

Minutes of an Extraordinary meeting held at Riverside, Lowestoft
on **Monday, 27 November 2017 at 6.02 pm**

Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Councillors N Webb (Chairman), S Barker, E Back, A Cackett, G Elliott, T Gandy, L Gooch, K Grant, P Light, J Murray, K Robinson and K Springall

Other Members in attendance

Councillor S Allen – Former Cabinet Member for Housing
Councillor M Bee – Leader of the Council
Councillor G Catchpole – Cabinet Member for Operational Partnerships
Councillor J Craig
Councillor A Green
Councillor K Patience
Councillor C Punt – Cabinet Member for Housing
Councillor T Reynolds

Officers present

J Brown (Principal Service Manager), P Harris (Communications Manager), J Hunt (Head of Housing Services), A Jarvis (Strategic Director), A Photi (Democratic Services Officer), S Shimmon (Tenancy Services Manager) and N Wotton (Democratic Services Manager)

Others

P Goodman – Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service

The Chairman welcomed the Committee, Officers, other Members and the Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS) Officer to the meeting.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / SUBSTITUTES

Apologies were received from Councillors S Allen and T Goldson.

Councillor Allen was in attendance to assist in her capacity as the former Cabinet Member for Housing and not as a Member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor A Cackett substituted for Councillor S Allen.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Gandy declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest having attended the recent Housing Benefits & Tenant Services Consultation Group (HoBTS) meeting, where the St Peter's Court Fire Prevention report was presented.

3 ST PETERS COURT REPORT – FIRE PREVENTION

The Chairman advised the Committee that in an effort to involve the residents of St Peter's Court in the proceedings, the Council had hand delivered letters to all residents of the building on the 13 November 2017, inviting them to attend the Extraordinary meeting. In addition, they were invited to nominate two representatives who lived in St Peter's Court to speak and answer Members questions if they so wished.

The Council subsequently delivered printed copies of the agenda and reports to each household and made the offer to provide transportation to and from the meeting for any resident wishing to attend. None of the occupants had taken up the offer to speak in representation of the residents at the meeting or taken the decision to attend.

The Extraordinary meeting had been arranged following the Cabinet request to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, to consider the background to the work and actions that had taken place to date at St Peter's Court, following the events at Grenfell Tower earlier this year, with a specific focus on the management of tenant safety.

Specifically, the Cabinet asked the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to consider the following:

- 1) To consider whether the Council's response had been timely and proportionate.
- 2) To assess whether there had been adequate and effective communication with tenants.
- 3) To establish whether the Council had an action plan that was pertinent and comprehensive and delivered actions in a timely manner.

Once the report had been presented and the questions from Members had been answered, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee needed to consider the three individual questions from the Cabinet. A response was required for each question. The Committee were also able to consider whether they wished to make any further recommendations.

The Leader of the Labour Group had submitted additional questions and those had been included within the report.

The Chairman then invited the Cabinet Member for Housing to formally introduce the report.

The Cabinet Member for Housing explained the purpose of the report was for the Committee to consider the work and actions taken at St Peter's Court in the context of Grenfell Tower, which focused on the management of tenant safety.

The Council had taken the matter of fire safety within St Peter's Court very seriously over the years and ensured compliance with the relevant legislation, which made sure the building and the residents were protected. Major investment had taken place since 2000 in providing modern, safe and warm homes for residents, which were outlined in more detail in the report.

The recent event at Grenfell Tower in London in June this year had highlighted fire safety as a national priority. St Peter's Court in Lowestoft was the Council's only tower block and had been the focus of interest for residents, Councillors and the local media.

The Cabinet Member for Housing advised that he had been appointed to this post in May 2017, shortly before the terrible event at Grenfell Tower, on 14 June 2017. The Grenfell tragedy was never to be forgotten and there were valuable lessons to be learnt for the improvement of fire safety.

By 8.00am on the morning of the incident at Grenfell Tower, Officers of the Council were on site at St Peter's Court to reassure residents, respond to any questions and concerns and to remind residents of what to do in the event of a fire.

