

North Lanarkshire Council Report

Communities and Housing Committee

approval noting

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Tower Strategy Update

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the report is to update Committee on the current progress relating to the fire safety within high rise towers in North Lanarkshire and progress with the re-provisioning programme.

Recommendations

Committee is asked to;

1. Note the current progress with the ongoing structural surveys of the Council's tower stock
2. Note that construction works to the four towers at Blairgrove, Merryston, Glen and Millbrae Courts in Coatbridge has commenced.
3. Note remedial works for stage 2 enhanced fire safety works is progressing and is expected to be completed early 2021.
4. Note the progress with the demolitions / fire risk assessment programme to date.
5. Note the progress in relation to the re-provisioning programme

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities

Ambition statement (1) Ensure a housing mix that supports social inclusion and economic growth

1. Background

- 1.1 The council has in excess of 4,000 flats within 48 multi-storey blocks. The towers were constructed between 1965 and 1973 and consist of six types of construction. All of the tower blocks have had cladding systems installed between 1985 and 2013. A report was approved at Housing and Social Work Services Committee in August 2016 to undertake a structural survey to assess the condition of all of the council's tower stock to help inform the future investment strategy. Following the Grenfell tower tragedy in June 2017 the format of these surveys was changed to support a three phased approach. Phase 1 of the survey was to provide information regarding the external cladding's fire integrity; phase 2 was to provide information in relation to the internal elements of the structure i.e. compartmentalisation of the homes and common areas and phase 3 is to review the main structural condition of the towers i.e. columns, beams, floors as well as roofs and how they would react in the event of a fire or accidental loading. It will also confirm any areas of remedial works to the various cladding systems.
 - 1.2 Phase 1 and 2 survey work is now complete and the findings are now being reviewed to inform future investment requirements. Phase 3 commenced in May 2018 and is nearing completion. Findings from the surveys will be considered to help inform future investment decisions. In addition to the current structural survey programme, Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) have undertaken additional fire safety surveys in common areas within towers, over and above their routine tower survey programme following national developments.
 - 1.3 In December 2017, as part of the HRA budget motion, the council announced its intention to start a consultation regarding the potential re-provisioning of all of its tower blocks over the next 25 years. In May 2018, the Enterprise and Housing Committee approved plans to commence the 1st phase of the re-provisioning programme, supported by over 80% of tenants, which includes demolition of over 1,700 flats in twelve tower blocks and three low rise flatted blocks.
 - 1.4 In February 2018, the Council approved proposals to develop a programme to retrofit both sprinkler systems and fire stopping/doors to the tower stock to provide further enhance fire safety and provide re-assurance to tenants. The pilot project at Birkshaw Tower is now complete ahead of programme, as a result of better than anticipated access and the reduction in installations due to the number of void properties.
 - 1.5 Following completion of all survey work at four blocks in Coatbridge (Blairgrove, Merryston, Glen and Millbrae) approval was given by Committee in November 2017 to progress a procurement exercise for the full refurbishment of these blocks, including overcladding work and installation of sprinkler systems. This tender was approved by Committee in February 2019 with works having now commenced.
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2. Report

2.1 As previously reported the intention is to undertake a 3 phased investigation of the 48 High Rise tower blocks together with inspections of the cladding on specific Social Work and Corporate buildings.

- **High Rise - Phase 1 (Assessment of Cladding).**

Survey work complete. Exercise confirmed that no Aluminium Cladding Materials (ACM's) are present and that mineral wool insulation has been employed in every situation except one (Burnside Court – External Wall Insulation system which has been assessed and is safe).

- **High Rise - Phase 2 (Fire Compartmentalisation Assessment).**

Survey work complete. Survey findings have identified remedial works required to blocks to enhance current safety requirements and address a range of issues.

- **High Rise - Phase 3 (Structural Investigation & Assessment).**

Programme commenced 15th May 2018 and will be completed late December 2019.

2.2 An action plan has been developed with proposals to close out the issues identified from both the phase 1 and 2 surveys and the SFRS findings from their visits and checks of communal areas in the towers.

- Stage 1; Works are now complete

- Stage 2; This work consists of renewing all front doors, common area door screens and fire escape doors to current standard where required, as well as fire stopping inside the tenants homes and common areas, testing and upgrading emergency lighting and installation of smoke detection in line with updated legislation as required. The contract award of this work was reported to Committee in February 2019 and is now progressing as per programme and due for completion early 2021.

