

MEETING: 16 JULY 2012

SUBJECT: DOMESTIC SPRINKLER CAMPAIGN AND UPDATE

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER and CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY

1. PURPOSE

1. This report will update Members on the national drive for sprinkler protection in domestic dwellings and of two examples of partnership working within Tyne and Wear where the retro-fitting of domestic sprinkler systems is being used to improve resident safety.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority (TWFR) has for many years advocated the fitting of sprinkler systems as a means of protecting life and property and has in the past worked with partners across Tyne and Wear to promote and secure the fitting of sprinklers in schools, businesses and commercial buildings.
- 2.2 Members may be aware that the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) are leading a national campaign to make sprinklers a standard safety feature in the home, in the same way that seat belts and airbags have become standard in cars. Sprinklers are incredibly affordable, but more importantly if universally installed, they will almost eliminate fire deaths in the home. Recent tragic incidents where multiple children have died in two severe fires have further brought focus to the need for action.
- 2.3 Over the next 25 years, based on an extrapolation of 2010/11 national statistics, another 8000 people will lose their lives in fires and 185,000 will be seriously injured. Fire and Rescue Services across the country have been lobbying Government for many years about the need for sprinklers and this Service has continued to be active in supporting this approach to protecting the community.
- 2.4 The Welsh Assembly have recently introduced legislation which will see all new build domestic properties fitted with sprinklers as standard and we believe the same legislation should be introduced in England. Government appear reluctant to consider this until they have new evidence which could take many more years to obtain, however one thing is clear, domestic sprinklers will save lives.
- 2.5 Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) continue to work with partners to promote the benefits of domestic sprinklers and this report updates Members on two such examples.

3. REGENT COURT: HIGH-RISE DWELLINGS

- 3.1 As a result of the fatal fire at Harrow Court, Stevenage, Hertfordshire in February 2005 and the subsequent fatal fire at Lakanal House, Camberwell,

London, Tyne and Wear Fire Safety officers have worked closely with all five Local Authorities and private providers to identify specific risks in residential high-rise buildings.

- 3.2 As part of this process Regent Court, Gateshead, was audited with the Gateshead Housing Group (GHG) and several areas of improvement were identified.
- 3.3 Working in partnership with the GHG, Milbank Architects and Gateshead Building Control, a 'Regent Court' case review was undertaken, where it was decided that either full compartmentation (non-sprinklered) or a fully sprinklered building would be the most appropriate solutions. Both options were met with interest, however further evidence on retro-fitting of sprinklers was sought.
- 3.4 Fire Safety officers identified Callow Mount, a high-rise sheltered accommodation block in Sheffield, as a project the partnership could learn from and arranged a visit with representatives from GHG, Milbank Architects and Gateshead Building Control; together with Gentoo, Your Homes Newcastle and South Tyneside Homes. Callow Mount is the only known high rise accommodation to have had sprinklers retro-fitted and the evidence from the visit demonstrated clearly the benefits of sprinklers to all attending.
- 3.5 Further investigation with independent surveyors provided a detailed financial analysis for both sprinklered and non-sprinklered options for the Gateshead property. Pre-tender costs indicated the full compartmentation (non-sprinklered) upgrade would be more than double the cost of the sprinklered solution, clearly demonstrating that sprinklers are not the most costly option as some have previously assumed.
- 3.6 As a result of the work lead by TWFRS Officers, Gateshead Housing Group has agreed to a retro-fit of sprinklers at Regent Court and has recently issued a tender. This is the first such project to be undertaken in standard residential high-rise premises in the country, and is an excellent example of partnership working to collaboratively improve the safety of our community.

4. INDIVIDUAL DWELLING: HIGH STREET, JARROW

- 4.1 Similar to the work of Fire Safety staff in reviewing high rise premises, the Prevention and Education team have worked in partnership to identify those most vulnerable in single dwellings.
- 4.2 During 2011 local intelligence identified that a resident in Jarrow had experienced a number of fires at his home since March 2009; many involving cooking and on most occasions the occupier was found in a state of inebriation. The occupier is a registered alcoholic and furthermore had threatened suicide by means of fire. Partners agreed the occupier was not only a danger to himself but also the residents of neighbouring properties.

- 4.3 As a result of the risk posed, Officers have worked with South Tyneside Homes, South Tyneside Anti-Social Behaviour Team (ASB), Adult Duty Team and Northumbria Police to agree a range of measures to address the risk to the occupier and his neighbours.
- 4.4 The measures implemented included the removal of the gas supply and cooker, and the fitting of a domestic sprinkler system, which was completed in August 2011. The costs of installation were shared equally between TWFRS and the landlord, South Tyneside Homes.
- 4.5 Following the installation the occupier has continued to be monitored by several agencies. There has been one further instance of fire, however due to the removal of the cooker, this was a minor incident which caused little damage and no injuries were sustained.
- 4.6 As a result of the partnership work undertaken, South Tyneside Homes have agreed to fit domestic sprinkler systems to two further premises, which will be used to house other vulnerable adults.

5. EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 5.1 Both case studies have been, and will be, employed as we continue to work with partners to improve safety in dwellings of all construction and types, with press and media opportunities used as appropriate.
- 5.2 As a result of the Regent Court project, a regional seminar is programmed for 12th July where housing associations, Building Control officers and sprinkler installers will gather to explore further opportunities and promote the benefits of sprinklers.
- 5.3 The commitment, enthusiasm and technical expertise demonstrated by TWFRS staff and all partners has been superb and we look forward to influence both regional solutions and national policy through our engagement with CFOA, CFRAU and CLG.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The fitting of domestic sprinklers greatly increased the chances of survival when a fire breaks out. The national campaign to make sprinklers a standard safety feature in the home has used recent tragic cases to drive forward this message to both the Government and the public alike.
- 6.2 TWFRS continues to champion domestic sprinklers through our communications and our actions. Working with partners to fit sprinklers in

dwellings to reduce deaths and injuries is a key strand of our protection strategy.

- 6.3 Our continued drive to improve the safety and lives of residents within Tyne and Wear will no doubt be challenging in the future financial climate. The continued commitment to see domestic sprinklers fitted widely in homes of the most vulnerable across Tyne and Wear must remain in our sights as we work with partners to ensure the safety of our communities.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The risk to the authority has been assessed as minimal.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 No financial implications in respect to the Regent Court project. The cost to TWFRS for the retro fit for the property in Jarrow amounted to £2000.
- 8.2 Estimated cost of the two additional properties in South Tyneside is anticipated at £1500 per property and these costs will be borne by South Tyneside Homes.

9. DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no diversity and equality implications in respect of this report.

10. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The benefits of domestic sprinklers not only improve survivability for the occupants, but also improves safety for front line fire fighters by suppressing the development of a fire and making conditions within the building less severe.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 The Authority is recommended to:
- a) Note the contents of this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- Report to the Secretary of State by the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser on the emerging issues arising from the fatal fire at Lakanal House, Camberwell on 3rd July 2009.