Within three days of the incident, a comprehensive letter went out to all residents on the 17 June, assuring residents that fire safety in the building was a top priority for the Council. The Cabinet Member for Housing referred the Committee to the letter in Appendix B which advised residents of some of the specific protective measures the Council had undertaken and were continuing to carry out. Significant efforts had been made to reduce the risk of fire within the building over the last five years. The letter also gave direct contact details for the Council's Housing department and for the onsite caretaker if residents had any concerns.

The Fire Service along with the Leader of the Council and Officers were on site within the first few days after the fire at Grenfell Tower, offering assurances and answering resident's questions. Residents commented that they felt reassured and confident of their safety, and had reported such to the local media.

On the 20 June 2017, a meeting was held at Riverside involving Building Control and representatives from the fire brigade whereby an action log was created on what needed to be done.

The Cabinet Member for Housing explained that the meeting had been called in order for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to answer the three specific questions from the Cabinet:

1. To consider whether the Council's response had been timely and proportionate.
2. To assess whether there had been adequate and effective communication with tenants.
3. To establish whether the Council had an action plan that was pertinent and comprehensive and delivered actions in a timely manner.

The report addressed the specific questions together with some additional questions raised subsequently by the Councillors from the Waveney District Council Labour Group, set out in paragraph 1.6 of the report. It considered the recent history of work to the building, as well as the two fire risk assessments that were carried out in 2015 and 2017 and the resultant action. The responses to the Labour Group questions had been included in paragraphs 2.4 to 2.9 of the report.

The position at St Peter's Court in relation to fire safety was summarised as:

- The Council had owned the block since it was built in 1968 and had comprehensive records;
- Regular Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) were completed prior to the Grenfell Tower disaster, most recently in 2015;

- Fire safety was predominantly ensured through the compartmentation of the flats which was provided during the construction to create 25cm thick concrete boxes. Work to date had provided reassurance that the compartmentation had not been compromised;
- The Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) had worked very closely with the Housing Service before and after Grenfell Tower to continuously assess and improve fire safety at St Peter's Court and had been supportive of the work done to date;
- The Council had communicated regularly with residents of St Peter's Court before and after Grenfell Tower, both face to face and in writing, in respect of fire safety and had invested in the past in fire protection and fire fighting equipment;
- Residents were supportive of the Council, evidenced by the fact that no transfer requests have been received since the Grenfell Tower fire concerning the safety of the building;

The fire safety provisions at St Peter's Court were deemed appropriate following previous actions taken on FRAs and enhancements, however in light of Grenfell Tower, there was a desire to improve those provisions further to reassure residents. Those improvements were underway with the impending installation of the sprinkler system to individual flats, conducting further intrusive auditing of the compartmentation of the flats, carrying out works to the window reveals of flats, replacing the front doors to flats, and the upgrading of the current level of fire detection.

The Cabinet Member for Housing summarised that six months on after the incident, much had been done to improve fire safety and the Council would continue to do more. Significant examples of which included:

- an intrusive assessment of a vacant flat had taken place whereby the entire property had been taken apart to check the integrity of the compartmentation
- a series of Fire Service tests
- the extension of the daily onsite caretaker role, increasing the level of the weekly inspections he undertook and his training in fire safety
- regular Tenancy Officer onsite visits
- the Council had commenced the Procurement Process for a sprinkler system to be fitted to St Peter's Court during 2018

The Council had put significant resources into these matters and would be increasing the frequency of the FRAs, with an eagerness for the next one to take place between July – October 2018.

The Cabinet Member for Housing invited Members to get in touch with him directly at any time if they had any concerns or questions whatsoever about housing matters. Members were also welcome to visit St Peter's Court and see the work being carried out, especially the vacant property which had undergone the intrusive FRA.

The Chairman then invited the Leader of the Council to speak.

The Leader of the Council thanked the Committee for bringing this important matter to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and to the Leader of the Labour Group for raising the concerns of the Group. The Council had taken the matter very seriously and he commended the Cabinet Member for Housing and Officers for all their hard work and in particular the efforts made to

reassure the residents of St Peter's Court. If there had been concerns, the room would have been full of residents, which was testament to all those involved.