- Stage 3; It was reported to Committee in September 2018 that Michael Dyson Associates Limited (MDA) had been appointed to design and manage the installation of sprinkler systems for 44nr tower blocks with the pilot project at Birkshaw Tower now complete. A call-off framework is currently being developed, incorporating lessons learned from the pilot project, to deliver the remaining towers included in the programme.

2.3 The re-provisioning programme is progressing well with 44.8% of all flats in Phase 1 vacant or about to become vacant. The demolition of the flats at Northburn Place are currently progressing on site with works anticipated for completion in Q4 19/20. It is currently estimated that the three multi storey flats in Holehills, Airdrie will be vacated by the end of October 2019 and the procurement of a demolition contractor is progressing with tender submissions currently being assessed. As at the end of September 2019, 681 tower properties within Phase 1 have become void. The breakdown is: 113 properties within Merrick, Cheviot and Pentland Court in Airdrie; 217 properties within Highcoats, Dunbeth, Jackson and Burnside Court in Coatbridge; 114 properties within Coursington, Draffen and Allan Tower in Motherwell and 37 properties within Allershaw and Birkshaw Tower in Gowkthrapple, Wishaw. In addition, 200 of the non-tower flatted properties in Coatbridge and Gowkthrapple are now void.

- 2.4 There are six owners within the first phase of the re-provisioning programme whose properties require to be bought back. Engagement with these owners has taken place and four owners have now sold their properties to the council. In addition there are 5 owners in the remaining multi storey flats, all in Motherwell. As previously approved by Committee, the council is seeking to acquire these properties and, if they wish, allow owners to remain in the flats as tenants. To date two flat have been purchased and discussions are on-going with the remaining owners.
- 2.5 Plans for the re-development of the re-provisioning sites are also progressing, including the development of a masterplan for Gowkthrapple and submission of a planning application for the re-development of the site at Northburn Place, Airdrie. The Committee also previously approved the procurement route for both the Northburn place site and the Holehills site, which includes adjacent land.
- 2.6 A newsletter is regularly sent to all tenants who are within phase one of the re-provisioning programme. The fourth in the series of newsletters to tenants within all towers in North Lanarkshire, was delivered on 4th August 2019, which provided an update on the progress of re-provisioning, information on the improvement and investment works continuing within the towers, with particular emphasis on fire safety improvement works including renewal of fire doors and fire stops, emergency lighting, installation of sprinkler systems and the progress of refurbishment programmes.
- Where fire safety work is scheduled to commence in the near future, tenant meetings have been held in order to explain the requirement for and the planned extent of the improvements.
- 2.7 Pre-construction works at the four blocks in Coatbridge (Blairgrove, Merryston, Glen and Millbrae) have commenced with the site established and investigative surveys ongoing. Following successful feedback from the Birkshaw Tower sprinkler installation, a show flat will be completed at Merryston Court which will enable tenants to see the extent of the works required prior to the contractors Christmas shut down period.
- 2.8 Enhanced Fire Risk Assessments are progressing well and are currently over 50% complete with identified remedial actions being completed and signed-off.
- 2.9 As the work on the tower strategy is now at various operational stages, a project board consisting of Heads of Service has been set up to oversee the delivery of the tower strategy objectives in line with the Councils contract management procedures.

3. Equality and Diversity

3.1 Fairer Scotland Duty

The plans contained within this report will help to improve housing conditions and housing choice for our residents which contributes to addressing inequality.

3.2 Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Impact

Any financial impact of the measures implemented will be contained within the existing HRA Capital Investment budget and will be drawn down via borrowing/CFCR as required and as reported to Committee in February 2019 in the outline capital programme.

4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative Impact

Any policy/legislative impacts will be identified and included in any future documentation relating to the projects.

4.3 Environmental Impact

The works contracts will ensure that where the impact on the council's carbon footprint is mitigated. The specifications incorporated within the contract documentation will deliver reduced energy need; encourage sustainable construction; promote health and wellbeing; reduce waste and resources through effective storage and composting of waste and recyclable materials and include measures which will reduce CO² emissions.

4.4 Risk Impact

There is a robust risk assessment process in place within the service to manage and mitigate risks relating to the tower strategy and associated works contracts.

5. Measures of success

The measures of success include:

- the successful completion of works to enhance fire safety in the tower blocks
- Completion of Phase 1 of the demolition programme over the next five years
- Successful delivery of the 4 towers project at Blairgrove, Merryston, Glen and Millbrae)
- Re-development of the re-provisioning sites to create new, high quality housing to meet future needs.



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