

<b>Item 6</b>	<b>Date:</b> 15 November 2017	<b>To:</b> Overview and Scrutiny committee
<b>Report title:</b>	Ledbury Estate Update	
<b>From:</b>	Mike Tyrrell, Director of Ledbury	

### **Recommendation**

1. Overview and Scrutiny committee (OSC) is asked to note the contents of this report.

### **Background**

2. This report provides an update to the previous reports to OSC on 13 July 2017 and 11 September 2017. As previously advised, action has been taken at the four 14 storey towers (Bromyard, Peterchurch, Skenfrith and Sarnsfield) on the Ledbury estate to address the issues of cracks breaching the compartmentation of the flats and the resulting compromised fire safety; and the subsequent findings that there is no evidence of the blocks having been strengthened to deal with potential gas explosions.
3. There are 224 properties in total, 76 one bedroom, 72 two bedroom and 76 three bedroom.
4. The blocks are large panel system construction, built by Taylor Woodrow between 1968 and 1970 and are former GLC properties which transferred to Southwark Council in 1982.
5. Since the last report to OSC, a team of officers solely dedicated to the Ledbury Estate has been set up in the Ledbury TRA Hall. The team is led by a new post, the Director for Ledbury, and it includes staff seconded full time from Engineering, Major Works, Communications, My Southwark Home Owners, Housing Solutions and Resident Services. The office is open 8am to 8pm daily and is staffed 24 hours every day to deal with emergencies.
6. The team is responsible for managing the ongoing remedial works, liaison with the Tenants and Residents' Association and the Ledbury Action Group, identifying housing options for residents who wish to move from the estate, dealing with leaseholder issues, and ensuring that residents are kept fully up to date on all of the issues arising from the current situation.
7. To deal with the issues relating to compartmentation, action has been taken to temporarily seal the cracks, as well as having a constant team of 7 fire wardens in each block until a new automated fire alarm is commissioned.
8. Arup, the leading civil engineering firm, were commissioned on Friday 30 June to investigate the structural integrity of the block. Their initial report was provided on 10 August 2017 and led to the decision to remove the gas supply to make the gas safe. Officers expect Arup's final report to be available on 20 November 2017.
9. As OSC will be aware, because of the issue with the structure of the block, the gas supply was removed from the block on 11 August 2017, however this left residents without heating and hot water; and cooking facilities for most.

10. Residents who are concerned about their safety have been offered the opportunity to go into Band 1 and bid for an alternative home via the council's choice based lettings system.

### **Fire Alarm**

11. An automated fire alarm system, linking the flats to the common areas, has been installed in each of the four blocks and these will be commissioned during w/c 13 November. This will reduce the need for fire wardens at every other floor, although two wardens per block will need to remain to assist in any evacuation of vulnerable residents. The new strategy will be carefully communicated to residents, wardens and staff before the systems are commissioned and brought into use.

### **Heating & Hot Water**

12. Following works to upgrade the electrical capacity of the blocks which were completed on 6 September 2017, immersion heaters were supplied to all flats that requested them to provide a (limited) hot water supply pending the installation of the new communal heating system. This work was hindered by the need to remove asbestos in the locations needed for the new cylinders. This was a short-term solution pending the identification, and installation of a more permanent heating and hot water supply to individual dwellings within the four tower blocks.
13. Following extensive research by the engineering team into the feasibility of alternative heating and hot water systems, and the speed of installation, a new district heating system to each of the four tower blocks has now been installed and is in operation delivering heat and hot water to all of the flats. Each block has a temporary large boiler sited outside the block on the ground floor. Pipework from the boiler runs internally up the blocks and is connected to the existing radiator and hot water circuit within each flat. The boilers were installed and tested during the week commencing 02 October 2017 and the installation of a heating and hot water units to the individual flats commenced on Saturday 7 October 2017, completing 16 October 2017.

### **Cooking**

14. 75 homes already had electric cooking facilities, leaving 149 homes without any cooking facilities when the gas was removed on 10 August 2017. The residents of these flats were offered a two ringed temporary hob and following the work to increase the electrical capacity of the block. As of 3 November 2017, 127 households have asked the council for a cooker and so far 81 have been delivered. Of those 74 have been connected and the remaining 7 have appointments booked. The contractor is chasing for the delivery of the 46 outstanding cookers. Some residents delayed choosing a cooker, or waited to replace their own, while UKPN increased the local capacity of their network and to the blocks. Working together with LBS electrical engineers this was completed on 14 October 2017.

### **Re-housing**

15. Of the 191 council tenanted homes, 26 are now void as some residents have taken the option to be re-housed.

16. All of the remaining tenants have registered for a move. A number of residents wish to remain in the blocks, however these residents have registered for re-housing in case they need to move in the longer term.
17. At point of writing there are a further 25 households who have been pre-allocated homes, are under offer or in the process of moving.
18. Although we do not yet know what the long-term solution is for the future of the tower blocks, all tenants will have a right to return to the Towers when any works have been completed, or to any replacement housing if this proves necessary. An IDM report has been written for the cabinet member for housing, which will formalise the decision for residents to return. The right to return will be for all residents or their succeeding spouse or partner and will be for a period of seven years.
19. We are finalising plans with Hyde Housing Association to purchase a brand new block very close to the Ledbury estate, with 80 properties from 1 to 3 bedrooms in size. These will be council properties at council rent. We are hoping these will be completely ready for occupation in February 2018, although we will do everything we can to expedite completion once we have purchased the block, and we will reserve the whole block for Ledbury Tower residents. A local lettings plan is being devised for the allocation of these properties and we will be able to pre-allocate the properties to residents well in advance of completion. This means that residents will know quickly if they are able to take up a new home in the Hyde development.
20. It is important to note that the purchase of the block is not yet complete. Although we are confident that purchase will proceed to successful completion, the council has no jurisdiction until the legal conveyancing process is final. Residents have requested that there should be a show flat available to view and early consideration of the letting process. We want to fully involve residents from the earliest stage and agree that a show flat should be made available but we are unable to progress any viewings until the block is in the council's ownership, although we consider that completion is imminent.
21. 2 households are currently in temporary accommodation both of which have signed new tenancies on new properties and are due to move in the week commencing 6 November 2017.