The Leader said that the event at Grenfell was a game changer in terms of fire safety. When incidents like that occurred it changed the way the world looked at things and in the case of Grenfell, it changed the way that everyone viewed fire safety. As an authority, the Council were happy to accept that a sprinkler system was necessary and believed that it would be compulsory in the future for buildings which had eight storeys or more. However, it was important to accept that that it was never possible to make a building completely safe due to the unknown activities which went on within private homes. All that could be done was to mitigate the risks wherever possible.

The Leader commended the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for undertaking this review which had shown the way for other authorities.

The Leader of the Labour Group commented that they were pleased that the Labour Group's questions had been included in the report. As the Council looked at the improvement of services, it was important for Members to have all the necessary information in which to carry out their scrutiny function. They said that Members had not been aware of the FRA reports before now and that there may also be other areas of interest in which they were unaware of.

The Strategic Director and Head of Housing Services presented the report which was written in response to the questions and provided the committee with relevant information to enable them to scrutinise the actions of the Council in relation to St Peter's Court since June 2017 and the Grenfell Tower disaster.

The former Borough of Lowestoft constructed St Peter's Court, a 16 storey high rise building, in 1968 as a commitment to develop new housing and improve living standards for the community of Lowestoft. The building, in full compliance with the regulations of the day, was constructed of reinforced concrete and designed to deliver a compartmentation of each flat and provide a sterile stairwell for evacuation. There had been post construction investment in fire protection and provision of fire fighting equipment such as extinguishers and alarms, FRAs and annual servicing.

The Council's historical investment in St Peter's Court provided strong evidence of its commitment to deliver good quality homes that were safe, warm and comfortable. Since 2000 significant investment had been made in the building. External enhancements with new cladding, new roof covering, windows, electronic fob-operated front doors and CCTV, had improved the look and quality of the building. Communal enhancements with the provision of a communal lounge and landscaped garden, new lift cars and mechanism, carpeting from the first floor upwards, and decoration throughout had improved the quality of life for residents living there. Finally, internal flat enhancements such as new boilers, modernised kitchens and bathrooms and rewiring had improved the tenants' homes. Fire protection enhancements were in addition to those other improvements.

The Council had also engaged residents in fire safety awareness guidance and prevention over that time. Current feedback suggested that residents had confidence in the building, the Council and their safety. There had been no requests by residents to relocate from St Peter's Court since the events of Grenfell Tower. This level of confidence was positive but the fire in Grenfell

Tower had a dramatic impact on the perspective of fire safety and prevention in high rise blocks at a national and local level.

Locally, attention had focussed on Waveney District Council as the owner of the only high rise tower block in the district. The block was entirely residential containing 90 two bedroom flats, a communal lounge and individual bin stores on the ground floor. The interest in fire prevention and the safety of the residents from local media and Members of the Council had resulted in a high profile for St Peter's Court. This had provided an opportunity to engage with residents to offer re-assurance and clarity on what was being done and to get their support and cooperation on complying with requests to minimise the risk of fire in the building.

The Council's Cabinet Member for Housing and Housing Managers believed it was important to have transparency on the safety of residents in St Peter's Court. It was necessary to ensure that the occupants had confidence in the Council and that their health and safety within the building was safeguarded.

Questions from Members

- **A Member requested an update on the Action Plan?** The Principal Service Manager gave the following update on the St Peter's Court Action Plan detailed in Appendix E:

Item	Update	Status
1.	Rubbish has been cleared from unlocked storage areas, unused lockers now locked	Completed
2.	Fire stops in cupboards and to flats around various cables etc. all filled with fire stop foam	Completed
3.	All fire signage reviewed and updated as necessary	Completed
4.	Repairs to small areas of cladding completed	Completed
5.	New locks and retaining brackets fitted to all service riser cupboards	Completed
6.	New locks fitted to overhead service lockers	Completed
7.	Fire safety training course completed by caretaker	Completed
8.	Fire door retainers fitted to lobby door	Completed
9.	Communal doors smoke seals replaced where necessary	Completed
10.	Flat entrance door closured fitted	Completed
11.	Caretakers inspection regime expanded to include checking of door closures, checking service cupboards are clear, signage remains intact	Completed
12.	Upgrade detection to Level 4. Includes additional detection as per Action 12, 15 & 16 of FRA	Ongoing and was due for completion January 2018
13.	Destructive type investigation to prove compartmentation	Completed
14.	Replace all flat entrance doors with new sets	Due for completion June 2018 following procurement process
15.	Installation of full sprinkler system	Due for completion October 2018. Expressions of interest had been sent out with a tender date of 10 January

