

North West Locality Committee

6.30pm, Wednesday 30 January 2019

Investing in Muirhouse Tower Blocks

Item number	8.3
Report number	
Executive/routine	Routine
Wards	1
Council Commitments	1 , 23 , 24 , 51

Executive Summary

This report updates Committee on further discussions with residents in the Muirhouse High Rise blocks and actions taken following Committee's consideration of the report [Investing in Muirhouse Tower Blocks](#) on 14 November 2018.

Investing in Muirhouse high flats

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Committee is asked to note the content of this report.

2. Background

- 2.1 Discussion with Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs) in Muirhouse High Rise are ongoing, as is dialogue with Living Rent. This report updates on this, as well as a number of issues raised by Committee in considering the November Committee report.

3. Main report

Short Term

- 3.1 The initial dampness survey comprised 68 properties, spread fairly evenly across the six blocks. Since then a further 53 properties have been added to the sample, giving a total per block as follows:

Block	Number of properties	Proportion
Oxcars Court	20	26%
Inchmickery Court	28	37%
Birnies Court	18	32%
Fidra Court	21	38%
May Court	13	27%
Gunnet Court	21	44%
Total	121	34%

- 3.2 The properties in the sample include a variety of flats from each level, orientation, and with and without balconies and adjacency to walkways, giving a representative

sample of the blocks as a whole. As before, new reports of dampness will be investigated as they are reported.

- 3.3 Thus far, access has been gained to 121 properties, of which 108 (89%) require remedial work. This ranges from repair of the ventilator fans to problems with internal stack, cold bridging from balconies and walkways and a build-up of condensation due to living conditions. Of the 108 properties requiring remedial work 51 have been completed as of 14 January 2019. Contact with the remaining 57 tenants is underway to arrange a suitable date for the works to commence.
- 3.4 Committee asked for more information on overall repairs reported within the high rise blocks. Appendix 1 details repairs received and completed.

Medium term

- 3.5 Investigative surveys have been carried out on walkways, balconies, internal pipework, and the laundry rooms to establish the extent and nature of likely remedial work required.

Balconies and walkways

- 3.6 All blocks have similar problems with balconies, with a lack of insulation causing cold bridging and surface condensation in the flats. Costs and a programme to insulate the balconies as an integral part of the overall refurbishment programme are being worked up.
- 3.7 The issue with external deck access walkways is more complex, but is limited to May and Gunnet Courts. Deterioration of the asphalt covering, coupled with similar lack of insulation as the balconies, has led to surface water pooling and cold bridging at doors, and will require the entire resurfacing of the walkways. This will be both expensive, and disruptive to residents, and will require to be integrated into the overall refurbishment programme. Costings and options are being worked up for discussion with the Development Group.

Drainage

- 3.8 The cast iron rainwater and soil stacks within all blocks have visually inspected, and no major issues have been identified with the exception of the stacks at Gunnet and Fidra Court. It is therefore anticipated that the majority of stacks will only require water jetting to remove any blockages or foreign bodies. This is being costed and programmed.
- 3.9 The rainwater stack at Gunnet Court is at end of life and in need of replacement. In addition, this pipe runs internally which is causing damage to residents' homes. It is therefore planned to renew and reroute this pipe to the outside of the building to allow easier repairs and maintenance in the future.
- 3.10 The soil stack in Fidra Court shows some external evidence of corrosion, and requires more in-depth internal investigation. A high tech robot surveying and lining system is being considered for deployment.

Laundry Rooms

- 3.11 The laundry rooms in all the blocks have been surveyed, and costs to bring them up to modern day standards of amenity and equipment are estimated to be in the region of £45-£55K per laundry room. There is some concern locally that the laundry rooms being are being used as much by non-residents as those living in the blocks, and it is therefore proposed that further consultation takes place with the Development Group and residents to establish whether refurbishing some or all of the laundry rooms is seen as value for money, or whether other solutions, including external ground-level drying areas, should be considered.

Long Term

- 3.12 All of the above remedial works will need integrated into overall refurbishment plans for the blocks, and it is proposed that a high level indicative programme will be discussed at the next Development Group meeting in mid-February. This will allow discussion of the work content, which order the blocks will be worked on, and how best to engage residents in discussions about the overall programme and plans for their individual block.

