

COUNCIL 16th MAY 2019

MEMBER QUESTIONS REPORT

1. Question from Councillor Kevin Pardy:

The Full Member's meeting of February 2019 unanimously voted to establish a wholly owned Council housing company in order to tackle the backlog of affordable housing required within the Unitary area of Shropshire.

I believe the founding of this company is an opportunity for this council to take a lead in home fire safety.

Government statistics show that 30,744 dwelling fires occurred in the year 2017/18 resulting in 263 deaths.

Statistics tell us that in total there were 5,447 non-fatal casualties in dwelling fires.

Injuries can be anything from slight burns, blisters, inhalation of smoke to more severe injuries such as loss of mobility, full body scarring, disfigurement, blindness and many more injuries including mental health problems.

The average cost of physical damage to a dwelling is between £14,500 and £15,000. The cost of fatalities can run into the millions in addition to the human cost and the loss endured by family and friends.

This council should ensure that deaths, injuries and damage to property be reduced to an absolute minimum. We, as a Council, can help to do this by fitting domestic sprinkler systems in the homes we build.

Having researched costs of a domestic sprinkler system it appears that costs range from £1,500 for a 2/3 bedroom house up to £2,500 for a 3 bedroom house.

The costs are minimal, relatively speaking, remembering that the costs quoted are for a one off fitting, costs are probably even less when developing a site with a number of homes.

I ask the leader to confirm that this authority will ensure Fire Safety Sprinkler Systems are fitted to Council built homes.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Strategic Planning:
ROB MACEY , PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Domestic fire safety is something that this administration takes very seriously, and we are keen to learn from best practice where domestic fire sprinklers have been installed.

The Welsh Assembly Government introduced changes to Building Regulations that apply across the whole of Wales and which resulted in a requirement to install automatic water suppression systems in all new houses and flats from 1st January 2016. I am not aware of any plans to introduce this change to Building Regulations in England. Regulations in England mean that only buildings constructed since 2007 and which are taller than 30m are required to have sprinklers fitted.

There has been no formal assessment of the effectiveness of the installation of sprinkler systems in Wales from the perspective of prevention of injury and death from fire. Given that the changes to Building Regulations were very recent, it is likely that it will be many years before any trends are apparent.

I am aware that there have been significant technical issues around the installation of sprinklers in Wales. The most pertinent is water pressure which impacts on the design and cost of installation. Cllr Parry is correct when he states that a basic sprinkler system costs up to approximately £2,000 per property. Experience in Wales has shown that the additional specialist pumps that are required to address water pressure issues result in additional costs of up to £1,500.

However, this administration does not approach this issue from a cost perspective. It is important that the new Housing Company develops a quality standard for houses designed and built which set a high benchmark for the local housing industry.

Our aim is to build houses to good space standards and which are energy efficient to reduce the carbon footprint whilst also addressing fuel poverty issues. High quality building materials will be used and excellent construction standards which will ensure compliance with building and fire regulations in England.

I would recommend that this issue is referred to the Supervisory Board for further detailed examination. Members will be aware that the Supervisory Board is a politically balanced group of Members who will be able to consider all issues relating to the development of exemplary homes in the county.”