		2017. It was expected that the prices would be put to Cabinet on 7 January 2018.
16.	Create cycle store in shed areas, clear foyer and open second fire exit	Partially completed with the opening of the second fire exit pending and due for completion in March 2018.

Members noted that an updated version of the action plan would be circulated outside of the meeting, for information.

- **A Member commented that one year to source and install the new fire doors seemed excessive. Why was this?** The Head of Housing Services advised that the flats currently had half an hour fire protection rated doors, which were acceptable according to the fire safety standards. However, the Council had taken the decision to upgrade and renew the front doors to each individual flat to benefit the block. The Cabinet Member for Housing advised that the current doors were those originally put in place in 1968 when the building was constructed. The letter boxes had been placed on the walls and the opening on the doors where they had been previously had been sealed.
- **When did the Council receive the 2017 Risk Assessment report?** The Head of Housing Services advised that the report was received on 29 July 2017, as per the date stated on the report.
- **Had residents been provided with the FRA reports, the Timeline and the Action Plan?** The Head of Housing Services advised that all households had received the Agenda pack containing the documents on the 13 November 2017.
- **Although there were no requests from residents to be moved, were alternative options to move offered to them regardless?** The Head of Housing Services advised that the Council had not proactively sought to encourage transfers. The ability to register a transfer request was well known and the Council would have dealt with any requests proactively should there have been any, which there were not.
- **A Member commented that they would have liked to have seen the start date, completion date and person responsible on the Action Plan in Appendix E, and that it would have been helpful if the statement made by the Leader of the Council on the 19 July giving his reassurances had been included. They then referred to the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 – Notification of Fire Safety Deficiencies St Peter’s Court Lowestoft in Appendix D and asked what the Articles related to and when the report was received?** The SFRS Officer advised that the Articles related to the Fire Safety Report. The report would have been posted on 25 July 2017 the day of the report; therefore the Council would have received it one or two days later.

The Leader of the Council advised that he had visited St Peter’s Court on 11 July with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Officers. They had been given a full tour of the building and were shown the current and potential issues. Reassurances were given by the Officers to residents with an explanation of what had been done and what was planned. All that needed to be done had been carried out by the Council at that point, taking into account all known information.

The statement he had made was based on what he had seen, conversations, feedback and information from Officers and residents. Residents were invited to the Riverside offices the following week, with transportation provided, where they were reassured that if anyone wished to be moved, then the Council would have made it happen. He said that “the Council would have moved heaven and earth to do this but no one came forward”. The compartmentation system provided a good level of safety however the installation of a sprinkler system would give added reassurance. The Council took the view that Sprinklers systems in buildings of this nature would be made compulsory in the future.

The Cabinet Member for Housing wished to address the point relating to the Council having provided a timely response. He had received an email from a Member on these matters in June 2017, to which he had provided a response within two hours of receipt. The reply expressed that any questions or concerns could be put to him directly. Had that dialogue continued, any questions and concerns would have been addressed and answered. He had received no further direct correspondence from the Member on that particular matter. It was disappointing that instead of maintaining the dialogue, whereby the issues and concerns would have been addressed immediately and directly, the matter was taken to the local media. He advised the Committee that communication via the media was not as effective as direct communication between Members. He did not live in Lowestoft and therefore did not read or rely on the Lowestoft Journal or other media, particularly outside of his own area, to be informed of Council matters. He urged and welcomed all Members to contact him directly with any questions or concerns. He was open and willing to address any matter and was committed to providing timely responses.

