

# Briefing Note

**Title: Private Tower Blocks in Wolverhampton**

**Date: 23 January 2020**

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**Intended Audience:**      Internal       Partner organisation       Public       Confidential

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## 1. Purpose or recommendation

Provide an update on fire safety matters relating to the privately-owned tower blocks in Wolverhampton.

## 2. Overview

In May 2018, the MHCLG issued a directive to local authorities to monitor and manage housing conditions in their area, with a specific focus on fire safety in public and privately-owned high-rise residential buildings over 18m in height.

The directive mandated all local authorities to:

- Maintain records of high rises over 18m and notify the MHCLG
- Review fire safety of all high-rise buildings, including carrying out inspections and hazard assessments
- Take enforcement action on private bodies and keep records of actions taken

Within Wolverhampton there are 42 residential high-rise blocks falling within the directive and/or National Building Safety Programme. 36 of these blocks are owned by City of Wolverhampton Council (CwC) (freehold) and managed by Wolverhampton Homes. Of the remaining six, five are privately owned and one is owned by CwC (freehold) and on long-term lease management arrangement to Sanctuary Housing Group.

The response of the Council to the MHCLG directive has been significant, based on feedback from building owners and managing agents, many of which own or manage high rise blocks in several different local authority areas, Wolverhampton is ahead of other Councils in its work to ensure the safety of those living in high rise buildings. The Programme Team leading the work has been complimented on its proactive approach by a key external stakeholder.

High-rise fire safety is planned and overseen by the Safer High-Rise Homes Group established in May 2018, the group has coordinated a programme of fire safety inspections of the privately-owned blocks. This has involved close collaboration with West Midlands Fire Service to ensure that there is a coherent approach to planning of any enforcement action, carrying out remedial works and communication with the various stakeholders including residents.

A Programme Manager has been appointed to provide coordination of the group. The Safer High-Rise Homes Group reports into the Fire Safety Compliance Group, Housing and Assets Leadership Team and provides updates to the Leader, Members and SEB as required.

### 3. Background and context

The table below provides an outline of the status of fire safety inspections in each of the privately-owned blocks.

High Rise Details	Status of Fire Safety Inspection and Follow on Activity
<p><b>Liberty Heights Blocks A, B and C</b>  <b>Culwell Street,</b>  <b>Wolverhampton, WV10 0JT</b></p> <p>Built circa 2009            Purpose built student accommodation, concrete and steel frame modular building system.</p> <p>The student accommodation is spread across 3 blocks (A, B and C) with a total of 657 en-suit bedrooms formed into 142 cluster flats with shared kitchen/Lounge and 3, 4 or 5 bedrooms per flat.</p>	<p>Fire safety inspection report issued August 2019. The Property Services Team of the freeholder has carried out a site visit to consider the inspection findings, awaiting its plan for carrying out remedial actions.</p> <p>WMFS carried out a routine visit in December and found no areas for concern.</p>
<p><b>The Studios</b>  <b>24 Birch Street, WV1 4HY</b></p> <p>Former office block, under refurbishment.</p>	<p>Fire safety inspection report issued April 2019. The Business Manager has advised that the remedial actions have been carried out. Will be arranging a follow-on inspection.</p>
<p><b>Hampton View</b>  <b>Woden Road, Heath Town, WV10 0PE</b></p> <p>Built circa 1960, 22 floors, single staircase, comprising 107 flats no gas within block. CwC owned, on long term lease to Sanctuary Housing.</p>	<p>Sanctuary Housing is in process of carrying out extensive refurbishment which has included replacement of fire doors, installation of sprinkler system is planned.</p> <p>A review of the works carried out to date will take place during the spring.</p>
<p><b>St. Cecelia's</b>  <b>Okement Drive, Heath Town, WV11 1XE</b></p> <p>Built circa 1970, 20 floors, single staircase. Comprising of 114 flats and gas services with block.</p>	<p>Fire safety inspection report issued December 2018, number of issues found.</p> <p>The Council has been liaising closely with WMFS to plan remedial works. This has involved meetings between CwC, WMFS and the managing agent.</p> <p>CwC has commissioned specialist legal guidance to identify liability for costs for fire safety works between the building freeholder, leaseholders and Right to Manage Company.</p> <p>CwC has used its regulatory powers to carry out and fund urgent fire safety works and has agreed with WMFS a schedule for the works which will commence in February and</p>

	complete during the Spring. These works will provide an interim solution until a detailed assessment is complete of the building.
<b>Market Square Apartments Market Square, Wolverhampton WV3</b>	WMFS visiting 28 January with representatives from the council to carry out an initial fire safety audit.

## **Proposal/Options**

### **Next Steps**

1. Continue to work with building freeholders and managing agents at each of the privately-owned blocks to implement the findings of the fire safety inspection reports.
2. To instigate enforcement action against responsible person(s) where there is insufficient progress with remedial works.
3. Ensure that that the Safer High-Rise Programme has an effective stakeholder engagement and communications plan so that residents are informed of the background to the inspection programme, its findings and implications for them as leaseholders, freeholders or tenants.
4. Consider the implications for the privately-owned blocks of the Grenfell Tower Phase 1 report and develop the appropriate plans in readiness for regulatory and legislative developments that will follow.