Resident Engagement

- 3.13 The Development Group comprising local RTOs, with Muirhouse Salvesen Community Council and Living Rent invited as observers, has been established, with a programme of bi-monthly meetings agreed for 2019. In addition to the condition of the blocks and overall programming, discussions have covered the content and timing of future newsletters, the frequency and timing of officers' surgeries, and how to help residents get the best use out of their smart storage heaters.
- 3.14 As noted above, the February Development Group meeting will focus on the potential work programme and planning resident consultation and engagement around it. The next residents' newsletter is being prepared for issue at the end of February, to take account of these discussions. Specific meetings will need to take place with the 10 owner-occupiers in the blocks (see table below for breakdown) to discuss how they can be supported to contribute to the refurbishment of their blocks.

Block	Owner Occupiers
Oxcars Court	2
Inchmickery Court	2
Birnies Court	1
Fidra Court	1
May Court	0

Gunnet Court	4
Total	10

- 3.15 In addition to the established RTOs, the pressure group Living Rent has been active in meeting residents and engaging with elected members. Living Rent have been invited to both Development Group meetings, but failed to attend the second. Despite this, they have accompanied some residents to report issues to the local office, and written on their behalf to elected members. Should Living Rent wish to continue to engage with the Council in this more formal manner then appropriate responses will be made.
- 3.16 Meanwhile, individual residents continue to attend weekly officers' surgeries and take advantage of the offer of free laundry tokens (15 residents have attended surgeries since the November Committee report, and 115 laundry tokens have been issued in October, 153 in November, 220 in December and 66 to 15 January). To date, limited use has been made of the dedicated repairs phone contact established for Muirhouse High Rise tenants.
- 3.17 Committee also requested information on how vulnerable tenants in the blocks would be supported. Publicity for the last officers' surgeries included the offer to meet with any tenants who felt they needed support, at their request, although to date there has been no take up of this offer. In the meantime, tenants who have previously self-identified as requiring support when they took up their tenancy (27 across the 6 blocks), and tenants receiving ongoing support from the Family and Household Support service (16 across the 6 blocks) are being proactively visited to ensure they are coping with any ongoing repairs issues. This will continue during the life of the refurbishment project.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 Modernised and improved properties;
- 4.2 Dampness issues resolved;
- 4.3 Reduction in complaints; and
- 4.4 Increased tenant satisfaction with their homes.

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 Around £7.5M is estimated to be required to bring the high rise blocks up to standard, with the exact amount dependent on the specific work content and programme to be agreed with residents.
- 5.2 These costs can be contained within a range of budgets, including the Housing Capital programme, Neighbourhood Environment Programme and revenue repairs.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 The programme of work is being co-ordinated through an officer working group and regular dialogue with RTOs and other interested parties will help mitigate any risk associated with the diverse range of parties involved.
- 6.2 Risk of reputational damage through negative publicity is being managed by an ongoing communication programme with residents and targeted actions to resolve problems as quickly as possible.
- 6.3 Regular updates will be provided to elected members to assist with ongoing monitoring and evaluation of progress and the impact of the range of initiatives.

7. Equalities impact

- 7.1 This work will have a positive impact on tenants who are often poorer and more likely to be adversely affected by dampness/hard to heat properties. Quantum (smart) storage heating has been installed in all six blocks over the last two/three years. These heating systems are highly efficient at storage and release of heat when it is required by the users through the control unit. As a comparison, these heaters are around 27% cheaper to run than the systems that they replaced.

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 Properties will comply with the new Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing.
- 8.2 Tenants will benefit from more affordable heating due to more efficient heating systems and better insulated blocks.

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 As noted in the body of the report

10. Background reading/external references

None

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

Contacts:

Peter Strong, North West Locality Manager
peter.strong@edinburgh.gov.uk, 0131 529 5005

William Gilhooly, Acting Housing Property Manager
william.gilhooly@edinburgh.gov.uk, 0131 529 7866.

11. Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1 – Repairs information

Appendix 1 – Muirhouse Tower Block Repairs Information – January to September 2018.

Muirhouse Tower Block Repairs	Jobs raised	Jobs completed on Northgate	% Complete
Block Repairs	475	438	92%
Internal Repairs	1006	817	81%
Reporting Period - April to September 2018			