

North Lanarkshire Council

Report

Housing & Regeneration Committee

approval noting

Ref BL/SL

Date 20/05/20

Tower Strategy Update

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this 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

It is recommended that the Housing and Regeneration committee:

- (i) Note the current progress of the structural surveys
- (ii) Note the progress of the Ambition programme
- (iii) Note the progress of the Sprinkler Installation / Fire Stopping programme
- (iv) Note the progress of the major refurbishment project at the 4 Towers, Coatbridge
- (v) Note the progress of Fire Risk Assessments of tower stock.

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 4000 flats within 48 multi-storey blocks. The towers were constructed between 1965 and 1973 and consist of three types of construction. All of the tower blocks have had cladding systems installed between 1985 and 2013. A report was approved at Housing & 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 in relation to the external claddings 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 fire or accidental loading. It will also confirm any areas of remedial works to the various cladding systems.

- 1.2 Phase 1 and 2 of the structural surveys are complete with findings being used to inform current investment requirements. Phase 3 (structural investigation & Assessment) commenced in May 2018.
- 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 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 Committee will recall in February 2018, the council approved proposals to develop a programme to retrofit both sprinkler systems and fire stopping/fire doors to the tower stock providing enhanced fire safety and reassurance to tenants.
- 1.5 Following a competitive procurement exercise, committee approval to proceed with the major refurbishment of Blairgrove/Merryston (Lot 1) and Glen/Millbrae (Lot 2) towers was granted in February 2019 with works commencing on Lot 1 in September and Lot 2 in November 2019.
- 1.6 Fire Risk Assessments are being carried out on the tower stock to determine potential fire hazards, evaluation of existing fire safety measures, necessary controls and mitigation measures.

2. Report

2.1 Structural Surveys

Phase 3 (structural investigation & Assessment) surveys are 97% complete. Unavailability of void properties within one tower block (Milton) has prevented the necessary intrusive surveys being carried out to complete the programme. Alternatives are being explored to conclude the survey programme in the event that void properties continue to remain unavailable. The final summary report, prepared by specialist consultant MDA Associates, will be issued with the available information and revised once intrusive surveys are complete.

2.2 Ambition

Re-provisioning is continuing with 754 of all occupied properties within the phase 1 programme vacant or about to become vacant. Breakdown as of March 2020 is shown in the table below:

Tower	Vacant Properties
Burnside Court	34
High Coats, Jackson & Dunbeth	262
Coursington, Allen & Draffen	173
Birkshaw & Allershaw	39
Coatbridge low-rise	82
Gowkthrapple low-rise	164
Total	754

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 with four now having sold properties back to the council. In addition, there are five owners remaining in the multi-storey flats, all in Motherwell. As previously approved by Committee, the council is seeking to acquire these properties and allow owners to occupy the properties as tenants, should they wish to do so.

The first phase of the re-provisioning programme commenced in August 2019 with demolition of low rise flatted blocks at Northburn, Airdrie. The demolition was successfully completed ahead of schedule in December 2019. A number of lessons learned were recorded throughout the project which will inform future demolition contracts.

Works also commenced in January 2020 on demolition of high rise blocks at Holehills, Airdrie, which will see the demolition of Merrick, Pentland & Cheviot towers. Stripping out works had been progressing, however, restrictions enforced by the Scottish Government in March 2020 regarding COVID-19 have resulted in all works ceasing and the site being closed down until further notice. Prior to departure, the Principal Contractor has closed all open works and secured the site as reasonably practical.

Demolition of Burnside Court, Coatbridge is next in the programme with the tender package nearing completion and works planned to commence in August 2020. Again, restrictions due to the COVID-19 emergency will inevitably impact programme dates. Committee will be updated on the revised programme at the earliest opportunity.

2.3 Sprinkler / Fire stopping Programme

The sprinkler installation pilot project at Birkshaw Tower was successfully completed in November 2019 with lessons learned adopted for the ongoing sprinkler installation programme. The tender for the next batch of sprinkler installations is currently being evaluated in line with procurement legislation and Committee will be advised in due course of the recommendation to award. Unfortunately, restrictions in accessing tenant's properties due to COVID-19 will significantly impact the programme of works and completion date. Committee will be updated at the earliest opportunity when the details of this delay are apparent.

The fire stopping/fire door installations are currently 70% complete in line with the original programme. Installation of smoke detection in line with Scottish Government targets had also been progressing well with a number of tower blocks fully compliant.

The emergency lighting upgrade programme has now reached 90% completion with one tower remaining. Unfortunately, restrictions enforced by the Scottish Government in March 2020 regarding COVID-19 have resulted in all works ceasing until further

notice. Communication with tenants will continue via online updates and newsletters to ensure that are aware of the latest developments and revised programme dates.

2.4 Major Refurbishment – 4 Towers

A number of key work activities at the tower blocks at Blairgrove/Merryston and Glen/Millbrae had continued to progress until restrictions enforced by the Scottish Government in March 2020 (COVID-19) resulted in all works ceasing and the site being closed down until further notice. Prior to departure, the Principal Contractor has closed all open works and secured the site as reasonably practical. Communication with tenants will continue via online updates and newsletters to ensure that are aware of the latest developments.

2.5 Fire Risk Assessments

Fire Risk Assessment surveys for the tower stock are now complete. Following assessment of individual reports, officers are developing a programme of works in response to the observations noted to control and mitigate the effects of a potential fire. Corporate Health & Safety will continue with a rolling programme of FRA's and will be programmed accordingly.

3. **Equality and Diversity**

3.1 **Fairer Scotland Duty**

3.1.1 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**

3.2.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out.

4. **Implications**

4.1 **Financial Impact**

4.1.1 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 2020 in the outline capital programme.

4.2 **HR/Policy/Legislative Impact**

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

4.3 **Environmental Impact**

4.3.1 The works will contribute to reducing the councils overall carbon footprint and will assist in promoting the health and wellbeing of residents within North Lanarkshire.

4.4 **Risk Impact**

- 4.4.1 Risk will be managed throughout the duration of the programmes and reported to the Project Board in line with the council's project management model. The significant risk to project/programme delivery as a result of COVID-19 is currently under assessment with mitigation measures under development.

5. Measures of success

- 5.1 Enhanced fire safety across the tower estate.
- 5.2 Successful progression of the Ambition programme including demolition and re-provisioning programmes over the next 5 years.
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