- **A Member asked if Article 9: Fire Risk Assessment in Appendix D related to the 2015 or 2017 assessment?** The SFRS Officer confirmed it was the 2015 assessment. He added that the letter was a reflection of many high rise buildings in the country and Suffolk. The SFRS were very thorough and worked closely with the Council and that the report was a reflection of what was going on around the country on the whole.
- **A Member asked if half an hour fire doors were adequate for a high rise building?** The Head of Housing Services advised that there were two fire doors within the properties. He explained that the breaks between the front door and the living room, corridor and kitchen which had another fire door and the two fire doors provided one hour of protection in total. This was how the building was originally designed. A Member said they were concerned that if one of the fire doors was wedged open, the protection time would be reduced by half, therefore replacing the current doors with half an hour doors would not be adequate. The SFRS Officer advised that tenants’ wedging open the fire doors was not something which could be controlled and that half an hour fire doors were acceptable in terms of the regulations. The installation of the sprinkler system would however significantly mitigate the risk. The Member said that taking all into account it would be better to put in the one hour fire doors.

The Strategic Director advised that the Council had followed all of the suggestions following the two fire inspections, none of which were for the doors to be upgraded. The external validation and expert advice which began pre Grenfell had given no suggestion that the Council fell short of fire protection. He also said that this had been the Councils proactive decision entirely and that it was not a cost driven replacement.

The Leader advised that compartmentation was vital and that any gaps needed to be considered. Replacing the doors was needed to improve both the appearance and to allow for the letter box to be placed on the outside. The Council wanted to take extra measures, and the sprinkler system was key to putting out a fire at source.

- **A Member asked what had prompted the 2017 FRA report?** The Cabinet Member for Housing said that it had been driven both by the Grenfell incident and his own request. Having formerly been in the oil and gas industry he recognised that an FRA was beneficial and that there would also be another assessment in 2018. Tenants had been given fire safety awareness guidance and advice, as it was critical that their personal safety was their number one priority.

The Leader advised that the Grenfell incident had triggered an increase in fire inspections up and down the country within a short space of time. It was important to look at the absolute maximum that the Council could do to ensure fire safety. He added that what happened at Grenfell could never happen at St Peter's Court, due to the absence of gaps in the external cladding.

- **A Member asked if an inspection had been scheduled pre Grenfell, as the 2015 FRA recommended that periodic inspection of fire dampers should be undertaken every two years?** The Head of Housing Services said that an inspection had not been scheduled for 2017 before the Grenfell incident. The Member commented that although the actions indicated in the 2015 FRA suggested that an annual FRA be undertaken, there would not have been one in 2017, had it not been for the awful event which took place.

The Head of Housing Services advised there was no legal requirement for FRAs to be held annually. It was the responsibility of the landlord to carry out assessments as necessary. Each tower block had its own safety system and each tower block was unique. The compartmentation factor was crucial. The Council had been the landlord of the building since it was built in 1968 and had continued to improve fire safety within it during that period. The Council kept comprehensive and detailed records since 1968, had excellent knowledge in all aspects of St Peter's Court fire safety and were in a position to carry out their own effective internal reviews and recommendations.

The SFRS Officer explained that there were no requirements on the frequency of their inspections. They as an authority gave recommendations. If there were no significant changes to a building or a dramatic change in occupancy, then there was no need for additional inspections.

- **The 2015 FRA made substantial recommendations for alterations which remained outstanding in the 2017 report. Why had this not flagged up the need for another review the following year in the interest of managing the risks and protecting the residents?** The SFRS Officer advised that as an authority they remained at arms length to a degree. The periodic reviews were down to the responsibility of the landlords to carry out, in whatever method they saw as fit and appropriate. The action points were a separate matter.

The Head of Housing Services advised that the Risk Assessors did not have the information that the Council, as landlord, possessed. Ultimately the responsibility came down to the Council, whose level of knowledge and expertise was substantial. The Council had concluded, via its internal reviews, in addition to the FRAs, that the building was safe to occupy, however it was difficult to convey all of this information in a two hour assessment.

The SFRS Officer advised that, particularly post Grenfell, assessors would ask for additional information during an assessment in order to cover all elements and prevent any fall back, some of which may not have been relevant to the premises. There were also different levels of assessment, such as compartmentation analysis, which would be undertaken by a specialist fire engineer, something which had not previously been required.

