

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET MEETING**

**13 March 2012**

Report of the Strategic Director – Environmental Services

**HOUSING AND FIRE SAFETY (REGENERATION)**

(1) **Purpose of the Report** To request that Cabinet supports measures to assist the Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service to achieve the installation of sprinkler systems and associated infrastructure in domestic properties.

(2) **Information and Analysis** The fatal fire at Hulland Ward in 2011 serves as a reminder that a fire in the home, whatever the cause, can have a devastating effect on families and communities.

Yet the risk to human life in fires like these can easily be minimised. Automatic sprinkler systems are exceptionally effective through their ability to control a fire before it develops to life threatening proportions. Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service (DFRS) is actively engaged in a campaign to ensure that all newly built homes are fitted with domestic sprinkler systems.

In November 2011, DFRS wrote to Derbyshire County Council setting out a number of objectives to address this issue. Councillor Kevin Parkinson, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, responded on behalf of Derbyshire County Council recognising the importance of this issue and setting out the Council's commitment to supporting DFRS with these objectives.

***Planning Policy***

DFRS is asking District and Borough Councils and the Peak District National Park Authority (local planning authorities) to notify it of consultations on emerging planning policy including Core Strategies. DFRS can then respond by highlighting the benefits of sprinklers and influence house builders and developers to install them as standard.

Derbyshire County Council is currently consulting on the draft Derbyshire Infrastructure Plan. The Plan, once approved, will be a key mechanism for the County Council to influence the Core Strategies of local planning authorities. DFRS is intending to respond to the consultation of the Derbyshire

Infrastructure Plan to request that the final version of the Plan highlights the importance of building well-designed housing that addresses safety and the needs of vulnerable people. These houses need to provide adequate safety for the occupant, including from fire, potentially throughout their lifetime and particularly in later years, when they may become more vulnerable to the effects of fire.

Following the close of the consultation, DFRS's response will be considered and appropriate amendments will be drafted to reflect this issue. Cabinet will be asked to approve the final Plan for publication in Spring 2012.

### ***Planning Applications***

DFRS is also asking local planning authorities to notify it of all proposed new housing developments when pre-application discussions are held and when planning applications are submitted. DFRS can then respond to highlight the benefits of sprinklers, and crucially, can ask local planning authorities to attach conditions to planning applications.

These conditions would require developers to fit 32mm mains water risers in place of the current 25mm. The benefit of 32mm over 25mm is that sprinkler systems can then be installed without incurring additional costs from water companies. The cost to a developer of installing a 32mm mains water riser is approximately £26 per dwelling. Installing a 32mm mains water riser at the point of construction also provides a potential future saving by enabling the installation of a sprinkler system at a reduced cost.

In addition, Derbyshire County Council is currently consulting on the draft Developer Contributions Protocol. The Protocol is a guidance document that provides developers with a comprehensive picture of what may be required of them when applying for planning permission. DFRS intends to request that the final version of the Protocol includes an example condition and to suggest that local planning authorities use it to require a 32mm mains water riser to be installed as part of new housing developments. DFRS has written to district and borough councils regarding this issue. District and borough councils are generally supportive in principle, however, the wording of the example condition in the Protocol will need to be carefully considered to ensure it is fit for purpose for use by local planning authorities. Again DFRS's response will be considered and appropriate amendments will be drafted to the Protocol to reflect this issue. Cabinet will be asked to approve the final Protocol in Spring 2012.

### ***Communications and Lobbying***

In advance of any national legislation or amendments to building regulations, the planning system (particularly the use of conditions) provides opportunities

to achieve improvements to new housing built locally. However, this regulatory approach must be balanced with measures to encourage the market to adopt higher standards voluntarily. The current lifetime homes standard does not adequately address the risk from fire. Well-designed safe housing that allows people to stay in their homes for longer (homes for life) are a key benefit that house builders can use to promote their schemes to potential buyers.

In addition to the proposed regulatory approach set out above, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration has agreed to convey the benefits of sprinkler systems and associated infrastructure to developers and house builders in Derbyshire. DFRS will also lobby organisations such as the Homes and Communities Agency and social housing providers, including Registered Social Landlords.

### ***Retro-fitting Existing Housing Stock***

DFRS is keen to have access to funds that can be used to retrofit sprinkler systems to existing housing. The cost of retro-fitting sprinkler systems to existing housing varies depending on the location, size and type of dwelling and the water supply infrastructure available. The average approximate cost for retro-fitting a typical house would be around £2,500. However, a recent project at Callow Mount Flats in Sheffield to retrofit 47 individual flats with sprinklers had a final cost of £1,100 per dwelling. DFRS is proposing to allocate funding towards retro-fitting existing vulnerable properties with sprinkler systems and discussions are ongoing regarding match funding from each local authority in Derbyshire (including Derbyshire County Council).

## **(3) Financial Considerations**

### **New Development**

The cost to developers of providing a 32mm water mains will be approximately £26 per dwelling. Installing a 32mm mains water riser at the point of construction also provides a potential future saving by enabling the installation of a sprinkler system at a reduced cost. The difference in cost between installing sprinklers in a new build and retro-fitting an existing property is approximately £975 per dwelling.

### **Retro-fitting Existing Housing**

DFRS is proposing to allocate £200,000 of funding (£20,000 for each Borough and District Council, Derby City Council, and Derbyshire County Council) towards retrofitting existing vulnerable properties with sprinkler systems. Discussions are ongoing regarding potential funding from each Council (including Derbyshire County Council) of £20,000. This would provide a total fund of £400,000 to provide the protection of sprinklers to vulnerable dwellings. Further discussions will be held with local planning authorities across Derbyshire.

(4) **Human Resources Considerations** The County Council's Planning Services section will support DFRS in seeking to secure sprinkler systems in new domestic properties via responses to planning policy and planning application consultations as per the final Developer Contributions Protocol and Derbyshire Infrastructure Plan (once approved), which will be the subject of a further report to Cabinet.

(5) **Environmental and Health Considerations** This work will help to improve housing quality and will help to address community (fire) safety.

(6) **Property Considerations** Improvements to existing properties could include Derbyshire County Council owned and managed property. Subject to further discussion, costs would be met via a contribution from DFRS and each participating local authority.

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: financial, legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

(7) **Key Decision** No.

(8) **Call-In** Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No.

(9) **Background Papers** Letter from DFRS and Derbyshire County Council's response held on file by the Planning Services Manager. Officer contact details - Harriet Fisher, extension 39551.

(10) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATIONS** That Cabinet:

10.1 Supports Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service's request that it is notified of consultations on emerging planning policy, including Core Strategies, and all pre-application discussions and planning applications for new housing development.

10.2 Notes the ongoing discussions regarding the creation of a fund to support a programme of work to fit sprinklers in existing vulnerable properties across Derbyshire. A further report will be brought back to Cabinet on this issue for consideration in due course.

10.3 Notes and welcomes the intention of Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service to submit a response to the current consultation on the draft Derbyshire Infrastructure Plan to request that the final Plan better reflects the need to build well-designed housing that addresses safety and the needs of vulnerable people.

- 10.4 Notes and welcomes the intention of Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service to submit a response to the current consultation on the draft Developer Contributions Protocol to request that the final Protocol includes an example condition and suggests local planning authorities use that condition to require a 32mm mains water riser to be installed as part of new housing developments.
- 10.5 Notes the commitment of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration to lobby the development industry on the issue of fire safety in new housing development.
- 10.6 Notes Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service's proposals to lobby the social housing sector on the issue of fire safety and existing residential properties.

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