

DECISION-MAKER:	CABINET		
SUBJECT:	HRA SCHEME APPROVAL – IMPROVEMENT WORK TO TOWER BLOCKS		
DATE OF DECISION:	17 FEBRUARY 2015		
REPORT OF:	CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND SUSTAINABILITY		
<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
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STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY				
N/A				
BRIEF SUMMARY				
<p>This report seeks formal approval, in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules, for expenditure on a specific housing project. This project will contribute to the Council's strategic housing objectives of improving facilities on our estates, and the wellbeing and the satisfaction of our residents in the areas where they live.</p> <p>The proposals are consistent with the HRA Business Plan and Capital Programme that will be considered by Council on 11 February 2015. We now need to seek Scheme Approval to progress with planning, procurement and delivery of this associated project, which in itself will require a suitable lead in time. The proposed works cover elements under the heading of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Safe, Wind and Weather Tight”. 				
RECOMMENDATIONS:				
	(i)	To approve, in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules, capital expenditure of £1,011,000 on fire prevention measures to Albion Towers, Sturminster House and Shirley Towers, provision for which exists within the HRA Capital Programme as follows:-		
		Safe Wind and Weather Tight	2015/16 £000	2016/17 £000
		Improvement Works to Tower Blocks.	<u>700</u>	<u>311</u>
		Total	<u>700</u>	<u>311</u>
REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS				

1.	Financial Procedure Rules state that all schemes already in the Capital Programme up to £500,000 will require Chief Officer approval, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, those between £500,000 and £2,000,000 will require Cabinet approval and those with total values above £2,000,000 will require the approval of full Council. The proposed scheme falls into the Cabinet approval requirement.
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ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

2.	A feasibility study was undertaken to determine the best option for these buildings and this report seeks approval for the most viable option. Due to the nature of the project not carrying out this work now is not considered an option due to the issues highlighted below.
3.	These works form part of the 5-year Capital Programme as detailed in the February 2015 HRA budget report.

DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)

4.	There have been various consultation meetings with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services (HFRS) during the last two years with regard to this proposed programme of Capital expenditure associated with the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and self-financing regime. We have not yet undertaken any formal consultation with residents but proposals are outlined later in this report.
5.	This report seeks permission to proceed with the development, procurement and implementation of this Capital project which forms part of the HRA Capital programme for 2015/16 and 2016/17 and is ready for approval. Tenants and Leaseholders have also been closely involved in the production of the Council's long term Business Plan for future investment and HFRS and Capita have been involved in developing this specific scheme.
6.	Under self-financing our stock condition database is crucial to planning the works needed to our housing stock. As part of our approach to developing a Business Plan we have identified, through the stock condition database, the properties where work is required over the next five years and we are now in a position to strategically plan the investment needed to complete the fire prevention measures to these tower blocks.
7.	Southampton City Council (SCC) has been working and liaising closely with the HFRS regarding possible fire prevention measures within its properties with specific attention to its tower blocks.
8.	In autumn 2013 Housing Services commissioned Capita, in partnership with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services, to undertake a feasibility study on the potential for retrofitting a sprinkler system within three specific tower blocks within the City's Housing stock. The feasibility study engaged with Domestic Sprinklers UK, a Weymouth based company who have been working with HFRS on their strategy and who were responsible for delivering a retrofit project to Callow Mount in Sheffield which has been the subject of a wider study. The feasibility study was designed to identify if it was possible, given the structure and layout of the tower blocks, to retrofit a sprinkler system within the towers which would not compromise the structural integrity of the building and cause minimal disruption to the tenants living in the building whilst providing significant benefits to residents and the Fire Service in the event of a fire in a flat.

