproportionate number of fires (and fire deaths) in blocks of flats. This highlights the importance of fire prevention and protection within the individual flats. It is also clear that much can be done by landlords, other housing providers and the Fire and Rescue Service to reduce the risk to all residents. This is particularly true in the case of the most vulnerable, such as the elderly, disabled, those who suffer from social deprivation; and those affected by drug or alcohol issues.
5. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2009, six people died in a fire at Lakanal House, which was a council-owned tower block in South London. The inquest into their deaths found opportunities to prevent the tragedy were missed. The Coroner Judge Frances Kirkham made various recommendations to Southwark Council, DCLG and London Fire Brigade at the end of the inquest in a series of letters, known as Rule 43 Recommendations. These included ensuring that residents know what to do in a fire, and that guidance on both the scope of fire risk assessments and the building regulations related to fire safety were made clearer.
6. On 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2005, two firefighters, Michael Millar and Jeffrey Wornham tragically died trying to save occupant Natalie Close at an intense fire at Harrow Court, which is a residential high rise block in Stevenage. Following the investigation into the incident the Coroner ruled that "Social housing providers should be encouraged to consider the retro-fitting of sprinklers in all existing high rise buildings in excess of 30 metres in height, particularly those identified by Fire and Rescue Services as having complex designs that make fire-fighting more hazardous and/or difficult. It is noted that current legislation requires that all newly built high rise buildings in excess of 30 metres in height must be fitted with sprinkler systems".
7. On 6<sup>th</sup> April 2010, two Firefighters James Shears and Alan Bannon tragically lost their lives fighting an intense fire at Shirley Towers, which is a residential high rise block in Hampshire. Following the investigation the coroner ruled: "Firefighters Alan Bannon and James Shears died from sudden exposure to initially intense heat from 20.38 to 20.41 and thereafter to excessive heat while dealing with a fire in a flat on the 9th floor of the high-rise tower block Shirley Towers. Obvious precautions to prevent the fire occurring were not taken in addition, operating conditions for all Firefighters involved became extremely difficult and dangerous and this significantly contributed to the deaths of Firefighters Alan Bannon and James Shears. Numerous factors have been identified as being relevant in the chain of causation which could have affected the eventual outcome and which, where appropriate, will form the basis of recommendations to improve safety in the future." Again the Coroner ruled that "*Social housing providers should be encouraged to consider the retro-fitting of sprinklers in all existing high rise buildings in excess of 30 metres in height, particularly those identified by Fire and Rescue Services as having complex designs that make fire-fighting more hazardous and/or difficult. It is noted that current legislation requires that all newly built high rise buildings in excess of 30 metres in height must be fitted with sprinkler systems*".

8. In 2004 the British Research Establishment (BRE) produced a report followed by subsequent reports to evaluate the effectiveness of sprinklers in residential properties. The report highlighted the effectiveness of sprinklers in reducing fire spread and the life risk in the compartment where the fire started - the "Room of Origin". In addition the report concluded that it would be cost effective to retro fit sprinklers into high rise accommodation blocks.
9. In September 2012 the Authority hosted a conference on Fire Risk Management in Purpose Built Blocks of Flats attended by local authority partners and representatives of Registered Social landlords, registered and private landlords. The conference included a presentation from Sheffield Housing who, in collaboration with the British Automatic Fire Sprinkler Association (BAFSA), retro fitted sprinklers in a high rise block, "Callow Mount". The project highlighted that retro fitting of sprinklers can be achieved, in partnership, at relatively low cost for the benefit of residents and Firefighters.
10. Since that conference Managers from each district have engaged with several Registered Social Landlords (RSL.s) who have expressed an interest in the retro fitting of sprinklers in purpose built blocks of flats. The premises being identified are those that house vulnerable residents, such as the elderly, and those that pose the greatest risk to Firefighters.
11. Whilst at an early stage, RSL's have expressed an interest in entering into a partnership to initiate projects to install sprinklers which would include MFRA making a capital contribution to the installation and an in kind contribution to support the project team. The subsequent revenue burden would be met by the RSL.
12. The recommendation of the Chief Fire Officer is that the Authority makes a capital sum of £200k available to be allocated across each of the districts, the project would be centrally managed by the Area Manager for Prevention and Protection.
13. The aim will be to provide a range of engineered solutions including sprinklers, tannoy and intercom and firefighting equipment in one block which represents best practice in fire risk management.
14. Additional projects will include sprinkler provision in other purpose built blocks of flats based on the identified risk.
15. Each project will be delivered by the District Management Team and coordinated by the Community Fire Protection Team.
16. Each project will be designed to bring together previous initiatives such as "Adopt a Block" and "High Rise Champions" which were undertaken by station based crews in partnership with residents and will support the Site Specific Risk Information work stream managed by Operation Preparedness.

### Equality & Diversity Implications

17. Each project will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. It is recognised some of the most vulnerable residents are the elderly which will be considered when identifying which premises to target.
18. Engagement with residents who reside in blocks of flats as part of this project will enable the Authority to understand their needs, and as such make them safer in their homes.

### Staff Implications

19. Staffing contribution for each project will be met from existing resource.

### Legal Implications

20. There is no legal obligation to fit sprinklers in existing purpose built blocks of flats, however RSL's and MFRA recognise the benefits of making that provision.
21. The Authority has powers under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything it considers appropriate for the purposes of the carrying out of any of its functions, so long as this is not illegal. The provision of sprinklers as recommended by this report, would constitute such a functional purpose.
22. Each project will be considered by Legal Services to ensure that any arrangements put in place do not expose the Authority to any legal or reputational risk.

### Financial Implications & Value for Money

23. In order to pump prime this proposal, it is suggested that the Authority set aside £200k specifically in reserves (this is expected to part fund about 5 or 6 initial installations). It is assumed that this will only be as a contribution towards the cost, which would be jointly funded by the property owner.
24. Members will recall that they set aside £1m in a firefighter safety reserve. It is proposed that £0.2m of that reserve is specifically earmarked for this proposal.

### Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

25. The provision of sprinklers will limit the spread and intensity of fire in the room or compartment of origin and mitigate fire spread beyond to other parts of the building.
26. The provision of a tannoy/intercom system allows residents to be informed of their actions in the event of a fire. For example, if a "stay put" policy is in place then this can be reinforced to prevent residents entering areas of risk.
27. The risk to Firefighters and to residents will be the major consideration in selecting which premises will be involved in the project.

Contribution to **\*\*Our Mission – To Achieve; Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Fire-fighters\*\***

28. The integrated approach to Fire Risk Management for purpose built blocks of flats by the provision of fixed Installations such as sprinklers and intercom will have a positive impact upon the making those premises safer for residents and Firefighters.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

N/A

**\*Glossary of Terms**

SMG - Strategic Management Group

MFRA - Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

BAFSA- British Automatic Sprinkler Association

DCLG – Department of Communities and Local Government

BRE - Building Research Establishment

SHQ - Service Headquarters

SSRI – Site Specific Risk Information

RSL - Registered Social Landlord