- **Did the Council permit DIY work to be undertaken in the six privately owned flats without their agreement and what could be done to control such work being carried out in the building?** The Head of Housing Services advised there were two areas of focus. The first was education, to ensure that residents were aware of their responsibilities. The second was communication with tradesmen. There were very clear notices in the building in relation to permits for carrying out work, which the caretaker was also aware. Although this provided a mechanism in which to challenge any concerns, the Council was required to provide residents with quiet enjoyment of their properties, and had no legal right to freely enter a property and perform checks. A Member asked if the Council, as landlord, had the right to check properties. The Head of Housing Services advised that they were, however notice would need to be given and it would take considerable time and resources. This would not necessarily ensure safety as alterations could be made at any time.

The Leader reported that the key issue was compartmentation. A vacant flat had been stripped to the core showing that the integrity of the flat was intact. The fundamental aspect of the building's fire safety was the compartmentation. The Fire Safety Service had concluded that the Council had done all it could to make the building as safe as possible. The Council was also looking at buying back the 6 privately owned flats in order to have more control over the entire tower block.

The fire safety of electrical goods also needed to be considered. It was not possible to demand that residents carry out PAT tests; however the Council was able to make the facility available to all residents. That would take things another step closer to making things safer, as the fire at Grenfell was thought to have been started by a faulty electrical appliance.

- **A Member advised that they were a tower block flat owner in London which had annual inspections carried out. They had started to look at what other Councils did and they were surprised to discover that many had not undertaken annual FRAs. They asked for clarification on Section 17 of the 2017 Action Plan relating to it being "virtually impossible to assess the containment/compartmentation of that type of building within the remit of a Type 1 FRA." They also asked for clarification on the Stay Put policy and how this was feasible in the absence of a sprinkler system?** The SFRS Representative advised that a Type 4 FRA involved an intrusive inspection, an example

of which had been carried out in the empty flat. The inspection involved pulling up carpets, checking behind cupboards and stripping the compartment down to the bare bones. This was why a Type 4 inspection was difficult to carry out.

- **How could assurances be given that what was discovered in the empty flat was the same in every property?** The SFRS Representative advised that the compartmentation had not been compromised in the empty flat and it was therefore assumed that this was the case throughout the building. He added that he had been in the Fire Service for a number of years and had experienced all types of fires. The recent fire at a flat in Ipswich had been contained within the flat. Had the building been fitted with a sprinkler system, the fire would have been kept in check. The Fire Service had one of the largest pre determined attendances in the area, with five appliances. They did not enter the tower block until all appliances were present, for the safety of their personnel. The last appliance to arrive took just under twenty minutes at an exercise undertaken at St Peter's Court. There was an exercise scheduled to take place on the 5 December and he welcomed anyone wishing to come to see the demonstration. It took a significant amount of time for the Fire Service to set up after arrival on site, and a sprinkler system would help considerably to reduce the time, as Fire Fighters would enter a building immediately if they knew there was a sprinkler system in place.
- **Could the intumescent door strips around the fire doors have perished over time? If this was the case, would they have no longer provided the appropriate fire protection time? If so, this was concerning considering that it would take the Fire Service twenty minutes to arrive and additional set up time before entering the building.** The SFRS Representative explained it could take up to one hour to take up position before entering a building. In terms of getting through the intumescent strips, the smoke seal did not tend to deteriorate. He asked Members to keep in mind that smoke was a major problem and was the real danger for people trying to vacate a building.
- **What procedures were in place to support vulnerable people and did the Council know how to locate them in the event of a fire?** The Tenancy Services Manager advised that the Council had written to all residents asking for their information and assistance needs in the case of an incident, if they were happy to share the information. The information was kept in the fire box within the building, which the Fire Service had access to. The information was updated on a regular basis.

The SFRS Representative advised that their job was primarily to check what procedures and processes the District Council had in place. The Fire Safety Protective Department was very reassured that the residents of St Peter's Court knew exactly what to do in the case of a fire in their own and in other flats. The Leader said that the Council had done all it could to keep the list current but would not necessarily know when there were changes and who was coming and going. They had done everything possible to obtain and update the information but were only able to go so far.

