

Appendix 3:

Fire at Riseholme House 14th January - briefing note from Veronica Ward

I said I would try and produce a briefing note for Housing Scrutiny on Monday 9th February:

A fire caused by faulty electrical wiring broke out at 4.00 on Wednesday 14th January 04 in Riseholme House on the East Dulwich Estate. Tenants and residents had to be evacuated and were told they could not return until the cause had been identified and dealt with. The flats were in any case without light or heat. I did not get the message about the incident until about 9.00 in the evening, when I then went to the estate, but another councillor reached the estate earlier in the evening.

I spoke to Cllr McNerney, Chair of the T&RA and other tenants and residents and representatives from the Housing Office. This is the impression I have of what happened and my concerns.

- Many families including those with young children and also elderly people had nowhere to go and it was a cold evening. Residents and Chair of T&RA said that they had to press the Housing Office to open Albrighton Hall, the Community Centre on the estate
- The Chair of the T&RA and Cllr McNerney said that they had to press the Housing Office to provide food for the families involved. Cllr.M, the Housing Manager and a tenant went to Sainsburys.
- That a van appeared with blankets as part of an emergency response - but the only one.
- Residents said that the Housing Office had to be pressed to provide alternative accommodation for the residents for that night as they could not return to their flats. There was no transport to the accommodation, some of which was quite far away. By this time it was after 10.00 at night. Some residents reported that the accommodation was very poor and one resident I received a report about, could not stay in the conditions she and her child were offered and walked home early in the morning to sleep in her flat.
- I asked about security for the empty flats, which was not immediately available except by phoning the police and alerting a guard at Goldwell House.

My concerns:

- That there did not seem to be an emergency procedure in place except that the Housing Office attended the scene and stayed on site until well into the small hours. This did not look like an emergency procedure. The Housing Office did what it could to respond to resident's requests but seemed to have little back up. I was surprised there seemed to be no emergency team immediately in place. Many families were evacuated from their flats.
- That security of the empty flats was not part of the "package" - if there was one.
- That alternative accommodation was organised but seemed ad hoc rather than a systematic approach.

Councillor Veronica Ward