

Housing Committee – 28th September 2021 - Question under Standing Order 30Question from Councillor O'Driscoll

On a recent visit to Newlands Court in Westway ward, a resident in the block has brought to my attention a number of issues which need addressing. These issues include a faulty tumble dryer left in situ, rough sleeping in the corridors and fire alarms in communal corridors that have been removed.

Seeing these first hand was shocking as it is not right that residents in Westway are having to live in these conditions. Will this Council commit to ensuring that these concerns are resolved so that Newlands Court residents can feel safe in their own homes and can this Council ensure that communal fire alarms are installed in every Council owned block in the District?

Response from the Executive Head of Communities

Newlands Court was, until 2019, a sheltered housing scheme with a daily site visit by a Sheltered Scheme Co-Ordinator and an emergency alarm provision. Following the decommissioning of the block, as part of the sheltered housing review, Newlands Court has since been general needs accommodation without the provision for daily visits and emergency alarm assistance. Like in all decommissioned blocks, the communal fire alarm was removed due to there being no ongoing provision of resource to carry out regular tests or attend the building should the fire alarm sound. All properties and communal areas within Newlands Court are fitted with mains powered smoke detectors, mitigating the need for a full alarm system. This is also true for every other building allocated as general needs accommodation. To install, maintain and monitor any alarm system is costly, a cost which would need to be recovered from residents by means of service charge. It should be noted that all Council owned blocks are subject to regular Fire Risk Assessments. The last one for Newlands Court took place in 2017 and later reviewed in 2019. So one is due again.

Having checked repairs raised against Newlands Court, we have just replaced a faulty tumble drier. In the past, the fault would have been reported by the Sheltered Scheme Co-Ordinator during their visits. As these visits no longer happen, residents are required to report any faults or damage to white goods in the laundry room in the same way as they would raise a repair request for their own property. A repair works order would then be raised and the surveyor would address the issue.

Finally, after speaking to colleagues from the Housing Needs team, there have been no reports of a rough sleeper using the communal areas at Newlands Court. Occasional one-off reports of rough sleeping around the District are sometimes received and encouragement is given to all to report on-going incidents to Streetlink via our website. This then triggers an outreach team to go and visit if accurate information on description of location and bedding down times are provided.

Continued ...

Supplementary Question from Councillor O'Driscoll

I took the Chief Executive to Newlands Court as part of his Ward visit earlier in September and he met residents who relayed the concerns expressed in my first question. Would the Executive Head of Communities be willing to meet with Newlands Court residents to listen to their concerns ...we can arrange the timings outside of the meeting?

Response from the Executive Head of Communities

Yes I would.