- **A Member asked for clarification on the repeated weaknesses noted in both FRA reports.** The Head of Housing Services explained that repeated subject areas did not mean that issues raised in 2015 had not been acted upon. An issue under a particular subject matter would have been addressed following the 2015 report; however a different issue under the same heading could come up in a future review, as was the

case in the 2017 report. Also, there were different types and levels of compartmentation, and differing minor issues were picked up during both assessments.

- **The 2015 report noted communication barriers with residents, in particular in relation to signage. What had the Council done to improve on this aspect?** The Communications Manager advised that the Council always took appropriate advice from Officers in relevant areas, and also sought to provide the correct and relevant method of communications and fill in any gaps.
- **Had additional signage been displayed to ensure the information was understood by all residents of the building?** The Tenancy Services Manager advised that at present the Council was not aware of any additional requirements and no additional signage over and above what was already in place was required.
- **A Member commented that it would have been useful to have additional information in the Action Plan giving the status of what had been done and when.** The Head of Housing Services advised that it was the role of the assessor to review the recommendations and the actions undertaken. One issue which the Council was unable to resolve was that of the fire doors whereby it was technically impossible to apply the strips to the letter boxes due to their design, therefore the Council took the decision to renew the doors. There was an element of repetition between the two Action Plans. The Member advised they were happy with the response given.

The Leader said the level of requirements in the 2018 FRA would be higher, that the Council would be prepared and that he expected that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee would require a report in one year's time, to review progress. In the past eighteen years of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's history, St Peter's Court had never been scrutinised, however given the level of testing and that the FRAs would be more demanding than ever, the Committee may wish to consider it for future scrutiny.

The Strategic Director advised that when the Council put together its Housing Strategy, tenant satisfaction was in the top quartile. One of the key factors was engagement with residents which was a particular strength within the Council.

The SFRS Representative explained that with regards to FRAs, they recommended to the responsible persons that if they could not undertake assessments themselves then they should employ those with the relevant expertise. If however there was in-house expertise, they recommended that Risk Assessments be carried out internally.

- **Had the CCTV room issue, as mentioned in Section 2.6 of the 2015 FRA, been addressed?** The Principal Service Manager advised that it had. Fire signage had been displayed as a result of the FRAs but it had disappeared over time. The Council now relied on the caretaker to report such matters so they could be rectified swiftly rather than waiting to find out via an FRA.
- **The letter in Appendix D stated that a further visit would be made after the 15 December 2018, had a date been confirmed?** The SFRS Representative advised that it would be revisited post the December fire exercise.

N.B Councillor Grant left the meeting at this point in the proceedings at 7.44pm.

A Member said they would like to see regular updates on the status of the Action Plan and the next FRA. They felt confident that the Council was doing all it should but that the Grenfell incident had shown that more could always be done to mitigate the risks. The Head of Housing Services advised the Committee that there had been 871 fires in London tower blocks in 2017 so far, the majority of which had been contained. The Cabinet Member for Housing advised that the future FRAs would be shared with all Members. Had it had not been for Grenfell, the Committee would not have convened the Extraordinary meeting on this date and it was important to learn from such tragedies.

A Member commented that as an ex Health & Safety Enforcement Officer, they were confident that the Council was doing as much as possible to reduce the risks. The Strategic Director advised that the next FRA would be taking place in July 2018. A report to the Cabinet would be provided on 17 January 2018 regarding the procurement of the sprinkler system and an update on the status of the sprinkler system would be provided in due course. The former Cabinet Member for Housing suggested the Committee take these matters on board and add a review to the Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme.

A Member asked that an analytical report of 2015/2017 be provided along with one for the future report planned for 2018 in order to look at all the information across the board. The Leader gave reassurances that any information the Committee required would be provided. He added that the requirements in 2018 were likely to be different to those in the 2015 and 2017 assessments, as changes to the inspection regime and legislation were expected.