### **Leaseholders**

22. 33 homes within the four blocks are of leasehold tenure. A meeting was held on 3 October 2017 with leaseholders in response to a set of questions raised. Responses to the questions are now available on the dedicated website which has been set up to capture all of the communications and response to issues raised by residents of the Ledbury estate. The key issues discussed at the meeting were:
  - a. Temporary accommodation
  - b. Heating, hot water and electric works
  - c. Compensation
  - d. Buy Backs
  - e. The Arup Report
23. A further meeting took place with Leaseholder on 1<sup>st</sup> November to discuss the council's buy back offer and other outstanding matters from the meeting held on 3 October 2017. At this meeting the key issues were:
  - a. Compensation
  - b. The Lease
  - c. Buy Back Offer

#### d. Electrical Works

24. 16 leaseholders have shown an interest in Southwark purchasing their properties and an offer for leaseholders in this position is being developed.
25. A dedicated website [www.southwark.gov.uk/ledburytowers](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/ledburytowers) was set up where all information has been posted, including all letters to residents and the weekly news letters that commenced in September. Copies of Fire Risk Assessments are available on this website. Ward councillors, the Chair of Ledbury TRA and the Ledbury Action Group have received regular updates. The latest weekly newsletter is attached to this report as Appendix Three.

#### **London Fire Brigade attendance**

26. There have been four incidents where the alarm has been raised and the LFB called. One at Skenfrith (cooking), one at Peterchurch (steam triggering internal heat alarm) and two false activations of the newly installed fire detection system at Bromyard.
27. These incidents tested the evacuation procedures that had been adopted in June 2017, and as a result changes have been made. As a result of the changes, the wardens are checked on a daily basis by the Ledbury Team. These checks are carried out, not just by the Resident Services Officers but also by the Managers in the Ledbury Team. The checks test the knowledge of the wardens and if they fail to pass the tests, they are dismissed. The issues at Ledbury have been very upsetting for residents and the high profile checks, especially those carried out at weekends, have given assurances to residents that the Ledbury Team are taking the most robust steps to ensure that issues raised are not repeated.
28. The incident at Peterchurch House due to steam triggering the internal heat detector, demonstrated the changes the Ledbury team made to the procedures worked; however this highlighted a problem with the London Fire Brigade (LFB). The LFB call centre at Merton had advised the fire wardens not to evacuate. This was wrong as the "Stay Put Policy" does not apply to the Ledbury towers. The Watch that attended from the local Fire Station also were not aware that there was not a Stay Put Policy at Ledbury. As a result of this being taken up with the Borough Commander, he has assured the council that every Watch is now aware of the situation at Ledbury and that the LFB call centre at Merton are also aware.

#### **Financial Assistance**

29. £200 has been agreed as a one-off compensation payment per household for the inconvenience and disadvantage caused. Cheques were hand delivered to all tenants in the four Towers on 31<sup>st</sup> August. Another payment of £20 weekly is being paid while heating and hot water was restored to the four blocks, this has also been applied to tenants of non-resident leaseholders. This is consistent with compensation that has been given elsewhere in the borough in emergency situations. The first payment was made on 30<sup>th</sup> September and the final payment was made on 30<sup>th</sup> October, which accounted for the period up to 14<sup>th</sup> October when the heating and hot water solution was fully implemented..
30. The council is also paying disturbance payments to those who move which is equivalent to the statutory Home Loss Payment. Up to the end of September 2017

the payment was £5,800 and since 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017 it has increased to £6,100 in line with the national guidelines for this statutory payment. Payments are made as soon as sign-up is completed.

31. If residents speak to officers in the TRA hall, cash can be made available for any emergencies and meals for those in temporary accommodation. So far, just over £9,000 has been spent on transport to school and hospitals from temporary accommodation; meals for those who have special dietary requirements; and a number of ad hoc payments associated with the lack of heating, hot water and cooking facilities.

## **Conclusion**

32. The situation at Ledbury Towers is constantly evolving and is being closely monitored by daily briefing meetings chaired by the Director for Ledbury Estate which responds to all of the operational issues captured by the locally based team, as well as the broad strategic issues such as, major works, ongoing structural surveys and rehousing options. The team ethos is very aware of the extremely difficult time that residents have experienced since the issues were first identified in June 2017. The team have built up some excellent relationships with residents and are fully committed to making a horrid experience as comfortable as possible for affected residents.
33. Residents are also being supported by an independent resident's friend who meets with the Ledbury TRA, The Ledbury Action Group and the Leaseholders Group. The residents' friend also has a fortnightly meeting with the Director of the Ledbury Estate. A resident project team has been set up to oversee the works that would be required following the receipt of the Arup report and the residents' friend chairs the meeting of the resident's project team.
34. As such the information contained in this report is current at the time of writing; however officers will provide further updates at the meeting on 15 November 2017.