9.	The design and construction of Albion Towers, Sturminster House and Shirley Towers is of a very particular type where living accommodation within individual flats is across two separate floor levels and cross the building on an intermediate landing level – otherwise known as scissor blocks. The flats or maisonettes in the building are spacious and very popular with residents but by their very nature the layout is more complex than a standard construction flat with all the accommodation on one level. These are the only buildings of this type within the City.
10.	Whilst the towers are well maintained and their fire integrity is not compromised it is a sad fact that in recent years there have been two high profile fatal fires in scissor blocks, one at Shirley Towers in 2010 and at Lakanal House in Southwark in 2009, where the very complexity of the layout of the buildings have made it harder for our colleagues at the Fire Service to quickly attend and bring matters under control. The time required to set up and prepare to fight a fire in the scissor blocks is longer in comparison to a standard flat in any other block in the city.
11.	The Chief Fire Officer and his staff at HFRS are supporting and endorsing this proposal and have provided the following statement: <i>"Sprinklers are the most effective way to ensure that fires are suppressed or even extinguished before the fire service can arrive. They save lives and reduce injuries, protect firefighters who attend incidents and reduce the amount of damage to both property and the environment from fire."</i> <i>"The installation of sprinklers in domestic premises is strongly endorsed by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Chief Fire Officers Association"</i>
12.	The works proposed consist of a pressurised sprinkler system being installed to all tenanted areas of the blocks i.e. each individual flat, and some communal areas such as bin stores. The system will be of a "single point" activation type where only the outlet within a fire zone would be activated by heat, thus meaning that only in the room where a fire was present would the head activate producing a fine extinguishing mist. The system in the rest of the property or any other property within the complex would not be activated. This type of system is commonly used in residential buildings and hotels across the country and prevents unnecessary damage to those unaffected rooms/locations. The sprinklers are not activated by smoke. The Council already provide hard-wired smoke detectors in all flats in the City for the protection and reassurance of residents.
13.	The system would be mains fed through an independent system from the domestic supply fed by a pump at ground floor level. The network of pipes installed within the buildings would utilise existing risers and voids with the building causing minimal disruption to the structural integrity. The system would enter each flat and provide a network of sprinkler heads in key locations within the property. All pipework and the sprinkler heads would be concealed within boxing at the junction of the wall and ceiling with the individual sprinkler heads only becoming visible on activation.
14.	There are many myths about sprinkler systems and we have agreed with HFRS that they would undertake a number of demonstrations and exercises with residents in the respective buildings to help address these myths and provide detailed information and support to residents. The Sprinkler heads do not activate from burning toast or smoking within a flat but would activate in the event of a chip pan fire for example. And only the sprinkler head that is by

	<p>the source of heat will activate, not all the heads in the flat or building as is often portrayed on television. The system is designed to suppress the source of fire giving time for the Fire Service to attend and deal with properly which results in less damage to an individual flat or block and a significant reduction in the volume of water which is needed to extinguish a fire resulting in less water damage to other properties. More information can be found on the British Automatic Fire Sprinkler Association (BAFSA) website</p>
15.	<p>The project is in the final design stage with Capita Property Services and following this we are planning a series of events with the residents of the three tower blocks to engage on the proposed project. It is proposed that the delivery of this project will coincide with the Council's ECO project previously agreed by Cabinet/Council for these three towers and will therefore form part of this overall programme of work reducing the overall disruption to residents and reduce procurement and contract management costs to the Council. It is anticipated that following final design and procurement, work will commence in the Autumn of 2015. A full programme will be shared with residents once a contractor is appointed.</p>
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Capital/Revenue</u>	
16.	<p>There are sufficient funds available within the HRA Capital Programme to meet the requirements of the proposed scheme. Obtaining Scheme Approval in this way minimises administration plus officer and member time, as well as maximising the potential for wider procurement efficiencies from long term planning. There will be some small additional annual revenue costs of servicing the systems of about £1,000 per block but this can be met from existing resources. There will also be a requirement for an annual inspection of each property but this can be combined with other servicing and inspections already undertaken.</p>
<u>Property/Other</u>	
17.	<p>The HRA Capital Programme is fully reflected in the Corporate Property Strategy. All tower blocks in Southampton are designed with all residential units as 'compartments' which are designed to prevent the spread of fire from one flat to another. Our capital programme is designed to ensure that any work to our tower blocks in no way impacts on the compartmentalisation of the building or structural integrity of the particular system build of the tower. Capita's Structures team have been involved at all stages of this study to ensure the integrity of the buildings are maintained.</p>
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:</u>	
18.	<p>Part 2 of the Housing Act 1985.</p>
<u>Other Legal Implications:</u>	
19.	<p>There are a small number of leaseholders within the three towers. We intend to formally consult with these residents and install the system in all properties within the towers regardless of tenure to ensure the Council's legal obligations with regard to the building are maintained. Leaseholders will only be required to contribute a standard fee of £250 plus an admin charge of 15%.</p>
POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS	

20.	The proposed scheme in this report contributes positively to the Council's objectives set out in the Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan to maintain and improve the condition of the City's housing stock. It also strongly supports our active partnership with HFRS.
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KEY DECISION?	Yes
WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	Bargate, Millbrook and Shirley Wards

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<u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u>
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Appendices

1.	None
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Documents In Members' Rooms

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Equality Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to be carried out.	Yes
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Other Background Documents Equality Impact Assessment and Other Background documents available for inspection at:
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Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
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