- **Had the fire dampers been fitted throughout the site?** The Principal Service Manager advised that the presence of dampers would be investigated by a specialist company in the near future.
- **Had the mobility impaired been moved to the lower floors of the building and had visual alarms been fitted?** The Tenancy Services Manager explained that all relevant details regarding the evacuation of residents requiring assistance were in the fire box. The Council were also looking at opening the second escape route, which had been closed several years ago as a result of a previous fire safety inspection. Bikes had been moved from the foyer and the Council were in the process of disposing of the shed, to make a bike area in order to enable the second route to be opened. This was planned for early 2018. The Head of Housing Services advised that Visual alarms would usually be located in individual flats in order to notify residents, however they were not considered an appropriate recommendation for this style of block. This illustrated the challenges with some of the points raised in the FRA.
- **A Member asked for an update regarding the smoke detectors.** The Principal Services Manager advised that an upgrade to the communal detection was taking place, however the heat and smoke detection within the flats themselves did not link to the communal system.

The Head of Housing Services advised Members that Flat 104 was where the intrusive investigation had taken place, and advised that they were welcome to come and view it to see the walls, which were 25cm thick with poured concrete. The Former Cabinet Member for Housing suggested that the Committee organised a visit to see the flat for themselves.

- **Had any communication gone out to residents to remind them of good behaviour in an effort to prevent fire hazards?** The Tenancy Services Manager advised that there had been, however it was a difficult area as blanket letters were often ignored. It was important that residents reported any incidents so that they could be addressed directly with the individuals concerned.

The Leader thanked the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for bringing the matter forward and for the opportunity to present and address concerns in the open. He congratulated them on some excellent examples of scrutiny during the course of the evening.

The SFRS Representative said he was pleased to come to the meeting as an independent person and that the scrutiny questions had been excellent. He urged the Council to continue with the maintenance programme and that a close eye needed to be kept on all contractors to ensure there was no breach in the compartmentation.

A Member drew the Committees attention to the coroners quote relating to the incident at Lakanal house; “had a fire risk been carried out at Lakanal House, it is possible that these features may have been highlighted for further investigation”. They reported that this was why the Committee were here, it was about protecting people’s lives and the Councils responsibility as a landlord. They thanked the Officers and the SFRS Officer for coming to the meeting and for giving clear and comprehensive answers to all the questions posed.

A Member commented that everything the Council was doing was making a difference for the future.

At this point in the proceedings, the Chairman invited the other Members in attendance to pose questions.

- **A Member asked if there was confidence in the sprinkler system being in place by October 2018?** The Principal Services Manager advised that it was hoped that deadline could be met; however it very much depended on the company that was awarded the tender and what they were able to deliver. The tender process was currently well underway. The Leader added that the installation would not be held up due to governance issues; however it was important to get the right company in to carry out the work and get the best possible system for St Peter’s Court.
- **A Member asked for clarification with regards to the letter sent out to residents in June 2017, following the Grenfell incident which stated that all doors were one hour fire protected.** The Head of Housing Services confirmed there was an error in the way the information was presented and pointed out that the letter had been put together and sent out to residents very quickly, within 1 hour of the incident. He confirmed that the doors individually were half an hour fire protected which provided one hour of fire protection in their entirety.

Following the question session the Committee addressed the Cabinet questions on an individual basis and put forward further recommendations.

On the matters being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED

1. That the Council's response had been timely and proportionate.
2. That there had been adequate and effective communication with tenants.
3. That the Council had an action plan that was pertinent and comprehensive and delivered actions in a timely manner.
4. That the Council investigates the feasibility of the installation of one hour fire protection doors to each individual flat.
5. That all Councillors would be kept updated on future Fire Risk Assessments and Action Plans for St Peter's Court.

The Chairman thanked the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Housing, Officers and the SFRS Officer for their clear and comprehensive responses to all questions put to them throughout the course of the evening and for all their ongoing work to ensure the safety of the residents at St Peter's Court. He also thanked the Overview & Scrutiny Committee Members and other Members in attendance for their valued and positive participation in the interest of those for which the Council had a responsibility to safeguard.

The Chairman wished everyone a safe onward journey home.

The meeting was concluded at 8.22 pm

Chairman